

'A Christmas Carol' Key Information Sheets



1. Context

- Written and set in Victorian London
- Poverty and social injustice/inequalities were a huge issue in society
- Dickens wanted richer members of society to recognise their social responsibility more
- Christmas was emerging as a festival of celebration – perfect as a vehicle for promoting kindness and the importance of families/friends
- The Victorians were beginning to recognise the importance of education for all
- Redemption and forgiveness + the idea that you could change for the better is key

2. Themes

<u>Key Themes:</u>	<u>Examples:</u>
Redemption	Scrooge The Spirits Marley's Ghost
The Supernatural	Marley's Ghost The Spirits
Poverty	The Cratchits Tiny Tim The Portly Gentleman Scrooge Belle
Christmas	Scrooge The Cratchits The Spirits Fred
Forgiveness	Scrooge The Spirits Belle Fred Tiny Tim Bob Cratchit
Social Injustice	Scrooge Tiny Tim Belle The Cratchits The Portly Gentleman

3. Key events

Stave 1: Scrooge presented as miserly. Fred's greetings are rejected and the charity collectors sent away. Jacob Marley's ghost warns him of his fate if he doesn't change and sets up the idea of the three ghosts visiting him to teach him a lesson.

Stave 2: Ghost of Christmas Past. We see a few years of Scrooge as a miserable schoolboy, eventually rescued by his sister. Fezziwig's ball shows us Scrooge as a happy apprentice. Belle breaking off the engagement concludes his lesson about money taking him over.

Stave 3: Ghost of Christmas Present – he shows him the possibilities of a happy gathering regardless of wealth. We see the Cratchits, some miners, lighthouse keepers, people on a ship and also Fred's party.

Stave 4: Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come – this is the predicted future for Scrooge. Tiny Tim has died in this alternate reality and Scrooge has died a lonely and unmissed man.

Stave 5: Redemption – Scrooge reveals his capacity for change.

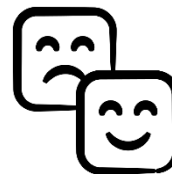


4. Literary features (AO2)

- 5 staves – structured by the 4 ghosts and an ending
- Begins and ends with Scrooge, but with direct contrasts of character, weather.
- Ghost story – the ghosts structure the novella with their moral lessons
- Time is critical – we move backwards and forwards through Christmas periods over the years (all in one night)
- Lists are often used to create the atmosphere of merry chaos

5. Prepared Introduction

Dickens presents **[key focus]** to demonstrate the importance of a kinder and more charitable society. Inequality in Victorian London is shown by Scrooge whose avarice is contrasted against the plight of the poor presented by the tragic situation of characters such as Tiny Tim. Dickens' intentions were to use the novella as an allegory to demonstrate the potential for progress shown by Scrooge's redemption arc from a "covetous, old sinner" to becoming "quite a baby" at the end symbolising his – and Victorian London's – rebirth.



Key Quotations:

<p>1. "I wear the chains I forged in life" & "light as a feather"</p>	<p>Marley's "chain" represents his sins and the imagery of imprisonment weighs him down so that he is burdened by his sins. Contrasting with this is how, when Scrooge is redeemed, he becomes as "light as a feather" showing how positive and happy he has become.</p>
<p>2. "solitary as an oyster" & "as good a man..."</p>	<p>Dickens represents Scrooge with the simile "solitary as an oyster" to indicate his hard shell, closed off attitude to the world, but perhaps also as an indication of the potential for good (the possibility of a valuable pearl inside). This is later contrasted with the frequent repetition of how "as good a man" he has become at the end of the novel.</p>
<p>3. "decrease the surplus population" & "Ignorance" and "Want"</p> <p>"I see a vacant seat"</p>	<p>At this point in the novel, Scrooge reacts to the charity gentlemen's request for aid with callous disdain. Scrooge sees life through the prism of money and uses the <u>lexis of accountancy</u> to bluntly suggest that poor people take up too much space and are therefore disposable entities who can simply be struck off like assets on a balance sheet. He is tapping into the Victorian misconception that the poor suffer due to laziness.</p> <p>Dickens is criticising the views of Malthus who warned the population growth in Europe was excessive and the world could not feed an increased population. Rather, Dickens believed the rich had a responsibility to look after the poorest in society.</p> <p>Dickens subverts this idea by personifying "Ignorance" and "Want" as two starving children to emphasise their innocence and shift public opinion towards the poor.</p> <p>At this point in the novel, the normally joyous Ghost of Christmas Presents delivers a stark message that Tiny Tim will not survive into adulthood.</p> <p>This moment acts as a pivotal <u>catalyst</u> for Scrooge's transformation as it invokes pity in Scrooge. By taking a personal interest in this child of poverty, Scrooge is turning a corner by beginning to develop a sense of empathy to help restore his humanity.</p> <p>Dickens uses the threat of Tiny Tim's impending death as a stark reminder that life expectancy for the poor was far too low while suggesting this situation can easily be rectified if the rich took on their rightful responsibility to look after the vulnerable in society.</p>
<p>4. "another Idol has displaced me [...] a golden one" & "as good as gold"</p>	<p>Belle tells Scrooge that "another Idol has displaced me" showing how wealth has replaced love for Scrooge. There is also a sense of blasphemy here because he is worshipping "a golden one" rather than God and so Dickens is showing the dangers of greed which is contrasted by how Tiny Tim is "as good as gold" attending church.</p>
<p>5. "a strange figure—like a child: yet not so like a child as like an old man" & "jolly giant" & "Phantom"</p> <p>"shrouded in a deep black garment"</p>	<p>The supernatural spirits personify concepts throughout the novel. The Past as "a strange figure—like a child: yet not so like a child as like an old man" uses oxymoronic similes to demonstrate the loss of innocence and gaining of grief. The Present "jolly giant" demonstrates the joys of Christmas which is contrasted by the death-like "Phantom" "shrouded in a deep black garment" of Christmas Yet to Come to warn readers of the ultimate judgements. Collectively, they reinforce the need for childish joy alongside mature compassion.</p>

<p>6 "The fog and frost so hung about the black old gateway of the house"</p> <p>"no fog, no mist; clear, bright"</p>	<p>In Stave 1 Dickens describes the melancholy atmosphere that lingers and lurks around Scrooge's home.. <u>Pathetic fallacy</u> is used here to associate Scrooge's house with miserable, cold obscurity. The <u>verb</u> 'hung' personifies the weather as miserable and depressed because it is fated into lingering around Scrooge's joyless home. The fog also adds a supernatural element to prepare the reader for Marley's arrival. The <u>adjective</u> 'black' reinforces the sense the old-fashioned Scrooge is living in ignorance by shutting himself away from society.</p> <p>Dickens presents Scrooge as a <u>caricature</u> of isolation and greed in Stave 1 to help his transformation in Stave 5 appear more miraculous and show everyone can change.</p> <p>In Stave 5, the fog hovering over the city leaves and is replaced with illumination and clarity.</p> <p>Dickens uses <u>pathetic fallacy</u> to portray Scrooge's transformation. The fog in Stave 1 reflected Scrooge's obscured view of humanity while the clear weather in Stave 5 mirrors his rediscovered ability to perceive humanity. The <u>adjective</u> 'bright' reflects Scrooge's adjusted outlook that now has the ability to view life optimistically. The end of the fog also marks the end of the supernatural element in the novella because it has achieved its objective of transforming Scrooge.</p>
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