

Teacher's notes

A Christmas Carol

by Charles Dickens



SUMMARY

Scrooge is a hard man who loves money more than people. For Scrooge, the very worst time of year is Christmas when everybody seems to be happy for no reason, as he sees it. It is also the time when he has to give his clerk, Bob Cratchit, the day off – and pay him 15 pence! Christmas, indeed happiness itself, is humbug to Scrooge. He scorns Christmas and spurns friendship even when it is repeatedly offered by his nephew, Fred. Then, one Christmas Eve, Scrooge is visited by the ghost of his long dead partner, Marley, who warns him that his heard-heartedness is making a heavy chain which he will carry for ever after his death, unless he takes heed of the advice of three ghosts that will visit him. The first ghost, the Ghost of Past Christmases, shows him scenes from his life as a schoolboy and young man. We learn that he had a lonely and probably unloved childhood, but that he won the heart of a lovely women then lost her through his greater love for money.

The second ghost, the Ghost of Christmas Now, shows him that people can be happy without a lot of money, and also shows him Tiny Tim, the ailing son of his clerk. Scrooge wants to know what will happen to the boy and he learns he will not survive.

The third ghost, the Ghost of Future Christmases, shows scenes after Scrooge's death. Nobody grieves him. His cleaner and his washerwoman are happy that he is dead – at least they were able to take and sell some of his things, including the bed clothes from his death bed and the nightshirt from his back. One of his tenants is happy – they won't have to pay the rent this week. Only the Cratchit family are sad but not for Scrooge. Tiny Tim, in this future, is dead, but Scrooge pleads with the ghost for a chance to change the future. When Scrooge awakes after the visits of the three ghosts, he discovers it is still only Christmas morning. He orders a large goose to be sent round to Bob Cratchit's house, pledges money for the poor and goes to dinner at his nephew's house. In the final paragraph, we are told that he became a second father to Tiny Tim and, we assume, changed the future through his change of behaviour.

ABOUT CHARLES DICKENS

Charles Dickens was born in 1812 in Portsmouth, a naval town on the south coast of England but, after a brief interlude in London between the age of two and four, of which he could later remember nothing, he spent his childhood in Chatham, another naval town to the east of London.

Dickens was the son of a clerk, put in prison for debt when Charles was just 12. This and other incidents in the young boy's life fuelled his imagination as they re-appear, suitably exaggerated, in his novels. The young Dickens was sent to work in Warren's blacking factory making shoe polish. He hated the job and the memory stayed with him always, as did the injustice of a young boy having to work when he should have been at school. After he left the factory, he worked as a journalist. He got his big break at the age of 24, when the publishers Chapman and Hall read his work and asked him to write a series of stories based on a fictitious club. These were published in monthly form and then in a single volume, *The Pickwick Papers*, in 1836. Within a few months, Dickens was the most popular author in England.

BACKGROUND AND THEMES

A Christmas Carol is a cautionary tale. It warns us that we make our future with our actions in the present. But it is also an uplifting story in that it suggests that it is never too late to change. Scrooge was an old man, and had done many bad things in his life. But he was worth saving, apparently, because no fewer than three ghosts took the trouble to show him the error of his ways. And change he did, to the benefit of all around him.

Dickens was deeply affected by the real-life poverty he saw all around him, but most especially in the slum streets of London. When the Ghost of Christmas Now introduces the two poverty-stricken children and says 'They are Everybody's', he is dearly expressing Dickens' own feelings about the need for better-off people to help the less well-off, with money and with education.

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ELEMENTARY

A CHRISTMAS CAROL



Teacher's notes

Dickens got the idea for *A Christmas Carol* at a political meeting in Manchester where he first set out his vision of education as the saviour of the poor, and indeed, as the saviour of society, as he believed that crime of all sorts stemmed from lack of education amongst the majority. He wrote the book as he walked the streets of London and saw the poverty at first hand.

The impact of the story on Dickens' readers was immense. He received an enormous number of letters and the critical acclaim of many including another great Victorian writer, Thackeray. It is perhaps ironic that Dickens made little money out of this book about poverty, because he had spent too much on the lavish illustrations which accompanied the first edition.

Communicative activities

The following teacher-led activities cover the same sections of text as the exercises at the back of the Reader and supplement those exercises. For supplementary exercises covering shorter sections of the book, see the photocopyable Student's Activities pages of this Factsheet. These are primarily for use with class readers but, with the exception of the discussion and pair/groupwork activities, can also be used by students working alone in a self-access centre.

ACTIVITIES BEFORE READING THE BOOK

- 1 Ask students to work in groups. Tell them to look at the picture on the front cover. Ask them what's happening. Elicit possible answers. Ask them where and when they think this story took place and why they think that.
- 2 Ask students to discuss these questions in pairs.
 - (a) Look at the table of contents. What kind of story is this? How many ghosts are there in the story?
 - (b) Look at the pictures in the book. Can you find any of the ghosts?

ACTIVITIES AFTER READING A SECTION

Chapter 1

- 1 Put students into pairs to role play a conversation between Bob Cratchit and Scrooge about Christmas Day. Bob wants the day off, Scrooge wants him to work. Bob wants to get his 15p, Scrooge doesn't want to pay him.
- 2 Put students into groups to discuss this question: What is each ghost going to show Scrooge?

Chapters 2-3

- 1 Put students into groups of three to role play the visits of the Ghost of Christmases Past and the Ghost of Christmas Now. The ghosts must describe each scene they are showing to Scrooge and Scrooge must react.
- 2 Put students into groups to think of one more scene from Scrooge's past life which shows why he has become so hard and in love with money.

Chapters 4-5

- 1 Put students into groups to discuss this question. Can we do things and change our future?
- 2 Put students into pairs to role play a conversation between Scrooge's cleaner and his washerwoman. They are talking about all the changes in Scrooge and trying to explain them.

ACTIVITIES AFTER READING THE BOOK

Dickens believed that education could end poverty and crime. Put students into groups to discuss this idea.

Glossary

It will be useful for your students to know the following new words. They are practised in the 'Before You Read' sections of exercises at the back of the book. (Definitions are based on those in the Longman Active Study Dictionary.)

Chapter 1

- candle** (n) a stick of wax that you burn to produce light
- chain** (n) a series of metal rings connected together in a line
- clerk** (n) someone whose job is to keep the records or accounts in an office, law court, etc.
- coal** (n) a hard black substance that is burned to produce heat
- fog** (n) thick cloudy air near the ground which is difficult to see though
- ghost** (n) the spirit of a dead person that some people believe they can see or feel
- humbug** (n) an old exclamation which means something is bad or stupid
- merry** (adj) happy
- past** (n) the time that existed before now
- poor** (adj) having very little money and not many possessions
- prison** (n) a building where criminals are kept as a punishment
- workhouse** (n) a building in past times where poor people were sent to live and work in bad conditions

Chapters 2-3

- carol** (n) a religious song that people sing at Christmas time
- goose** (n) a common water bird that is similar to a duck but bigger
- holly** (n) a tree with green leaves and red berries used as a decoration at Christmas
- tiny** (adj) very small

Chapters 4-5

- curtain** (n) a piece of hanging cloth that can be pulled across a window
- grave** (n) the place where a dead body is buried
- undertaker** (n) someone whose job is to arrange funerals
- washerwoman** (n) a person who in old times did the washing for other people



Student's activities

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Students can do these exercises alone or with one or more other students. Pair/group-only activities are marked.

Activities before reading the book

Read the Introduction. Answer these questions.

- 1 When was Dickens born?
- 2 When did he write *A Christmas Carol*?
- 3 Was the story his first one?
- 4 What did his father do?
- 5 What happened to Dickens in 1824?
- 6 Where does this story take place?
- 7 What was the city like at that time?
- 8 How many people bought the story before Christmas 1843?

Activities while reading the book

Chapter 1

- 1 Match each character from Chapter 1 with a description.
 - (a) Scrooge
 - (b) Marley
 - (c) Bob Cratchit
 - (d) Fred
 - (i) Scrooge is his uncle
 - (ii) Scrooge's clerk
 - (iii) a man who worked with Scrooge many years before
 - (iv) a hard man who loved money
- 2 Who ...
 - (a) died 7 years before?
 - (b) gets £1 per week?
 - (c) doesn't like Christmas?
 - (d) asks Scrooge to come to dinner?
 - (e) works in a small room near Scrooge?
- 3 Complete each of these sentences from Scrooge's conversation with the two men (pages 3 and 4). Use a word from the box in each case.

city homes night poor prisons time years

 - (a) Marley died on this ... back in 1836.
 - (b) Oh! Dead for seven ...
 - (c) Things are difficult for poor people in the ...
 - (d) Many of them have no ...
 - (e) Aren't there any ... for them?
 - (f) Prisons and workhouses can't make people merry at this ...
 - (g) I won't give money to the ... so they can be happy.

A Christmas Carol



- 4 Match these questions (a-l) and answers (i-xii) about the information in the section from *Scrooge had dinner ...* (page 5) to the end of the chapter.
 - (a) What did Scrooge hear before he saw the ghost?
 - (b) How did the ghost come into the sitting room?
 - (c) Where was the chain with money, money bags and money boxes on it?
 - (d) What was strange about the ghost?
 - (e) When did Scrooge fall onto the floor?
 - (f) What kind of dead people walk the streets?
 - (g) How long is Scrooge's chain?
 - (h) Why can't the ghost stay with Scrooge?
 - (i) How many more ghosts will come to Scrooge?
 - (j) When will the first ghost come?
 - (k) How did the ghost leave the room?
 - (l) What did Scrooge see outside his window?
 - (i) At one o'clock that night.
 - (ii) Round the ghost.
 - (iii) When the ghost's mouth fell open.
 - (iv) People who in this life are not happy when other people are happy.
 - (v) Scrooge could see through him.
 - (vi) Longer than Marley's.
 - (vii) Through the door.
 - (viii) He has to go to new places every minute.
 - (ix) Three.
 - (x) Through the window.
 - (xi) The noise of a heavy chain down below.
 - (xii) Ghosts with chains.

Chapters 2-3

- 1 These sentences from Chapter 2 are almost correct. Work with a partner. What is the correct information in each case?
 - (a) When Scrooge opened his eyes, it was after two.
 - (b) It was 12 midday.
 - (c) The ghost came then Scrooge saw a light.
 - (d) The ghost was a child.
 - (e) The ghost had a hat on his head.
 - (f) The ghost said, 'My bad past life made this hat.'
 - (g) The ghost took Scrooge to the window and he fell out.
- 2 What did the Ghost of Past Christmases show Scrooge? Put the scenes in the correct order.
 - (a) A Christmas Eve party

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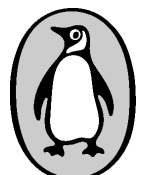
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ELEMENTARY

A CHRISTMAS CAROL



Student's activities

- (b) A house with a happy family – father, mother and daughter
- (c) A young Scrooge at a school desk
- (d) A young Scrooge with a girl who is crying
- (e) A young Scrooge with his sister, Fan
- (f) The place where he was born
- (g) The place where young Scrooge worked
- 3 Find a reply (i–xii) for each statement or question (a–l) from Chapter 3.
- (a) Tonight you can teach me and I will learn.
- (b) Where's Martha?
- (c) Martha, you're very late.
- (d) How was Tiny Tim in church?
- (e) A Merry Christmas to us all!
- (f) Will Tiny Tim live?
- (g) Oh, no, kind ghost! Say that he will live.
- (h) My uncle, Ebenezer Scrooge, says 'Humbug' when you say 'Merry Christmas' to him. He does it every time.
- (i) Fred, I know the answer.
- (j) Let's drink to Uncle Scrooge!
- (k) Ghost. Are they yours?
- (l) Isn't there a place for them somewhere?
- (i) Aren't there any prisons? Aren't there any workhouses?
- (ii) He was very good.
- (iii) Here I am, Mother.
- (iv) I can see Tiny Tim's chair. It is near the fire. Nobody is sitting in it.
- (v) In this future the Ghost of Future Christmases will not find him here.
- (vi) Merry Christmas!
- (vii) Take my hand.
- (viii) That's very bad.
- (ix) They are Everybody's.
- (x) Uncle Scrooge!
- (xi) We had to do a lot of work in the shop last night and we had to finish it this morning.
- (xii) What is it?

4 Work in pairs.

Who said each thing in Exercise 3? Practise the words.

Chapters 4–5

- 1 Who or what do the words in italics refer to in these sentences from Chapter 4? Choose from the list of people and things.
- Bob Cratchit
- Scrooge
- Scrooge's dothes
- Scrooge's rooms

The Ghost of Future Christmases

the news

Tiny Tim's death

- (a) I know that *you* want to help me.
- (b) *They* left the busy centre of the city.
- (c) *He's* dead. *He* can't use these things.
- (d) *There* was nobody there when he died.
- (e) How much money can I have for *them*?
- (f) Is *it* good or bad?
- (g) *He'll* be here in a minute.
- (h) I've very sorry about *that*.
- 2 What did Scrooge do in the morning? Match the beginnings and endings of the sentences from Chapter 5.
- | | |
|-----------------|---|
| (a) He looked | (i) about the goose in the shop window. |
| (b) He heard | (ii) at the bed curtains. |
| (c) He ran | (iii) dinner with Fred. |
| (d) He called | (iv) for the goose. |
| (e) He asked | (v) his best clothes. |
| (f) He put on | (vi) into the street. |
| (g) He paid | (vii) the church clock. |
| (h) He gave | (viii) the man Bob Cratchit's address. |
| (i) He went out | (ix) to a boy in the street. |
| (j) He spoke | (x) to a man. |
| (k) He had | (xi) to the window. |
- 3 The story ends happily. Work with a partner. What are some of the good things that Scrooge does at the end of the story?

Activities after reading the book

Work with a friend. Which part of this story did you find:

- the most frightening
- the saddest
- the funniest
- the most interesting

