

Year 10 Workbooklet – Charles Dickens: *A Christmas Carol*

1. Charles Dickens – The Man Behind *A Christmas Carol*

Charles Dickens was born in 1812 in Portsmouth, England. He grew up in a poor family and experienced hardship from a young age, which had a big influence on his writing. Dickens worked in a blacking factory as a child while his father was imprisoned for debt. These experiences made him deeply aware of social injustice and poverty, and he often wrote about the struggles of poor and vulnerable people in Victorian society.

Dickens became one of the most famous writers of the 19th century, known for novels like *Oliver Twist*, *Great Expectations*, and *David Copperfield*. In 1843, he published *A Christmas Carol*, a novella that combines storytelling, social critique, and festive spirit. The story is a morality tale that shows how kindness, generosity, and reflection can transform a person.

Questions:

1. How do you think Dickens' childhood influenced his writing?
2. Why might Dickens have been interested in writing about poverty and social injustice?
3. What does the term "morality tale" mean, and why is it important for understanding *A Christmas Carol*?

2. Historical Context – Victorian England and Poverty

A Christmas Carol was written during the Victorian era, a time when Britain was rapidly industrialising. Cities grew quickly, and many people lived in poor, overcrowded conditions. Children often worked long hours in factories, and there was little support for those in poverty.

At the same time, Christmas traditions were being revived, with an emphasis on family, charity, and goodwill. Dickens wanted to remind people of the importance of kindness and generosity, especially towards the poor and vulnerable. Through *A Christmas Carol*, he criticises greed, selfishness, and social inequality, while showing the positive impact of compassion and generosity.

Questions:

1. How does Victorian society influence the themes in *A Christmas Carol*?

2. Why do you think Dickens chose Christmas as the setting for his story?
3. What social messages might Dickens want readers to take from this novella?

3. Character Profiles – Chapter 1

Ebenezer Scrooge is the main character of the story. In Stave 1, he is introduced as a cold, greedy, and bitter man who despises Christmas and refuses to show kindness or generosity. He represents selfishness and the negative effects of valuing money over human relationships.

Bob Cratchit is Scrooge's clerk. He is poor but kind, patient, and hardworking. Despite Scrooge's harsh treatment, he remains gentle and caring, showing the importance of compassion.

Jacob Marley is Scrooge's former business partner who has died. He appears as a ghost, bound in chains as punishment for a greedy and selfish life. Marley warns Scrooge that he must change his ways or face the same fate.

Other Characters Mentioned:

- **Fred** is Scrooge's cheerful nephew, who loves Christmas and family.
- **Charity Collectors** visit Scrooge at the start of the story to ask for donations for the poor, but he refuses them.

4. Chapter 1 – Summary & Extracts

Summary

The story begins on a cold Christmas Eve in London. Scrooge is introduced as a miserly man who hates Christmas. He refuses his nephew Fred's invitation to dinner and rejects requests for charity. Scrooge is visited by the ghost of his former business partner, Jacob Marley. Marley is wrapped in heavy chains, warning Scrooge that he will suffer a similar fate unless he changes his ways. He tells Scrooge that he will be visited by three spirits who will guide him to understand the consequences of his choices.

Extracts

On Scrooge's Character:

"Oh! But he was a tight-fisted hand at the grindstone, Scrooge! a squeezing, wrenching, grasping, scraping, clutching, covetous old sinner!"

Meaning: Dickens uses repetition and strong language to emphasise Scrooge's greed and selfishness.

Jacob Marley's Warning:

"I wear the chain I forged in life... I am here tonight to warn you, that you have yet a chance and hope of escaping my fate. You will be visited by three spirits."

Meaning: Marley represents the consequences of a life spent in selfishness and sets the stage for Scrooge's transformation.

5. Questions on Chapter 1

Comprehension Questions:

1. How is Scrooge presented at the start of the story?
2. What is Scrooge's attitude towards Christmas and charity?
3. Who is Jacob Marley, and what warning does he give Scrooge?
4. How is Bob Cratchit presented in Stave 1?
5. What kind of life does Dickens suggest Scrooge has led so far?

Analysis Questions:

1. How does Dickens use language to show Scrooge's miserly nature?
2. Why is Marley's appearance important for the story's message?
3. What does Stave 1 suggest about the consequences of greed and selfishness?
4. How does Dickens use contrasting characters, like Scrooge and Cratchit, to highlight themes of generosity and compassion?

6. Creative Tasks

Diary Entry:

Imagine you are Ebenezer Scrooge on Christmas Eve, just after Marley's visit. Write a diary entry describing your thoughts and feelings. Are you afraid? Angry? Confused?

Letter Rewrite:

Rewrite the description of Scrooge in modern English. How does the tone change?

7. Stretch and Challenge

1. How is greed shown as a negative quality in Stave 1?
2. How does Dickens make Scrooge an unsympathetic character at the start of the story?
3. Why do you think Dickens introduces Marley as a ghost with chains?
4. How does Dickens create a contrast between Scrooge and other characters, like Fred and Cratchit?

8. Glossary

Morality Tale – A story that teaches a lesson about right and wrong.

Miserly – Extremely greedy or unwilling to spend money.

Charity – The act of giving help, often money, to those in need.

Consequence – The result or effect of an action or choice.

Supernatural – Beyond the natural world, such as ghosts or spirits.

Transformation – A complete change in character or behaviour.

Dramatic Irony – When the audience knows something that the character does not.