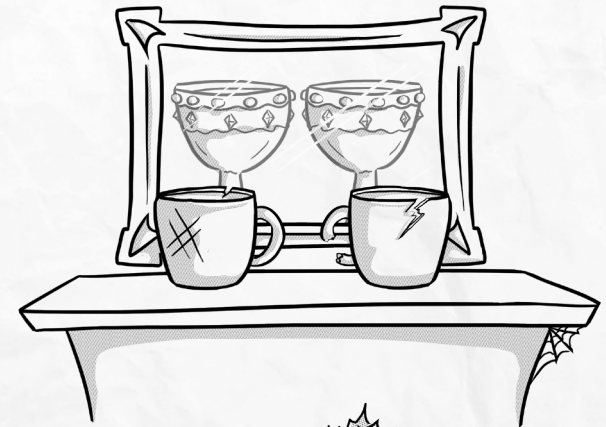


GCSE A Christmas Carol

Charles Dickens



ThinkIT

Genre

Consider the title: *A Christmas Carol*. What images and associations does the word 'carol' have (both contemporary and modern)? Why do you think Dickens chose this title, instead of 'story' or 'tale'? What genre(s) do you think *A Christmas Carol* belongs to? *E.g. Ghost story, moral tale, adventure story... Why?*

Narrative Voice *Who do you think the narrator is?*

Are there clues to their identity? If not, how does an omniscient, anonymous narrator affect how you respond to the story? Is the way that a story is narrated important to you? Why/why not?

Can you make distinctions between the things the narrator shows you and the things that the narrator tells you? *Do the narrator's personal opinions affect how you react to certain characters or episodes?*

How does the narrator's tone shape how different readers could respond to the text? How well suited is the narrative voice to the audience?

"And as close to it as I am now to you, and I am standing in the spirit at your elbow".
How do you react to this? Is the narrator 'haunting' the reader?

Themes and Religion

In *'A Letter to the Young Reader'* written by one editor of the story it states: *"its story and its Christian teaching have passed far beyond the land of its birth"*.

Obviously Christmas is a Christian holiday – but do you think the themes of the story are specifically Christian? *Why? Why not?*

Do you think *A Christmas Carol* is a story about the importance of Christmas, or about the importance of social conscience and charity more generally? *"But I am sure I have always thought of Christmas time, when it has come round – apart from the veneration due to its sacred name and origin, if anything belonging to it can ever be apart from that – as a good time; a kind, forgiving, charitable, pleasant time."*

Consider the themes of the novel relating to sin and atonement: how does this support a religious/Christian reading?

Is the presentation of innocence significant when reading *A Christmas Carol* as a religious text? *"Spirit of Tiny Tim, they childish essence was from God!"*

Can you find references to Christianity – or religion more generally – in the supernatural aspects of the story?

How does Dickens present ideas about life after death?

Marley: *"I wear the chain I forged in life [...] I made it link by link, and yard by yard"*

Description of Bob Cratchit after Tiny Tim's death: *"He broke down all at once. He couldn't help it. If he could have helped it, he and his child would have been farther apart perhaps than they were."*

Head and Heart

Do you think there is a conflict – both in Scrooge's character and in the novel as a whole – between being emotional/empathetic and rational/pragmatic? How is this represented? Does the balance shift throughout the novel?

Consider how Scrooge seems to struggle with doubt and faith; with things that he can explain and things that he can't: *"It isn't possible [...] that I can have slept through a whole day and far into another night. It isn't possible that anything has happened to the sun, and this is twelve noon!"*

How does the resolution of the novel affect the balance between doubt and faith?

"The Spirit stood beside sick beds and they were cheerful; on foreign lands, and they were close to home; by struggling men, and they were patient in their greater hope; by poverty, and it was rich."

Dickens' Methods and his Audience

Who do you think Dickens' intended audience was? Do you feel like the audience has changed over time? Why/why not?

Is Dickens able to write an entertaining, accessible story for a young readership, that is also engaging for an adult audience? If yes, how? If no, why?

Things you might want to consider: use of humour, language, cliché, questions syntax, double-entendre, politics, inter-textual references (Shakespeare, the Bible)...

Setting and Location

Think about the different locations that feature in the narrative. How do they reflect the characters' experiences at the time? *"The water-plug being left in solitude, its overflowing suddenly congealed, and turned to misanthropic ice."*

What is the impact of the Ghost of Christmas Present taking Scrooge outside of London? *"The city seemed to spring up about them."*

How do the characters move between different locations? Do they all travel in the same way? Is their mode of travel significant? How does Dickens present this?

Social Responsibility and Conscience

How does Dickens present the importance of having a social conscience in the novel?

"The misery with them all was, clearly, that they sought to interfere for good in human matters and had lost the power forever."

Charity
How is charity presented in *A Christmas Carol*?
What significance can you find in the altercation between Scrooge and the Ghost of Christmas Present regarding charity?
"There are some upon this earth of yours [...] who lay claim to know us, and who do their deeds of passion, pride, ill-will, hatred, envy, bigotry and selfishness in our name, who are as strange to us and all our kith and kin, as if they had never lived. Remember that, and charge their doings on themselves, and not us."
How do you think this also relates to presentations of religion in the novel?

Socialism
In what ways could you argue that *A Christmas Carol* has a socialist message?
What do you understand by the term socialist?
"I support the establishments I have mentioned – they cost enough: and those who are badly off must go there."
Whose responsibility is it to care for the poor and vulnerable:
- in Scrooge's opinion
- in Dickens' opinion
- in your opinion?
How does Dickens bring these ideas to the fore in the conclusion of the narrative?

Wealth

"There are many things from which I might have derived good, by which I have not profited." How is money presented in the novel? What effect does Dickens show money having on people?

Does Dickens present a relationship between goodness and wealth? How does this then relate to happiness and a sense of fulfilment? *"What right have you to be merry? What reason have you to be merry? You're poor enough."*

Do you find attitudes towards wealth and money in the novel problematic in any way? For example, how do you react to young Scrooge's words about society: *"There is nothing on which it is so hard as poverty; and there is nothing it professes to condemn with such severity as the pursuit of wealth."* Do you think there are 'good' and 'bad' ways to move up the social ladder?

Time, Pace and Structure

Consider the importance of time in the novel. What is the dramatic effect of all of the events unfolding in a single night? *"Lead on! The night is waning fast, and it is precious time to me, I know!"*

Does your sense of time passing change throughout the novel? How does Dickens provide markers for how long things are taking? Consider how the structure affects the overall dramatic impact of key moments in the novel. E.g. the appearance of the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come at the end of the third stave.

How does Dickens create suspense in *A Christmas Carol*? Consider as a starting point the speed and order of Scrooge's revelations.

Think about the relationship that each of the ghosts have with time and ageing – e.g. how the Ghost of Christmas Past is *"like a child; yet not so like a child as an old man"*, the lifespan of the Ghost of Christmas Present etc.

The Ghosts

Think about the physical descriptions of the four spirits. How does their appearance reflect/contrast with the function they perform within the story? The Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come: *"It was shrouded in a deep black garment, which concealed its head, its face, its form, and left no thing visible, save one outstretched hand. But for this it would have been difficult to detach it from the darkness by which it was surrounded."* Is it significant that this ghost does not speak?

Do each of the ghosts have a particular gift? E.g. The Ghost of Christmas Present's incense and its ability to diffuse animosity between people. Consider in detail what Ignorance and Want represent. Why do you think Dickens chose these two? Why are they attached to the Ghost of Christmas Present and not the others? *"But most of all beware this boy [Ignorance], for on his brow I see that written which is Doom, unless the writing be erased."*

How does Scrooge's attitude towards the ghosts change as the narrative progresses? Is it a linear progression, or are there moments where he regresses? *"But as I know your purpose is to do me good, and as I hope to live to be another man from what I was, I am prepared to bear your company, and do it with a thankful heart."*

Characters and the Theme of Class

How are the working classes presented in *A Christmas Carol*? Are there specific locations that are the domain of the working classes? *"He recognised its situation and its bad repute. The ways were foul and narrow; the shops and houses wretched; the people half-naked, drunken, slipshod, ugly."*

Do the different ghosts present the classes differently? Are there moments where Dickens appears to idealise the working classes? How important is how the working classes are perceived to Dickens' wider messages? Do you think it is more or less important for a contemporary readership?

"It may be that in the sight of Heaven you are more worthless and less fit to live than millions like this poor man's child." Consider the character of Fezziwig. How does Dickens utilise him to show how the wealthier classes should behave?

"A small matter [...] to make these silly folks so full of gratitude."
"The happiness he gives is quite as great as if it had cost a fortune."

Family: 'Uncle!' 'Nephew!'

How are family relationships presented in *A Christmas Carol*? How do you react to Scrooge's interactions with Fan in the second stave? What function do the scenes with Bob Cratchit's family, and Scrooge's ex-fiancée's family, perform in the novel? How is Scrooge affected by what he witnesses in these scenes?