

AQA English Literature GCSE

A Christmas Carol: Character Profile

Bob Cratchit

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Bob Cratchit

Character Summary

Bob Cratchit, Scrooge's Clerk, is introduced to the novella as a **timid** and **nervous man**. He remains **unnamed** for the first stave and is instead referred to as **"the Clerk"**. Perhaps Dickens only identifies Bob according to his occupation to **highlight how the lower-class didn't have an individual identity** and were instead only recognised for their service. This illustrates the way in which the working class were defined by their positions in the workforce, which is where their value came from. In this way, it could be argued that Bob Cratchit's role in the novella is to **represent the plight of the poor**, as he is an immediate **source of sympathy** in the novella.



https://muppet.fandom.com/wiki/Bob_Cratchit

However, when the Ghost of Christmas Present visits the Cratchit household with Scrooge the reader is exposed to a different side of Bob. Dickens depicts him as a **loving father and husband**, which could be interpreted as an **idealisation of the lower class**. Despite his poor wages and cruel employer, Bob Cratchit remains **grateful and compassionate**, celebrating Christmas in a way that the significantly richer Scrooge never could.

Dickens may have also wanted to depict Bob Cratchit more **holistically** to present the lower class in a different light. Usually in Victorian literature, the working class were depicted as peripheral, unimportant characters. In the works of Dickens he defies these expectations. **presenting the lower class in a positive light** and as **multi-faceted characters**. This is evident through the character of Bob Cratchit.

Context

During the Victorian era the word **'bob'** was often used as a slang word for **'shilling'**. Therefore, it could certainly be argued that there is greater meaning behind Dickens' choice for Bob Cratchit's name. This is highlighted when he draws attention to it by the **pun "Bob had but fifteen 'Bob' a-week himself"**. Perhaps this is to serve as a constant reminder of how little Bob earns, or may be to represent the **importance and power of money over the lower classes** - so much so that it can alter life and death. This is seen in the case of Tiny Tim who, without Scrooge's help, would have died.



Key Themes

Poverty

The **plight of the lower class** is highlighted through Bob's character. Dickens highlights Bob's **maltreatment** in the workplace by contrasting his fear towards and dependence on Scrooge. He explores this theme in a **sympathetic** way towards the poor, challenging many of the prejudices and misconceptions that **contemporary readers** (readers at the time of publication) may have had.

- Instead of presenting the Cratchits as ungrateful and lazy, he repeatedly references their **contentment** ("**nobody said or thought it was at all a small pudding for a large family**") and the fact that both **Bob and Martha are working**. He builds on this by revealing that Bob has a "**situation (job) in his eye for Master Peter**" too, which ultimately characterises the family as **hardworking**.
- Dickens does this to **challenge the misconceptions of his Victorian readers** as many would have believed that people lived in poverty because they were lazy.

Religion

Dickens explores the idea of religion through Bob. After returning from church with Tiny Tim he "**trembled**" as he told the family that Tiny Tim had told him that he hoped when people saw him they would remember Jesus, the man who "**made lame beggars walk**". The **verb "trembled"** highlights his **deep emotional connection with religion**.

Furthermore, when his wife expressed her distaste for Scrooge during Bob's toast, he reminds her that it is "**Christmas Day**" highlighting the respect and honour he gives the celebration. Here, Dickens presents Bob as a **morally righteous** man, as readers are likely to associate religion with a strong moral standing.

Family

Dickens highlights the theme of family through the characterisation of Bob by spotlighting the extent to which he values his family, presenting them as an essential part of his Christmas celebration. The family are described as **united** as Dickens details how they all joined in with the preparation of dinner - "**Mrs Cratchit made the gravy... Master Peter mashed the potatoes... Miss Belinda sweetened up the apple-sauce...**". This unity is significant as Dickens had a greater agenda when writing the novella. He intended for it to teach and reform the way Christmas was celebrated.

Bob is presented as the ideal family figure who **valued, loved** and **respected** his family. He appreciates their efforts (calling the meal "**the greatest success achieved by Mrs Cratchit since their marriage**") and worries when one of them is missing. In this way, Dickens introduces the idea that family should be an essential focus of the festive time.



Character Development

Bob begins the novella as an unnamed, poorly paid and maltreated Clerk, but, as Scrooge undergoes his own personal character development, (see 'Character Profile: Ebenezer Scrooge') Bob too undergoes a change.

It should be noted that as Scrooge gets a deeper understanding of the lower classes so does the reader. Therefore, the **supernatural experience** is not just an educational experience for Scrooge but also for the reader. They are able to view Bob in the **intimate setting** of his family home, exposing them to the loving and compassionate side of his personality which wasn't explored in the opening stave.

With regards to finance, Bob ends the novella significantly more well off than at the start, as Scrooge announces he will **"raise"** his **"salary"** and **"discuss"** his **"affairs"** over lunch. It is interesting to note, however, that Bob's character development is **dependant** on Scrooge. This is perhaps to **symbolise the power and superiority of the upper class over the poorer members of society**.

In addition to this, he does not develop in the drastic way that Scrooge does. Instead, he remains a compassionate and righteous character throughout the novella. This is significant as it contributes to the idea that Dickens carefully constructs Bob's character to act as an **idealised representation of the lower class**, and so limits his faults.

Relationships

- **Scrooge:** In the opening stave of the novella Scrooge is cruel and merciless towards Bob. He makes him work in a **"dismal little cell"** and complains that he is **"ill-used"** for paying **"a day's wages for no work,"** using an **accusatory and aggressive tone** towards the helpless clerk. It is interesting to note that the narrator is not sympathetic towards Scrooge but *is* sympathetic with regards to Bob, causing the reader to side with his character. This consequently characterises Scrooge as the villain. Following Scrooge's transformation, **Bob displays compassion as he forgives Scrooge for mistreating him**, once again idealising his character.
- **Mrs Cratchit:** The relationship between Bob and Mrs Cratchit again furthers the idealisation of his character as they cultivate love and happiness between them. This is emphasised when he remarks that she is a **"good wife"**.
 - However, when Bob proposes a toast to Scrooge, the supposed **"Founder of the Feast"**, Mrs Cratchit does not approve. While this seems justified and so does not reflect badly on Mrs Cratchit, Bob replies in a **"mild"** way. He simply reminds his wife of **"the children"** and that it is **"Christmas Day"** **elevating his position**. This is because his behaviour presents him as remarkably patient and so heightens the righteousness of his character.



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- **Tiny Tim:** Bob's youngest child, Tiny Tim, is described as a **"cripple"**. He is arguably used by Dickens to showcase the loving aspect of Bob's character and causes the reader to sympathise with him more as we understand the **intricate difficulties** of his life.
 - This is seen most notably following Tiny Tim's death in Stave Four, where we witness Bob trying to remain peaceful despite his grief. He reminds his family not to **"quarrel easily"** amongst each other in order to honour Tiny Tim's memory.
 - In addition to building sympathy towards Bob, Tiny Tim's character is also used to **foreground Bob's virtue**. Dickens details how Bob returned from church with **"Tiny Tim upon his shoulder"**. This adds religious weight to his goodness, presenting his character as morally righteous, which is solidified by the **pastoral image** of him holding his child.



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- **Remaining Cratchit children:** Similar to his relationship with his wife, Bob maintains a **loving** and **endearing** relationship with his children which Dickens refers to throughout the text. For example, he seems distraught when the children pretend that Martha cannot make it for Christmas Day, repeating **"not coming!"** with a sudden **"declension in his high spirits"**. This highlights the extent to which Bob values his family which is a quality Dickens presents as **ideal**, perhaps as a lesson to the reader so they too aspire to be like the Cratchit family.

Key Quotes

- **"He tried to warm himself at the candle"**
 This is interesting as it conveys a lot to the reader about Bob's characterisation and the cruel treatment he faces at work. By using the **pitiful verb "tried"**, Dickens creates a sense of helplessness. This causes us to sympathise with Bob and acknowledge his powerlessness before Scrooge. Furthermore, the **anticlimactic "candle"** highlights the poor provisions in place for Bob at the workplace, as he has nothing but a lone candle to warm himself. Dickens follows this line with the blunt and matter-of-fact: **"he failed"**. This illustrates the **nonchalant** attitude that many of the rich held towards the appalling working conditions of the lower class.
- **"I'll give you Mr Scrooge, the Founder of the Feast!"**
 By including this toast to Scrooge despite the terrible way he treats Bob, Dickens exemplifies Bob's **patience** and **compassion**, as he is grateful and good-natured towards his employer regardless of the way he is treated. It is also interesting to note that Bob refers to Scrooge with a title (**"the Founder of the Feast"**) **elevating** his position and attributing importance to him, even though he does not necessarily deserve it. It could be argued that Dickens does this to once again highlight the superiority of the rich over the lower-class, as even in his apparent absence Bob gives Scrooge a sense of respect and honour.



- ***“Oh, a wonderful pudding! Bob Cratchit said, and calmly too, that he regarded it as the greatest success achieved by Mrs. Cratchit since their marriage... Everybody had something to say about it, but nobody said or thought it was at all a small pudding for a large family. It would have been flat heresy to do so”***



This **exclamatory remark** highlights Bob's appreciation towards his family and embodies the gratefulness of the Cratchits - despite the size of the pudding nobody even **“thought”** it was **“small”**. Once again, this presents Bob and the Cratchits as an idealised representation of the lower class. The pudding is an important image as it represents the **hard work** and **unity** of the family, although small, it is still well received.

