

AQA English Literature GCSE

A Christmas Carol: Character Profile

Ebenezer Scrooge

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Ebenezer Scrooge

Character Summary

Ebenezer Scrooge is the **protagonist** (main character) of 'A Christmas Carol'. He is a banker or 'moneylender' of sorts who owned his own 'counting house' alongside his late business partner Jacob Marley.

In the opening of the novella, Scrooge is presented as a **miserly** and **misanthropic** (someone who dislikes other people) businessman with a strong aversion to Christmas and the society around him in general.

Dickens follows his journey of **redemption** as his character evolves into a **"good"** man who **"knew how to keep Christmas well"**. This is an impressive character development which becomes a **defining feature** of both the novella and Scrooge's character. It could be argued that this serves two main purposes: firstly to highlight to the reader that anyone is capable of change and that they should actively try to alter any of their weaknesses, and secondly that Christmas is a time of compassion and charity so should be celebrated as such. Dickens achieves these goals by presenting Scrooge as an idealised man in the final stage, subtly informing readers on what he believed to be the model way of celebrating Christmas.



<https://frogofiamancha.blog/2018/12/25/12-days-of-mcc-1-scrooge/>

This is a suggestion which evidently worked, as Dickens is often credited with playing a major role in shaping Christmas celebrations due to his **altruistic** (selfless concern for others) and **emotional** approach, emphasised through the character of Scrooge.

Character Development

The defining aspect of Scrooge's character is his **remarkable transformation**, as he evolves from miserly businessman into a man as good as **"the good old city knew"**. Therefore, it can certainly be argued that he is used by Dickens to symbolise a greater message which **transcends** (goes beyond) his own character. It could be argued that he shows this change in order to inform the reader on how they too should change themselves to align with true Christmas values.

Dickens achieves this message by initially portraying Scrooge as **unchanging**. By emphasising his stagnant nature in the opening of the novella, Dickens heightens the impact of his eventual change which suggests to the reader that change is possible for anyone. His **development is gradual** rather than sudden, perhaps to **increase the tension** for the reader as the novel progresses. Alternatively, this may be to draw attention to each of the ways that Scrooge changes. A summary of his development is outlined on the next page.



Stave One: In the opening Stave the narrator is **unsympathetic** in his dealings with Scrooge, presenting him as wholly unlikeable through the use of an **extended metaphor** (a metaphor which is repeated) where Scrooge is likened to the weather.

- Dickens writes that **“a frosty rime was on his head”** and that it was the **“cold within him”** rather than external temperatures which **“froze his old features”**. This presents him as a cold, hostile and unappealing character.
- This description in some ways presents him as an **archetypal villain** (the classic and conventional portrayal of a villain).

Stave Two: The Ghost of Christmas Past teaches Scrooge the value of reflection and causes the reader to sympathise with him, as we see the emergence of regret and a desire to change.

- For example, Scrooge reveals that there **“was a boy singing a Christmas Carol”** at his door and he regrets not giving him anything, highlighting the first stage of his **repentance** and therefore development.
- This furthered when he tells the Spirit that he wishes **“to say a word or two”** to Bob Cratchit, highlighting that he actively wants to make a change which establishes the start of his **reformation**.

Stave Three: The Ghost of Christmas Present builds on the concept of change. He does this through showing Scrooge the Cratchit family on Christmas day.

- Here, the reader sees Scrooge develop **empathy** and display **compassion** towards Tiny Tim, an interest **“he had never felt before”**. This signposts the extent to which he has changed, as even he himself can recognise the change within.

Stave Four: The final Spirit teaches Scrooge that his **actions have consequences**, causing him to put his material obsessions into perspective as he realises that his wealth will not keep him company in the event of his death.

- The stave ends with Scrooge repenting profusely, promising that he will remember **“the lessons”** that the Spirits had taught him and change for the better.

Stave Five: The narrator reveals that Scrooge was **“better than his word”**, highlighting to the reader that his character has indeed transformed. Dickens emphasises this by drawing **direct contrasts** between Scrooge’s behaviour in the final and opening staves.

- He shows how Scrooge donated money to one of the **“portly gentlemen”** despite his refusal in the first stave.
- Furthermore, in the opening stave Bob was sure that if he tried to **“replenish”** the coal Scrooge would have fired him, but in the final stave Scrooge instructs Bob to **“make up the fires”**, again making his transformation clear.



Key Themes

Time

The importance and significance of **time** is highlighted to Scrooge through his **interactions with the Spirits**, they teach him valuable lessons surrounding this concept in order to better himself.

- The Ghost of Christmas Past teaches Scrooge the value of **reflecting on the past** to become a better person. When Scrooge reflects on his time spent with Fezziwig he realises that he has been treating Bob Cratchit unfairly. He reveals to the Spirit that he wishes he could **“say a word or two to his clerk right now”**.
- In a similar fashion, the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come highlights to Scrooge that the way you conduct yourself in the present will have **consequences** later on in time. This is exemplified by Scrooge’s charwoman, who steals things from him after his death. She justifies her actions by saying that if Scrooge **“wanted to keep”** his things he should have been more **“natural in his lifetime”**.

Poverty

Dickens believed that society needed to come together in order to help stop the spread of poverty and so included this idea within the novella. He highlights this viewpoint by using a **disapproving tone** when describing Scrooge’s views on the poor in the opening stave. This is seen when Scrooge makes **no distinction between the lower class and criminals** - asking the charity collectors if there are any **“prisons”** they can send the poor to. Dickens later mocks this statement when Scrooge asks the Ghost of Christmas Present if there is any **“refuge”** for the children clutching at his robe, to which the Spirit echoes **“are there no prisons?”** evidently **parodying** his views.



Redemption

The novella closely follows Scrooge’s **journey of redemption**, a transformation which is made more impactful by Dickens’ description of Scrooge’s character in order to foreground this theme. Initially, Dickens presents Scrooge as a man who **cannot change**, alluding to his **stubborn nature** by clarifying that **“No warmth could warm, no wintry weather chill him”**. However, as the novel progresses we see Scrooge learn a number of lessons and evolve as a character, eventually **repenting for his behaviour**.

This is significant because Scrooge’s redemption does not stop at simple repentance as he goes on and **actively tries to recompense for his actions**. For example, while he was rude to the charity collectors in the opening of the novella, in the final stave he whispers to the gentleman the amount he would like to donate, shocking the man and allowing for a complete redemption.



Christmas Spirit

Dickens uses Scrooge’s character to highlight the ideal way of celebrating Christmas by introducing an **emotional element** to the celebration. He promotes the idea that Christmas is a **time for charity** and compassion through Scrooge’s behaviour in the final stave. He ensures that this is seen as the ideal



by asserting that ***“it was always said”*** that Scrooge ***“knew how to keep Christmas well”***.

Family

The importance of family is highlighted through the crucial role it plays in allowing for Scrooge’s all important **redemption**. This is evident when he is with the Ghost of Christmas Present who shows him how Fred and his family celebrate Christmas. Scrooge realises that if he had spent time with his family he might have ***“cultivated the kindness of life”***, highlighting the crucial role that a person’s family can play on their character.

Materialism

Dickens highlights how Scrooge’s **materialism** costs him significantly more than it benefits him - a theme first introduced by Jacob Marley in the opening stave when he refers to Scrooge as a ***“man of worldly mind”***. This is shown to the reader when Scrooge visits his old fiancée Belle who tells him that she is leaving him because he has replaced her with a ***“golden [...] idol”***. She continues by saying he has become a man who ***“fears the world too much”***, conveying the **severe cost** of Scrooge’s materialism.



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This is later identified by Fred, who notes that Scrooge’s wealth is ***“of no use to him”*** as ***“he doesn’t do any good with it”*** showing the reader that his obsession with the material world is essentially useless if he doesn’t use his wealth properly.

Regret

Scrooge’s **regret** is **instrumental in allowing for his redemption**. This emotion not only makes Scrooge seem human but also endears the reader towards him. This is poignantly highlighted when Scrooge wistfully wonders what it would feel like to have children who ***“might have called him father”***, causing his sight to grow ***“very dim indeed”***. This implies that he has been brought to tears, **showing the reader his regret while simultaneously causing them to sympathise with him**. Ultimately this increases the **readers involvement** with his character, causing them to anticipate the end of the novella.

It is essential to Dickens’ message for the reader to like his character. If he lacked regret his reformation would not seem genuine and wouldn’t be convincing to the reader. This would weaken Dickens’ moral message

Isolation

Scrooge’s **isolation from society** is highlighted through Dickens’ lengthy descriptions of his relationship with those around him (see ‘Relationships: other members of society’ below).

By **ostracising** (excluding) himself from society he can exist in a **state of ignorance** which allows him to be totally unaware of the state of the poor and other vulnerable members of society. He is both unaware and unbothered of Tiny Tim’s plight and only begins to care once Tiny Tim’s death is foretold by the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come.



Once Scrooge's isolation decreases and he interacts with other characters he becomes more aware of the problems of others and transforms as a character. After his reformation Scrooge plays an active part in Tiny Tim's life becoming a **"second father"** to him and preventing his death. It could be argued that this reflects the importance of **engaging with wider society** as it benefits all those who take part. Not only is Tiny Tim's life preserved but Scrooge becomes happier and more content as a person. Here Dickens alludes to a sense of **social responsibility**, which he had a strong affinity to.

Relationships

- Marley:** Dickens **draws parallels** between the two characters, likening them to such an extent that Scrooge **"answered to both names"**. He pays close attention to Marley's isolation from society (which reflects similarly onto Scrooge) and shows that Scrooge was central to his life. He repeats that Scrooge was his **"sole"** executor, administrator, assign, residuary legatee, friend and mourner, and even he was not **"so dreadfully cut up by the sad event"**. Both characters are portrayed as unappealing by Dickens.
 - This arguably causes the reader to feel an **initial dislike** towards Scrooge, as his lack of emotion towards the death of someone so central to his life characterises him as hard and unfeeling.
 - In this way, his relationship with Marley helps the reader to gain a better understanding of his character, as they realise his **isolation** and **apathetic** nature.
- Other members of society:** Again, Dickens characterises Scrooge through his relationships with those around him. He reveals that **"nobody ever stopped him in the street"** to say hello and that **"even the blindmen's dogs appeared to know him"**, avoiding him whenever they could. This highlights the extent of the community's dislike towards Scrooge.
 - The reader's own aversion towards his character is built on and furthered, as their negative opinion of Scrooge is supported by those around him. Therefore, the reader likely feels as though they are making a **fair** and **correct judgement** of his character.
- Bob Cratchit:** It could be argued that Bob Cratchit has two main roles with regards to Scrooge: firstly to explain why Scrooge is hated by those around him and secondly to spotlight Scrooge's changed nature to the reader.
 - In the opening of the novella Dickens describes **"dismal"** cell that Bob was made to work in, revealing that despite the cold conditions and small fire he could not **"replenish"** the coal for fear of being fired. This not only exemplifies the **cruel working conditions** that many lower-class workers faced in Victorian society but also acts as an example of Scrooge's inhumanity, **epitomising his cruelty**.
 - Towards the end of the novel, Scrooge's newfound attitude is highlighted when he instructs Bob to **"make up the fires"** and buy **"another coal scuttle"** starkly



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contrasting his earlier behaviour and so highlighting Scrooge's changed nature to the reader.

- **Fanny:** By choosing to include the character of Fanny during Scrooge's time with the Ghost of Christmas Past, Dickens allows the reader to sympathise with Scrooge and so form an **important attachment** with the protagonist. This causes them to remain interested in the narrative.
 - Fanny is used as a **catalyst** for Scrooge's reformation. When the Spirit reminds Scrooge that although she has passed away, she left behind a child, he begins to feel "**uneasy**", highlighting to the reader that he is beginning to reflect on his actions.

- **Tiny Tim:** Bob Cratchit's son, Tiny Tim, is introduced to the novella when Scrooge is with the Ghost of Christmas Present. His character is used to highlight Scrooge's developing **empathy** and so signpost the changes in his character.
 - This is most apparent when the Spirit uses his own words against him - Scrooge asks about Tiny Tim's future but the Ghost simply replies that if he was going to die he had "**better do it**" and "**decrease the surplus population**". This prompts Scrooge to hang "**his head**" which shows his regret highlighting his regret, and so as an extension of this, the transformation of his character.

- **Fellow Businessmen:** The Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come takes Scrooge to listen to the conversations of his fellow businessmen. Scrooge had always tried to impress these men, revealing that he had "**made a point of always standing well in their esteem**". However, when the men discuss his death, they do so as if it is **trivial**, referring to him as "**Old Scratch**" and quickly moving on to talk about the weather ("**Cold isn't it?**"). This highlights that Scrooge's previous values, that is, his focus on **materialism** and **business** over family, ultimately leave him isolated in his death. This is perhaps to prompt him to put things into perspective and realise the error of his ways.



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Comparison to Other Characters

It could be argued that both Fezziwig and Fred act as **foils** to Scrooge. Dickens uses these characters as a contrast to Scrooge's negative characteristics in order to highlight the drastic transformation he goes through within the text.

Fred

Dickens carefully constructs a **cold and hostile atmosphere** in the opening of the novella through the **semantic field** (a group of words with a similar meaning or theme) of **cold weather** and the description of Bob Cratchit's misery.



- This undertone is immediately contrasted with the introduction of Fred who wished his uncle a **“merry Christmas”** with a **“cheerful voice”**. This makes Scrooge’s misery appear **increasingly bleak**.
- Fred repeatedly responds to Scrooge’s bitter comments with optimism, teasing Scrooge by saying that he has no reason to be **“morose”** as he is **“rich enough”**. He then goes on to directly contrast Scrooge’s miserly attitude saying that there are many things that he has benefited from even if he hasn’t **“profited from them”**, Christmas being one of them.

By including a character with such optimism and appeal, Dickens furthers the effect of Scrooge’s **pessimism**, making him appear even worse.

Fezziwig

As an employer, Fezziwig directly contrasts Scrooge, seen most notably through his attitude and behaviour on Christmas Eve.

- While Fezziwig tells his apprentices that there will be **“no more work to-night”** as it is **“Christmas Eve”** Scrooge complains to Bob claiming that he is **“ill-used”** for having to pay **“a day’s wages for no work”**. This contrast highlights just how cruel Scrooge was as an employer, causing him to come to this realisation and change the way he acted with Bob.

In some ways it could be argued that including Fezziwig as a **foil** to Scrooge plays a role in his transformation as it **catalyses** feelings of regret and a desire to change.

Key Quotes

- **“A squeezing, wrenching, grasping, scraping, clutching, covetous old sinner!”**. Dickens uses **asyndetic listing** (a list broken up by commas rather than conjunctions like ‘and’) in his description of Scrooge, perhaps to show the extent of his greed. The **relentless verbs** refer to him being miserly and selfish. In this way he is immediately and undeniably characterised as an **unlikeable character**. This makes it difficult for the reader to empathise with him while also drawing attention to the **unsympathetic narration**.
- **“Solitary as an oyster”**. This **simile** is interesting as although Dickens describes Scrooge as **“solitary”**, **highlighting his isolation** and so presenting him as hostile. The choice of an oyster is significant as despite an oyster being dark and hard on the outside they can contain something beautiful and valued on the inside; Pearls. Here, Dickens is suggesting to the reader that there is something worth saving within Scrooge, implying that as the novel progresses the Spirits will destroy his hard exterior to reveal the ‘pearl’ within.
- **“I’m quite a baby.”** This is interesting as it contrast Dickens’ earlier description of Scrooge as a **“covetous old sinner”**. He instead presents Scrooge as **innocent** through the **connotations associated with a baby**, highlighting the extent of his change. It is also interesting to note that by ending the novel with reference to Scrooge being a baby Dickens alludes to the **cycle of rebirth** and, as an extension, his transformation.

