

AQA English Literature GCSE

A Christmas Carol: Themes *Redemption and Change*

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Redemption and Change

The concept of redemption is defined as 'being saved from error or sin', a theme which appears as a **strong undertone** throughout the novella. This is inevitable as 'A Christmas Carol' follows the journey of Scrooge's redemption, so the theme is prominent and interwoven within the **structural patterning** of the text.

The hope of Scrooge's transformation is used by Dickens to **create** and **build tension** throughout the novella as the reader anticipates whether he will ultimately be redeemed. This effect is heightened through Dickens' characterisation of Scrooge. He is initially presented as a **"covetous old sinner"** who is unchanging and **"hard and sharp as flint"**. This makes it difficult for readers to believe that he will be redeemed so increases the **suspense** within the novella.



<https://www.deviantart.com/danidraws>

In addition to this, Dickens explores strong emotions during Scrooge's time with the Spirits such as regret, sadness and fear. Through each **supernatural experience** Scrooge's emotions build and intensify until they **reach a crescendo** in the final stave where the reader is able to witness Scrooge's transformation. In this way, it could be argued that this theme is vital to Dickens' **dramatic plotting**.

Dickens also increases the **dramatic tension** through his use of **foreshadowing**.

- In the opening of the novella, he describes Scrooge to be as **"solitary as an oyster"**. This is significant as oysters are animals which often contain pearls, suggesting to the reader that Scrooge too has a treasure inside which simply needs to be uncovered.
- Furthermore, in Stave Two, Fan informs Scrooge that their father **"is much kinder than he used to be"** perhaps to highlight to the reader that Scrooge too will be able to change. In both of these examples, Dickens uses **foreshadowing to increase the tension** as the reader eagerly anticipates Scrooge's transformation.

The Importance of Change

The **theme of change** is instrumental to the novella in several ways. Dickens uses Marley's ghost to show Scrooge how important it is for Scrooge to change. When Marley appears he reveals that his own change arose too late, as he was only able to see the error of his ways after experiencing **purgatory**. He realises that **"human kind"** should have been his **"business"** and warns Scrooge that if he does not improve, he too will be **"doomed"**.



Dickens also presents the idea that the concept of 'change' is important to readers as part of his wider **social commentary**. He focuses on the unchanging nature of Scrooge's character, outlining that even **"external heat and cold had little influence on him"**. This suggests that he is too stubborn and unchanging to be affected by even the forces of nature. By constructing such a **theatrical change**, where Scrooge transforms from a **"covetous old sinner"** into a man who is **"quite a baby"**, Dickens inspires readers. He is able to give readers motivation to improve themselves; if a man as stubborn and miserly as Scrooge is able to change then they too can transform themselves. This solidifies the **didactic** and **allegorical** (moral) purpose of the novella.

Theme development

Dickens foregrounds the theme of redemption through the structure of the text as he creates **direct contrasts** between the opening and closing staves within the novella:

- **Charity collectors:** In the opening of the novella, Scrooge dismisses everything that the gentlemen have to say to him. He informs them that the suffering of other people in society is not his **"business"**. However, this attitude is completely contrasted in Stave Five.
 - In the final stave Scrooge runs after the gentleman, **"quickenning his pace"**. This highlights the **active nature** of his redemption, causing the reader to appreciate the extent of his change. Furthermore, Dickens is perhaps presenting the idea that readers should be more forthcoming in their own redemption, glorifying Scrooge's behaviour. To build on this, Scrooge informs the gentleman that his donation includes **"many back-payments"**. This reveals that he is not only improving his behaviour in the present but is also **making amends for his past mistakes** - portraying his redemption as thorough and complete.
- **Attitudes to Christmas:** When Scrooge discusses Christmas with Fred in the opening stave he tells him that **"every idiot who goes about with 'Merry Christmas' on his lips should be boiled with his own pudding, and buried with a stake of holly through his heart"**. This **violently hyperbolic** assertion conveys the extreme nature of Scrooge's aversion towards Christmas. This makes it difficult for readers to envision a transformation.
 - In the final stave, Dickens presents an improved attitude. He reveals, once again in **hyperbolic fashion**, that **"it was always said"** that Scrooge **"knew how to keep Christmas well, if any man alive possessed the knowledge"**. This **polarised** (divided) presentation of Scrooge's character displays the substantial change that Scrooge has undergone, as he moves from one extreme to the other.



- **Temperature and Weather:** Dickens uses a plethora of **imagery** and descriptions in the opening stave to convey the **cold and gloomy atmosphere of the setting**. He describes the climate as **“cold, bleak, biting weather”** and goes on to explore the fog which intruded into people’s homes, **“pouring in at every chink and keyhole”**. This presents the hostile atmosphere as **intrusive and uncontrollable**, allowing it to dominate the tone of the stave.
 - In the final stave, however, Dickens writes that there was **“no fog, no mist”** and that the sky was instead **“clear, bright, jovial”** and filled with **“golden sunlight”**. This use of **pathetic fallacy** (using weather to reflect on the mood) dramatically **alters the tone of the stave**, highlighting Scrooge’s transformation and successful redemption.
 - This is solidified by the idea that it was **Scrooge who contributed to the cold temperatures** in the opening stave as **“the cold within him”** was so powerful it had the ability to freeze his **“old features”**. In the final stave, on the other hand, it is arguably his **“glowing”** and **“fluttered”** state of mind which is reflected in the weather, presenting his redemption as **absolute**.
- **Narration:** The narrative voice in the opening stave is **utterly unsympathetic**, epitomised by the relentless **list of verbs** which describe Scrooge as a **“squeezing, wrenching, grasping, scraping, clutching, covetous old sinner”**.
 - The **tone of narration** dramatically changes by the final stave which reflects on Scrooge’s transformed character. Instead of a disapproving tone, the narrator adopts an **increasingly positive and optimistic voice**. This allows Scrooge’s change to become more apparent.
 - Stave Five opens with the exclamation **“Yes!”**, establishing the change in tone from the very offset of the stave. This is followed by descriptions of Scrooge’s **“good intentions”** and a detailed analysis of his laugh. The narrator outlines that his laugh was a **“splendid...most illustrious laugh”**, which was the **“father of a long, long line of brilliant laughs”**. This provides the reader with a sense of hope as it implies that Scrooge’s change is permanent due to the prediction of more laughs. This ultimately creates the impression that Scrooge’s redemption is **convincing** and **comprehensive**.

