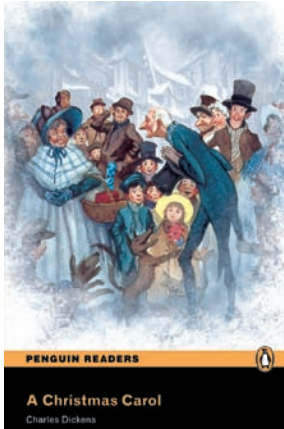




A Christmas Carol

Charles Dickens



About the author

Charles Dickens, the most popular writer of the Victorian age, was born near Portsmouth, England, in 1812 and died in Kent in 1870. When his father was thrown into debtors' prison, young Charles was taken out of school and forced to work in a shoe-polish factory, which may help explain the presence of so many abandoned and victimized children in his novels. As a young man he worked as a reporter before starting his career as a fiction writer in 1833. In his novels, short stories and essays, Dickens combined hilarious comedy with a scathing criticism of the inhuman features of Victorian industrial society. Many of his novels, such as *Great Expectations*, *David Copperfield* and *Oliver Twist*, have been made into films.

Summary

On Christmas Eve, four ghosts teach Scrooge, an elderly miser, that love and friendship are much more important than amassing a fortune. The first ghost is that of Marley, his former business partner, who warns him about the suffering awaiting him if he does not change. The three other ghosts reveal to Scrooge scenes from his past, present and future. After witnessing these scenes, Scrooge is a changed man.

Chapter summary

Chapter 1

Scrooge is a cold, hard man who loves money more than people. For him, the worst part of the year is Christmas, a time in which even the poor make merry. This Christmas Eve, after rejecting his nephew's invitation to Christmas

dinner, Scrooge is visited by two kind gentlemen who are collecting money for the poor. Not only does he refuse to give them any, he also suggests that poor people should be kept in prisons and workhouses. After dinner, he receives another visit, that of his long dead partner, Marley, who warns him that his miserly behaviour will make him suffer for eternity, unless he follows the advice of three ghosts that will come to see him very soon.

Chapter 2

The first ghost, that of Past Christmases, shows him scenes from his life as a schoolboy and a young man. We learn that he had a sad and lonely childhood, but that he won the heart of a lovely woman whom he lost through his greater love for money.

Chapter 3

The second ghost, the Ghost of Christmas Now, shows Scrooge that people can spend a happy Christmas day even without much money. He shows him Fred, his nephew, and Bob, his employee, enjoying Christmas with their families. However, the ghost also shows him two sad sights: that of Bob's ailing son and that of two other children who represent all the poor and ignorant children in the world.

Chapter 4

The third ghost, the Ghost of Future Christmases, shows Scrooge scenes after his death. Everybody is happy that he has died. Only the Cratchit family is very sad – their son Tiny Tim has passed away. It is then that Scrooge begs the ghost to let him change such a horrible future.

Chapter 5

When Scrooge wakes up after the visits have ended, he realizes it is only Christmas morning. He orders a large goose to be sent to the Cratchits, promises to help the poor and dines at his nephew's house. Scrooge, now a changed man, becomes a second father to Tiny Tim, who, fortunately, does not die young.

The original text

A Christmas Carol, first published in 1843, is the most popular of all his Christmas stories.

Its moral, which still applies today, is that a change of heart is needed among those who are well-off regarding the less fortunate, and that there is no better season for it to take place than Christmas.



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Background and themes

In *A Christmas Carol* Dickens wishes to raise awareness of social inequality in Victorian England. Among the many sources of suffering for the poor were the workhouses, public establishments that provided them with housing at the expense of brutal treatment.

Social inequality: Who is responsible for the well being of the less fortunate, the state or every one of us?

Childhood: Does an unhappy childhood necessarily lead to an unhappy adulthood?

A change of heart: Can human beings change their behaviour for the better as Scrooge does?

Christmas and communal festivities: To what extent do they foster social bonding?

Suffering: Does suffering make us mature?

Discussion activities

Chapter 1

Before reading

1 Discuss: Christmas time

Have students discuss the importance of Christmas in their country. If they celebrate other religious festivals, get them to talk about them.

Here are some suggested questions:

Is it cold or hot at Christmas time in your country? Do families meet to eat and drink? What do children like about Christmas?

While reading

2 Discuss: Celebrations

Have students compare what they do for their religious celebrations and what Scrooge does for Christmas.

Here are some suggested questions:

Do you invite the family or also some friends? What do you eat? Does Scrooge have any friends? Does he have a family? Why doesn't he go to his nephew's house for Christmas?

3 Discuss: Ghosts

Have students stop reading on page 7 and discuss whether they believe in ghosts.

Marley thinks that some people walk the streets of the world when they are dead. Why does he think they must do that? Do you think there are ghosts around us?

After reading

4 Write:

Have students write a short letter as if they were one of the men who visit Scrooge on pages 3–4.

Yesterday I went to ask Scrooge for some money for the poor people in the city ...

5 Read carefully:

Have students reread pages 7 and 8 to find out why Marley is so sad.

6 Read carefully:

Then have students reread Marley's description and ask them to draw him with his heavy chain.

Chapter 2

While reading

7 Discuss: The Ghost of Past Christmases

Have students discuss the ghost's appearance.

Why is this ghost old and young at the same time? Why does it have a light? Why doesn't Scrooge want to see the light?

8 Discuss: Scrooge, the child

Have students discuss Scrooge's childhood.

Was Scrooge happy as a child? What was his father like? Do you feel sorry for him?

After reading

9 Write:

Have students write a letter that little Scrooge sent his Dad when he was alone at school.

10 Research and Pair work:

Have students find out about the stories Scrooge loved as a child: *Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves* and *Robinson Crusoe*. Then, in pairs, have them make a list of their favourite children's stories.

11 Role play:

Have students role play the dialogue between Scrooge and his girlfriend on page 16.

Chapter 3

Before reading

12 Predict:

Have students predict what the chapter will be about.
What will the next ghost show Scrooge? Will Scrooge be a better man after this new visit?

While reading

13 Look carefully:

Have students look at the picture on page 19 and then answer the questions.

How is this ghost different from the Ghost of Past Christmases? What is there near him?

14 Discuss: Lessons

Have students discuss the lessons Scrooge learns at the Cratchits' and at Fred's house.

15 Discuss: Schools and food

Have students discuss what the two children next to the Ghost of Christmas Now represent.

Here are some suggested questions:

Why do the children look like animals? Why does the ghost show them to Scrooge? Why does the ghost tell Scrooge that they are everybody's children?

When Scrooge asks the ghost who can help the children the ghost answers: 'Aren't there any prisons? Aren't there any workhouses?' Why does he say so?



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After reading

16 Artwork:

Have students draw the two children described on page 25.

17 Read carefully and write:

Have the students reread pages 22–24. Then in pairs, they can write down what Mrs Cratchit and Fred's wife think of Scrooge.

18 Research:

Have students look for different illustrations of Scrooge's face on the Internet. Then they can choose the one they like best and explain why they have chosen it.

Chapter 4

While reading

19 Discuss: Facing facts

Have students discuss the following:

When does Scrooge understand that the dead man is he himself?

20 Discuss: Fear

Have students discuss the following:

How does this ghost make Scrooge afraid? Why does he do so? Which is the worst thing that he shows him? Can that make you afraid?

After reading

21 Write:

Have students write an obituary, a short newspaper note on somebody's death. Have the students write Scrooge's obituary.

22 Predict:

At the end of Chapter 4 Scrooge says: 'I'll change my future!' Have students predict the changes.

Chapter 5

While reading

23 Discuss: Sudden changes

Have students discuss Scrooge's change.

Do you like Scrooge's change? Does it make the story better or worse?

After reading

24 Write: Change Chapter 5

Have students suggest a different ending to the story and write two or three paragraphs as a new Chapter 5.

25 This traditional English Christmas carol is more than four hundred years old. To listen to it, download the music from the Internet. Have students sing it and then make a list of the Christmas carols or traditional songs that people sing in their country for religious festivals and celebrations.

We wish you a merry Christmas,

We wish you a merry Christmas,

We wish you a merry Christmas,

And a happy New Year.

Students may want to collect the words of all the songs on the list and build a webpage with them.

Vocabulary activities

For the Word List and vocabulary activities, go to www.penguinreaders.com.