

Context: what was happening when the text was written

Charles Dickens – Charles Dickens was born in 1812 and spent the first years of his life in Kent, England. At 9, he moved to London. At 12, his father was sent to a debtors’ prison for racking up huge debts, and Dickens was given a painful job labelling bottles near the prison. He found this period in his life hellish, and it doubtlessly led him to draw his readers’ attention to the plight of the poor when he later found success as an author. Many of his works are about social hardships and inequalities.

Class divides – despite industrial changes altering the social landscape, there were still relatively distinct social classes in operation: the nobility, the upper class, the middle class, and the working class. Life was terrible for the poorest: lack of money resulted in a negligible food supply. For some working families, money was so tight that they required their children to work in order to survive.

The Victorian era – the Victorian era describes the period in which Queen Victoria sat on the English throne – between 1837 and 1901 (most of Dickens’ life). Whilst this was a time of industrial revolution, it was also an extremely harsh time to live, and there was a huge disparity between the lives of the richest and the poorest . The Victorian era was a period of great change. In this time, the population of England doubled – from 16.8 million 1851 to over 30 million in 1901 but the country struggled to accommodate this increase and the poor suffered the most.

Health and medicine – the NHS was not established until much later so healthcare was not accessible for everyone, and medicine was nowhere near as advanced today. Many diseases were rife, and childbirth and poverty were very real dangers to people living in the era. As a result, a middle class person may expect to live to 45 at the time, whereas a working class person would have been fortunate to have lived half that time. In ‘A Christmas Carol’, the restrictions in healthcare are evident in Tiny Tim’s continued suffering.

Workhouses – a workhouse was a place where a person went if they could not afford to financially support themselves and their families; the most vulnerable in society. Men, women and children (mostly orphans) lived and worked in the workhouses, which were very crowded – making living conditions unhealthy and unpleasant. People slept in dormitories, where disease was easily spread. In ‘A Christmas Carol’, Scrooge voices his support for workhouses.

The Poor Law - in 1834 the Poor Law Amendment Act was passed by Parliament. This was designed to reduce the cost of looking after the poor as it stopped money going to poor people except in exceptional circumstances. Now if people wanted help they had to go into a workhouse to get it. The 19th century consequently saw a growth in the numbers of charities such as The Salvation Army and Dr Barnardo’s children’s homes to help those living in poverty.

Language/ structural techniques	Definition	Example
Pathetic fallacy	A type of personification where emotions are given to a setting, an object or the weather.	‘The fog came pouring in at every chink and keyhole, and was so dense without, that although the court was of the narrowest, the houses opposite were mere phantoms.’
Symbolism	When an object represents an idea that is much deeper and more significant.	Marley’s chains are an example of symbolism: they represent the greed and selfishness of mankind.
Personification	Describing an inanimate object as having human feelings.	‘The gruff old bell was always peeping slyly down at Scrooge out of a Gothic window in the wall.’
Metaphor	A descriptive technique that names a person, thing or action as something else.	‘A frosty rime was on his head, and on his eyebrows, and his wiry chin. He carried his own low temperature always about with him.’
Simile	A descriptive technique that compares one thing with another, usually using ‘as’ or ‘like’.	‘As solitary as an oyster.’
Foreshadowing	When the writer hints what is going to happen later on in the text.	“Without their visits, you cannot hope to shun the path I tread.”
Superlative	An adjective/ adverb that indicates the most of something.	‘We’re to be together all the Christmas long, and have the <u>merriest</u> time in all the world.’
Intensifier	A word, especially an adverb or adjective, that has little meaning itself but is used to add emphasis to another adjective, verb, or adverb.	‘Uncle Scrooge had imperceptibly become <u>so</u> gay and light of heart.’
Minimiser	A word that is used to make another adjective, verb or adverb sound lesser.	‘ <u>Poor</u> Tiny Tim...My <u>little</u> child.’
Imperative	A sentence that is a command.	“Leave me! Take me back. Haunt me no longer!”
Exclamatory	A sentence that expresses a heightened emotion. They end with an exclamation mark	“They are Man’s!...And they cling to me, appealing from their fathers. This boy is Ignorance. This girl is Want. Beware them both.”
Listing	When the writer includes several words/ phrases/ ideas, one after the other.	‘(the chain) was long, and wound about him like a tail; and it was made (for Scrooge observed it closely) of <u>cash-boxes, keys, padlocks, ledgers, deeds, and heavy purses wrought in steel.</u> ’
Repetition	When a word/ phrase is noticeably repeated throughout a sentence/ paragraph/ whole text.	‘My little, little child.’ cried Bob. ‘My <u>little</u> child.’
Imagery	A technique in which the author appeals to the senses i.e. seeing, hearing, touching.	‘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. He should!’
Foil	A character that exaggerates the opposing qualities of another character.	Fred’s kind and compassionate character is used as a foil to Scrooge’s egocentric character.

Themes: an idea that is explored throughout the text	Ideas
Family	Dickens suggests that family is the ultimate key to happiness and fulfilment. Dickens links Scrooge’s decision to be alone to darkness and the cold whilst he links family and companionship to light and warmth. Dickens implies that a successful life is one that is filled with significant relationships with others.
Redemption/change/ transformation	Dickens implies that we all have the ability to change and that we should continually reflect on how our behaviour affects others. Dickens suggests that many unfavourable qualities are born out of ignorance and that, by seeking to find out more about the lives of others, we can transform and become better people.
Supernatural	Dickens uses the supernatural to encourage self-reflection. Dickens also uses the supernatural to emphasise the idea that, through exploring our past behaviours and considering the impact on our future, we can become more compassionate and kinder people.
Greed/ wealth	Dickens implies that concentrating solely on accumulating more money only results in emptiness and dissatisfaction. Dickens suggests that true ‘wealth’ is to have significant relationships with others.
Social inequality/ poverty	Dickens suggests that the Victorian society ignored the poverty experienced by many. Dickens also highlights the divide between the rich and the poor and exposes the often inescapable cycle of poverty. Dickens portrays the poor as victims of a cruel society.
Forgiveness	Dickens suggests that change, both on an individual and societal level, is only possible through forgiveness. Dickens implies that that to be truly compassionate is to forgive.
Christmas/ tradition	Dickens portrays Christmas as being an important time because it is a rare opportunity for kindness and compassion. Dickens also implies that it’s a particularly important tradition because it is something that highlights the extravagance of the rich and the desperation of the poor.
Time	Dickens explores the idea that our past has direct implications on our behaviour in the future and that we need to recognise this pattern in order to be better people. Dickens also explores the notion that time is finite and that we should therefore live in the best way we can, all of the time to maximise the time we have.

Key terms	Definition
Morality tale	A story which teaches the reader a lesson about right and wrong.
Gothic	A style of writing that is characterised by elements of fear, horror, death, and gloom, as well as Romantic elements, such as nature, individuality, and deep self-reflection.
Allegory	A story in which the characters and events represent other things and express a deeper, often moral message.
Social inequality	When resources and opportunities are distributed unfairly in society, resulting in a significant difference in the quality of life experienced by the rich and the poor.

HT1 'A Christmas Carol' - Vocabulary List

Word	Definition	In a sentence	Synonyms
1. Disparity	Noun: a lack of equality or similarity, especially in a way that is not fair.	There was a growing <u>disparity</u> between rich and poor.	
2. Intolerable	Adjective: too bad or unpleasant to deal with or accept.	The constant fighting made life at home <u>intolerable</u> .	
3. Meritocratic	Adjective: a social system in which people's success or power is related to their abilities. Meritocracy is the idea that people succeed based on their own accomplishments rather than, for example, on their background or social class.	As a social commentator, Dickens saw the value of <u>meritocracy</u> but believed that greater humanitarianism should be shown to the poor and the vulnerable.	
4. Avaricious	Adjective: having or showing an extreme greed for wealth or material gain.	He had created a corrupt and <u>avaricious</u> government.	
5. Cantankerous	Adjective: arguing and complaining a lot.	He's getting a bit <u>cantankerous</u> in his old age.	
6. Unfavourable	Adjective: negative and showing that you do not like something.	Of those surveyed, an overwhelming majority said they had an <u>unfavourable</u> opinion of the president.	
7. Dissatisfied	Adjective: not pleased with something; feeling that something is not as good as it should be.	He felt increasingly <u>dissatisfied</u> with his life as he approached middle age.	
8. Self-imposed	Adjective: decided by yourself, without being influenced or ordered by other people.	The end of the year was their <u>self-imposed</u> deadline for finishing the work.	
9. Repentant	Adjective: feeling sorry for something that you have done.	She is truly <u>repentant</u> for her incredible naivety and stupidity.	
10. Resolute	Adjective: determined in character, action, or ideas.	She's utterly <u>resolute</u> in her refusal to apologise.	

HT1 'A Christmas Carol' - Vocabulary List

11. Insidious	Adjective: (of something unpleasant or dangerous) gradually and secretly causing harm.	It is an insidious system of taxation, which discriminates in favour of the rich.	
12. Peril	Noun: great danger, or something that is very dangerous.	The journey through the mountains was fraught with peril.	
13. Egocentric	Adjective: thinking only about yourself and what is good for you.	Babies are entirely egocentric, concerned only with when they will next be fed.	
14. Munificent	Adjective: very generous with money.	A former student has donated a <u>munificent</u> sum of money to the school.	
15. Humble	Adjective: not proud or not believing that you are important.	He's very <u>humble</u> about his success.	
16. Empathetic	Adjective: having the ability to imagine and understand how someone else feels.	Francesca is such a kind and <u>empathetic</u> friend.	
17. Gregarious	Adjective: liking and enjoying being with other people.	He is a <u>gregarious</u> and outgoing person.	
18. Illuminating	Adjective: giving you new information about a subject or making it easier to understand.	The class had a most <u>illuminating</u> discussion.	
19. Revelatory	Adjective: making something known or showing something that was previously secret.	Reading the novel had been a <u>revelatory</u> experience.	
20. Anguished	Adjective: experiencing or expressing severe mental or physical pain or suffering.	He gave an <u>anguished</u> cry.	
21. Unassuming	Adjective: quiet and shows no wish for attention or admiration.	He was shy and <u>unassuming</u> and not at all how you expect an actor to be.	
22. Perturbed	Adjective: worried and concerned.	He didn't seem overly <u>perturbed</u> by the news.	
23. Ominous	Adjective: suggesting that something	The engine had been making an <u>ominous</u> sound all the way	

HT1 'A Christmas Carol' - Vocabulary List

	unpleasant is likely to happen.	from my parents' house.	
24. Compassionate	Adjective: showing a strong feeling of sympathy and sadness for the suffering of others and a wish to help them.	The public's response to the crisis appeal was generous and <u>compassionate</u> .	
25. Exultant	Adjective: very happy, especially at someone else's defeat or failure.	The crowd gave an <u>exultant</u> cheer.	
26. Reformed	Adjective: having given up an immoral, harmful or self-destructive lifestyle.	I'm considered to be a <u>reformed</u> character these days.	
27. Philanthropic	Adjective: helping poor people, especially by giving them money; generous and benevolent.	He is known for his <u>philanthropic</u> work for children in Africa.	