

Context	
<p>Charles Dickens (1812 – 1870): Dickens’ own story is one of ‘rags to riches’ - at the young age of 12, his father was sent to a debtors’ prison for racking up huge debts, and Dickens was given a painful job in a blacking factory. He endured appalling conditions, loneliness and despair. He found this period in his life hellish and never forgot the experience – 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 economic hardships and social inequalities, and the wickedness and ignorance perpetuated by the privileged. In his writing, he “becomes a voice for the often voiceless” (<i>Pryke and Staniforth</i>).</p>	<p>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 (some of whom were very wealthy, like Scrooge), and the working class (such as the Cratchit family). 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.</p>
<p>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 the 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 in 1851 to over 30 million in 1901 but the country struggled to accommodate this increase and the poor suffered the most (usually from over-crowding in cities, hunger and disease).</p>	<p>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.</p>
<p>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 at the start of the novella.</p>	<p>Malthus and the Poor Laws: in 1798, Thomas Malthus wrote that the human population would grow faster than food supplies, leading to famine and death. Malthus believed a surplus population resulted in poverty and destitution. In 1834 the Poor Law Amendment Act was passed by Parliament. This was designed to decrease the cost of looking after the poor by reducing the financial help available to them, except in exceptional circumstances. Now, if people needed help, food and shelter, 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.</p>
Characters	
<p>Ebenezer Scrooge</p>	<p>Scrooge is the protagonist of the novella. He is a miserly owner of a counting house (what would now be called an accountant’s office). Initially greedy, selfish and cold, Scrooge hates Christmas and lacks any form of Christmas spirit. The novella charts his moral and psychological transformation through his visits from the Ghosts of Christmas Past, Present and Yet to Come. Dickens uses him to symbolise the power of the Christmas spirit and the possibility of redemption.</p>
<p>Bob Cratchit</p>	<p>Scrooge’s loyal clerk, he is very poorly treated by Scrooge and his large family live in poverty. Bob is emblematic of the Christmas spirit, loyalty and forgiveness. Despite their hardships, his family are cheery and determined to enjoy the few positives that they can get from life.</p>
<p>Tiny Tim</p>	<p>Tiny Tim is a young boy who has been born with physical disabilities that his family are too poor to have treated. He can be seen sitting on his father’s shoulder or struggling along with his crutch. However, Tim is the merriest, bravest character of all, always reminding others of the spirit of Christmas. The thought of Tiny Tim’s death fills Scrooge with regret and is a catalyst for his transformation.</p>
<p>Fred</p>	<p>Fred is Scrooge’s nephew. He symbolises the importance of family and meaningful relationships, as seen in his joy, warmth, compassion and forgiveness of Scrooge.</p>
<p>Fan</p>	<p>Scrooge’s sister and Fred’s mother. She is deceased at the time of the story, but appears in the vision of the Ghost of Christmas Past. She is a symbol of the loving kindness of Christmas time and she reveals a very different Scrooge to the reader – a frightened and lonely boy who was isolated from his home as a child.</p>
<p>Belle</p>	<p>Scrooge’s young love, who breaks off their engagement because of his increasing greed – when they met, he was happy to be poor and in love, but money fuels his existence now. Her happiness and fulfilment is contrasted with Scrooge’s bleak and empty life.</p>
<p>The Ghost of Christmas Past</p>	<p>The first spirit to visit Scrooge. He is a curious child-like figure with an illuminated head, symbolising how shining a light on memories from the past can be used to illuminate one’s thoughts and behaviours in the future. The Ghost of Christmas Past forces Scrooge to revisit painful memories and experiences. He symbolises enlightenment.</p>
<p>The Ghost of Christmas Present</p>	<p>The second of the three ghosts to visit Scrooge. He is a majestic jolly giant, who is dressed in a green robe. His lifespan is restricted to Christmas Day, and he has ‘over 1800 brothers’, representative of the other Christmas Days that were once in the present. He shows Scrooge how others spend Christmas, forcing him to contemplate his own solitary existence. He also shows him the need to consider ‘Want’ and ‘Ignorance.’ He symbolises Christmas: good will, plenty and peace.</p>
<p>The Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come</p>	<p>The third and final spirit to visit Scrooge. He is a silent phantom, reminiscent of Death. He presents Scrooge with an ominous view of his own death: the only people who his death remotely affects are those who owe him money (who are relieved), those who can make money from him (such as those dealing with his estate) and those who he could have saved (Tiny Tim). He symbolises the dark future that awaits humanity if it does not change.</p>
<p>Jacob Marley</p>	<p>Scrooge’s late business partner and the first supernatural spirit to visit Scrooge. Marley symbolises the perils and regrets of a greedy and selfish life. After his death, he has been condemned to wander the world in misery, unable to find peace, rest or salvation. He tries to save Scrooge from the same fate and begins Scrooge’s journey of reflection and transformation.</p>
Themes	
<p>Family</p>	<p>Dickens suggests that family is the ultimate key to happiness and fulfilment. When Scrooge is alone, his life is dark and cold, whereas family and companionship are linked to light and warmth. Dickens implies that a successful and worthwhile life is one that is filled with family and genuine relationships.</p>
<p>Redemption, change and transformation</p>	<p>Dickens implies that we all have the ability to change and that we should continually reflect on the effects of our behaviour and attitudes upon others. Dickens suggests that we can transform and become better people if we care about others, pay attention to others and think about how we can use our own lives to enhance the lives of others.</p>
<p>Supernatural</p>	<p>Dickens uses the supernatural to encourage self-reflection and a better understanding of ourselves. Dickens also uses the supernatural to show Scrooge (and the reader) how we can become more compassionate and kind people by exploring our past, thinking about our present and predicting our future. The different ghosts show Scrooge (and the reader) different aspects of the human experience: they remind him, show him, teach him, and warn him.</p>
<p>Greed and wealth</p>	<p>Dickens implies that greed only causes emptiness and dissatisfaction. Dickens suggests that true ‘wealth’ is to have significant relationships with others.</p>
<p>Social inequality and poverty</p>	<p>Dickens suggests that the majority of 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 and indifferent society.</p>
<p>Responsibility</p>	<p>Dickens suggests that every individual has a responsibility to the others around them. Dickens implies that if we take responsibility for each other, for the less fortunate in our society, and for humanity as a whole, then we can find personal redemption and make a significant difference to the lives of others.</p>
<p>Christmas</p>	<p>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. Contextually, until the mid-1800s, Christmas was solely a religious festival. Dickens helped to popularise many of the elements that we now associate with Christmas (e.g. food, decorations, music) and therefore creating a more secular (non-religious) idea of Christmas, based on the values of giving to others, good will and forgiveness.</p>
<p>Time</p>	<p>Dickens explores the idea that our past has direct implications upon 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.</p>

Subject terminology	Definition
Allegory	A story with two different meanings, where the straightforward meaning on the surface is used to reveal/ unlock a deeper meaning underneath. For example, Dickens expresses a deeper, moral message about the perils of inequality and what true wealth really is.
Prolepsis (flash forward)	A flashforward is a reference (or scene) to imagined or actual future events . Flash-forward is similar to foreshadowing. However, foreshadowing only hints at the possible outcome in the future, whereas a flashforward actually shows it.
Analepsis (flashback)	A flashback is a reference (or scene) to something that takes place before a story begins . Flashbacks interrupt the chronological order of the main narrative to take the reader back in time to the past events in a character's life.
Catalyst	Something – an event, meeting or realisation, for example - that begins a process of change or transformation .
Cyclical structure	A structural technique where the ending of the text mirrors the opening in some way. In this novella, Dickens begins with Scrooge falling asleep alone on Christmas Eve, and he ends the novella with Scrooge waking up alone on Christmas Day morning, but a dramatic transformation has occurred.
Exposition	The beginning of the text where elements of plot, character and setting are introduced.
Foil	A character whose purpose is to emphasise or contrast with the qualities of another character e.g. Fred's kind and compassionate character is used as a foil to Scrooge's egocentric character.
Gothic	A style of writing that is characterised by elements of fear, horror, death, and gloom. Gothic writing also tends to explore the darker side of humanity , as well as containing elements of the supernatural, transformation and deep self-reflection . Dickens uses many conventions of the gothic genre in this novella.
Morality tale	A story which teaches the reader a lesson about right and wrong.
Narrative perspective	The voice telling the story or relating a sequence of events (the viewpoint from which a story is told). Intrusive voice: a Dickens uses a narrative voice that offers opinions on the characters e.g. "Oh! But he was a tight-fisted hand at the grindstone, Scrooge!"
Protagonist	The leading character in the novel.
Stave	A musical term, like 'carol'. Carols are popular at Christmas and usually deal with stories of birth, joy and the spirit of giving to others. The structure of Dickens's novella uses a similar structure to a song to present a moral tale of transformation and rebirth.

Literary and structural techniques	Definition
Exclamatory	A sentence that expresses a heightened emotion . They end with an exclamation mark <i>"They are Man's!...And they cling to me, appealing from their fathers. This boy is Ignorance. This girl is Want. Beware them both."</i>
Imagery	The use of vivid language to evoke a sensory experience or create a picture with words for a reader. Writers often use the different senses to describe something – such as seeing, hearing and touching – in order to help the reader experience what is being described. <i>"...he became sensible of confused noises in the air; incoherent sounds of lamentation and regret; wailings inexpressibly sorrowful and self-accusatory."</i>
Foreshadowing	Where the author gives the reader hints or signs about the future . It suggests what is to come through imagery, language, and/or symbolism. It does not directly give away the outcome, but rather, suggests it. <i>"Without their visits, you cannot hope to shun the path I tread."</i>
Imperative	A sentence that is a command . They begin with a verb. <i>"Leave me! Take me back. Haunt me no longer!"</i>
Juxtaposition	When the writer places two ideas together for contrasting effect . Scrooge's coldness is juxtaposed with Fred's warmth.
Listing	When the writer includes several words/ phrases/ ideas, one after the other . <i>"A squeezing, wrenching, grasping, scraping, clutching, covetous, old sinner!"</i>
Metaphor	A type of image when one thing is compared to another thing to help the reader to understand an aspect of the original thing more clearly. The original thing (called the ' tenor ') is compared to another thing (this is called the ' vehicle ') to help the reader to understand it more clearly (understanding the link between the tenor and the vehicle is called the ' ground '). <i>"...it was a splendid laugh, a most illustrious laugh. The father of a long, long line of brilliant laughs."</i>
Motif	An object, image, symbol or idea that is repeated throughout a literary work. Motifs help to explain bigger ideas or themes. Scrooge is repeatedly linked with coldness.
Pathetic fallacy	A type of personification where emotions are given to a setting, a natural object or the weather . <i>"...no wind that blew was bitterer than he, no falling snow was more intent upon its purpose, no pelting rain less open to entreaty."</i>
Pathos	A moment that makes us feel pity or sorrow . Dickens uses pathos to describe people's suffering at various points in the novella. <i>"...when he thought that such another creature, quite as graceful and as full of promise, might have called him father, and been a spring-time in the haggard winter of his life, his sight grew very dim indeed."</i>
Personification	A type of image where a human quality is attached to a thing or idea. <i>"The gruff old bell was always peeping silyly down at Scrooge out of a Gothic window in the wall."</i>
Semantic field	A group of words that are very similar in meaning . Semantic fields are often used by writers to keep or reinforce a certain image/ feeling/ impression in the reader's mind. <i>"The cold within him froze his old features, nipped his pointed nose, shrivelled his cheek, stiffened his gait...A frosty rime was on his head...He carried his own low temperature always about with him; he iced his office in the dogdays; and didn't thaw it one degree at Christmas."</i>
Simile	A type of image that writers use to compare one thing with another, using 'like' or 'as' . <i>"Hard and sharp as flint, from which no steel had ever struck out generous fire; secret, and self-contained, and solitary as an oyster."</i>
Symbol/ symbolism	A thing that represents or stands for something else – usually, this is an object that represents a much deeper idea, emotion or feeling. A symbol might occur only once to signify a particular emotion or idea. It becomes a motif if it is repeated at various points in a text. Therefore, a symbol could be described as a 'mini-motif'! Marley's chains are an example of symbolism: they represent the greed and selfishness of mankind that ultimately weigh us down and prevent us from being free and able to help others.