

A CHRISTMAS CAROL

BY CHARLES DICKENS

AN INTRODUCTORY PACK FOR GCSE

Whether you're looking at this at home, or are back in school, this pack is a great way to get to grips with one of your key GCSE English Literature texts. Put together by the English Literature experts at York Notes, it will really kickstart your studies!

So – what's in the pack?

1. Find out about Charles Dickens, his times and the plot of *A Christmas Carol*.
2. Explore the settings of the novel – who lives where, and what key events are linked to these places.
3. Have a go at some warm-up tasks and activities to keep your brain active, and get a head start on your studies.
4. Follow up with our suggested links and ideas: websites, videos, and so on.

We hope you enjoy your introduction to this great text!



Who was Charles Dickens?

Three key things about Charles Dickens

1. Dickens was born in **1812** and had a difficult early life due to his father's **financial problems**.
2. Dickens wrote over **twenty books** including **novels**, short stories and non-fiction.
3. Dickens was much **loved** in his lifetime and he travelled the country reading his books to **packed halls**.



What happened in Dickens's early life?

- He was born in **Portsmouth** and initially was sent to school.
- At the age of **twelve**, Dickens was forced to work in a **blacking factory** to help support his family who were living in the debtor's prison with his father.
- Dickens became a **journalist**, a role which gave him an eye for detail.

Why did he write *A Christmas Carol*?

- Dickens read a government report about **child poverty** in 1843 and was appalled. In response, he decided to write a story to '**strike a sledgehammer blow**' on behalf of poor children.
- Dickens argued that employers, like **Scrooge**, should be held responsible for ensuring their workers worked in reasonable conditions.
- His description of **Martha Cratchit** working long hours for little pay was typical of the way young people were forced to live.

What was the response to *A Christmas Carol*?

- Most reviewers and readers praised it highly both for its characters and its **powerful message**.
- Fellow novelist **William M. Thackeray** suggested that people rush out '**and purchase five thousand more copies**'.
- Ironically, Dickens was criticised for the **high cost of the book**, which was expensively bound and illustrated. Later editions were **cheaper** and more **affordable** for ordinary families.

A Christmas Carol – the plot

A Christmas Carol is set mainly in London in the middle of the 19th century.

Stave One

- It's Christmas Eve, and miserly **Scrooge** is introduced at work in **his office**. He mistreats his clerk, **Bob Cratchit**.
- He is visited by his nephew **Fred** and some charity collectors whom he rejects. He chases away a poor boy who sings carols at his door.
- Back at **Scrooge's home**, the ghost of **Marley**, Scrooge's former business partner, appears. Marley begs Scrooge to change his behaviour.
- Scrooge is told he'll be visited by **Three Spirits**.

Stave Two

- The first spirit – the **Ghost of Christmas Past**, who looks both old and young, arrives at 1 a.m.
- Scrooge is shown himself as a lonely child at **school** with his (now dead) sister **Fan**, the mother of Fred.
- Next, Scrooge sees himself as a young man working for kind **Mr Fezziwig**, at his **warehouse**. He regrets his treatment of Bob.
- Finally, Scrooge is shown a scene with his former fiancée **Belle**. She breaks off their engagement due to his greed. He sees Belle later in her **house**, now happily married with children.

Stave Three

- The clock strikes one again, and Scrooge is visited by the second spirit, the **Ghost of Christmas Present**. He is a giant sitting atop a mountain of food.
- The ghost shows Scrooge a scene at the **Cratchits' house** where the Cratchits are enjoying their meagre Christmas supper.
- Scrooge learns **Tiny Tim**, Bob's disabled child, will die if Scrooge does not change his miserly ways.
- The ghost then shows people celebrating Christmas in difficult circumstances including miners living on a bleak **moor**, and **lighthouse** keepers.
- Finally, the ghost reveals the terrifying child-like figures of **Ignorance** and **Want** beneath his robes.

Stave Four

- Scrooge's final visitor is the **Spirit of Christmas Yet to Come**. It shows Scrooge some hard-hearted businessmen's reactions to an unnamed dead man.
- Then, Scrooge sees a **gloomy pawnbrokers**, where a cleaner, an undertaker and a washer woman reveal **things** they have taken from the dead man's bed.
- Scrooge is shown a **body under a sheet**, but still can't guess who the unloved, dead person is.
- At the Cratchits, Scrooge is horrified to find that **Tiny Tim has died**.
- Finally Scrooge sees his own **grave** and realises that he is the dead man. He begs the Ghost for the chance to change.

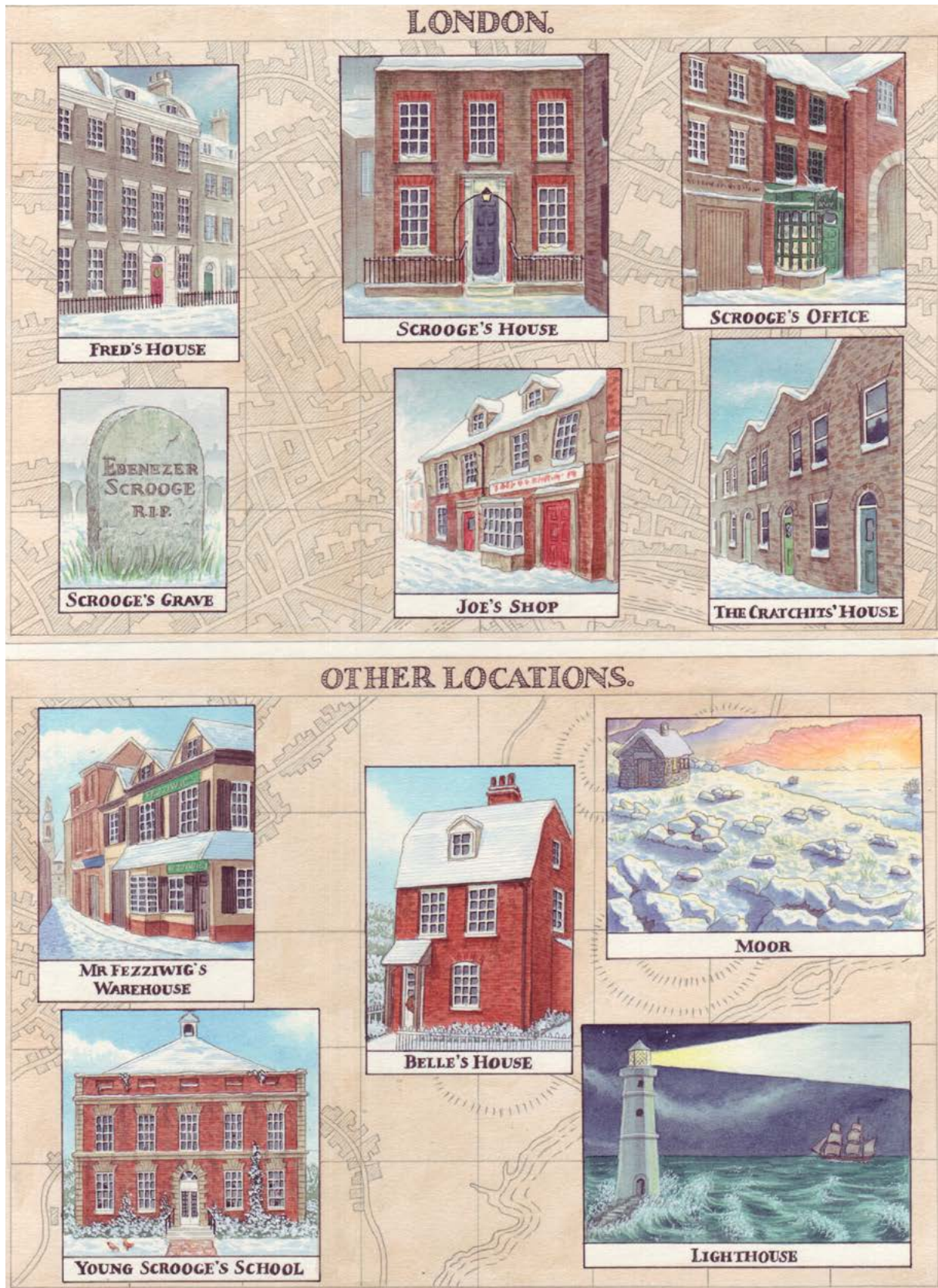
Stave Five

- Scrooge wakes up on a **sunny Christmas Day morning**. He realises that he now has a second chance and is delighted.
- Scrooge stops a boy in the street and pays him well to buy a **huge turkey** and deliver it to **the Cratchits**.
- He sees the **charity collectors** again, and promises them a large sum of money.
- Scrooge **surprises Fred** by joining him and his wife at their **home** for Christmas lunch.
- He goes on to **live a happy and generous life**, and becomes a 'second father' to **Tiny Tim, who does not die**.



The settings of *A Christmas Carol*

Look at these pictures of some key settings in *A Christmas Carol*. Can you label each setting with any of the important events or characters linked to it?



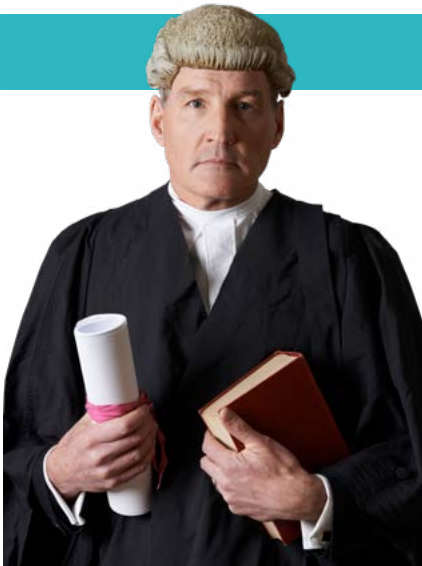
Things to do

1. The guilt scale

Now that you have read the plot summary, it's time for you to take on the role of judge and jury.

Looking back over the events of the novel, what would you say were Scrooge's biggest crimes?

Using the scale below, label it with Scrooge's actions with the worst at the top and the not so bad at the bottom. Then add a note saying *why* that action deserves to be high or low on the list in your opinion.



SCROOGE'S WORST ACTIONS	WHY?
SCROOGE'S NOT SO BAD ACTIONS	WHY?

2. Write like Dickens!

Read this famous description from the beginning of the novel about Scrooge.

Oh! But he was a tight-fisted hand at the grindstone, Scrooge! a squeezing, wrenching, grasping, scraping, clutching, covetous, old sinner! Hard and sharp as flint, from which no steel had ever struck out generous fire; secret, and self-contained, and solitary as an oyster. The cold within him froze his old features, nipped his pointed nose, shrivelled his cheek, stiffened his gait; made his eyes red, his thin lips blue; and spoke out shrewdly in his grating voice. 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; he iced his office in the dog-days; and didn't thaw it one degree at Christmas.

blue highlights: adjectives – often in a list – describing Scrooge

yellow highlights: similes – Scrooge described as being 'like' something else

green highlights: additional details about Scrooge's appearance

purple highlights: an extended metaphor or analogy referring to Scrooge being 'iced up'

Imagine Scrooge goes into a bakery and speaks to the baker, who is the exact opposite of Scrooge – warm, generous and welcoming. Write a Dickens-style description of the baker. Try to use as many of Dickens's stylistic skills as you can.

Ah! But the baker was ...

3. Dickens and the image of the poor

Dickens gives several images of the poor in the novel. Here are three of the descriptions you will come across when you read the whole text.

A) A boy who comes to Scrooge's door (Stave One)

The owner of one scant young nose, gnawed and mumbled by the hungry cold as bones are gnawed by dogs, stooped down at Scrooge's keyhole to regale him with a Christmas carol: but at the first sound of "God bless you, merry gentleman! May nothing you dismay!" Scrooge seized the ruler with such energy of action, that the singer fled in terror...



B) The disabled child Tiny Tim (Stave Three)

"God bless us every one!" said Tiny Tim, the last of all. He sat very close to his father's side, upon his little stool. Bob held his withered little hand in his, as if he loved the child, and wished to keep him by his side, and dreaded that he might be taken from him.

C) Child-like figures hidden under the cloak of the Ghost of Christmas Present (Stave Three)

They were a boy and girl. Yellow, meagre, ragged, scowling, wolfish; but **prostrate**, too, in their **humility**. Where graceful youth should have filled their features out, and touched them with its freshest tints, a stale and shrivelled hand, like that of age, had pinched, and twisted them, and pulled them into shreds. Where angels might have sat enthroned, devils lurked; and glared out menacing.

Glossary

prostrate: lying on, or bending low to the ground, face downwards

humility: modesty or low view of your own importance

Activities

Task

Tick the box (or boxes) you think applies to each description.

	A	B	C
Shows how poverty has affected their physical appearance.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Shows the poor as linked to God.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Shows the poor as frightening.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Shows the poor as suffering.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Shows the poor as hungry.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



Task

The two figures in **extract C** are '**Ignorance**' and '**Want**' (they are symbolic figures). Scrooge also says their feet are more like '**claws**' than feet. But, could you draw these two children?* Draw them on a separate sheet and label with words/phrases from the extract.

*You could check out one of the many screen adaptations and see how filmmakers have presented them.

Want to know more?

If you are reading or studying *A Christmas Carol* for the first time, here are some really useful and interesting resources you could check out.

Background to the novel and Dickens himself

1. The British Library has lots of articles about Dickens and *A Christmas Carol*. While some are quite long, the detail is fascinating.
Go to: **www.bl.uk** and search for 'A Christmas Carol'.
2. As far as Dickens himself is concerned, the film *The Man who Invented Christmas* (2017) gives a rather sentimental view, but might be an entertaining watch. You can find the official trailer on YouTube.
3. The actor Simon Callow also gives an insight into Dickens as a performer in his short video on the British Library website.
Go to: **www.bl.uk** and search for 'Dickens performer' and click 'View Online'.

Finding out more about the plot, theme and characters

1. How have the different characters been portrayed? By doing a simple image search for 'Scrooge' or 'The Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come', for example, you can find anything from modern animated versions to the original line drawings by John Leech.
2. For a simple summary of some of the themes and ideas of *A Christmas Carol*, check out the dedicated Dickens site.
Go to: **www.charlesdickenspage.com**, click 'Search' and search for 'A Christmas Carol'.
3. For a more analytical and thoughtful exploration, look again at the British Library resources. There are many pages and articles to choose from but the one on the ghosts in the story is particularly good.
Go to: **www.bl.uk**, search for 'Ghosts in A Christmas Carol' and click 'View Online'.
4. Finally, there have been lots of theatrical versions of the novel, and this resource produced by the Old Vic Theatre in London is worth checking out. It is probably aimed at teachers, but don't be put off by that as it has some interesting thoughts on how to adapt the story, and on some of its themes.
Go to: **www.oldvictheatre.com** click 'Join in' then 'For Schools' and find 'Resource packs' in the side bar.

Finally, don't forget that York Notes has lots more resources to help you with your studies!

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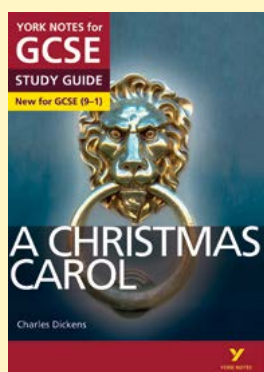
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Study Guide



Workbook



Practice Tests

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