



A CHRISTMAS CAROL

EMC Study Edition



English  
&Media  
centre

# Acknowledgements

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# TEACHERS' NOTES

This English and Media Centre study edition has been designed to help students gain a detailed critical and contextual understanding of Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*. While primarily intended for GCSE students, it can also be readily adapted for use with 11-14 year olds.

The 'Before Reading' activities have been designed to give students a flavour of Dickens' writing and the times in which he lived. They will help to prepare students to tackle the full text, which has been divided into manageable sections. Each section contains 'During Reading' activities, which are designed to help guide students through the text, while familiarising them with important aspects of study.

The extensive 'After Reading' activities provide students with opportunities to explore the novel in detail, while developing their skills of critical analysis and writing. Opportunities to practise exam-style questions have been built into this section, as well as a range of stimulating reading, writing and speaking and listening activities.

The text of the novel has been checked against a published version of the 1843 first edition, with some irregular spellings put in modern form. On several occasions the punctuation in this edition does not match with current Standard usage, particularly when applied to dashes, colons and semi-colons. It was decided to stick with Dickens' original usage in order to give an indication of the speech rhythms he wanted to emphasise in readings of his work.

# BEFORE READING

## Christmas in 1843

*A Christmas Carol* was first published in 1843 at the start of what is known as the Victorian Age. It was a time of rapid social changes and the establishment of new traditions, such as those around the celebration of Christmas. For example, the same year saw the first commercially produced Christmas card, shown on page 7.

The central image on the card shows three generations of a family raising a toast to whoever receives it. The images on either side show acts of charity, with food and clothing being given to the poor.

- Look closely at the card with a partner and discuss the following:
  - How is it similar or different to Christmas cards that are sent today?
  - What does it suggest about what British society was like in 1843?
  - What does it suggest about what people did to celebrate and mark Christmas in 1843?

## Dickens and Christmas

Charles Dickens had a fascination with Christmas. It features several times in his books. Two extracts are included on page 8.

- Read the accounts of Christmas that he wrote before *A Christmas Carol* and discuss the following with your partner:
  - How is Christmas shown in each extract?
  - What do the extracts suggest about Dickens' personal view of Christmas?
  - How do you think Christmas might be shown in *A Christmas Carol* based on these extracts?

## Different versions of *A Christmas Carol*

- In pairs, discuss what you notice about the images on page 9, all DVD covers or posters for different versions of *A Christmas Carol*.
- Based on these, what do you expect to find in the novel?



Published at Summerly's Home Treasury Office,  
12, Old Bond Street, London.

From

### Extract 1

Who can be insensible to the out-pourings of good feeling, and the honest interchange of affectionate attachment, which abound at this season of the year? A Christmas family-party! We know nothing in nature more delightful! There seems a magic in the very name of Christmas. Petty jealousies and discords are forgotten; social feelings are awakened, in bosoms to which they have long been strangers; father and son, or brother and sister, who have met and passed with averted gaze, or a look of cold recognition, for months before, proffer and return the cordial embrace, and bury their past animosities in their present happiness. Kindly hearts that have yearned towards each other, but have been withheld by false notions of pride and self-dignity, are again reunited, and all is kindness and benevolence! Would that Christmas lasted the whole year through (as it ought), and that the prejudices and passions which deform our better nature, were never called into action among those to whom they should ever be strangers!

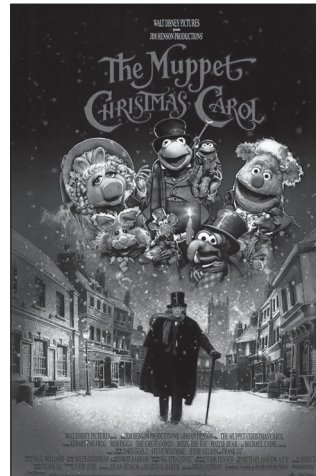
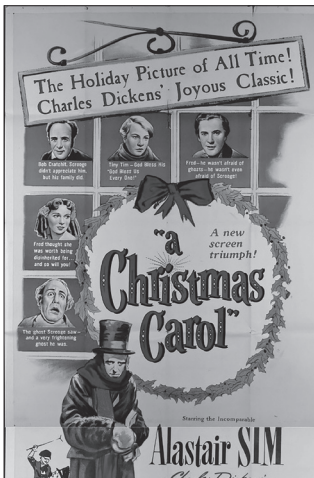
*From Charles Dickens, 'A Christmas Dinner' (1836)*

### Extract 2

And numerous indeed are the hearts to which Christmas brings a brief season of happiness and enjoyment. How many families whose members have been dispersed and scattered, far and wide, in the restless struggles of life, are then reunited, and meet once again in that happy state of companionship, and mutual goodwill, which is a source of such pure and unalloyed delight, and one so incompatible with the cares and sorrows of the world, that the religious belief of the most civilised nations, and the rude traditions of the rudest savages, alike number it among the first joys of a future condition of existence, provided for the blest and happy! ... Happy, happy Christmas, that can win us back to the delusions of our childish days; that can recall to the old man the pleasures of his youth; and transport the sailor and the traveller thousands of miles away, back to his own fireside and his quiet home!

*From Charles Dickens, The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club (1836-37)*

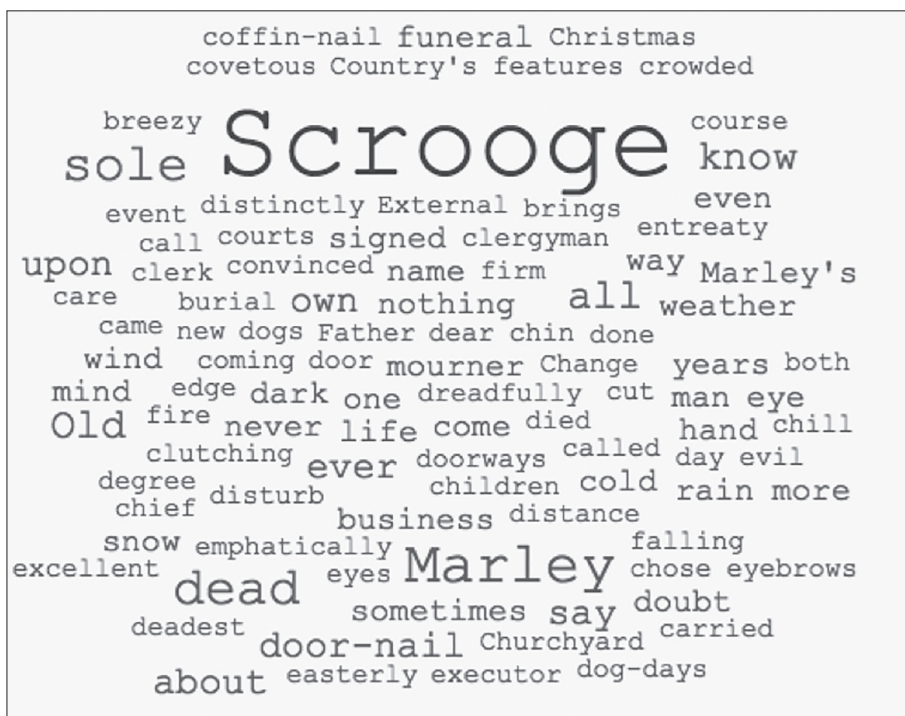




## Key words and motifs

In pairs, explore the word cloud below. It contains the most significant words from the first two pages of *A Christmas Carol*, with the size of the word based on the number of times it occurs.

- What groups of linked words can you find in the cloud, for instance words to do with weather? What themes do these suggest that the novel will explore?
- Based on these words, what kinds of things do you think might happen in the opening section?
- Write the opening paragraph to a short story that includes at least 10 of the words in the cloud.
- When you have read the first two pages, return to this section and see how well your answers matched what actually happens in the story.



# Dickens' World – Common Themes and Style of Writing

Dickens is perhaps the most famous novelist ever to have written in the English language, with his work still widely read all over the world.

- In pairs, read the extracts below that come from some of his other novels.
- Based on these extracts, what themes do you think he might commonly write about?
- What do the extracts suggest about his writing style? (Think about the vocabulary he uses, how he uses sentences and his tone of voice.)

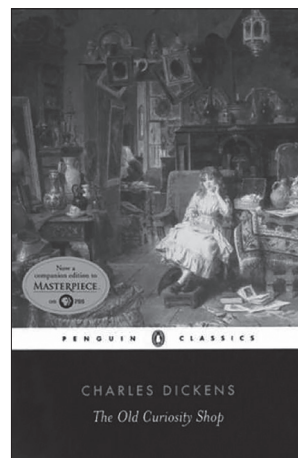
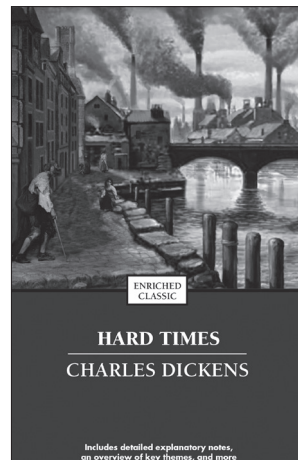
## Extract 1: from *Hard Times*

‘Now, what I want is, Facts. Teach these boys and girls nothing but Facts. Facts alone are wanted in life. Plant nothing else, and root out everything else. You can only form the minds of reasoning animals upon Facts: nothing else will ever be of any service to them. This is the principle on which I bring up my own children, and this is the principle on which I bring up these children. Stick to facts, sir!’

The scene was a plain, bare, monotonous vault of a school-room, and the speaker’s square forefinger emphasised his observations by underscoring every sentence with a line on the schoolmaster’s sleeve.

## Extract 2: from *The Old Curiosity Shop*

She was dead. Dear, gentle, patient, noble Nell was dead. Her little bird – a poor slight thing the pressure of a finger would have crushed – was stirring nimbly in its cage; and the strong heart of its child mistress was mute and motionless forever.



### Extract 3: from *Great Expectations*

The man, after looking at me for a moment, turned me upside down, and emptied my pockets. There was nothing in them but a piece of bread. When the church came to itself – for he was so sudden and strong that he made it go head over heels before me, and I saw the steeple under my feet – when the church came to itself, I say, I was seated on a high tombstone, trembling while he ate the bread ravenously.

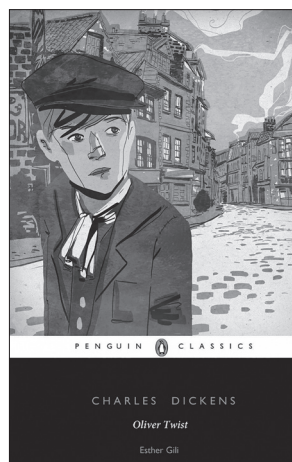
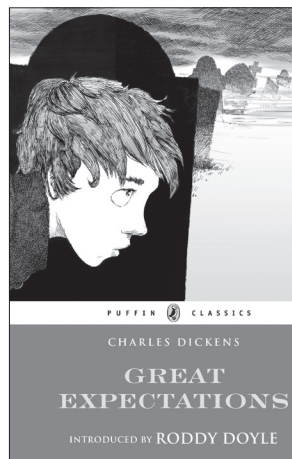
‘You young dog,’ said the man, licking his lips, ‘what fat cheeks you ha’ got.’

I believe they were fat, though I was at that time undersized for my years, and not strong.

### Extract 4: from *Oliver Twist*

The evening arrived; the boys took their places. The master, in his cook’s uniform, stationed himself at the copper; his pauper assistants ranged themselves behind him; the gruel was served out; and a long grace was said over the short commons. The gruel disappeared; the boys whispered each other, and winked at Oliver; while his next neighbours nudged him. Child as he was, he was desperate with hunger, and reckless with misery. He rose from the table; and advancing to the master, basin and spoon in hand, said: somewhat alarmed at his own temerity:

‘Please, sir, I want some more.’



# STAVE 1

## MARLEY'S GHOST

### Before Reading Stave 1, Section A

#### The Preface

- Look at Dickens' preface to the book, below.
  - What tone does Dickens set in this preface?
  - What type of relationship is he establishing with the reader?

#### PREFACE

I HAVE endeavoured in this Ghostly little book, to raise the Ghost of an Idea, which shall not put my readers out of humour with themselves, with each other, with the season, or with me.

May it haunt their houses pleasantly, and no one wish to lay it.

Their faithful Friend and  
Servant,

C. D. December, 1843.



#### Establishing Scrooge's character

As you are reading this section think about how Dickens establishes Scrooge's character.

- What kind of man is he?
- How is he described?
- How does he compare with other characters in this section?

# Stave I<sup>1</sup>:

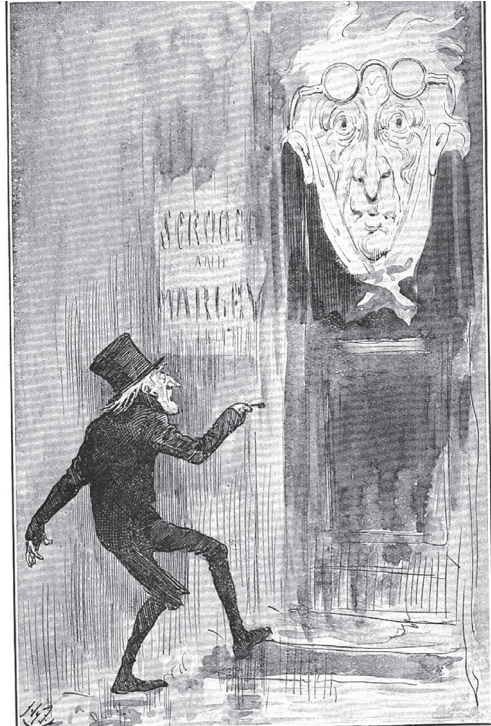
## MARLEY'S GHOST

MARLEY was dead: to begin with. There is no doubt whatever about that. The register of his burial was signed by the clergyman, the clerk, the undertaker, and the chief mourner. Scrooge signed it: and Scrooge's name was good upon 'Change<sup>2</sup> for anything he chose to put his hand to. Old Marley was as dead as a door-nail.

Mind! I don't mean to say that I know, of my own knowledge, what there is particularly dead about a door-nail. I might have been inclined, myself, to regard a coffin-nail as the deadest piece of ironmongery in the trade.

But the wisdom of our ancestors is in the simile; and my unhallowed hands shall not disturb it, or the Country's done for. You will therefore permit me to repeat, emphatically, that Marley was as dead as a door-nail.

Scrooge knew he was dead? Of course he did. How could it be otherwise? Scrooge and he were partners for I don't know how many years. Scrooge was his sole executor<sup>3</sup>, his sole administrator, his sole assign, his sole residuary legatee<sup>4</sup>, his sole friend, and sole mourner. And even Scrooge was not so dreadfully cut up by the sad event, but that he was an excellent man of business on the very day of the funeral, and solemnised it with an undoubted bargain.



<sup>1</sup> A 'stave' usually refers to the five lines on which musical notes are written. Here it is used instead of 'chapter'

<sup>2</sup> Short for 'The Royal Exchange', the centre of the London financial system

<sup>3</sup> Person appointed to carry out the terms of a will

<sup>4</sup> The person who gets what is left in someone's will once all debt payments have been made

The mention of Marley's funeral brings me back to the point I started from. There is no doubt that Marley was dead. This must be distinctly understood, or nothing wonderful can come of the story I am going to relate. If we were not perfectly convinced that Hamlet's Father<sup>5</sup> died before the play began, there would be nothing more remarkable in his taking a stroll at night, in an easterly wind, upon his own ramparts, than there would be in any other middle-aged gentleman rashly turning out after dark in a breezy spot – say Saint Paul's Churchyard for instance – literally to astonish his son's weak mind.

Scrooge never painted out Old Marley's name. There it stood, years afterwards, above the warehouse door: Scrooge and Marley. The firm was known as Scrooge and Marley. Sometimes people new to the business called Scrooge Scrooge, and sometimes Marley, but he answered to both names: it was all the same to him.

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<sup>6</sup> 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<sup>7</sup>; and didn't thaw it one degree at Christmas.

External heat and cold had little influence on Scrooge. No warmth could warm, no wintry weather chill him. No wind that blew was bitterer than he, no falling snow was more intent upon its purpose, no pelting rain less open to entreaty. Foul weather didn't know where to have him. The heaviest rain, and snow, and hail, and sleet, could boast of the advantage over him in only one respect. They often 'came down'<sup>8</sup> handsomely, and Scrooge never did.

Nobody ever stopped him in the street to say, with gladsome looks, 'My dear Scrooge, how are you? When will you come to see me?' No beggars implored him to bestow a trifle, no children asked him what it was o'clock, no man or woman ever once in all his life inquired the way to such and such a place, of Scrooge. Even the blind men's dogs appeared to know

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5 In Shakespeare's play Hamlet's father was murdered by his Uncle Claudius

6 The frost that covers an object

7 The hottest days of the year

8 Slang for 'gave money'

him; and when they saw him coming on, would tug their owners into doorways and up courts; and then would wag their tails as though they said, 'No eye at all is better than an evil eye, dark master!'

But what did Scrooge care! It was the very thing he liked. To edge his way along the crowded paths of life, warning all human sympathy to keep its distance, was what the knowing ones call 'nuts' to Scrooge.

Once upon a time – of all the good days in the year, on Christmas Eve – old Scrooge sat busy in his counting-house<sup>9</sup>. It was cold, bleak, biting weather: foggy withal: and he could hear the people in the court outside, go wheezing up and down, beating their hands upon their breasts, and stamping their feet upon the pavement stones to warm them. The city clocks had only just gone three, but it was quite dark already – it had not been light all day – and candles were flaring in the windows of the neighbouring offices, like ruddy smears upon the palpable brown air. 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. To see the dingy cloud come drooping down, obscuring everything, one might have thought that Nature lived hard by, and was brewing on a large scale.

The door of Scrooge's counting-house was open that he might keep his eye upon his clerk, who in a dismal little cell beyond, a sort of tank, was copying letters. Scrooge had a very small fire, but the clerk's fire was so very much smaller that it looked like one coal. But he couldn't replenish it, for Scrooge kept the coal-box in his own room; and so surely as the clerk came in with the shovel, the master predicted that it would be necessary



<sup>9</sup> An office in which a business carries out its operations, often to do with accounting



for them to part. Wherefore the clerk put on his white comforter, and tried to warm himself at the candle; in which effort, not being a man of a strong imagination, he failed.

‘A merry Christmas, uncle! God save you!’ cried a cheerful voice. It was the voice of Scrooge’s nephew, who came upon him so quickly that this was the first intimation he had of his approach.

‘Bah!’ said Scrooge, ‘Humbug!’

He had so heated himself with rapid walking in the fog and frost, this nephew of Scrooge’s, that he was all in a glow; his face was ruddy and handsome; his eyes sparkled, and his breath smoked again.

‘Christmas a humbug, uncle!’ said Scrooge’s nephew. ‘You don’t mean that, I am sure?’

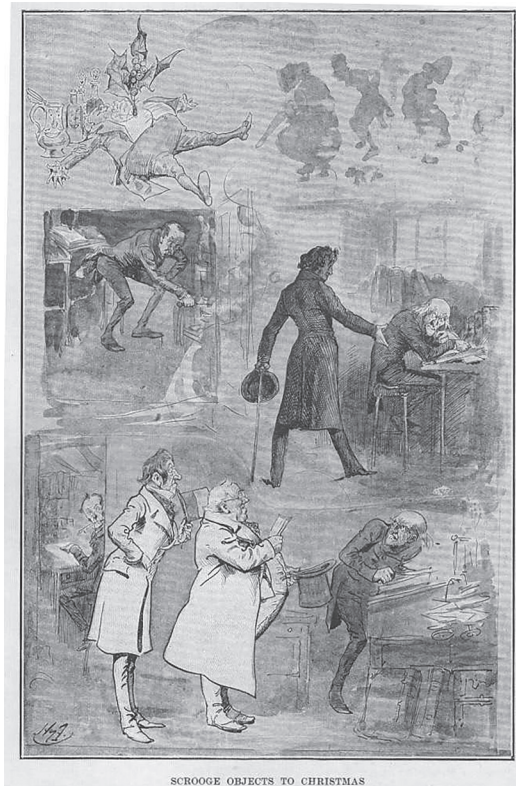
‘I do,’ said Scrooge. ‘Merry Christmas! What right have you to be merry? What reason have you to be merry? You’re poor enough.’

‘Come, then,’ returned the nephew gaily. ‘What right have you to be dismal? What reason have you to be morose? You’re rich enough.’

Scrooge having no better answer ready on the spur of the moment, said, ‘Bah!’ again; and followed it up with ‘Humbug.’

‘Don’t be cross, uncle!’ said the nephew.

‘What else can I be,’ returned the uncle, ‘when I live in such a world of fools as this? Merry Christmas! Out upon merry Christmas! What’s Christmas time to you but a time for paying bills without money; a time for finding yourself a year older, but not an hour richer; a time for balancing your books and having every item in ‘em through a round



SCROOGE OBJECTS TO CHRISTMAS

dozen of months presented dead against you? If I could work my will,' said Scrooge indignantly, '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!'

'Uncle!' pleaded the nephew.

'Nephew!' returned the uncle, sternly, 'keep Christmas in your own way, and let me keep it in mine.'

'Keep it!' repeated Scrooge's nephew. 'But you don't keep it.'

'Let me leave it alone, then,' said Scrooge. 'Much good may it do you! Much good it has ever done you!'

'There are many things from which I might have derived good, by which I have not profited, I dare say,' returned the nephew: 'Christmas among the rest. But I am sure I have always thought of Christmas time, when it has come round – apart from the veneration due to its sacred name and origin, if anything belonging to it can be apart from that – as a good time: a kind, forgiving, charitable, pleasant time: the only time I know of, in the long calendar of the year, when men and women seem by one consent to open their shut-up hearts freely, and to think of people below them as if they really were fellow-passengers to the grave, and not another race of creatures bound on other journeys. And therefore, uncle, though it has never put a scrap of gold or silver in my pocket, I believe that it has done me good, and will do me good; and I say, God bless it!'

The clerk in the Tank<sup>10</sup> involuntarily applauded: becoming immediately sensible of the impropriety, he poked the fire, and extinguished the last frail spark forever.

'Let me hear another sound from you,' said Scrooge, 'and you'll keep your Christmas by losing your situation! You're quite a powerful speaker, sir,' he added, turning to his nephew. 'I wonder you don't go into Parliament.'

'Don't be angry, uncle. Come! Dine with us tomorrow.'

Scrooge said that he would see him – yes, indeed he did. He went the whole length of the expression, and said that he would see him in that extremity first.

'But why?' cried Scrooge's nephew. 'Why?'

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<sup>10</sup> Small section of the office in which the clerk worked

‘Why did you get married?’ said Scrooge.

‘Because I fell in love.’

‘Because you fell in love!’ growled Scrooge, as if that were the only one thing in the world more ridiculous than a merry Christmas. ‘Good afternoon!’

‘Nay, uncle, but you never came to see me before that happened. Why give it as a reason for not coming now?’

‘Good afternoon,’ said Scrooge.

‘I want nothing from you; I ask nothing of you; why cannot we be friends?’

‘Good afternoon,’ said Scrooge.

‘I am sorry, with all my heart, to find you so resolute. We have never had any quarrel, to which I have been a party. But I have made the trial in homage to Christmas, and I’ll keep my Christmas humour to the last. So A Merry Christmas, uncle!’

‘Good afternoon!’ said Scrooge.

‘And A Happy New Year!’

‘Good afternoon!’ said Scrooge.

His nephew left the room without an angry word, notwithstanding. He stopped at the outer door to bestow the greetings of the season on the clerk, who, cold as he was, was warmer than Scrooge; for he returned them cordially.

‘There’s another fellow,’ muttered Scrooge; who overheard him: ‘my clerk, with fifteen shillings a week, and a wife and family, talking about a merry Christmas. I’ll retire to Bedlam’<sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> Short for ‘Bethlehem’, a notorious asylum for the mentally ill

# After Reading Stave 1, Section A

## Establishing Scrooge's character

- What did you notice about Scrooge's character as you read?
- How does he compare with the two other characters mentioned, Scrooge's nephew, Fred, and his clerk (whose name you will find out later in the book)?
- Remind yourself of the description of Scrooge on pages 20-21 (from 'Oh! But he was a tight-fisted...' to '... 'nuts' to Scrooge!').
  - Read the passage in pairs and pick out the sentence, or part of a sentence, that you think describes him most vividly. Share your choices around the class.
  - Still in your pair, read the statements below and select the two that you think best describe what Dickens is trying to achieve with this description.

<b>Dickens' description of Scrooge is written like this in order to:</b>	
<b>A.</b>	Grab the reader's attention at the very start of the novel.
<b>B.</b>	Match Scrooge's characteristics to the season of winter.
<b>C.</b>	Show off his (Dickens') extravagant writing style to the reader.
<b>D.</b>	Turn the reader against Scrooge from the very beginning.
<b>E.</b>	Establish Scrooge as a caricature (an exaggerated character) rather than a realistic one.
<b>F.</b>	Establish that this novel is partly comic in tone.
<b>G.</b>	Set up themes about kindness, goodness and their opposites.

## Dramatising Dickens

Dickens' work has been adapted for stage and screen on numerous occasions. In part this is because his characters are described so colourfully and speak in such memorable dialogue.

- In pairs, remind yourself of the conversation between Scrooge and his nephew at the end of this section (from "A merry Christmas, uncle! God save you!" on page 22 to the end).
- Develop a reading of this section, using the dialogue only. You should limit yourself to 100-150 words in order to try and get across the essence of what the two men are saying.
- Hear one or two examples of your work around the class and discuss how Scrooge's character comes across and how he compares to his nephew.