

1

Stave One: Marley's Ghost

How does Dickens set up the story?



Your progress in this unit:

- discuss what you already know of the story
- understand the role of the narrator
- examine how Scrooge and Marley's Ghost are presented
- consider ideas about poverty.

GETTING STARTED - THE STORY AND YOU

What's it all about?

Even if you have never read *A Christmas Carol*, you are probably familiar with the story, which has been produced many times on film and television.

- 1 Work in small groups. Talk about:
 - a any productions of *A Christmas Carol* you have seen
 - b what you know about the story.
- 2 In your groups, decide which of the following statements about *A Christmas Carol* are true:
 - a It is set in New York.
 - b Scrooge is visited by four ghosts.
 - c The ghosts appear on New Year's Eve.
 - d The story was written by Walt Disney.
 - e It is set in London.
 - f Scrooge always carries a pocket watch.
 - g Three ghosts appear before Scrooge.
 - h It was written in the 19th century.
 - i Scrooge falls into his own grave.
 - j It ends with the words 'God bless us, every one!'

The story is divided into five 'staves', or chapters. A stave is a musical symbol made up of five horizontal lines and four spaces, which each represent a different musical pitch. Dickens may have chosen to call his chapters 'staves' to reflect the title *A Christmas Carol*, with its **connotations** of songs and music. The story was first published in 1843. It is set in Victorian England, at Christmas time.

Read the summary, then read Stave One.



Watch a dramatic reading of the beginning of Stave One on Cambridge Elevate.

GETTING CLOSER - FOCUS ON DETAILS

The meaning of Christmas

- 1 Work in small groups. Talk about:
 - a what Christmas means to you
 - b whether you celebrate Christmas or not
 - c the traditions you associate with Christmas.



Key terms

connotations: things or ideas suggested by a word.

STAVE ONE: MARLEY'S GHOST

It is Christmas Eve. Scrooge is busy in his counting-house, keeping a careful eye on his clerk, Bob Cratchit. Scrooge's nephew arrives to wish him a Merry Christmas and invite him to dinner the next day. Scrooge rudely refuses the invitation.

As the nephew leaves, two portly gentlemen arrive and ask Scrooge to donate to a fund to help the poor. Scrooge refuses and turns the gentlemen away. The next visitor is a young carol singer who is quickly frightened away by Scrooge's actions.

As the day moves on, the fog and darkness thicken and it becomes colder. When it is time to close the counting-house, Scrooge scolds his clerk for wanting Christmas Day off work.

Scrooge eats in a tavern and makes his solitary way home. When he arrives, he notes with some alarm that his door knocker appears to have changed into the face of his former business partner, Jacob Marley, who has been dead for seven years.

Scrooge enters his house cautiously, checking that all is as it should be before double locking his door, putting on his nightgown and sitting down by a small fire to eat his gruel. Suddenly, every bell in the house begins to ring and he hears the clanking of chains. Marley's Ghost appears.

At first, Scrooge claims not to believe in this ghostly figure, but its fearful cry soon changes his mind. Marley's Ghost explains that the heavy chain it carries was formed throughout Marley's lifetime when he failed to help others. The ghost tells Scrooge that his own chain is growing even longer and heavier.

Marley's Ghost explains that Scrooge will be visited by three spirits. These spirits will give him a chance to avoid Marley's fate. After showing Scrooge many other ghosts as a warning, Marley's Ghost leaves and Scrooge goes to bed.

GCSE English Literature for AQA: A Christmas Carol

- 2 The following quotations are taken from Stave One. How far do they reflect your own experiences of Christmas?
- a **Greetings:** 'A Merry Christmas, uncle! God save you!'
 - b **Cost:** 'What's Christmastime to you but a time for paying bills without money?'
 - c **Charity:** 'I have always thought of Christmastime [...] as a good time; a kind, forgiving, charitable, pleasant time.'
 - d **Food:** 'Come! Dine with us tomorrow.'
 - e **Shopping:** The brightness of the shops, where holly sprigs and berries crackled in the lamp heat of the windows ...
 - f **Carols:** 'God bless you, merry gentleman, / May nothing you dismay!'

Ideas about charity

The idea of charity is important in *A Christmas Carol*. Look at this dictionary definition of 'charity':

charity *noun* (giving)

1 a system of giving money, food, or help free to those who are in need because they are ill, poor or have no home, or any organisation that has the purpose of providing money or helping in this way.

2 the quality of being kind to people and not judging them in a severe way.

- 1 Talk about:
- a your views on helping the poor
 - b the importance of charity at Christmas
 - c the importance of showing kindness to others.
- 2 The chain that Marley's Ghost carries was not created by the bad things he did in life, but by his failure to do good. In Stave One, what opportunities has Scrooge had - and failed to use - to do good?
- 3 Scrooge's famous expression is '**Humbug!**' Use a dictionary to find out what this word means. What does Scrooge's frequent use of this word suggest about his attitude to the world?

Dickens's purpose

'Who **tells** this story?' is not the same question as 'Who **wrote** this story?' We know that Charles Dickens wrote *A Christmas Carol*. In a short **preface**, he reveals the effect he hoped it would have on his readers:

1 Stave One: Marley's Ghost

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.

Preface

- 1 What effects does he hope the story will and will not have on his readers?
- 2 Choose words from the word bank to describe the **tone** of this preface. Explain your choices.

| | | |
|---------------|-------------|---------|
| sinister | mysterious | playful |
| light-hearted | frightening | serious |

The narrator

The **narrator** is the person who tells the story. There are different types of narrative, including **first-person narrative** and **third-person narrative**. In *A Christmas Carol*, Dickens combines these two.

The narrator uses the first-person narrative:

Mind! I don't mean to say that I know, of my own knowledge, what there is particularly dead about a doornail.

Stave One

He makes judgements about the **characters**:

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.

Stave One

He addresses the reader directly:

You will, therefore, permit me to repeat, emphatically, that Marley was dead as a doornail.

Stave One

However, large parts of *A Christmas Carol* are written in the third person:

The Lord Mayor, in the stronghold of the mighty Mansion House, gave orders to his fifty cooks and butlers to keep Christmas as a Lord Mayor's household should.

Stave One

- 1 Copy the following table. Find further examples in Stave One to support the statements made in the first column.

| The narrator ... | Evidence |
|---------------------------------------|----------|
| uses the first-person narrative | |
| makes judgements about the characters | |
| addresses the reader directly | |
| sees and knows everything | |
| uses the third-person narrative | |



Key terms

- preface:** an introduction or explanation written by the author at the start of a book.
- tone:** the mood or attitude that a writer conveys in a story.
- narrator:** the character in a novel who tells the story.
- first-person narrative:** an account of events using the pronouns 'I', 'me' and 'we'.
- third-person narrative:** an account of events using 'he', 'she' or 'they', rather than 'I' or 'we'.
- characters:** the people in a story; even when based on real people, characters in a novel are invented or fictionalised.

GCSE English Literature for AQA: A Christmas Carol

The listener

In Victorian times, people often listened to stories being read to them. This may explain why the narrator in *A Christmas Carol* sometimes sounds as though he is speaking aloud, and why Dickens sometimes uses punctuation in an unusual and non-standard way.

- 1 Work in small groups. Focus on the first nine paragraphs of Stave One, where the narrator reveals Scrooge's history with Marley – up to the words '**Once upon a time**'. Take it in turn to read a paragraph aloud. Aim to:
 - a capture the 'voice' of the narrator
 - b engage your listeners through your tone and expression.
- 2 Talk about the ways in which this narrator seems to see and know everything. Focus on:
 - a what he knows about past events
 - b what he reveals about Scrooge
 - c what he reveals about how others respond to Scrooge.

PUTTING DETAILS TO USE

Describing Scrooge

Dickens created many well-known characters, but Ebenezer Scrooge is one of his most famous. The word 'Scrooge' even appears in dictionaries and is associated with being mean or miserly.

We learn about Scrooge's life, his actions, his thoughts and words through the story's narrator. At times, the narrator makes judgements on Scrooge, but sometimes he leaves readers to judge for themselves. Right from the start, we get a clear idea of the narrator's view of Scrooge: '**Oh! but he was a tight-fisted hand at the grindstone, Scrooge!**' Read the full paragraph. You may find the following explanations of some of the words useful:

- **grindstone:** a round solid stone used for sharpening knives and tools
- **covetous:** eagerly or enviously wanting things
- **flint:** a very hard mineral that produces a spark when struck
- **oyster:** a mollusc that lives in a hard shell
- **gait:** way of walking
- **rime:** ice formed by droplets of fog
- **dog days:** the hottest days of the year.



Find out more about plot and structure in *A Christmas Carol* in Unit 6.



Contexts

School attendance was not made compulsory until 1870 – 27 years after *A Christmas Carol* was published. Many people in Victorian England could not read and there was no radio or television. Instead, adults and children alike would listen to stories being read aloud to them. Dickens was well aware of this, of course, so he wrote his stories with the listener in mind, as well as the reader.

- 1 Look at the following table, which identifies some of the language features in this paragraph. Copy the table and complete it by explaining the effect of each language feature.

| Quotation | Language feature | Effect |
|---|---|--------|
| 'a squeezing, wrenching, grasping, scraping, clutching, covetous, old sinner' | a list of seven adjectives used to describe Scrooge the 'sinner' | |
| 'Hard and sharp as flint from which no steel had ever struck out generous fire' | extended simile | |
| 'solitary as an oyster' | simile | |

- 2 List all the words and phrases in this paragraph that link to coldness. What do these add to your impression of Scrooge?
- 3 Now read the next paragraph. How does Dickens use aspects of the weather to continue the description of Scrooge?
- 4 What do you think the final sentence of this paragraph means?



Find out more about language in *A Christmas Carol* in Unit 10.



Key terms

adjective: a word that describes a person, place or thing.

simile: a comparison between two things that uses the words 'as' or 'like'.

Oh! but he was a tight-fisted hand at the grindstone, Scrooge!

Stave One