

# Grade 9 A Christmas Carol Essay

2021 PAPER

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## Charles Dickens: *A Christmas Carol*

Read the following extract from Chapter 2 of *A Christmas Carol* and then answer the question that follows.

In this extract, the Ghost of Christmas Past shows Scrooge the Christmas party he attended at Mr Fezziwig's warehouse when he was a young man.

- But if they had been twice as many—ah, four times—old Fezziwig would have been a match for them, and so would Mrs. Fezziwig. As to her, she was worthy to be his partner in every sense of the term. If that's not high praise, tell me higher, and I'll use it. A positive light appeared to issue from Fezziwig's calves.
- 5 They chone in every part of the dance like moons. You couldn't have predicted, at any given time, what would have become of them next. And when old Fezziwig and Mrs. Fezziwig had gone all through the dance; advance and retire, both hands to your partner, bow and curtsy, corkscrew, thread-the-needle, and back again to your place; Fezziwig "cut"—cut so deftly, that he appeared to wink
- 10 with his legs, and came upon his feet again without a stagger. When the clock struck eleven, this domestic ball broke up. Mr. and Mrs. Fezziwig took their stations, one on either side of the door, and shaking hands with every person individually as he or she went out, wished him or her a Merry Christmas. When everybody had retired but the two 'prentices, they did the
- 15 same to them; and thus the cheerful voices died away, and the lads were left to their beds; which were under a counter in the back-shop. During the whole of this time, Scrooge had acted like a man out of his wits. His heart and soul were in the scene, and with his former self. He corroborated everything, remembered everything, enjoyed everything, and underwent the
- 20 strangest agitation. It was not until now, when the bright faces of his former self and Dick were turned from them, that he remembered the Ghost, and became conscious that it was looking full upon him, while the light upon its head burnt very clear.
- "A small matter," said the Ghost, "to make these silly folks so full of gratitude."
- 25 "Small!" echoed Scrooge. The Spirit signed to him to listen to the two apprentices, who were pouring out their hearts in praise of Fezziwig: and when he had done so, said, "Why! Is it not? He has spent but a few pounds of your mortal money: three or four perhaps. Is that so much that he deserves this praise?"
- 30 "It isn't that," said Scrooge, heated by the remark, and speaking unconsciously like his former, not his latter, self. "It isn't that, Spirit. He has the power to render us happy or unhappy; to make our service light or burdensome; a pleasure or a toil. Say that his power lies in words and looks; in things so slight and insignificant that it is impossible to add and count 'em up: what then? The
- 35 happiness he gives, is quite as great as if it cost a fortune."

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Starting with this extract, explore how Dickens presents ideas about joy and happiness in *A Christmas Carol*.

Write about:

- how Dickens presents joy and happiness in this extract
- how Dickens presents ideas about joy and happiness in the novel as a whole.

[30 marks]

### PLAN

- Scrooge's happiness and Joy as a young apprentice
- Happiness and joy can be robbed by money- Scrooge at the beginning
- Happiness and joy can be achieved again through redemption- Scrooge at the end

Dickens constructs an idea of happiness and joy in Stave 2 through introducing a jovial youthful version of Scrooge- the antithesis to his earlier parsimonious and miserable presentation. Scrooge is presented as full of vitality and life, his loving nature being pertinent as the “two apprentices” were “pouring out their hearts in praise of Fezziwig”. The diction on “hearts” creates an image of benevolence and cherishment, mirroring how Scrooge is elated and joyful in this setting that is full of benevolence- as Fezziwig cherishes him and the other apprentice, Scrooge radiates happiness as he finally belongs. This is exacerbated through the reader understanding he didn’t belong as a “solitary child” and thus Fezziwig is emblematic of safety, love, and joy for Scrooge. Alternatively, Stave 2 is full of joy as the ghost of Christmas past is symbolic of joy and hope as it has a “light” which “burnt very clear”. The motif of light is used throughout the novella to symbolise hope, yet as the ghost has a light that “burnt very clear” it illuminates how he is trying to elicit clarity and reminiscence from Scrooge about the previous joy and happiness he experienced. Alternatively, as light can illuminate, this emulates how the ghost illuminates that these feeling of joys, happiness and love are still accessible for Scrooge if he allows himself the chance of redemption. The illumination of Scrooge’s happiness and joy in Stave 2, as illuminated by the ghost, directly indicts his earlier Malthusian presentation. Dickens drew parallels between Scrooge and Malthus, an economist who believes supplies were scarce and the poor were to blame, to show that holding these views prohibits joy and happiness. As Scrooge displayed these traits in his earlier years, it reinforces to the reader that it was the obsession with money, exacerbated through the adoption of Malthusian views, caused Scrooge lose this joy and happiness. Thus, compounding to the reader that being preoccupied with materialism and ignorant views is synonymous with the loss of happiness and joy.

Alternatively, Dickens carefully crafts Scrooge to be an archetype of a Victorian miser and villain in the context of an impoverished society. This vilifies the apathetic and avaricious nature of the Victorian upper class, highlighting how these traits lead to a loss of happiness and joy. Scrooge is the epitome of misery in Stave 1 as he wilfully ostracises himself from society to avoid joy and happiness: “the cold within his froze his old features”. The conceit of the relentless cold reinforces his likeness to the bitter weather- his cold and apathetic attitude makes him hostile, particularly unwelcoming to any happiness or joy. Moreover, the adjective “old”, paired with the “cold” freezing this, shows how his internal apathy and detachment is so omnipotent, it has altered his physical appearance and preserved him in this aging melancholic state. Alternatively, his clear rejection of joy and happiness is prevalent through the asyndetic listing “squeezing, wrenching, grasping, scraping, clutching, covetous old sinner”. ‘Squeezing’ and ‘wrenching’ connote a struggle, this reinforcing how Scrooge wilfully wants to struggle to assimilate into society so he can reject all happiness and joy, and therefore, remain protected in his own ignorant bubble. Scrooge’s wilful ignorance and rejection of joy and happiness for himself and others is clear as he is a supporter of the dehumanising 1834 poor law. This “New poor Law” introduced the workhouses which were hubs of squalor that exploited the poor due to the belligerent conditions they were put in- even children as young as 4 or 5 were subject to this. Dickens’ allegorical novella is scathing of the ignorance and belligerence upper class members, symbolised through Scrooge, perpetuated due to their ignorance. He constructs Scrooge as an archetypal villain to make the reader aware that upper classes are privileged enough to choose to reject their own chances at happiness and joy, yet the poor suffer at the expense of their ignorance and selfishness: he exposes that the poor are exploited and dehumanised so therefore cannot dictate their own happiness and joy, yet the rich exploit this privilege and make others suffer as a consequence.

Lastly, as Scrooge embarks on a pathway of salvation and redemption in Stave 5, his pure and untainted joy and happiness comes because of this- he becomes reborn into a paradigm of a model citizen after his transmogrification. Scrooge's infantile language in act 5 reflects his rebirth as he refers to himself as "quite a baby" and "as merry as a schoolboy". As both a "baby" and "schoolboy" connote innocence and youth, Scrooge is showcasing how through him repenting for his sins, he has regained his youthful innocence and ability to see the world through a lens of joy and happiness- he no longer sees the world as a tainted place he wants to ostracise himself from, instead a place filled with benevolence and joy. Moreover, as being a "baby" is the start of life, this signifies that Scrooge has been reborn as he has gone from an "old sinner" back to the most innocent form of human life- he has had the ultimate rebirth as he has regressed back into an untainted happy being. The idea of rebirth is salient in Christianity. It is believed that a rebirth indicates that a person develops a strong personal and emotional connection with God. It also holds significance as Jesus Christ was reborn to provide salvation for mankind. This could perhaps suggest that Scrooge's rebirth will provide salvation, joy and happiness for others. The religious allusions of a rebirth would have been poignant in the Victorian era as it was highly religious, especially shown through their strong beliefs that redemption is instrumental in Christianity as God is providing salvation for those who confess to their sins. Dickens uses the religious undertones of Victorian society within Scrooge's transformation to highlight to the reader that regaining joy and happiness is synonymous with bringing an individual back to the foundations of morality- religion. He thus emphasises to his religious readership that redemption and acts of atonement will provide happiness and joy to not only yourself, but the wider world around you.

In concatenation, Dickens presents happiness and joy as being evident throughout Scrooge's entire life, he just needed to embark on redemption to unlock this deeply repressed emotions. He alternatively portrays how apathy and avariciousness obstructs happiness and joy, consequently leading to the misery of the less fortunate too. He overall displays to his readership that happiness and joy is fundamental to abolishing social injustices and creating a progressive and equal society- individuals from the upper class whom deny themselves happiness and joy, ultimately deny others less fortune this privilege.