

A Christmas Carol

A Reading A-Z Level Z2 Leveled Book
Word Count: 2,894

Connections

Writing

Write a "prequel" to *A Christmas Carol*. Describe how Scrooge developed as a character.

Social Studies

Research conditions in nineteenth-century London, focusing on debtors' prisons, orphanages, and workhouses. Write an essay explaining their relevance to the story.

LEVELED BOOK • Z²

A Christmas Carol

Part 1



Reading A-Z

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A Christmas Carol



"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

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Focus Question

Does money guarantee happiness?

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Words to Know

beguiled	melancholy
congealed	misanthropic
counting-house	morose
covetous	ominous
dismal	palpable
entreaty	Parliament
facetious	phenomenon
impenetrable	relinquished
labours	solemnised
legatee	tacitly
liberality	tremulous
livid	workhouses

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Correlation

LEVEL Z2

Fountas & Pinnell	Y-Z
Reading Recovery	N/A
DRA	70+



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. Old 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, his sole administrator, his sole assign, his sole residuary **legatee**, 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.

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.

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, shriveled his cheek, stiffened his gait. It 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 dogdays; 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" 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 him; and when they saw him coming on, would tug their owners into doorways and up courts. Then, they 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**. It was cold, bleak, biting weather. 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. 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. So surely as the clerk came in with the shovel, the master predicted that it would be necessary 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? 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 as a good time: a kind, forgiving, charitable, pleasant time. It’s 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. They 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 involuntarily applauded: becoming immediately sensible of the impropriety, he poked the fire, and extinguished the last frail spark for ever.

“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?”

“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."

This lunatic, in letting Scrooge's nephew out, had let two other people in. They were portly gentlemen, pleasant to behold, and now stood, with their hats off, in Scrooge's office. They had books and papers in their hands, and bowed to him.

"Scrooge and Marley's, I believe," said one of the gentlemen, referring to his list. "Have I the pleasure of addressing Mr Scrooge, or Mr Marley?"

"Mr Marley has been dead these seven years," Scrooge replied. "He died seven years ago, this very night."

"We have no doubt his **liberality** is well represented by his surviving partner," said the gentleman, presenting his credentials.

It certainly was; for they had been two kindred spirits. At the **ominous** word "liberality," Scrooge frowned, and shook his head, and handed the credentials back.

"At this festive season of the year, Mr Scrooge," said the gentleman, taking up a pen, "it is more than usually desirable that we should make some slight provision for the Poor and Destitute, who suffer greatly at the present time. Many thousands are in want of common necessities; hundreds of thousands are in want of common comforts, sir."

"Are there no prisons?" asked Scrooge.

"Plenty of prisons," said the gentleman, laying down the pen again.

"And the Union **workhouses**?" demanded Scrooge. "Are they still in operation?"

"They are. Still," returned the gentleman, "I wish I could say they were not."

"The Treadmill and the Poor Law are in full vigour, then?" said Scrooge.

"Both very busy, sir."

"Oh! I was afraid, from what you said at first, that something had occurred to stop them in their useful course," said Scrooge. "I'm very glad to hear it."

"Under the impression that they scarcely furnish Christian cheer of mind or body to the multitude," returned the gentleman, "a few of us are endeavouring to raise a fund to buy the Poor some meat and drink and means of warmth. We choose this time, because it is a time, of all others, when Want is keenly felt, and Abundance rejoices. What shall I put you down for?"

"Nothing!" Scrooge replied.

"You wish to be anonymous?"

"I wish to be left alone," said Scrooge. "Since you ask me what I wish, gentlemen, that is my answer. I don't make merry myself at Christmas

and I can't afford to make idle people merry. I help to support the establishments I have mentioned—they cost enough; and those who are badly off must go there."

"Many can't go there; and many would rather die."

"If they would rather die," said Scrooge, "they had better do it, and decrease the surplus population. Besides—excuse me—I don't know that."

"But you might know it," observed the gentleman.

"It's not my business," Scrooge returned. "It's enough for a man to understand his own business, and not to interfere with other people's. Mine occupies me constantly. Good afternoon, gentlemen!"

Seeing clearly that it would be useless to pursue their point, the gentlemen withdrew. Scrooge returned to his **labours** with an improved opinion of himself, and in a more **facetious** temper than was usual with him.

Meanwhile the fog and darkness thickened so, that people ran about with flaring links, proffering their services to go before horses in

carriages, and conduct them on their way. The ancient tower of a church, whose gruff old bell was always peeping slyly down at Scrooge out of a Gothic window in the wall, became invisible. It struck the hours and quarters in the clouds, with **tremulous** vibrations afterwards as if its teeth were chattering in its frozen head up there. The cold became intense. In the main street at the corner of the court, some labourers were repairing the gas-pipes. They had lighted a great fire in a coal pit, round which a party of ragged men and boys were gathered: warming their hands and winking their eyes before the blaze in rapture. The water-plug being left in solitude, its overflowing sullenly **congealed**, and turned to **misanthropic** ice. The brightness of the shops where holly sprigs and berries crackled in the lamp heat of the windows, made pale faces ruddy as they passed.

Foggier yet, and colder! Piercing, searching, biting cold. One young singer, 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, leaving the keyhole to the fog and even more congenial frost.

At length the hour of shutting up the counting-house arrived. With an ill-will Scrooge dismounted from his stool, and **tacitly** admitted the fact to the expectant clerk in the Tank, who instantly snuffed his candle out, and put on his hat.

“You’ll want all day tomorrow, I suppose?” said Scrooge.

“If quite convenient, sir.”

“It’s not convenient,” said Scrooge, “and it’s not fair. If I was to stop half-a-crown for it, you’d think yourself ill-used, I’ll be bound?”

The clerk smiled faintly.

“And yet,” said Scrooge, “you don’t think me ill-used, when I pay a day’s wages for no work.”

The clerk observed that it was only once a year.

“A poor excuse for picking a man’s pocket every twenty-fifth of December!” said Scrooge, buttoning his great-coat to the chin. “But I suppose you must have the whole day. Be here all the earlier next morning.”

The clerk promised that he would; and Scrooge walked out with a growl.

Scrooge took his **melancholy** dinner in his usual melancholy tavern; and having read all the newspapers, and **beguiled** the rest of the evening with his banker's-book, went home to bed. He lived in chambers which had once belonged to his deceased partner. It was old enough now, and dreary enough, for nobody lived in it but Scrooge, the other rooms being all let out as offices. The yard was so dark that even Scrooge, who knew its every stone, was fain to grope with his hands. The fog and frost so hung about the black old gateway of the house, that it seemed as if the Genius of the Weather sat in mournful meditation on the threshold.

Now, it is a fact, that there was nothing at all particular about the knocker on the door, except that it was very large. It is also a fact, that Scrooge had seen it, night and morning, during his whole residence in that place. Let it also be borne in mind that Scrooge had not bestowed one thought on Marley, since his last mention of his seven years' dead partner that afternoon. And then let any man explain to me how it happened that Scrooge, having his key in the lock of the door, saw in the knocker, not a knocker, but Marley's face.

Marley's face. It was not in **impenetrable** shadow as the other objects in the yard were, but had a dismal light about it, like a bad lobster in a dark cellar. It was not angry or ferocious, but looked at Scrooge as Marley used to look: with ghostly spectacles turned up on its ghostly forehead. The hair was curiously stirred, as if by breath or hot air; and, though the eyes were wide open, they were perfectly motionless. That, and its **livid** colour, made it horrible. But its horror seemed to be in spite of the face and beyond its control, rather than a part of its own expression.

As Scrooge looked fixedly at this **phenomenon**, it was a knocker again.

To say that he was not startled would be untrue. But he put his hand upon the key he had **relinquished**, turned it sturdily, walked in, and lighted his candle.

Glossary

beguiled (<i>v.</i>)	passed the time with a pleasant occupation (p. 17)
congealed (<i>v.</i>)	thickened or solidified, especially in cool temperatures (p. 15)
counting-house (<i>n.</i>)	an office or building used for holding money and accounts and transacting business (p. 6)
covetous (<i>adj.</i>)	having or showing a desire to possess things, often things that belong to others (p. 4)
dismal (<i>adj.</i>)	gloomy; dreary (p. 6)
entreaty (<i>n.</i>)	a serious and earnest request; plea (p. 5)
facetious (<i>adj.</i>)	having or showing a humorous attitude toward serious issues, often inappropriate (p. 14)
impenetrable (<i>adj.</i>)	impossible to see through; unable to be pierced or passed through (p. 18)
labours (<i>n.</i>)	difficult physical work (British spelling) (p. 14)
legatee (<i>n.</i>)	someone who inherits money or property (p. 3)
liberality (<i>n.</i>)	generosity with money or other things (p. 12)

livid (<i>adj.</i>)	having a deep purple or blue color, as in a bruise (p. 18)
melancholy (<i>adj.</i>)	sad and thoughtful; gloomy (p. 17)
misanthropic (<i>adj.</i>)	having or showing dislike or contempt for other people (p. 15)
morose (<i>adj.</i>)	sullen and serious (p. 8)
ominous (<i>adj.</i>)	threatening or foreboding (p. 12)
palpable (<i>adj.</i>)	able to be touched or felt (p. 6)
Parliament (<i>n.</i>)	the lawmaking body of the United Kingdom (p. 10)
phenomenon (<i>n.</i>)	a remarkable and observable event or occurrence (p. 18)
relinquished (<i>v.</i>)	gave something up or turned it over to another person (p. 18)
solemnised (<i>v.</i>)	observed formally, often with a ceremony (British spelling) (p. 4)
tacitly (<i>adv.</i>)	in a way that expresses something without directly stating it (p. 16)
tremulous (<i>adj.</i>)	trembling slightly (p. 15)
workhouses (<i>n.</i>)	places where people who are poor live and work in exchange for shelter and food (p. 13)