

A Christmas Carol

A Reading A-Z Level Z2 Leveled Book
Word Count: 2,709

LEVELED BOOK • Z²

A Christmas Carol

Part 8

Connections

Writing

Using clues from the text, infer the identity of the dead person. Use this information to rewrite a scene from the ghost's perspective.

Social Studies

Research the ways people today sell used goods. Draw a Venn diagram comparing one of these methods with the beetling shop in Part 8.

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Adapted from the Writings of Charles Dickens
Illustrated by Yevgenia Nayberg

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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

How will knowledge of the future affect Scrooge?

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Words to Know

appraised	latent
beetling shop	loiter
calico	offal
charwoman	plunder
defiance	recoiled
dumb	reeked
excrescence	scanty
flaunting	scrutinise
frowsy	shrouded
gallantry	spoil
keenly	trivial
laden	unseemly

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Correlation

LEVEL Z2

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



In Part 7 of A Christmas Carol, Scrooge and the Ghost of Christmas Present visit the home of Scrooge's nephew, Fred, on Christmas Day. They witness a holiday party filled with fun and games. Scrooge discovers that his misery makes him the butt of their jokes.

The Phantom slowly, gravely, silently approached. When it came, Scrooge bent down upon his knee; for in the very air through which this Spirit moved it seemed to scatter gloom and mystery.

It was **shrouded** in a deep black garment, which concealed its head, its face, its form, and left nothing of it visible save one outstretched hand. But for this it would have been difficult to detach its figure from the night, and separate it from the darkness by which it was surrounded.

He felt that it was tall and stately when it came beside him, and that its mysterious presence filled him with a solemn dread. He knew no more, for the Spirit neither spoke nor moved.

"I am in the presence of the Ghost of Christmas Yet To Come?" said Scrooge.

The Spirit answered not, but pointed onward with its hand.

"You are about to show me shadows of the things that have not happened, but will happen in the time before us," Scrooge pursued. "Is that so, Spirit?"

The upper portion of the garment was contracted for an instant in its folds, as if the Spirit had inclined its head. That was the only answer he received.

Although well used to ghostly company by this time, Scrooge feared the silent shape so much that his legs trembled beneath him, and he found that he could hardly stand when he prepared to follow it. The Spirit paused a moment, as observing his condition, and giving him time to recover.

But Scrooge was all the worse for this. It thrilled him with a vague uncertain horror, to know that behind the dusky shroud there were ghostly eyes intently fixed upon him, while he, though he stretched his own to the utmost, could see nothing but a spectral hand and one great heap of black.

“Ghost of the Future!” he exclaimed, “I fear you more than any spectre I have seen. But as I know your purpose is to do me good, and as I hope to live to be another man from what I was, I am prepared to bear you company, and do it with a thankful heart. Will you not speak to me?”

It gave him no reply. The hand was pointed straight before them.

“Lead on!” said Scrooge. “Lead on! The night is waning fast, and it is precious time to me, I know. Lead on, Spirit!”

The Phantom moved away as it had come towards him. Scrooge followed in the shadow of its dress, which bore him up, he thought, and carried him along.

They scarcely seemed to enter the city; for the city rather seemed to spring up about them, and encompass them of its own act. But there they were, in the heart of it; amongst the merchants; who hurried up and down, and chinked the money in their pockets, and conversed in groups. They looked at their watches, and trifled thoughtfully with their great gold seals; and so forth, as Scrooge had seen them often.

The Spirit stopped beside one little knot of businessmen. Observing that the hand was pointed to them, Scrooge advanced to listen to their talk.

“No,” said a great fat man with a monstrous chin, “I don’t know much about it, either way. I only know he’s dead.”

“When did he die?” inquired another.

“Last night, I believe.”

“Why, what was the matter with him?” asked a third, taking a vast quantity of snuff out of a very large snuff-box. “I thought he’d never die.”

“God knows,” said the first, with a yawn.

“What has he done with his money?” asked a red-faced gentleman with a pendulous **excrecence** on the end of his nose, that shook like the gills of a turkey-cock.

“I haven’t heard,” said the man with the large chin, yawning again. “Left it to his company, perhaps. He hasn’t left it to me. That’s all I know.”

This pleasantry was received with a general laugh.

“It’s likely to be a very cheap funeral,” said the same speaker; “for upon my life I don’t know of anybody to go to it. Suppose we make up a party and volunteer?”

“I don’t mind going if a lunch is provided,” observed the gentleman with the excrescence on his nose. “But I must be fed, if I make one.”

Another laugh.

“Well, I am the most disinterested among you, after all,” said the first speaker, “for I never wear black gloves, and I never eat lunch. But I’ll offer to go, if anybody else will. When I come to think of it, I’m not at all sure that I wasn’t his most particular friend; for we used to stop and speak whenever we met. Bye, bye!”

Speakers and listeners strolled away, and mixed with other groups. Scrooge knew the men, and looked towards the Spirit for an explanation.

The Phantom glided on into a street. Its finger pointed to two persons meeting. Scrooge listened again, thinking that the explanation might lie here.

He knew these men, also, perfectly. They were men of aye business: very wealthy, and of great importance. He had made a point always of standing well in their esteem: in a business point of view, that is; strictly in a business point of view.

“How are you?” said one.

“How are you?” returned the other.

“Well!” said the first. “Old Scratch has got his own at last, hey?”

“So I am told,” returned the second. “Cold, isn’t it?”

“Seasonable for Christmas time. You’re not a skater, I suppose?”

“No. No. Something else to think of. Good morning!”

Not another word. That was their meeting, their conversation, and their parting.

Scrooge was at first inclined to be surprised that the Spirit should attach importance to conversations apparently so **trivial**. But feeling assured that they must have some hidden purpose, he set himself to consider what it was likely to be. They could scarcely be supposed to have any bearing on the death of Jacob, his old partner, for that was Past, and this Ghost's province was the Future.

Nor could he think of any one immediately connected with himself, to whom he could apply them. But nothing doubting that to whomsoever they applied they had some **latent** moral for his own improvement.

He resolved to treasure up every word he heard, and everything he saw; and especially to observe the shadow of himself when it appeared. For he had an expectation that the conduct of his future self would give him the clue he missed, and would render the solution of these riddles easy.

He looked about in that very place for his own image; but another man stood in his accustomed corner. Though the clock pointed to his usual time of day for being there, he saw no likeness of himself among the multitudes that poured in through the Porch.

It gave him little surprise, however; for he had been revolving in his mind a change of life, and thought and hoped he saw his new-born resolutions carried out in this.

Quiet and dark, beside him stood the Phantom, with its outstretched hand. When he roused himself from his thoughtful quest, he fancied from the turn of the hand, and its situation in reference to himself, that the Unseen Eyes were looking at him **keenly**. It made him shudder, and feel very cold.

They left the busy scene, and went into an obscure part of the town, where Scrooge had never penetrated before, although he recognised its situation, and its bad repute. The ways were foul and narrow; the shops and houses wretched; the people half-naked, drunken, slipshod, ugly.

Alleys and archways, like so many cesspools, disgorged their offenses of smell, and dirt, and

life, upon the straggling streets; and the whole quarter **reeked** with crime, with filth, and misery.

Far in this den of infamous resort, there was a low-browed, **beetling shop**, below a pent-house roof, where iron, old rags, bottles, bones, and greasy **offal**, were bought. Upon the floor within, were piled up heaps of rusty keys, nails, chains, hinges, files, scales, weights, and refuse iron of all kinds. Secrets that few would like to **scrutinise** were bred and hidden in mountains of **unseemly** rags, masses of corrupted fat, and sepulchres of bones.

Sitting in among the wares he dealt in, by a charcoal stove, made of old bricks, was a grey-haired rascal, nearly seventy years of age. He had screened himself from the cold air without by a **frowsy** curtaining of miscellaneous tatters, hung upon a line; and smoked his pipe in all the luxury of calm retirement.

Scrooge and the Phantom came into the presence of this man, just as a woman with a heavy bundle slunk into the shop. But she had scarcely entered, when another woman, similarly **laden**, came in too.

She was closely followed by a man in faded black, who was no less startled by the sight of them, than they had been upon the recognition of each other.

After a short period of blank astonishment, in which the old man with the pipe had joined them, they all three burst into a laugh.

“Let the **charwoman** alone to be the first!” cried she who had entered first. “Let the laundress alone to be the second; and let the undertaker’s man alone to be the third. Look here, old Joe, here’s a chance. If we haven’t all three met here without meaning it!”

“You couldn’t have met in a better place,” said old Joe, removing his pipe from his mouth.

“Come into the parlour. You were made free of it long ago, you know; and the other two an’t strangers. Stop till I shut the door of the shop. Ah! How it skreeks! There an’t such a rusty bit of metal in the place as its own hinges, I believe; and I’m sure there’s no such old bones here, as mine. Ha, ha! We’re all suitable to our calling, we’re well matched. Come into the parlour. Come into the parlour.”

The parlour was the space behind the screen of rags. The old man raked the fire together with an old stair-rod, and having trimmed his smoky lamp (for it was night), with the stem of his pipe, put it in his mouth again.

While he did this, the woman who had already spoken threw her bundle on the floor. She sat down in a **flaunting** manner on a stool; crossing her elbows on her knees, and looking with a bold **defiance** at the other two.

"What odds then! What odds, Mrs Dilber?" said the woman. "Every person has a right to take care of themselves. *He* always did."

"That's true, indeed!" said the laundress. "No man more so."

"Why then, don't stand staring as if you was afraid, woman; who's the wiser? We're not going to pick holes in each other's coats, I suppose?"

"No, indeed!" said Mrs Dilber and the man together. "We should hope not."

"Very well, then!" cried the woman. "That's enough. Who's the worse for the loss of a few things like these? Not a dead man, I suppose."

"No, indeed," said Mrs Dilber, laughing.

"If he wanted to keep them after he was dead, a wicked old screw," pursued the woman, "why wasn't he natural in his lifetime? If he had been, he'd have had somebody to look after him when he was struck with Death, instead of lying gasping out his last there, alone by himself."

"It's the truest word that ever was spoke," said Mrs Dilber. "It's a judgment on him."

"I wish it was a little heavier judgment," replied the woman; "and it should have been, you may depend upon it, if I could have laid my hands on anything else. Open that bundle, old Joe, and let me know the value of it. Speak out plain. I'm not afraid to be the first, nor afraid for them to see it. We know pretty well that we were helping ourselves, before we met here, I believe. It's no sin. Open the bundle, Joe."

But the **gallantry** of her friends would not allow of this; and the man in faded black, mounting the breach first, produced his **plunder**.

It was not extensive. A seal or two, a pencil-case, a pair of sleeve-buttons, and a brooch of no great value, were all.

They were severally examined and **appraised** by old Joe, who chalked the sums he was disposed to give for each upon the wall, and added them up into a total when he found there was nothing more to come.

“That’s your account,” said Joe, “and I wouldn’t give another sixpence, if I was to be boiled for not doing it. Who’s next?”

Mrs Dilber was next. Sheets and towels, a little wearing apparel, two old-fashioned silver teaspoons, a pair of sugar-tongs, and a few boots. Her account was stated on the wall in the same manner.

“I always give too much to ladies. It’s a weakness of mine, and that’s the way I ruin myself,” said old Joe. “That’s your account. If you asked me for another penny, and made it an open question, I’d repent of being so liberal and knock off half-a-crown.”

“And now undo my bundle, Joe,” said the first woman.

Joe went down on his knees for the greater convenience of opening it, and having unfastened a great many knots, dragged out a large and heavy roll of some dark stuff.

“What do you call this?” said Joe.
“Bed-curtains!”

“Ah!” returned the woman, laughing and leaning forward on her crossed arms.
“Bed-curtains!”

“You don’t mean to say you took them down, rings and all, with him lying there?” said Joe.

“Yes I do,” replied the woman. “Why not?”

“You were born to make your fortune,” said Joe, “and you’ll certainly do it.”

“I certainly shan’t hold my hand, when I can get anything in it by reaching it out, for the sake of such a man as he was, I promise you, Joe,” returned the woman coolly. “Don’t drop that oil upon the blankets, now.”

“His blankets?” asked Joe.

“Whose else’s do you think?” replied the woman. “He isn’t likely to take cold without them, I dare say.”

“I hope he didn’t die of any thing catching? Eh?” said old Joe, stopping in his work, and looking up.

“Don’t you be afraid of that,” returned the woman. “I an’t so fond of his company that I’d

loiter about him for such things, if he did. Ah! You may look through that shirt till your eyes ache; but you won't find a hole in it, nor a threadbare place. It's the best he had, and a fine one too. They'd have wasted it, if it hadn't been for me."

"What do you call wasting of it?" asked old Joe.

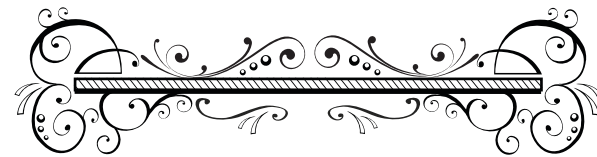
"Putting it on him to be buried in, to be sure," replied the woman with a laugh. "Somebody was fool enough to do it, but I took it off again. If **calico** an't good enough for such a purpose, it isn't good enough for anything. It's quite as becoming to the body. He can't look uglier than he did in that one."

Scrooge listened to this dialogue in horror. As they sat grouped about their **spoil**, in the **scanty** light afforded by the old man's lamp, he viewed them with a detestation and disgust, which could hardly have been greater, had they been demons, marketing the corpse itself.

"Ha, ha!" laughed the same woman, when old Joe, producing a flannel bag with money in it, told out their several gains upon the ground. "This is the end of it, you see. He frightened every one away from him when he was alive, to profit us when he was dead! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Spirit," said Scrooge, shuddering from head to foot. "I see, I see. The case of this unhappy man might be my own. My life tends that way, now. Merciful Heaven, what is this?"

He **recoiled** in terror, for the scene had changed, and now he almost touched a bed: a bare, uncurtained bed: on which, beneath a ragged sheet, there lay a something covered up, which, though it was **dumb**, announced itself in awful language.



Glossary

appraised (<i>v.</i>)	judged the worth of someone or something after careful examination (p. 15)
beetling shop (<i>n.</i>)	a shop where items are bought and resold (p. 11)
calico (<i>n.</i>)	heavy, plain white cotton cloth (p. 17)
charwoman (<i>n.</i>)	a cleaning woman; a maid (p. 12)
defiance (<i>n.</i>)	the act of challenging or resisting someone or something (p. 13)
dumb (<i>adj.</i>)	unable to speak; silent (p. 18)
excrescence (<i>n.</i>)	an outgrowth or something that sticks out (p. 7)
flaunting (<i>v.</i>)	openly displaying something so that others notice (p. 13)
frowsy (<i>adj.</i>)	untidy or dirty (p. 11)
gallantry (<i>n.</i>)	polite behavior or attention (p. 14)
keenly (<i>adv.</i>)	with great interest or perception (p. 10)
laden (<i>adj.</i>)	covered with; heavy with (p. 11)
latent (<i>adj.</i>)	something that exists but is currently hidden or not yet developed (p. 9)
loiter (<i>v.</i>)	to stay in a place without an obvious purpose (p. 17)

offal (<i>n.</i>)	an animal's internal organs used for food (p. 11)
plunder (<i>n.</i>)	items of value stolen or taken (p. 14)
recoiled (<i>v.</i>)	stepped or sprung back quickly from something upsetting or disgusting (p. 18)
reeked (<i>v.</i>)	gave off a strong odor, usually an unpleasant one (p. 11)
scanty (<i>adj.</i>)	very little; small in amount (p. 17)
scrutinise (<i>v.</i>)	to examine carefully (<i>British spelling</i>) (p. 11)
shrouded (<i>v.</i>)	covered or hidden (p. 3)
spoil (<i>n.</i>)	loot or treasure, usually taken from another (p. 17)
trivial (<i>adj.</i>)	unimportant (p. 9)
unseemly (<i>adj.</i>)	improper; not polite (p. 11)