

A Christmas Carol

A Reading A-Z Level Z2 Leveled Book
Word Count: 2,622

LEVELED BOOK • Z²

A Christmas Carol

Part 2

Connections

Writing and Art

Draw a Venn diagram comparing Marley's ghost and Scrooge. Write an essay describing how the differences between them are significant to the plot.

Social Studies

Discuss with a partner Marley's advice about caring for others. Design and present a poster illustrating ways students can help others in their community.

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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 do the decisions we make in the present affect our future?

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Words to Know

| | |
|-------------|------------|
| apparition | obliged |
| benevolence | penance |
| caustic | persecuted |
| countenance | ponderous |
| dirge | procuring |
| fettered | remorse |
| humility | repose |
| incessant | resounded |
| incredulous | spectre |
| infernal | vapour |
| lamentation | waggish |
| mortal | wretched |

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Level Z2 Leveled Book
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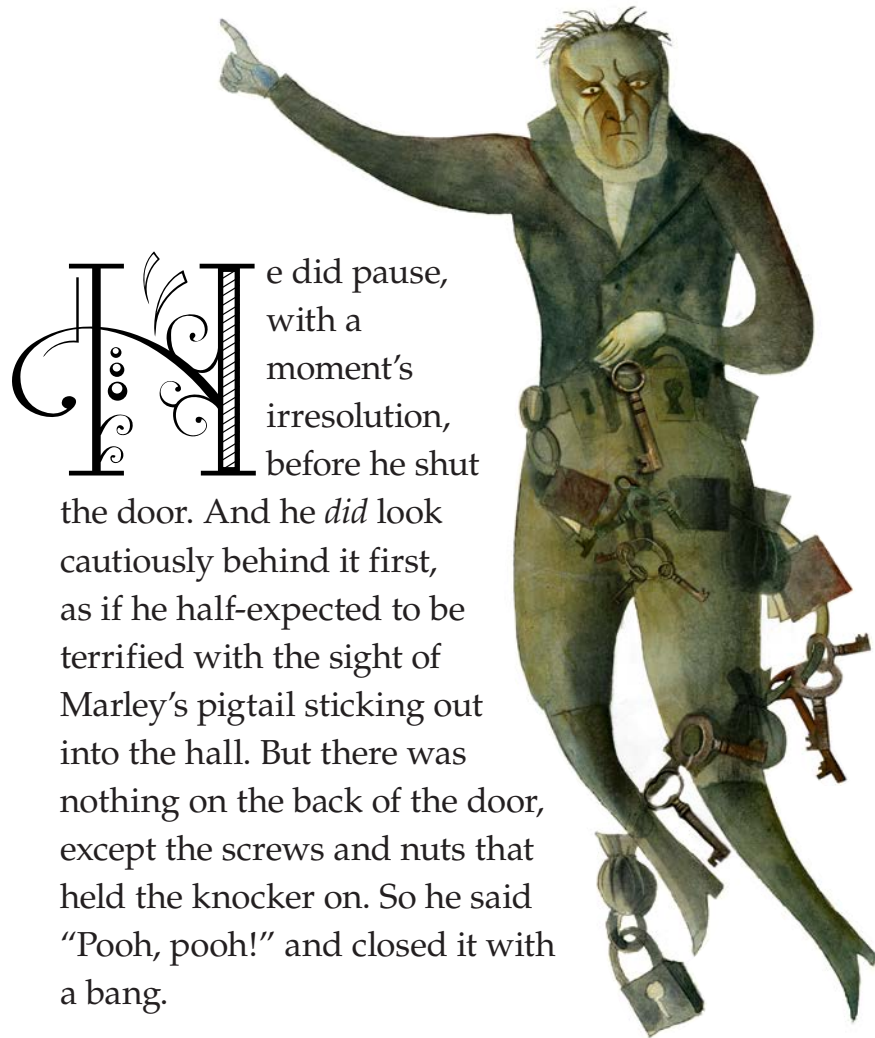
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Correlation

LEVEL Z2

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

In Part 1 of A Christmas Carol, readers are introduced to Ebenezer Scrooge, a stingy, joyless money-lender in nineteenth-century London whose business partner, Jacob Marley, died years before. Not one subject to flights of fancy, Scrooge has an unusual encounter with his door knocker.



He did pause, with a moment's irresolution, before he shut the door. And he *did* look cautiously behind it first, as if he half-expected to be terrified with the sight of Marley's pigtail sticking out into the hall. But there was nothing on the back of the door, except the screws and nuts that held the knocker on. So he said "Pooh, pooh!" and closed it with a bang.

The sound **resounded** through the house like thunder. Every room above, and every cask in the wine-merchant's cellars below, appeared to have a separate peal of echoes of its own. Scrooge was not a man to be frightened by echoes.

He fastened the door, and walked across the hall, and up the stairs; slowly too: trimming his candle as he went. Half a dozen gas-lamps out of the street wouldn't have lighted the entry too well, so you may suppose that it was pretty dark with Scrooge's dip.

Up Scrooge went, not caring a button for that. Darkness is cheap, and Scrooge liked it. But before he shut his heavy door, he walked through his rooms to see that all was right. He had just enough recollection of the face to desire to do that.

Sitting-room, bedroom, lumber-room. All as they should be. Nobody under the table, nobody under the sofa; a small fire in the grate; spoon and basin ready. Nobody under the bed; nobody in the closet; nobody in his dressing-gown, which was hanging up in a suspicious attitude against the wall. Lumber-room as usual. Old fire-guards, old shoes, two fish-baskets, washing-stand on three legs, and a poker.

Quite satisfied, he closed his door, and locked himself in; double-locked himself in, which was not his custom. Thus secured against surprise, he took off his cravat; put on his dressing-gown and slippers, and his nightcap; and sat down before the fire to take his gruel.

It was a very low fire indeed; nothing on such a bitter night. He was **obliged** to sit close to it, and brood over it, before he could extract the least sensation of warmth from such a handful of fuel.

“Humbug!” said Scrooge; and walked across the room.

After several turns, he sat down again. As he threw his head back in the chair, his glance happened to rest upon a bell, a disused bell, that hung in the room. It was with great astonishment, and with a strange, inexplicable dread, that as he looked, he saw this bell begin to swing.

It swung so softly in the outset that it scarcely made a sound; but soon it rang out loudly, and so did every bell in the house.

This might have lasted half a minute, or a minute, but it seemed an hour. The bells ceased as they had begun, together. They were succeeded by a clanking noise, deep down below; as if some person were dragging a heavy chain over the casks in the wine merchant’s cellar. Scrooge then remembered to have heard that ghosts in haunted houses were described as dragging chains.

The cellar-door flew open with a booming sound. He heard the noise much louder on the floors below; then coming up the stairs; then coming straight towards his door.

“It’s humbug still!” said Scrooge. “I won’t believe it.”

His colour changed though, when, without a pause, it came on through the heavy door, and passed into the room before his eyes. Upon its coming in, the dying flame leaped up, as though it cried, “I know him; Marley’s Ghost!” and fell again.

The same face: the very same. Marley in his pigtail, usual waistcoat, tights and boots; the tassels on the latter bristling, like his pigtail, and his coat-skirts, and the hair upon his head.

The chain he drew was clasped about his middle. It was long, and wound about him like a tail. It was made of cash-boxes, keys, padlocks, ledgers, deeds, and heavy purses wrought in steel. His body was transparent, so that Scrooge, observing him, and looking through his waistcoat, could see the two buttons on his coat behind.

Scrooge had often heard it said that Marley had no guts, but he had never believed it until now.

No, nor did he believe it even now. Though he looked the phantom through and through, and saw it standing before him; though he felt the chilling influence of its death-cold eyes; and marked the very texture of the folded kerchief bound about its head and chin, which wrapper he had not observed before: he was still **incredulous**, and fought against his senses.

“How now!” said Scrooge, **caustic** and cold as ever. “What do you want with me?”

“Much!”—Marley’s voice, no doubt about it.

“Who are you?”

“Ask me who I *was*.”

“Who were you then?” said Scrooge, raising his voice.

“In life I was your partner, Jacob Marley.”

“Can you—can you sit down?” asked Scrooge, looking doubtfully at him.

“I can.”

“Do it, then.”

Scrooge asked the question, because he didn’t know whether a ghost so transparent might find himself in a condition to take a chair. In the event of its being impossible, it might involve the necessity of an embarrassing explanation. But the ghost sat down on the opposite side of the fireplace, as if he were quite used to it.

“You don’t believe in me,” observed the Ghost.

“I don’t,” said Scrooge.

“What evidence would you have of my reality, beyond that of your senses?”

“I don’t know,” said Scrooge.

“Why do you doubt your senses?”

“Because,” said Scrooge, “a little thing affects them. A slight disorder of the stomach makes them cheats. You may be an undigested bit of beef, a blot of mustard, a crumb of cheese, a fragment of an underdone potato. There’s more of gravy than of grave about you, whatever you are!”

Scrooge was not much in the habit of cracking jokes, nor did he feel, in his heart, by any means **waggish** then. The truth is, that he tried to be smart, as a means of distracting his own attention, and keeping down his terror; for the **spectre’s** voice disturbed the very marrow in his bones.

To sit, staring at those fixed glazed eyes, in silence for a moment, would play, Scrooge felt, the very deuce with him. There was something very awful, too, in the spectre’s being provided with an **infernal** atmosphere of its own. Scrooge could not feel it himself, but this was clearly the case; for though the Ghost sat perfectly motionless, its hair, and skirts, and tassels, were still agitated as by the hot **vapour** from an oven.

“You see this toothpick?” said Scrooge, wishing, though it were only for a second, to divert the vision’s stony gaze from himself.

“I do,” replied the Ghost.

“You are not looking at it,” said Scrooge.

“But I see it,” said the Ghost, “notwithstanding.”

“Well!” returned Scrooge, “I have but to swallow this, and be for the rest of my days **persecuted** by a legion of goblins, all of my own creation. Humbug, I tell you! Humbug!”

At this the spirit raised a frightful cry. It shook its chain with such a dismal and appalling noise, that Scrooge held on tight to his chair to save himself from falling. But how much greater was his horror, when the phantom taking off the bandage round its head, as if it were too warm to wear indoors, its lower jaw dropped down upon its breast!

Scrooge fell upon his knees, and clasped his hands before his face.

“Mercy!” he said. “Dreadful **apparition**, why do you trouble me?”

“Man of the worldly mind!” replied the Ghost, “do you believe in me or not?”

“I do,” said Scrooge. “I must. But why do spirits walk the earth, and why do they come to me?”

"It is required of every man," the Ghost returned, "that the spirit within him should walk abroad among his fellowmen. It should travel far and wide; and if that spirit goes not forth in life, it is condemned to do so after death. It is doomed to wander through the world and witness what it cannot share, but might have shared on earth, and turned to happiness!"

Again the spectre raised a cry, and shook its chain and wrung its shadowy hands.

"You are **fettered**," said Scrooge, trembling. "Tell me why?"

"I wear the chain I forged in life," replied the Ghost. "I made it link by link, and yard by yard; I girded it on of my own free will, and of my own free will I wore it. Is its pattern strange to you?"

Scrooge trembled more and more.

"Or would you know," pursued the Ghost, "the weight and length of the strong coil you bear yourself? It was full as heavy and as long as this, seven Christmas Eves ago. You have laboured on it, since. It is a **ponderous** chain!"

Scrooge glanced about him on the floor, in the expectation of finding himself surrounded by iron cable: but he could see nothing.

"Jacob," he said, imploringly. "Old Jacob Marley, tell me more. Speak comfort to me, Jacob!"

"I have none to give," the Ghost replied. "It comes from other regions, Ebenezer Scrooge, and is conveyed by other ministers, to other kinds of men. Nor can I tell you what I would. A very little more, is all permitted to me. I cannot rest, I cannot stay, I cannot linger anywhere.

"My spirit never walked beyond our counting-house; in life my spirit never roved beyond the narrow limits of our money-changing hole; and weary journeys lie before me!"

It was a habit with Scrooge, whenever he became thoughtful, to put his hands in his breeches pockets. Pondering on what the Ghost had said, he did so now, but without lifting up his eyes, or getting off his knees.

"You must have been very slow about it, Jacob," Scrooge observed, in a business-like manner, though with **humility** and deference.

"Slow!" the Ghost repeated.

"Seven years dead," mused Scrooge. "And travelling all the time!"

"The whole time," said the Ghost. "No rest, no peace. **Incessant** torture of **remorse**."

"You travel fast?" said Scrooge.

"On the wings of the wind," replied the Ghost.

"You might have got over a great quantity of ground in seven years," said Scrooge.

The Ghost, on hearing this, set up another cry, and clanked its chain hideously in the dead silence of the night.

"Oh! Captive, bound, and double-ironed," cried the phantom, "not to know that any Christian spirit working kindly in its little sphere will find its **mortal** life too short for its vast means of usefulness. Not to know that no space of regret can make amends for one life's opportunity misused! Yet such was I! Oh! Such was I!"

"But you were always a good man of business, Jacob," faltered Scrooge, who now began to apply this to himself.

"Business!" cried the Ghost, wringing its hands again. "Mankind was my business. The common welfare was my business; charity, mercy,

forbearance, and **benevolence**, were, all, my business. The dealings of my trade were but a drop of water in the comprehensive ocean of my business!"

It held up its chain at arm's length, as if that were the cause of all its unavailing grief, and flung it heavily upon the ground again.

"At this time of the rolling year," the spectre said, "I suffer most. Why did I walk through crowds of fellow-beings with my eyes turned down, and never raise them to that blessed Star which led the Wise Men to a poor abode! Were there no poor homes to which its light would have conducted *me*!"

Scrooge was very much dismayed to hear the spectre going on at this rate, and began to quake exceedingly.

"Hear me!" cried the Ghost. "My time is nearly gone."

"I will," said Scrooge. "But don't be hard upon me! Don't be flowery, Jacob! Pray!"

"How it is that I appear before you in a shape that you can see, I may not tell. I have sat invisible beside you many and many a day."

It was not an agreeable idea. Scrooge shivered, and wiped the perspiration from his brow.

“That is no light part of my **penance**,” pursued the Ghost. “I am here tonight to warn you, that you have yet a chance and hope of escaping my fate. A chance and hope of my **procuring**, Ebenezer.”

“You were always a good friend to me,” said Scrooge. “Thank ‘ee!”

“You will be haunted,” resumed the Ghost, “by Three Spirits.”

Scrooge’s **countenance** fell almost as low as the Ghost’s had done.

“Is that the chance and hope you mentioned, Jacob?” he demanded, in a faltering voice.

“It is.”

“I—I think I’d rather not,” said Scrooge.

“Without their visits,” said the Ghost, “you cannot hope to shun the path I tread. Expect the first tomorrow, when the bell tolls one.”

“Couldn’t I take ‘em all at once, and have it over, Jacob?” hinted Scrooge.

“Expect the second on the next night at the same hour. The third upon the next night when the last stroke of twelve has ceased to vibrate. Look to see me no more; and look that, for your own sake, you remember what has passed between us!”

When it had said these words, the spectre took its wrapper from the table, and bound it round its head, as before. Scrooge knew this, by the smart sound its teeth made, when the jaws were brought together by the bandage. He ventured to raise his eyes again, and found his supernatural visitor confronting him in an erect attitude, with its chain wound over and about its arm.

The apparition walked backward from him; and at every step it took, the window raised itself a little, so that when the spectre reached it, it was wide open. It beckoned Scrooge to approach, which he did. When they were within two paces of each other, Marley’s Ghost held up its hand, warning him to come no nearer. Scrooge stopped.

Not so much in obedience, as in surprise and fear. For on the raising of the hand, he became sensible of confused noises in the air; incoherent sounds of **lamentation** and regret; wailings inexpressibly sorrowful and self-accusatory.

The spectre, after listening for a moment, joined in the mournful **dirge**; and floated out upon the bleak, dark night.

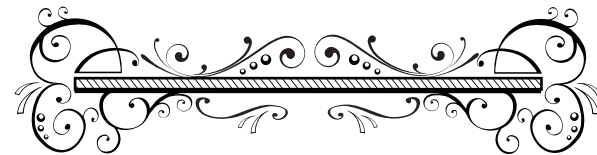
Scrooge followed to the window: desperate in his curiosity. He looked out.

The air was filled with phantoms, wandering hither and thither in restless haste, and moaning as they went. Every one of them wore chains like Marley's Ghost; some were linked together; none were free. Many had been personally known to Scrooge in their lives. He had been quite familiar with one old ghost, in a white waistcoat, with a monstrous iron safe attached to its ankle. He cried piteously at being unable to assist a **wretched** woman with an infant, whom it saw below, upon a door-step.

The misery with them all was, clearly, that they sought to interfere, for good, in human matters, and had lost the power for ever.

Whether these creatures faded into mist, or mist enshrouded them, he could not tell. But they and their spirit voices faded together; and the night became as it had been when he walked home.

Scrooge closed the window, and examined the door by which the Ghost had entered. It was double-locked, as he had locked it with his own hands, and the bolts were undisturbed. He tried to say "Humbug!" but stopped at the first syllable. And being much in need of **repose**; went straight to bed, without undressing, and fell asleep upon the instant.



Glossary

| | |
|------------------------------------|---|
| apparition (<i>n.</i>) | a ghost or spirit (p. 10) |
| benevolence (<i>n.</i>) | generosity or kindness (p. 14) |
| caustic (<i>adj.</i>) | bitter or sarcastic; harsh (p. 7) |
| countenance (<i>n.</i>) | a person's face or expression (p. 15) |
| dirge (<i>n.</i>) | a sad, slow song often played at a funeral (p. 17) |
| fettered (<i>adj.</i>) | chained around the feet (p. 11) |
| humility (<i>n.</i>) | simple or modest attitude; the quality of not acting or thinking you are better than others (p. 12) |
| incessant (<i>adj.</i>) | continuing without interruption; not stopping (p. 13) |
| incredulous (<i>adj.</i>) | not believing or not accepting something presented as true (p. 7) |
| infernal (<i>adj.</i>) | extremely bad or unpleasant; of or relating to hell (p. 9) |
| lamentation (<i>n.</i>) | a feeling or expression of grief or disappointment about something (p. 16) |
| mortal (<i>adj.</i>) | subject to death; not living forever (p. 13) |

| | |
|----------------------------------|---|
| obliged (<i>v.</i>) | had to do something because of necessity (p. 5) |
| penance (<i>n.</i>) | something you do to show regret or make up for bad behavior (p. 15) |
| persecuted (<i>v.</i>) | mistreated or oppressed a specific person or people (p. 10) |
| ponderous (<i>adj.</i>) | large or heavy; awkward or clumsy because of weight (p. 11) |
| procuring (<i>v.</i>) | finding or obtaining something, often with effort (p. 15) |
| remorse (<i>n.</i>) | regret or feelings of guilt (p. 13) |
| repose (<i>n.</i>) | a state of sleep, rest, or relaxation (p. 18) |
| resounded (<i>v.</i>) | filled a place with sound; made a loud or echoing sound (p. 4) |
| spectre (<i>n.</i>) | a ghost or spirit (<i>British spelling</i>) (p. 9) |
| vapour (<i>n.</i>) | gaseous matter, such as mist, fumes, or smoke, floating in the air (<i>British spelling</i>) (p. 9) |
| waggish (<i>adj.</i>) | amusing or playful (p. 9) |
| wretched (<i>adj.</i>) | unhappy, unfortunate, or distressed (p. 17) |