“Mr. Dickens, dead? Does that mean Father Christmas will die as well?”

“I have always thought of Christmas time, when it has come round, as a good time: a kind, forgiving, charitable time; 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, and to 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.” - Charles Dickens

Discussion Question: What does it say about Dickens that a book promoting charity is packaged in such an ornate way? Was the beautiful packaging just another aspect of his artistic expression? Or was the beautiful packaging an attempt to increase his profits with more sales?
Charles John Huffam Dickens was born on February 7, 1812 in Landport, a district of Portsmouth, England. He was the second eldest of eight children under his parents, John and Elizabeth Dickens and sometimes wrote under the pen-name of ‘Boz,’ a family nickname. On April 2, 1836, Dickens married Catherine Thomson Hogarth with whom he had ten children. *A Christmas Carol*, published on December 19, 1843, was one of about 20 novels Dickens wrote in his lifetime and stands out as his most famous story. He also wrote a great amount of short stories, plays, poetry, and non-fiction, as he is one of the most famous and renowned British authors. Certain aspects of Dickens’ childhood inspired the idea for *A Christmas Carol*, beginning with his father’s imprisonment for severe debt in 1824. Dickens was only 12 years-old at the time and was forced to get a job working in a blacking factory; to do this, he had to drop out of school, sell his books, and take lodgings. While working in this environment, he felt above the people he was around in terms of social class and intelligence, leaving him humiliated and resenting his father as a result. These upset feelings toward his father were what ultimately inspired the character of Scrooge. Observing the lives of families living in poverty was another big inspiration for the story. Dickens planned to publish a political pamphlet to make the public more aware of what poor people were going through at the time, but soon changed his mind and instead decided to write a novel which would soon become *A Christmas Carol*. Dickens died on June 9, 1870 at age 58 due to a stroke, but has certainly stayed to be very prominently remembered. To learn more about Charles Dickens click [here](#).

**Original Book Cost Today**

An original copy of *A Christmas Carol* recently sold in the Rare Book Room on AbeBooks for over $30,000.

**Themes**

*Christmas Spirit*
It is a fair, even-handed, noble adjustment of things, that while there is infection in disease and sorrow, there is nothing in the world so irresistibly contagious as laughter and good-humour (Dickens, 87).

'A Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to the old man, whatever he is!' said Scrooge's nephew. 'He wouldn't take it from me, but may he have it, nevertheless. Uncle Scrooge (Dickens, 91)!

The spirit of Christmas can indeed be contagious. Dickens here portrays Christmas not as the perhaps commercial driven holiday we know today but rather as a time for making merry with friends and family and being generous to your neighbors. A time for gathering around the hearth and playing games with your family, as demonstrated by Scrooge's nephew and his Christmas celebration. Dickens is advocating keeping the spirit of generosity and giving found at Christmastime present all year round. While Christmas is a Christian holiday the book is not a Christian book. The book promotes Christian values but is not overtly religious.

Charity

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 he establishments I have mentioned—they cost enough: and those who are badly off must go there (Dickens, 39).

Charity is a consistent theme in the novels of Charles Dickens. Dickens himself was very concerned with the plight of the poor in Victorian Britain. If a person is fortunate in life as Scrooge is then it is their duty and obligation to give a little back. As Dickens demonstrates in the quote above, men come to Scrooge as a man of wealth and have a natural assumption that he will contribute something to their cause. They are completely taken aback when he does not, and gives them the reply quoted above. Dickens is saying that those with means should do what they can to help those less fortunate.

Redemption

I will honour Christmas in my heart, and try to keep it all the year. I will live in the Past, the Present, and the Future. The Spirits of all three shall strive within me. I will not shut out the lessons that they teach. Oh, tell me I may sponge away the writing on this stone (Dickens, 110)!
Scrooge was better than his word. He did it all, and infinitely more; and to Tiny Tim, who did not die, he was a second father (Dickens, 116).

Scrooge undergoes an amazing transformation. He learns the error of his previous ways and becomes a charitable and giving man. His generosity saves the life of Tiny Tim. Scrooge finds redemption and happiness after his night with the three ghosts. There has been much debate in the believability of Scrooge's transformation. It is important to factor in the supernatural element, because Scrooge actually seeing the Past, Present and Future vividly in such extraordinary ways may enhance the believability. However, through Scrooge's reformation Dickens is telling his readers that they too can give more and be better.

**Discussion Question:** Can Scrooge undergo this transformation without supernatural intervention?

**Rich vs. Poor - Wealth vs. Happiness**

'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 (Dickens, 36).'

He went to church, and walked about the streets, and watched the people hurrying to and fro, and patted the children on the head, and questioned beggars, and looked down into the kitchens of houses, and up to the windows; and found that everything could yield pleasure. He had never dreamed that any walk—that anything—could give him so much happiness (Dickens, 115).

The novel contrasts Scrooge and Cratchit beautifully to symbolize the huge divide between the rich and the poor, and Scrooge's nephew serves as a symbol of those less fortunate but still cheerful like Cratchit. Scrooge has more than enough money but his life at the beginning of the novel holds no joy. On the other hand the Cratchit family is clearly struggling to provide the basics like food and warmth but are happy. The representation of the two men perfectly poses the age old question, can money buy happiness? Dickens clearly says that it cannot. True happiness is found in our fellow human beings, our families and taking good care of one another.

**Time**

To his great astonishment, the heavy bell went on from six to seven, and from seven to eight, and regularly up to twelve; then stopped. Twelve! (Dickens, 53)!
"It's Christmas Day!" said Scrooge to himself. 'I haven't missed it. The spirits have done it all in one night. They can do anything they like. Of course they can' (Dickens, 112).

The element of time is multi-layered in A Christmas Carol. The bells are always ringing the time for Scrooge, but there is a fluidity to time in the novel. What feels like three separate nights to Scrooge is actually one night. As for the spirits being able to do what they like, so too can Dickens do what he likes. In crafting the novel with time being flexible rather than a constant, Dickens is making a point about the time that people have on Earth. Scrooge as a miserly old man set in his mean would be easy to write off as beyond redemption. However, he does change and grow as a person. Dickens is telling his readers that it is never too late short of your grave to make a difference.

Character List

**Ebenezer Scrooge:**

One of the most famous (or infamous) characters of all Victorian literature, the term "Scrooge" has made its way even into the Webster dictionary. Ebenezer's hatred of Christmas and everything with even the most remote sense of cheer is his most defining feature; he is a misery old man who hoards his money greedily. He doesn't appear to spend his fortune; instead he simply saves it for money's sake. He works at a counting-house and used to be partners with Jacob Marley. As a boy he attended boarding school and became something of a solitary child. He had one love, Belle, as a young adult; however, fearing poverty, he developed affection for money instead, which consumed him. His last confrontation with Belle appears to be the real turning point in his demeanor to the world, transforming him into the continuously pessimistic and hope-fearing man he is for most of the story.

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, stiffened his gait; made his eyes red, his thin lips blue; and spoke out shrewdly in his grating voice. A frosty rim was on his head, and on his eyebrows, and his wiry chin. He carried his own low temperature always about with him" (Dickens, 34).

**Bob Cratchit**
Mr. Cratchit is a clerical assistant at the countinghouse. As an employee of Scrooge he is treated unfairly on a daily basis. He serves as a kind of juxtaposition to Ebenezer Scrooge: Where Scrooge's heart and house are empty, Mr. Cratchit's are full to bursting. He has a large family but is very poor, though he is no doubt constantly worried about being able to make enough to feed his family, yet he still has a sense of joy and good cheer - particularly around Christmastime. (on the Cratchit family in general):

They were not a handsome family; they were not well-dressed; their shoes were far from being waterproof; their clothes were scanty; and Peter might have known, and very likely indeed, the inside of a pawn-broker's. But they were happy, graceful, pleased with one another, and contented with the time" (Dickens, 84).

The Ghost of Christmas Past

This is the first ghost who visits Scrooge in the night; Dickens writes the ghosts in chronological order. He is small, like a child, and yet at the same time like an old man. He has long white hair, but no wrinkles; he has muscular arms but frail, aging legs. A light springs from his head; he uses a cap to diminish this. He is very soft and patient with Scrooge throughout his part of the tale, with the exception of Scrooge asking for him to put his cap on. The light on his skull is never fully explained, but it could serve as a metaphor for the ghost shedding light on the past.

'What!' exclaimed the Ghost, would you so soon put out, with worldly hands, 'the light I give? Is it not enough that you are one of those whose passions made this cap, and force me through whole trains of years to wear it low upon my brow!' (Dickens, 56).

The Ghost of Christmas Present

The next ghost to visit in the Ghost of Christmas Present. Jolly and boisterous, this ghost seems to be the most personable of the three. Where the first ghost was wispy and slightly mysterious, the second is whimsical. He sets up a feast of sorts in Scrooge’s apartment – decorations and all – feasting being a common theme of Christmas Eve/Day. He is warm presence, juxtaposing with the third chilling ghost. He wears a holly wreath around his head and a scabbard at his waist; the scabbard bears no sword, perhaps indicating his peaceful demeanor.

There sat a jolly Giant, glorious to see; who bore a glowing torch, in shape not unlike Plenty’ s horn, and held it up, high up, to shed its light on Scrooge, as he came peeping round the door. ‘Come in!’ Exclaimed the Ghost. ‘Come in! and know me better, man!’ (Dickens, 72).
The Phantom

The last ghost to visit Scrooge, The Phantom, or the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come, is easily the eeriest of the three. Mysterious, gloomy, and silent as the grave, the only part of him that we see is his outstretched hand. The most notable aspect of his character which sets him apart from his fellow ghosts is that he does not speak. Scrooge repeatedly asks him questions but he refuses to answer. His black-cloaked figure gives him the appearance of a demonic figure, adding a chilling aspect to the last section of Scrooge’s transformation. He is particularly important because he is the ghost to show Scrooge his own grave, wrapping up the process of making Scrooge into a better, cheerier man.

It thrilled [Scrooge] 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” (Dickens, 96).

Tiny Tim Cratchit

Though Tiny Tim, too, is one of the most well-known characters in fiction, he has a surprisingly small role. The son of Bob Cratchit, he has health issues and uses a crutch. He exists in the plot mainly to draw our sympathies for the Cratchit family; he is the voice of the London Unfortunates: poor, sick, and lame. However he, like his father, sees the good in everything; he has a sweet childish innocence that Dickens seems to want us to replicate on Christmas.

‘God bless us every one!’ said Tiny Tim, the last of all. He sat very close to his father’s side, upon his little stool. Bob held his withered little hand in his, as if he loved the child, and wished to keep him by his side, and dreaded that he might be taken from him (Dickens, 82).
Comparing Dickens’ Books

**Scrooge = A Favorite Dickens Character Type?**

Scrooge seems to be a specific character type re-used by Dickens. The wealthy, old, and unpleasant man with little to no family and no sense of charity. Let’s compare Scrooge with the characters of Mr. Tulkinghorn from *Bleak House*, Mr. Bounderby from *Hard Times*, and Mr. Jaggers from *Great Expectations*. All four are men of business, relatively solitary, and all four fit the character type. Both Scrooge and Tulkinghorn are referred to as “oysters.” Both Scrooge and Bounderby use the phrase “Humbug.”

**Discussion Question:** What is the significance of Dickens repeatedly using this same character type?

**Discussion Question:** Can readers consider a redemption possible for the characters of Tulkinghorn, Bounderby or Jaggers without supernatural means?

**Spontaneous Combustion**

The very controversial demise of Krook in *Bleak House* and also mentioned by Scrooge in *A Christmas Carol*:

> All this time, he lay upon his bed, the very core and centre of a blaze of ruddy light, which streamed upon it when the clock proclaimed the hour; and which, being only light, as more alarming that a dozen ghosts, as he was powerless to make out what it meant, or would be at; and was sometimes apprehensive that he might at that very moment an interesting case of spontaneous combustion, without having the consolation of knowing it.

For more information on spontaneous combustion click [here](#).

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**Additional Materials**

**Useful Scholarly Articles**

Learn about the visual effects of Dickens’ story which lead to it being reproduced in so many different types of mediums [here](#).

Decide if you believe in the credibility of the character Scrooge and his moralistic changes with [this article](#).

Go more into depth with Dickens’ reoccurring theme of suffering children [here](#).

Learn more about Dickens and the role of economies in his works [here](#).

Find out common omissions and changes made in the different pop culture remakes of *A Christmas Carol* [here](#).

Learn all about the political, social, and religious overtones in Dickens’ story [here](#).

Find out even more about *A Christmas Carol* with this useful [study guide](#).

Join the Facebook *A Christmas Carol* Fan Page [here](#).

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**Different Reproductions of A Christmas Carol on Stage**

Dickens’ story *A Christmas Carol* has led to a multitude of remakes in all different types of medium. One significant and common reproduction of his work is through representation on stage. While many productions of *A Christmas Carol* stick close to the story, his work has also allowed for and influenced people to adapt it to different modes and even different cultures. An American Country: *A Christmas Carol* features big names and lots of country music incorporated in with Dickens’ tale. Broadway features *A Christmas Carol* through music and dance numbers. Kids are allowed to get in on this too through kid-friendly versions. It has also been spiced up with a little comedy and a mix of other Christmas stories [here](#). Dickens’ tale has also been shrunk down to a one-man show, as well as turned into a reproduction mixing *A Christmas Carol* with a little Mexican and Native American heritage. Through his extraordinary talent to reach out to all different types of readers, *A Christmas Carol* has allowed for many different interpretations that all ultimately reiterate the Dickens’ main theme—the importance of giving, sharing, and loving not only during the holidays but all year round.

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**Other Fun Pop Culture Re-makes**

Want even more? Check out Barbie and her little sister in their own *Barbie’s Christmas Carol*. Or check out Bill Murray in the movie adaption *Scrooged*. Watch this guy learn the lessons of Christmas through a series of visits of past ex-girlfriends with *A Christmas Carol* with Diane and Susan [here](#). Fan of Britney Spears? Check out the remake of her hit song, *Ebenezer*. In a rush? Catch JibJab’s quick recap of *A Christmas Carol* [here](#).
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