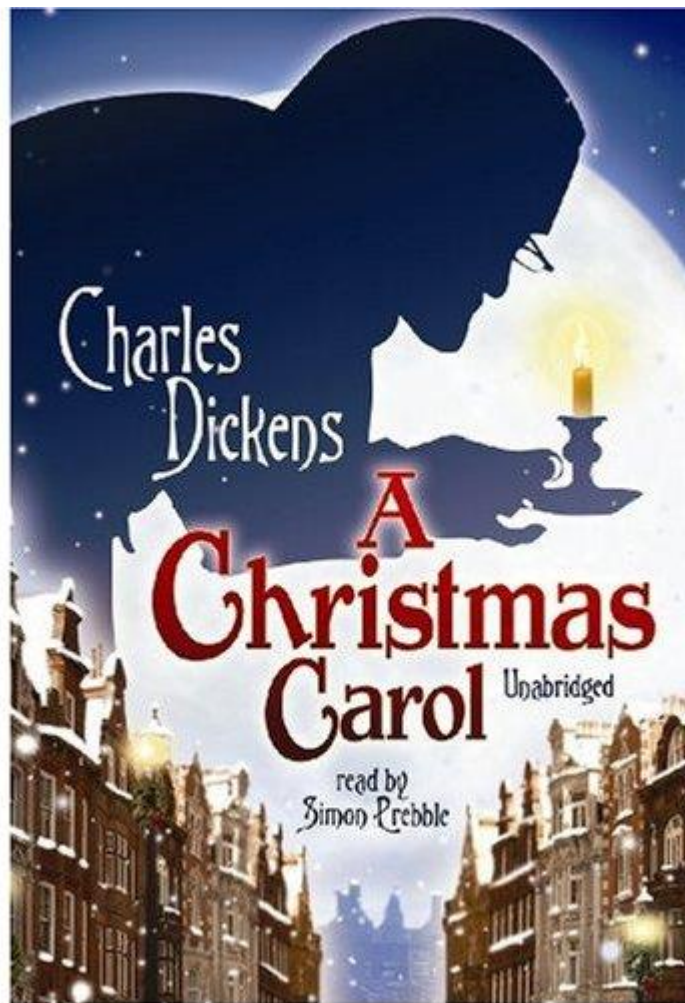


# A Christmas Carol – Charles Dickens



# **Charles Dickens Biography**

Dickens was born on 7th February, 1812, the second of eight children born to John and Elizabeth Dickens. He spent the first nine years of his life living in Kent, a county in the southeast of England. Despite being a kind and loving man, John Dickens was financially irresponsible and with a large family to provide for, found it very easy to rack up large debts.

As a result of this, the family moved to Camden Town in London, in 1822. John Dickens continued to live beyond his and his family's means and in 1824, he was finally arrested and sent to debtor's prison. Shortly afterwards, and probably as a result of being unable to provide for herself and her eight children, Elizabeth Dickens moved the rest of the family into prison with John.

Charles, however, did not join the rest of the family and was sent to live with a family friend, where, at 12 years old, he was sent out to work. He joined other child labourers at a blacking factory (where shoe polish was made), sticking labels onto bottles for 10 hours a day. This job made a lasting impression on Dickens; the conditions and pay were poor and the employers cruel.

When John Dickens' grandmother died and left him a sum of money, John was able to pay off his debts and was released from prison. Charles did not immediately leave the factory, at his mother's request and this only served to heighten his disregard for the poor working and living conditions that the working classes had to endure.

When eventually Charles returned to school, he attended The Wellington House Academy, which he described as being haphazard, full of poor discipline, brutality, desultory teaching and a run-down atmosphere. Despite this, Charles did well at school, becoming a law clerk and then a court reporter, which taught him a great deal about the bureaucracy and shortcomings of the English legal system.

Dickens' first novel, *The Pickwick Papers*, was published in monthly instalments in 1836, when Dickens was still only 25. *Oliver Twist*, *Nickolas Nickleby*, *The Old Curiosity Shop* and *Barnaby Rudge* were all published in monthly instalments between 1837 and 1841.

Dickens married Catherine Hogarth in 1836 and the subsequently had 10 children. A *Christmas Carol*, one of Dickens' most famous and well loved works was published in 1843, reportedly under rushed circumstances in order to meet the financial demands of his wife's fifth pregnancy.

In 1858, Dickens left his wife Catherine, although they did not divorce: it was still unheard of for someone as famous as he was. It is widely believed that Dickens had a long standing affair with an actress named Ellen Ternan, who was with him for the last 13 years of his life. On his death, Dickens settled an annuity (an annual sum of money) on Ternan, meaning she was financially secure for the rest of her life.

Dickens travelled a great deal, visiting America twice, Switzerland and Italy and wrote a great many novels on top of those mentioned above: *David Copperfield*, *Bleak House*, *Hard Times*, *A Tale of Two Cities* and *Great Expectations* being the most well known.

# **Victorian England**

Conduct some research into Victorian England. As far as possible try to link what you found out to the books, life and times of Charles Dickens as an individual living through these times.

Use the template below for your ideas.

Area of research	Key information	How this affects Dickens
Poverty and Money		
Working Conditions		
Industrial Revolution		
Women and Children		
London Life		

## **Characters:**

**Ebenezer Scrooge** - The miserly owner of a London counting-house, a nineteenth century term for an accountant's office. The three spirits of Christmas visit the stodgy bean-counter in hopes of reversing Scrooge's greedy, cold-hearted approach to life.

**Bob Cratchit** - Scrooge's clerk, a kind, mild, and very poor man with a large family. Though treated harshly by his boss, Cratchit remains a humble and dedicated employee.

**Tiny Tim** - Bob Cratchit's young son, crippled from birth. Tiny Tim is a highly sentimentalized character who Dickens uses to highlight the tribulations of England's poor and to elicit sympathy from his middle and upper class readership.

**Jacob Marley** - In the living world, Ebenezer Scrooge's equally greedy partner. Marley died seven years before the narrative opens. He appears to Scrooge as a ghost condemned to wander the world bound in heavy chains. Marley hopes to save his old partner from suffering a similar fate.

**The Ghost of Christmas Past** - The first spirit to visit Scrooge, a curiously childlike apparition with a glowing head. He takes Scrooge on a tour of Christmases in his past. The spirit uses a cap to dampen the light emanating from his head.

**The Ghost of Christmas Present** - The second spirit to visit Scrooge, a majestic giant clad in a green robe. His lifespan is restricted to Christmas Day. He escorts Scrooge on a tour of his contemporaries' Holiday celebrations.

**The Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come** - The third and final spirit to visit Scrooge, a silent phantom clad in a hooded black robe. He presents Scrooge with an ominous view of his lonely death.

**Fred** - Scrooge's nephew, a genial man who loves Christmas. He invites Scrooge to his Christmas party each and every year, only to be refused by his grumpy uncle.

**Fezziwig** - The jovial merchant with whom the young Scrooge apprenticed. Fezziwig was renowned for his wonderful Christmas parties.

**Belle** - A beautiful woman who Scrooge loved deeply when he was a young man. Belle broke off their engagement after Scrooge became consumed with greed and the lust for wealth. She later married another man.

**Peter Cratchit** - Bob's oldest son, who inherits his father's stiff-collared shirt for Christmas.

**Martha Cratchit** - Bob's oldest daughter, who works in a milliner's shop. (A milliner is a person who designs, produces, and sells hats.)

**Fan** - Scrooge's sister; Fred's mother. In Scrooge's vision of Christmases past, he remembers Fan picking him up from school and walking him home.

**The Portly Gentlemen** - Two gentlemen who visit Scrooge at the beginning of the tale seeking charitable contributions. Scrooge promptly throws them out of his office. Upon meeting one of them on the street after his visitations, he promises to make lavish donations to help the poor.

**Mrs. Cratchit** - Bob's wife, a kind and loving woman.

## **Structure:**

The structure of this story is really easy to follow and understand. Summarise each of the staves below and comment on the important outcomes of each stage of the novella.

Stave 1: Marley's Ghost

Summary of the Stave: \_\_\_\_\_

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Important Outcomes of the Stave: \_\_\_\_\_

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Stave 2: The Ghost of Christmas Past

Summary of the Stave: \_\_\_\_\_

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Important Outcomes of the Stave: \_\_\_\_\_

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Stave 3: The Ghost of Christmas Present

Summary of the Stave: \_\_\_\_\_

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Important Outcomes of the Stave: \_\_\_\_\_

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Stave 4: The Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come

Summary of the Stave: \_\_\_\_\_

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Important Outcomes of the Stave: \_\_\_\_\_

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Stave 5: The End of It

Summary of the Stave: \_\_\_\_\_

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Important Outcomes of the Stave: \_\_\_\_\_

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## **Themes:**

A list of major themes has been provided below. You should make notes on each one – events, characters etc.

- Change
- Poverty and Injustice
- Greed
- Life and Death
- Memory and Regret
- Family

## **Important Quotes:**

Look at each of the quotes and make brief notes under each about their context (where they're from in the book, who says them, about who, to who etc...) and why they are important.

1. Marley was dead: to begin with.
2. Oh! but he was a tight-fisted hand at the grindstone, Scrooge! a squeezing, wrenching, grasping, scraping, clutching, covetous old sinner!
3. "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!"
4. "If they would rather die," said Scrooge, "they had better do it, and decrease the surplus population.
5. "Bah! Humbug!"
6. "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?"
7. "The school is not quite deserted," said the Ghost. "A solitary child, neglected by his friends, is left there still."



8. "There was a boy singing a Christmas Carol at my door last night. I should like to have given him something; that's all."
9. "when they faded, and looked happier yet in the bright sprinklings of the Spirit's torch at parting, Scrooge had his eye upon them, and especially on Tiny Tim, until the last."
10. "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."
11. "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?"
12. "I will live in the Past, the Present, and the Future!" Scrooge repeated, as he scrambled out of bed. "The Spirits of all Three shall strive within me."
13. "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. He became as good a friend, as good a master, and as good a man, as the good old city knew, or any other good old city, town, or borough, in the good old world."