

Individual Learning Packet

**Teaching Unit**

**A Christmas Carol**

by Charles Dickens

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# A Christmas Carol

## Notes

Unlike many English writers, Charles Dickens (1812-1870) was born into a family with very little money; as a consequence, Dickens was sent out to work when he was nine years old. From first-hand experience, Dickens knew of the trials and tribulations in the lives of the ordinary person. All of those experiences wound up in his books.

But for all of his social commentary, neither Dickens nor his characters became cynical or embittered. The philosopher/critic George Santayana has said that Dickens' characters are like people we know in the world; they are both absurd and charming, and "the springs of kindness and folly in their lives would not dry up."

Santayana goes on to point that Dickens is as popular today as he was in his own time, but not because of any great ideas he had or wrote about. In fact Santayana states, "he [Dickens] had no *ideas* on any subject; what he did have was a vast sympathetic participation in the daily life of mankind.... Common life as it is lived was varied and lovable enough for Dickens."

In the story, *A Christmas Carol*, Scrooge's nephew implies that the hard, mean life Scrooge lives carries its own penalty; the obvious corollary that Dickens points to is that living a good life carries its own rewards. Thus, as you read this novel, try to see how the spirit of Dickens' humanity shines through in his characters and in the descriptive scenes he depicts of everyday life; this is Dickens' genius.

Some critics have accused Dickens of engaging in sentimentality and of writing caricatures of people rather than solid, believable characters. Today, most critics, while they recognize the validity of the early criticism, believe that Dickens' genius far overshadows his artistic lapses.

Although admitting that the characters' actions and even their names are eccentric, critics find these characters charming, engaging people who, while not realistic depictions of people, do reflect truth about life and people. A number of Dickens' characters are so memorable, in fact, that their names have passed into the language as common nouns. "Scrooge" is the most notable example.

All quotations come from the Dover Thrift Edition of *A Christmas Carol*, published 1991.

# A Christmas Carol

## Vocabulary

### Stave I

*apparition* – a strange figure appearing suddenly and thought to be a ghost

*bedlam* – insane asylum

*caustic* – bitter, sharp, biting

*dismal* – gloomy, dark, bleak, dreary

*facetious* – joking, humorous

*gruel* – a thin porridge

*incessant* – never ceasing; continuing or being repeated without stopping or in a way that seems endless

*irresolution* – hesitation

*kindred spirits* – two who are alike in spirit and/or attitude

*liberality* – generosity

*morose* – ill-tempered, gloomy, sullen

*palpable* – able to be touched or felt

*phantom* – something that seems to appear to the sight but has no physical existence; something that exists only in the mind; an illusion

*ponderous* – very heavy, bulky, massive

*proffer* – to offer service

*remorse* – regret, sorrow

*residuary legatee* – a person who receives the remainder of an estate after specific bequests have been paid

*rime* – a coating, like dew

*solemnized* – celebrated with formal ceremony

# A Christmas Carol

## Objectives

By the end of this Unit, the students will be able to:

1. state their personal opinion of the book and provide specific details from the work to support their generalizations.
2. compare and contrast Dickens' style of writing with the style of other authors they have read.
3. discuss those elements in a Dickens' novel that prompt critics to say he is one of the greatest English authors.
4. point out examples of the author's evocative description of people and scenes.
5. state the major theme in *A Christmas Carol* and explain how it is developed.
6. comment on the social issues that Dickens raises in this book.
7. point out examples of Dickens' humor and comment on its delivery.
8. indicate the time frame in this story and point out how Dickens manipulates time.
9. identify the narrative voice used in this novel and point out its advantages.
10. define these literary terms from *A Christmas Carol* and cite examples of each:
  - satire
  - sentimentality
  - caricature
  - metaphor
  - tone
  - irony
  - point of view
  - symbol
  - simile
11. write a short character sketch of Scrooge, Tiny Tim, and Bob Cratchit.
12. discuss the roles that Scrooge's nephew and Marley play in this story.

# A Christmas Carol

## Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. Discuss the time frame in this story. When does it start, when does it end, and how much time goes by?
2. Why do you suppose Dickens called his book *A Christmas Carol*?
3. Although young Ebenezer Scrooge seems like a fine young man, he changes as he grows older. Why does he become so callous and hardhearted, and what point is Dickens making in presenting this change in Scrooge? What does Scrooge's changed attitude at the end reflect?
4. After you have read this story, what would you infer is Dickens' attitude about organized religion?
5. Was Jacob Marley's character important or extraneous to this story?
6. Describe the author's depiction of Tiny Tim.
7. Point out examples of symbolism you see in this story.
8. Satire is an exposing and ridiculing of vice and folly. With this idea in mind, what aspect of society or individuals is Dickens satirizing?
9. Point out some descriptive passages in the novel where Dickens' love for the Christmas season can be seen.
10. Point out examples of sentimentality and caricature in this novel.
11. For what reasons do you suppose Dickens is considered one of England's greatest writers?
12. Discuss the point of view from which this story is told and point out what advantages this type of narration affords the author.

# A Christmas Carol

## Stave I: Marley's Ghost

1. In his prefatory note, what do you think Dickens is saying?

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2. What is meant by the phrase, "...and Scrooge's name was good upon [the exchange], for anything he choose to put his hand to"?

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3. What does the author say has to be understood before this story can be of any significance?

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4. Why do you suppose the author refers to Hamlet and his father?

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5. Why is Marley's being dead so important to this story?

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18. How does this scene end?

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19. In the last scene of this chapter, what family scene does Scrooge witness, and what is his reaction to it?

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20. What seems to be the major theme of this stave?

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