

# *A Christmas Carol* *Study Guide*

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For the novel by  
Charles Dickens



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## Synopsis

Ebenezer Scrooge is a hard-hearted, stingy, grouchy old man. He is unfriendly to his nephew, cruel to his employee, and verbally abusive to charity collectors.

On Christmas Eve, the ghost of his old partner, Jacob Marley, appears to Scrooge to warn him to change his ways. Bound in chains and tormented by his mistakes, Marley tells Scrooge that he will be visited by three Spirits. These Spirits offer Scrooge a chance to escape the same fate as Marley.

The Spirits take Scrooge on a journey through his past, his present, and his possible future. Scrooge suddenly sees what he is—and even more importantly, what he is not.

As Scrooge learns, our lives are guided by what we deem important, and all we choose to do affects those around us. We must choose with wisdom and love.

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- \_\_\_\_\_ 11. adamant  
a. lost  
b. inflexible  
c. admiring
- \_\_\_\_\_ 12. odious  
a. hateful  
b. ugly  
c. smelly
- \_\_\_\_\_ 13. exulted  
a. laughed  
b. rejoiced  
c. frowned
- \_\_\_\_\_ 14. execrable  
a. clever  
b. bad  
c. silly

**Questions:**

1. How is Scrooge's room transformed by the arrival of the Ghost of Christmas Present?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. What is a "twice-turned" gown? What does it mean that Mrs. Cratchit and her daughter are "brave" in ribbons? What do these details convey?

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3. The Spirit reveals that Tiny Tim will die “[i]f these shadows remain unaltered by the Future.” Why is Scrooge “overcome with penitence and grief”?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
4. According to Scrooge’s nephew, Fred, who always suffers from Scrooge’s “ill whims”?

#### **Analysis:**

5. *Humor* in writing taps into the human disposition to laugh at the ridiculous, the ludicrous, and the comical. *Hyperbole* is exaggeration used for humorous effect. How does Dickens use humor and hyperbole to help the reader understand how frightened Scrooge is of the second Spirit? Cite specific examples.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
6. What does the incense from the Spirit’s torch seem to represent?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
7. *Foreshadowing* is a hint or a clue an author gives to suggest something that may happen later in the story. What might Dickens be foreshadowing in this passage: “Bob’s voice . . . trembled more when he said that Tiny Tim was growing strong and hearty”?

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8. *Juxtaposition* is the act of placing two things side by side. An author uses juxtaposition to underscore the distinctive characteristics of two people, things, or places. For example, Dickens juxtaposes the setting of black house fronts, furrowed streets, gloom, dingy mist, and soot with the cheerfulness of the people in the houses, emphasizing the contrast. Find another example of juxtaposition in Stave Three.
  
9. The Ghost of Christmas Present states that he lives only until Twelfth-Night. What is Twelfth-Night? Why does the Ghost only live that long?
  
10. *Personification* gives human form to abstractions. How does Dickens personify ignorance and want (poverty) in Stave Three? Why do you think he chooses to personify these abstractions as he does?

### **Dig Deeper:**

11. Of the Cratchit's Christmas celebration, the narrator states:

There was nothing of high mark in this. . . . But they were happy, grateful, pleased with one another, and contented with the time. . . .”

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Despite having barely enough to fill everyone at the meal, every Cratchit is thankful and refrains from even hinting that the pudding is small. Why?

Read Philippians 4:12–13. What does Paul say is the “secret” of being “content in any and every situation”?

12. The Spirit takes Scrooge from place to place and to many homes. What personal qualities or traits are demonstrated for Scrooge through these encounters?

Read Galatians 5:22–23. What are the fruits of the Spirit listed in this passage? Compare this list to the list you made in the previous question. What are their similarities and differences?

To what extent can we cultivate these qualities in ourselves, and to what extent are they gifts from God?

## *A Christmas Carol Study Guide Answer Key*

4. The Spirit wants Scrooge to pull back the sheet and reveal the identity of the corpse. Scrooge cannot bring himself to uncover the corpse. Though part of him wants to look, he tells the Spirit that he does not have the power. Perhaps his fear of what he might see—an unspoken acknowledgment that he already knows the identity of the dead man—keeps him from looking.

5. Answers will vary but may mention grief, compassion, sympathy, sadness, anger, shock, and disbelief. The Ghost shows Scrooge a couple deep in debt to the dead man. The couple is relieved that this man's death will allow them more time to pay the debt. The only emotion expressed at Scrooge's death is pleasure.

### *Analysis:*

6. Answers will vary. Accept reasonably supported answers. The term "phantom" implies a more fearful image than the term "spirit" or "ghost."

7. Answers will vary. Accept reasonably supported answers. Dickens may have wanted the third Spirit to seem forbidding and uncompromising. Silence lends it a more ghostly air and makes it more mysterious, since the unknown is often more frightening than the known. Dickens may also be illustrating that we can learn less from the future than the past or present; the future is silent.

8. Tim's death causes grief. His family is sad; they cry; they miss him; they try to be brave; they are comforting one another. Scrooge's death causes men to laugh and talk about it; people are stealing his goods and selling them; a young couple is happy over the news of his death because it will give them more time to pay a debt. Interpretations of Dickens's intent may vary, but most likely he wishes to underscore once more the extent to which Scrooge has alienated himself from the rest of humanity.

9. Scrooge points out that he is not the man he was. He asks why the Spirit should show him this future if he is past hope. The Spirit's hand shakes and trembles and is called "kind," and yet the Spirit resists Scrooge's attempt to cling to him. Interpretations of the Spirit's reaction will vary. Perhaps the Spirit's trembling, "kind" hand indicates that the Spirit is glad Scrooge has resolved to change. On the other hand, the Spirit's efforts to break free from Scrooge may imply that Scrooge must still learn that such a change is solely within his own power and not the Spirit's.

### *Dig Deeper:*

10. Scrooge still shows some fear of the Spirit, but knows its purpose is good. Scrooge expresses a hope "to live to be another man from what [he] was." He is "prepared to bear [the Spirit's] company with a thankful heart."

11. Answers may vary, but students should note that Scrooge is now promising to "honor Christmas in [his] heart" and to not shut out the lessons that they have taught him. Scrooge is demonstrating his willingness to change.

12. Answers will vary. These verses tell us that as Christ died and rose again, so shall we; and the spiritual body and life will be far superior to the physical life we know now. Christ has conquered death and we look forward to salvation. Because of this, we should have joy and show faith and honor toward God.

### *Stave Five*

#### *Vocabulary:*

1. blithe: carefree and lighthearted

2. unanimity: sharing the same opinions or views; being in complete harmony or accord