

*A CHRISTMAS CAROL*

**EXAM REVISION  
BOOKLET**

## Dickens' Life:

Charles Dickens was born in 1812 in Kent and moved to London at the age of 9. When he was 12 years of age, his father was arrested and sent to a debtors' prison. Dickens' mother moved seven of their children into prison with their father but took Charles out of school and arranged for him to live alone outside the prison, **working with other child labourers in a terrible job** which involved pasting labels on bottles in a blacking (shoe polish) warehouse; he was **poorly paid and the conditions were terrible**.

After his father was released from prison, Dickens returned to school, becoming a law clerk and then a **court reporter where he saw the harsh justice system first-hand**. He used his own experiences of growing up in Kent and working as a court reporter in his stories. Dickens shocked audiences of his day with his novels, where **'gentlemen' (the ones with the wealth and education) are the least morally 'good' characters** and a convict turns out to be the most like a gentleman. He campaigned for a fairer justice system, a reform of the workhouses, the **rights of the poor (particularly children) to have access to education**, effective sewers and reasonable housing; many of his novels deal with these topics.

With such colourful characters, riveting narratives and wonderfully descriptive language, Dickens became one of the most popular English novelists of his time, both in England and America. In 1870, he eventually collapsed from overwork and died.

## Social and Historical Context:

Dickens was born into a time of great change in the way people lived. The industrial revolution was taking place and there was a sudden growth of the cities – the economy shifted from agriculture to industry and trade. Money from industry made the rich, richer and the **rich/poor gap widened**. Workers had to toil for long hours and little money. Out of necessity, children of all ages (even as young as five years old!) didn't go to school and worked long hours for a wage in 1840s' Britain.

The housing was appalling for working class families who lived in squalor, deprivation, disease and misery. They barely had enough money to buy food and the **child mortality was very high**. In the poorer quarters of Britain's larger cities almost 1 in 5 children born in the 1830s and 40s had died by the age of five. The main causes of death were polluted drinking water, damp and tuberculosis, which claimed between 60,000 and 70,000 lives in each decade of Victoria's reign. There was no healthcare – if you got ill and couldn't work, your whole family was at **risk of death**.

For those who were unable to support themselves, there were the workhouses: these were not intended as pleasant places to stay. Men, women and families were separated and those who were physically able were expected to work for their keep. Similar to the workhouses were debtors' prisons (those who were unable to pay a debt), such as Marshalsea, where Charles Dickens' father spent time.

The wealthy few on the other hand, lived in luxury with large houses, plenty of money, food and clothes. Their children didn't work, were educated, had expensive toys and often went on holiday.

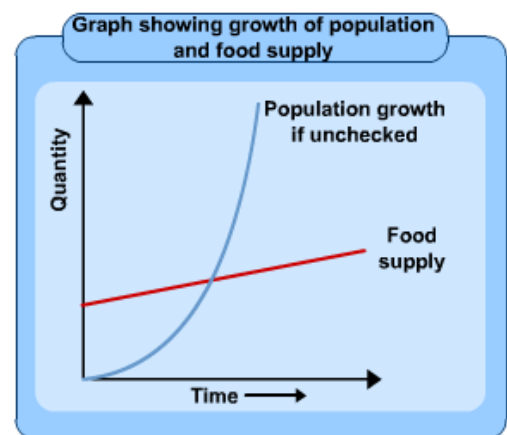
**Being seen to be civilised and adhering to a strict set of morals was important to high society in the Victorian age**. However, this was often criticised as being hypocritical for some of the reasons mentioned above. Controversially there was a call for a Sunday Observance Bill (by the MP, Andrew Agnew) which would ban any business or recreations taking place on a Sunday. Those who supported it believed that it would ensure that Sunday remained a spiritual day. Those who opposed it (Dickens was one of those – he wrote a scathing essay about Andrew Agnew) saw it as an attack on the poor who

used Sundays to do what they liked. So, why do you think that Scrooge's character attacks this idea when speaking to the Ghost of Christmas Present?

### A Christmas Carol:

During this time of unrelenting social change, Dickens wrote *A Christmas Carol*. Firstly, he wanted to write a good 'ghost' tale – a few scares, a few laughs, a few tears – to cheer up families around the hearth at winter (and to pay for his own turkey, no doubt); **telling ghost-stories at Christmas-time was a long-standing tradition (many Victorians believed in ghosts coming back to haunt people) and the gothic genre was popular throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century.** However, he also had the intention of drawing readers' attention to the **plight of England's poor, a recurring theme in much of his work.** As such, the novella can be read as a **social criticism** or an **allegory** (when a work has a social or political message). In the tale, Dickens includes a description of the hardships faced by the poor alongside a heartless **Malthusian\*** capitalist (Scrooge); the heart-rending, sentimental celebration of the Christmas season where Scrooge turns into generous private benefactor is what Dickens feels could be **the answer to most of society's problems.** Ironically, by concentrating on the 'pagan' traditions of Christmas, rather than on the nativity, Dickens helped to change Christmas from a primarily Christian festival to an inclusive, secular, social celebration – the novella's publication was the same year as the first commercially produced Christmas card was sent!

\*A reminder of **Malthus' Theory**: see graph below. The economist, Thomas Malthus saw having smaller families as one positive contribution to reducing the problem of over-population. He also described any causes that contributed to "decreas[ing] the surplus population" (Scrooge's words) as positive: war, famine and poor living & working conditions which might give rise to low resistance to disease.



### The Plot:

1. On Christmas Eve, Scrooge makes his clerk, Bob Cratchit, work in the cold.
2. He refuses an invitation to his nephew Fred's Christmas party and will not give money to the charity collectors.
3. At home he is visited by the ghost of his old business partner, Jacob Marley, who warns Scrooge that his way of life will lead to misery.
4. The Ghost of Christmas Past wakes Scrooge and shows him moments from his childhood, his apprenticeship and his failed engagement.
5. The Ghost of Christmas Present takes him to the Cratchit's home, where he is saddened by the ill, but kind, Tiny Tim. He is also shown how Fred celebrates Christmas with friends and how others celebrate Christmas together, despite being poor.
6. The final ghost is the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come who terrifies Scrooge with visions of his death, where nobody mourns his passing. He also discovers that Tiny Tim has died.
7. Scrooge awakes on Christmas Day and is delighted to find he has the chance to change his miserly ways. He buys a turkey for the Cratchits and attends his nephew's party.
8. Scrooge becomes like a second father to Tiny Tim (who doesn't die) and gains a reputation for knowing how to celebrate Christmas.

## So...why does Scrooge change?

- He is upset at the thought that Tiny Tim might die.
- The Ghost of Christmas Present uses his own cruel words against him.
- He sees what he is missing in the family scenes of celebration.

## Themes (bits in italics are other themes that fit under this umbrella theme):

**The supernatural:** this was a part of the Christmas story-telling tradition that started in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. By the 19<sup>th</sup> century, there was an interest in spiritualism; people believed spirits who resided in the afterlife wanted to communicate with the living. Dickens has 4 spirits who wish to communicate with him!

**Generosity and compassion:** this is the essence of the *Christmas* spirit. It's a time when *families* and friends come together in the *home* to share food and exchange gifts but it's also a time when we're supposed to think of *those who are less fortunate* than us. Scrooge's nephew and his clerk show compassion towards Scrooge which is in stark contrast to those who coldly dismiss Scrooge (fellow business people, his servants, the pawn shop owner) as he does them. Is there a message here, perhaps? A lack of compassion leads to a lack of compassion?

**Redemption:** This means *seeing* the error of your ways and being saved from sin or evil. Scrooge is *transformed* from a mean, greedy and *lonely* old miser, who was *blind* to his sin, into a generous, good-natured, beloved character...and just in *time!* The moral message of the novella is that all human beings have the opportunity / can make the *choice* to behave in kinder ways towards each other and be saved from *damnation* (don't forget the religious aspect!).

**Social injustice:** Just like *An Inspector Calls*, Dickens' story is an attack on a society where there is an unequal distribution of wealth: the rich, who enjoy comfort and feasting at Christmas, ignore the dreadful living conditions of the poor; in fact, they effectively punish the poor for their *poverty* through such things as the "Treadmill" and the "Workhouses". The thieves show how people were driven to steal from the dead. The Ghost of Christmas Present presents the children (Ignorance and Want) and states that "They are Man's" **responsibility**.

## Structure of the novella:

Carol singing was popular when Dickens wrote *A Christmas Carol* and he was certainly a lover of music. A carol is a festive song, particularly popular at Christmas (these carols are often about Christ's birth and the spirit of giving). When songs are written they're done so on staves. A staff is a set of five parallel lines on which a musical note is written (see below). So, referring to the chapters as staves **links to the title of the novella** and perhaps suggests to the reader that this will ultimately be a **joyous/moral tale**. The final (fifth) staff returns to many of the ideas in Staff 1 so there's symmetry to the novella. Furthermore, the last staff is both short and upbeat with Scrooge having rejected all of his earlier miserly ways, becoming a good Christian again.



## SAMPLE EXAM QUESTION

You will get an **extract** from the novella and **one question**, which will be in **two parts**. See below for the sample question that the exam board have provided.

### **Charles Dickens: *A Christmas Carol***

Read the following extract from Chapter 1 and then answer the question that follows.

In this extract Scrooge is being introduced to the reader.

5	External heat and cold had little influence on Scrooge. No warmth could warm, nor wintry weather chill him. No wind that blew was bitterer than he, no falling snow was more intent upon its purpose, no pelting rain less open to entreaty. Foul weather didn't know where to have him. The heaviest rain, and snow, and hail, and sleet, could boast of the advantage over him in only one respect. They often 'came down' handsomely, and Scrooge never did.
10	Nobody ever stopped him in the street to say, with gladsome looks, 'My dear Scrooge, how are you? When will you come to see me?' No beggars implored him to bestow a trifle, no children asked him what it was o'clock, no man or woman ever once in all his life inquired the way to such and such a place, of Scrooge. Even the blindmen's dogs appeared to know him; and when they saw him coming on, would tug their owners into doorways and up courts; and then would wag their tails as though they said, 'No eye at all is better than an evil eye, dark master!'
15	But what did Scrooge care? It was the very thing he liked. To edge his way along the crowded paths of life, warning all human sympathy to keep its distance, was what the knowing ones call 'nuts' to Scrooge.

Starting with this extract, how does Dickens present Scrooge as an outsider to society?

Write about:

- how Dickens presents Scrooge in this extract
- how Dickens presents Scrooge as an outsider to society in the novel as a whole.

**[30 marks]**

## WHAT ARE THE EXAMINERS LOOKING FOR?

(30 marks: AO1=12, AO2=12, AO3=6)

<b>AO1</b>	Read, understand and respond to texts.  Students should be able to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• maintain a critical style and develop an informed personal response</li><li>• use textual references, including quotations, to support and illustrate interpretations.</li></ul>
<b>AO2</b>	Analyse the language, form and structure used by a writer to create meanings and effects, using relevant subject terminology where appropriate.
<b>AO3</b>	Show understanding of the relationships between texts and the contexts in which they were written.

## WHAT SHOULD I WRITE?

- Firstly, **highlight** the key words in the question
- Now read the extract and **highlight** good evidence to answer the first bullet point of your question **(5 mins)**
- Write essay
  - Don't bother with an introduction – go straight into **analysing the extract (20 mins)**
  - **Write a couple of detailed SQIE** for the second part of your question. **(20 mins)**
  - **Sum up** how the writer presents...whatever the question asks. **(5 mins)**

## SO WHAT DOES A DETAILED SQIE LOOK LIKE?

**AO1 (how well you answer the question & use quotes): 40%**

**AO2 (Analysis of language, structure and form): 40%**

**AO3 (Context): 20%**

### **Model paragraph for a question about how Scrooge is presented:**

The first stave makes it clear how mean-spirited and miserly Scrooge is. Firstly, he is described as being **“as solitary as an oyster”**, a **simile** which demonstrates how Scrooge locks himself away from society and has a hard demeanour (although the simile also **foreshadows** Scrooge later revealing his softer side). The fact that the simile is in a long **complex sentence** of other similes connotes the idea of him being a difficult character. Furthermore, the use of **sibilance** suggests that he is frightening; this is reinforced by sinister physical descriptions where he is described as having **“eyes red”** and **“lips blue”**, evoking images of the living dead. Such gothic descriptions would have **appealed to a Victorian readership, who were fascinated with the macabre and would have identified Scrooge as being a wicked character; Dickens may have wished to suggest to his primarily middle class readership, who were highly concerned with appearance, that those who behave wickedly will appear wicked.** Dickens then **juxtaposes** Scrooge's character alongside Fred's in order to...

AO1 (Quotes & response) 40%	AO2 (Analysis of language, structure & form) 40%	AO3 (Context) 20%
“squeezing, wrenching, grasping, scraping...” <b>link to</b> “one coal”	<b>3<sup>rd</sup> person narration</b> delivers a judgemental and somewhat mocking tone which portrays Scrooge in a negative light. <b>Asyndetic listing of verb modifiers</b> which are all <b>synonyms</b> with <b>negative connotations</b> suggest that there’s no end to his selfish actions – this is reinforced by the “one coal” that he allows his clerk in the middle of winter; the reader would feel sympathy for Bob Cratchit (the clerk).	This reflects the wealthy who made money at the expense of the poor workers. Dickens was renowned for his detailed writing style with lots of long lists, powerful adjectives, similes and metaphors. After all, he had to fill a weekly column each week!
“as solitary as an oyster”	<b>Simile</b> – hard on the outside but hints ( <b>foreshadows</b> his later transformation) at a softer inner self. <b>Sibilance</b> creates a sinister effect which links to his description (see next piece of evidence).	
“eyes red...lips blue” <b>link to the ghost</b> “coming up the stairs” <b>link to</b> “The chain. . . was long, and wound about him like a tail” <b>and</b> “infernal atmosphere”	Placement of <b>adjectives</b> is reverse of expectations – suggests he’s a monster.  Gothic atmosphere is continued with Dickens’ use of <b>ellipsis</b> of “it was” and the use of the <b>present participle</b> “coming” to create the effect of it happening now – tense for the reader. See George Booth’s paragraph on the blog to see how you could write about this more complex analysis. The description of Marley’s ghost is disturbing and the “tail” is suggestive of a snake, which itself is <b>symbolic</b> of the devil – this idea is reinforced by “infernal ( <i>relating to hell</i> ) atmosphere”.	Gothic description – popular genre. There’s also a similarity to the way that Frankenstein’s monster is described in Mary Shelley’s earlier novel (written in 1818).  The image of purgatory would have been very recognisable (and frightening!) to a Christian readership.
“fog”	<b>Repetition / pathetic fallacy</b> create an uninviting atmosphere (which links to Scrooge’s personality at the start). Also <b>symbolic</b> of Scrooge’s inability to see the good around him.	London was known for its smog (mixture of smoke and fog) from all the factories and homes. Dickens actually opens his novel <i>Bleak House</i> by describing the smog as being responsible for the “death of the sun”.
“a stake of holly through his heart” <b>vs.</b> Fred’s (“handsome...eyes sparkled”) / “think of people below them”	Using items associated with Christmas to kill those who celebrate Christmas is violent <b>imagery</b> but so <b>exaggerated</b> that Scrooge’s character seems more ridiculous than sinister: Dickens doesn’t want the reader to really hate Scrooge’s character otherwise we would feel no joy at his later “transformation”. The <b>juxtaposition</b> of Fred’s character who is handsome and charitable makes Scrooge’s character seem even uglier.	Readers would have instantly associated the “holly” and “pudding” with Christmas.



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"A solitary child" <b>link to</b> "father...much kinder than he used to be"	The use of the Ghost of Christmas Past allows the reader to feel sympathy for Scrooge as we realise that he may have been treated unkindly as a child. Scrooge feels sympathy first for himself and then the young carol singer he threatened the previous evening and then he feels guilty about not being a better uncle to the nephew of his sister who had "a large heart" and died young.	Dickens himself felt lonely when his family went to a debtors' prison.
Fezziwig: "fuel heaped upon the fire" / "happiness he gives...as great...as a fortune" <b>link to</b> "clerk"	All of the words associated with Fezziwig have <b>positive connotations</b> . Scrooge actually argues with the ghost who tricks him into defending his former boss by saying that Fezziwig didn't spend much on the party. It also makes Scrooge think about how he treats his "clerk".	
"I release you" from the "contract" <b>link to</b> "a golden [idol]"	This is the <b>language of commerce</b> which demonstrates that Belle (a name that means beautiful incidentally) understands that Scrooge is obsessed with money. It also suggests that he is no longer a good Christian – see context →	A biblical allusion (it is a Christmas story after all!) to the story of the gold calf which was worshipped as a false god.
"alone"	<b>Repeated</b> – suggesting that selfishness will lead to a life of loneliness but also intimates that <u>individually</u> we must pay for our sins in life, e.g. like Jacob Marley does.	The second idea here would have been a recognisable passage from the bible (Corinthians) to Victorian readers who would have been well versed in the scriptures.
"he could not hide the light"	Light is <b>repeated</b> and is <b>symbolic</b> of see the truth/right path to take. Scrooge doesn't want to know what his greed has done to him (and others), i.e. losing Belle. He'd rather remain in his "fog" than be <u>illuminated</u> (learn from his past to change his present actions – similar idea to <i>An Inspector Calls</i> ).	There's another biblical <b>allusion</b> here. Light represents goodness/hope/God. Again, this would have been obvious to a Victorian readership.
"Transformation" <b>link to</b> "Light" <b>link to</b> "Let me profit by it"	Scrooge's room had been transformed and the word "light" is <b>repeated</b> again but Scrooge has also been transformed: he wishes to "profit" by learning any "lesson" the Ghost of Christmas Present has to teach. However, the <b>language of commerce</b> here suggests that his learning isn't yet complete.	
"Because [poverty] needs it most." <b>link to</b> "This earth of yours" <b>link to</b> "They are man's" – "Ignorance" & "Want" – "shrivelled" & "twisted"	<b>Personification</b> of poverty to elicit sympathy – reinforced by the <b>short sentence</b> . When Scrooge questions the laws done in God's name, there's an attack by the ghost saying the laws are man's creation. Later he presents the two children (more <b>personification</b> ) to <b>metaphorically</b> represent the rich (ignorant) and the poor (those who are need help); Ignorance might also be interpreted as the lack of education afforded to the poor, which would have enabled them to forge better lives. The description of the poor children is particularly shocking/horrifying.	Dickens was familiar with the poor working conditions of the workers. He also campaigned for the education rights for children. As well as this, see the note about the proposed Sunday Observance Bill in the contextual information, which relates to this exchange between the ghost & Scrooge. You may need to reread the extract.



AO1 (Quotes & response) 40%	AO2 (Analysis of language, structure & form) 40%	AO3 (Context) 20%
<p>“Decrease the surplus population” <b>link to</b> “Scrooge hung his head” <b>link to</b> “discovered What the surplus is”</p>	<p>The ghost uses Scrooge’s <b>earlier</b> words to attack him when Scrooge begs for Tiny Tim’s life to be spared. There’s also another nice quote (<b>metaphor</b>) about the “insect on the leaf” that you may wish to use (see Stave 3).</p>	<p>This is also Dickens’ attack on Malthus’ Theory. Don’t forget that Scrooge is a metaphor for Malthusian capitalists. See contextual information above if you can’t recall what the theory entails.</p>
<p>“Their clothes were scanty...but they were happy” <b>link to</b> “remember upon Christmas Day, who made lame beggars walk”</p>	<p>The Cratchits make do with the very little they have, are caring and supportive of one another – shows their generous spirit, even in challenging circumstances (we also see this when the ghost takes Scrooge to a number of terrible places). Even Tiny Tim’s comment is generous: he sees his disability positively as it will make others think of Jesus on Christmas Day. Scrooge is very moved by Tiny Tim and shows concern.</p>	<p>Dickens challenges preconceptions that the wealthy had about the poor. The story of Jesus performing miracles upon the lame and the blind would have been well-known.</p>
<p>“If these shadows remain unaltered by the Future, the child will die.”</p>	<p>The <b>conditional subordinate clause</b> represents Scrooge’s future actions &amp; it’s also <b>repeated</b> later. In terms of <b>syntax</b>, the <b>main clause</b> has been placed at the end to demonstrate the results of those actions. The <b>brevity</b> of the main clause is shocking/emotive and <b>represents</b> Tiny Tim’s short life. Furthermore, the <b>modal verb</b> “will” conveys certainty, making it all the more emotive &amp; persuades Scrooge that his transformation is urgently required in order to save the boy. See George Booth’s paragraph on the blog to see how to write about this.</p>	<p>Child mortality was high and this was largely due to the terrible living conditions of the poor who struggled to survive on such low wages. See contextual information above.</p>
<p>“His wealth is of no use to him. He don’t do any good with it.”</p>	<p>Unlike his guests, Fred feels sympathy not anger towards Scrooge. He’s a forgiving character even though he’s been treated badly by Scrooge.</p>	<p>Links to Dickens’ desire for a fairer, more caring society. See contextual notes.</p>
<p>“I hope to live to be another man” <b>or</b> “he resolved to treasure up every word” <b>or</b> “I will honour Christmas in all my heart”</p>	<p>Use any of these quotes to <b>contrast</b> with Scrooge’s stubbornness and feelings about others/Christmas at the start of the novella.</p>	
<p>“calico...becoming to the body” <b>link to</b> “they have brought him to a rich end”</p>	<p>Scrooge’s good shirt has been replaced by one made of “calico”, which the servant feels is fitting to the type of person he was; his more expensive items are sold to make them money. Scrooge’s body is dealt with by cruel, ugly people who treat him the way he treated others in life. Scrooge is horrified and seems to understand that money is not as important as friends and family.</p>	<p>Calico is a very cheap material. The deceased were usually dressed in their best attire; for the rich that would be silk shirts, etc.</p>

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<p>“bereft, unwatched, unwept, uncared for was the body” <b>link to</b> “his sole friend, and sole mourner” <b>link to</b> “a happier house for this man’s death” <b>link to</b> “[Fred] is the pleasantest-spoken gentleman”</p>	<p>Another long list of <b>adjectives</b>, which are <b>synonyms</b>. Compare with <b>repetition</b> of “sole” (6 times in one sentence!) about Marley at the start of the novella – emphasises that nobody cares about him and reminds us how <b>similar</b> Marley and Scrooge are. Then <b>contrast</b> what was said about Scrooge with what was said about Fred.</p>	<p>This went against what Victorians considered to be a “good death” where you die surrounded by friends &amp; family and then are mourned afterwards.</p>
<p>“My little child! My little child!” <b>link to</b> “thy childish essence was from God!”</p>	<p>The <b>repeated short exclamations</b> are honest &amp; emotive. Bob Cratchit would elicit sympathy (perhaps guilt?) from primarily female, wealthy readers. Tiny Tim’s generous spirit &amp; selflessness represent the Christmas spirit and as such he seems like an unnecessary sacrifice due to the selfishness of the wealthy.</p>	<p>Link to the high mortality rate of children, particularly amongst the poor – see contextual notes.</p>
<p>“I am as light as a feather...as happy as an angel...”</p>	<p>Lots of <b>similes</b> to show both Scrooge’s elation at a ‘second chance’ in life (he’s been ‘saved’) and to demonstrate how difficult it is to put into words how happy he is. The “angel” certainly <b>contrasts</b> with the devilish description of Marley at the start of the novella.</p>	
<p>“clang, clash, hammer” <b>link to</b> “glorious...glorious!”</p> <p>“cold” <b>link to</b> “everything could yield him pleasure”</p>	<p><b>Onomatopoeia</b> of unpleasant sounds and yet Scrooge appreciates them which is evident when he repeats/exclaims, “glorious”.</p> <p>Something normally unpleasant like the “cold” gives Scrooge “pleasure” – demonstrates how he has changed / appreciates everything around him.</p>	
<p>“no fog, no mist, clear, bright”</p>	<p><b>Motifs</b> of dark and light again. The “fog” that was repeated at the start is now gone. He has learnt his lesson and transformed.</p>	
<p>“some people laughed...these would be blind anyway” <b>link to</b> “standing in the spirit at your elbow”</p>	<p>The <b>narrator</b> seems to remind us that there are still those who are like Scrooge in society. The <b>declarative sentence</b> suggests certainty from a mysterious narrator who is “at your elbow” (suggesting that the narrator is an angel/God?) to persuade the selfish wealthy to change their ways for the Day of Judgement.</p>	<p>This idea that God is always watching your actions is something that a Victorian readership would have often heard in church.</p>
<p>“to Tiny Tim, who did <i>not</i> die, he was a second father”</p>	<p>Scrooge has an adopted family. The <b>relative clause</b> and the <b>italicising</b> (capitalisation in some editions) of “not” demonstrates that Scrooge’s choices/actions ultimately saved Tim’s life. The novella <b>ends</b> on positive note suggesting that we can all change our selfish ways.</p>	

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