

# A CHRISTMAS CAROL

CHARLES DICKENS

## LIVING LITERATURE SERIES

A PERMA-BOUND PRODUCTION

TEACHER'S GUIDE

GUIDE WRITTEN BY MARY ELLEN SNODGRASS

### SYNOPSIS

The tale of Ebenezer Scrooge's conversion from a pinch-penny misanthrope to a philanthropist begins at his London accounting firm where he and his clerk, Bob Cratchit, work long hours in icy misery. Scrooge has a reputation for tight-fistedness, especially at Christmas, a holiday he abominates. He openly disparages it to his nephew Fred, who insists upon wishing his uncle well at the joyous season.

Scrooge's reasons for despising the yuletide are monetary; he rejects the notion of providing food and lodging for people who would be better off in public workhouses or prisons. Brushing aside a polite collector for charity, a surly Scrooge returns to work and smartly rebukes a caroler who interrupts his concentration. With niggardly words to his employee, who expects a day off for Christmas, Scrooge makes his way home.

On his arrival home, Scrooge notices a strange resemblance to his former partner Jacob Marley in the face on the door-knocker. Later, Marley's spirit appears and explains to an incredulous Scrooge that he must wander among men whom he ignored in his lifetime. Before taking leave of his old partner and only friend, the ghost predicts the visitations of three spirits.

As the bell inexplicably begins to toll midnight, Scrooge finds his bed curtains drawn aside by a figure who seems half child, half old man. The Ghost of Christmas Past draws Scrooge magically through the wall and down the road to a school, where the young Scrooge waits alone, comforting himself with the companionship of friends from books. His sister Fan arrives to escort him home to enjoy the holidays with their father, who has softened his churlish ways. On the next stop, the spirit reveals the warehouse where Scrooge once worked and a Christmas party which is hosted by his employer, Mr. Fezziwig, and his jolly wife.

The last vision, a conversation between an older Scrooge and his fiancée Belle, reminds him of the hardness of heart which led to the loss of his only love. In later years, she is happily married to a warm-hearted man who loves his family and who feels pity for the lonely miser working in his office while his partner breathes his last. Scrooge extinguishes the spirit by placing his cap on the bright rays emanating from his head; then he sinks into heavy sleep.

Awakened by the arrival of the second spirit as the clock strikes one, Scrooge finds a cheery giant in his room surrounded by an effusion of decoration and holiday foods. At Scrooge's touch on his robe, new visions reveal the joys of Christmas Present. In the humble dwelling of the Cratchit family, Mrs. Cratchit and five of her children await Bob and his frail crippled son, Tiny Tim, who are returning from church services. Scrooge is enthralled with their meager celebration and begs to know if Tiny Tim will survive. The ghost reports a vacant chimney seat and an abandoned crutch.

Passing celebrations by coal miners and lonely mariners, Scrooge arrives at the home of his nephew Fred, where hilarity and amusements abound. A game of "Yes and No" ends in an unflattering depiction of Scrooge. The scene shifts to a collage of sick-beds, poverty, and institutions for the destitute. The spirit reveals a claw protruding from the edge of his skirt. Scrooge is horrified by the appearance of two wretched children, whom the spirit insists are the responsibility of all mankind. As the spirit vanishes with the tolling of the clock, a dark, solemn phantom replaces him.

The Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come, points relentlessly toward the future where various people discuss the death of a lonely, forgotten man. Haunted by his unacknowledged awareness of the corpse's identity, Scrooge observes the charwoman, the laundress, and the undertaker bargaining with Joe, the junk dealer, for goods scavenged from the dead man's rooms. Scrooge, scandalized at the lack of sorrow for the departed, asks if no one shows emotion. The spirit's answer, a vision of a debt-ridden man comforting his wife with the news of a reprieve from financial disaster, gives no solace to the miser.

The last segment of his journey to the future returns Scrooge to the Cratchit house, where a grieving family mourns the loss of Tiny Tim. Scrooge fears that the spirit will depart before he finds answers to urgent questions—who was the dead man and are these predictions irrevocable. The ghost points to a grave marked "Ebenezer Scrooge." Before the spirit's disappearance, a changed man pleads with him to intercede. Promising to replace his miserly ways with a sincere celebration of Christmas, Scrooge finds himself alone in his room.

Rushing to the window, a frenzied Scrooge begs to know the day. He discovers it is not too late to celebrate Christmas, orders the prize turkey from the butcher shop, and vows to send the fat beast to the Cratchits' house as a belated gift. On his way down the street, Scrooge, now dressed in his holiday best, passes the gentleman who had previously asked a donation and whispers a secret amount to cover all his past lapses in charity. He arrives at Fred's house, jubilant with his second chance but hesitant about interposing himself among the merry-makers. The next day, he contrives to be his old self in order to surprise Bob with a raise and financial aid for his family. The tale closes with the best of hopes for Scrooge's conversion and the blessing of Tiny Tim, "God bless us, Every One!"

### BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

In his lifetime, Charles John Huffam Dickens achieved a fame that few authors earn even after their deaths. His many novels, filled with vivid portrayals of poverty and degradation and unforgettable characters such as Oliver Twist, Pip, Tiny Tim, David Copperfield, and Smike, pleased audiences on both sides of the Atlantic.

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Dickens was born at Portsea on February 7, 1812, to a lower middle class family. A scholarly child, he grew up in Chatham and became a voracious reader of Smollett, Defoe, Richardson, Fielding, and Goldsmith, the notable authors of English fiction. His father, John Dickens, a pay clerk for the Royal Navy, demonstrated little ability to manage money and subsequently served a sentence at Marshalsea prison for his debts. His personal and household goods were sold at public auction and the family transported to prison apartments.

Dickens's life was forever changed at this point. Humiliated, he left school at the age of twelve and labored in a shoe polish factory pasting labels on bottles. He served as an office boy in a law firm before mastering shorthand and establishing himself in journalism. His more memorable characters, such as Ebenezer Scrooge, Mr. Micawber, and Uriah Heep, became household names to readers who devoured his works, which were often serialized in London's *Morning Chronicle*, where Dickens found employment around age twenty as reporter of political debates in the House of Commons.

After his marriage to Catherine Hogarth, Dickens wrote for the *Monthly Magazine*, *Bentley's Miscellany*, and the *Evening Star*, for which he produced *Sketches by Boz*, published under his pseudonym from 1836 to 1837. His first novel, *Pickwick Papers* (1837), led to lasting fame as an entertaining novelist. Subsequent emphasis on social issues such as workhouses, child welfare, alcoholism, crime, and protective labor laws earned him the reputation of reformer and the support of John Forster, who later composed his biography. In 1842, a tour of the United States brought Dickens in contact with his American supporters, although he drew criticism for some of his beliefs, especially from the Southern press for his disdain for slavery.

At the height of his career, Dickens, while living at Tavistock Square in London, produced his major classics—*David Copperfield* (1850), *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859), and *Great Expectations* (1861). A tour in 1854 of the industrial town of Preston inspired his shortest novel, *Hard Times*, which was published in *Household Words*, a weekly journal, beginning April 1 and concluding August 12, 1854. In a letter to Thomas Carlyle dated July 13, 1854, Dickens noted, "I am going, next month, to publish in one volume *Hard Times* . . . It contains what I do devoutly hope will shake some people in a terrible mistake of these days."

Fascinated with the theater, he absorbed himself in local stage productions and had an affair with actress Ellen Ternan. His health suffered in his last years from the punishment of too many public readings and lectures and from the mental anguish he experienced when his marriage crumbled in 1858 and his name was linked with his housekeeper in an unsubstantiated scandal. In 1870, suffering from exhaustion, he died, leaving the manuscript of *Edwin Drood* unfinished. His body was buried in Poet's Corner of Westminster Abbey.

### CRITIC'S CORNER

The exigencies of serial writing for magazines and of rapid production of novels placed constraints on Dickens's work, most seriously the lack of opportunity for rewriting and tightening details and controlling metaphor, and tone. *A Christmas Carol* is the most memorable example of a series of short holiday pieces that Dickens wrote out of a pressing need for money. Although critics are quick to point out Dickens's obvious faults, such as the overuse of coincidence

and caricature, as well as heavy-handed social criticism, melodrama, and excessive sentimentality, he holds an enviable position among English novelists. During his lifetime he was able to move the reading public to action against human misery by intense depictions of poverty and the cruelties of social institutions such as orphanages, workhouses, factories, and boarding schools. In recent times perennial retellings of *A Christmas Carol* in movies and on stage have kept Dickens's vivid account about nineteenth-century England as popular as it was in his own day. The sincerity of his belief in the Christmas spirit and his espousal of Christian charity are major reasons for the book's success. The Christmas season would seem bleak indeed without a retelling of Dickens's story of the late-night conversion of cold-hearted Ebenezer Scrooge.

### GENERAL OBJECTIVES

1. To analyze the use of the supernatural
2. To assess character faults
3. To recognize the themes of love and acceptance
4. To examine harsh settings
5. To account for the title
6. To isolate examples of social evils
7. To define didacticism
8. To summarize holiday traditions
9. To express the meaning of conversion
10. To comment on classic literature
11. To recognize Christian philosophy
12. To define the novel of conscience

### SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

1. To recognize the effect of Scrooge's lonely childhood
2. To analyze the types of love in Scrooge's life
3. To describe the style of holiday celebration in Victorian England
4. To determine the reason for happiness among destitute people on Christmas
5. To identify Dickens's purpose in composing this short work
6. To grasp the author's depiction of poverty as a cause of human suffering
7. To discuss how Fred reunites with Scrooge
8. To contrast shifts in atmosphere in past, present, and future
9. To account for Mrs. Dilber's sale of Scrooge's personal possessions
10. To view film and video versions of the story for comparison to the original

### MEANING STUDY

Below are words, phrases, sentences or thought units that have a particular meaning in the story. Explain the meaning each has in this book. Stave and page numbers are given so that you can note the context from which the item is taken.

1. Stave One (Table of Contents, p. v)  
(In keeping with his musical title, Dickens names his five chapters after the five lines (known as staves) on which music is written.)
2. But the wisdom of our ancestors is in the simile; and my unhallowed hands shall not disturb it, or the Country's

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done for. (Stave One, p. 1)

*(Dickens is referring to the simile in paragraph 2, "Old Marley was as dead as a door-nail," which is an essential statement to his point—that Marley appears to his former partner in the form of a spirit from the dead in order to change Scrooge's attitude before it is too late.)*

3. Scrooge was his sole executor, his sole administrator, his sole assign, his sole residuary legatee, his sole friend, and sole mourner. (Stave One, p. 2)  
*(Ebenezer Scrooge received the remains of Marley's estate after specific bequests were made. Like his partner, Scrooge lives alone and has few people to mourn him or profit from an inheritance after he dies. Dickens points out the pathos of Marley's solitary life as a warning to Scrooge to enjoy his family and friends while he still can.)*
4. I'll retire to Bedlam (Stave One, p. 8)  
*(Scrooge, driven to distraction by the demands of the holiday season, refers to an insane asylum, St. Mary's of Bethlehem in London, by its common name. At the asylum, ambulatory patients were allowed to walk the streets and beg for pocket money, food, or other charity. Manic patients were chained to the wall, where their families visited them, brought them food and medicine, and marveled at the chaotic noises made by the suffering inmates. In modern times the word bedlam (a corruption of Bethlehem) has come to mean any place of noise and confusion.)*
5. "The Treadmill and the Poor Law are in full vigor, then?" said Scrooge. (Stave One, p. 9)  
*(Scrooge refers to situations affecting indigent citizens in Dickens's day. The treadmill placed a row of prisoners (debtors) on a revolving drum that remained stationary while they walked along its treads, spinning it at a steady pace as a form of punishment. By keeping prisoners occupied, guards had less trouble keeping them out of mischief. A law enacted in England in 1834 decreed that no able-bodied man in Great Britain could receive public assistance unless he entered a workhouse.)*
6. Though he looked the phantom through and through, and saw it standing before him; though he felt the chilling influence of its death-cold eyes, and marked the very texture of the folded kerchief bound about its head and chin, which wrapper he had not observed before, he was still incredulous, and fought against his senses. (Stave One, p. 18)  
*(Scrooge senses that Marley is dead by the cold quality of his eyes. The binder which prevents the corpse's chin from exhibiting the effects of rigor mortis proves that he is dead. The realization causes Scrooge to doubt that he is really talking to a ghost.)*
7. Think of that! Bob had but fifteen 'Bob' a week himself; he pocketed on Saturdays but fifteen copies of his Christian name and yet the Ghost of Christmas Present blessed his four-roomed house! (Stave Three, p. 73)  
*(The author is making a pun to illustrate the pathetic salary of Bob Cratchit. A bob is slang for a shilling, twenty of which made up a pound, which was then equivalent to five American dollars. A shilling, then, was equal to an American quarter, so Bob Cratchit supports his family of seven on the equivalent of \$3.75 a week [in*

*1996, approximately \$187.50].)*

8. Here is a glass of mulled wine ready to our hand at the moment and I say, 'Uncle Scrooge!' (Stave Three, p. 79)  
*(A favorite drink in cold weather in Dickens's time was hot wine which often contained spices such as cinnamon, cloves, and nutmeg. The mixture was sweetened with honey or sugar and dotted with slices of citrus fruit. Sometimes the wine was heated by the immersion of a hot poker into the tankard. More often it was left on the hearth near the fire for a more gradual warming.)*
9. Stop! There was first a game at blindman's-bluff. (Stave Three, p. 76)  
*(In honor of the Christ Child, the celebrants at Fred's house enjoy children's games. They are playing a game that requires one blindfolded player to pursue and identify another player, who then becomes the "blindman." The game gets rowdy; the player knocks down fire-irons and chairs, bumps the piano, and tangles himself in curtains in pursuit of "the plump sister.")*
10. "Well!" said the first. "Old Scratch has got his own at last, hey?" (Stave Four, p. 86)  
*(Businessmen in Scrooge's vision of Christmas Future are exulting over the death of the unnamed old man, whom they suppose to be in the hands of Satan. They part without commenting further on the unnamed corpse.)*

### COMPREHENSION STUDY

Answer the following questions in your own words. There is not always a right answer. Your judgment is important and you should be ready to defend your answers by referring to passages in the book.

#### Questions 1-5 Literal Level

1. What time period does the book cover?  
*(Marley's ghost arrives on Christmas Eve, exactly seven years after his death. The ghost indicates that the first two spirits will appear over the span of two days beginning at the stroke of 1:00 A. M. The visitations will continue a third night at the stroke of midnight. Despite this spooky warning, the story takes place in twenty-four hours, from the scene in Scrooge's office on Christmas Eve to his joyous celebration of Christmas Day after his conversion. The passage of time may explain Scrooge's confusion when he awakens on Christmas morning and is uncertain what day it is.)*
2. What relationship did Marley have with his partner?  
*(Jacob Marley and Ebenezer Scrooge were business partners in a counting house but were not close friends. Just as Scrooge was able to continue working while Marley lay dying, so is Marley able to terrify Scrooge and offer no words of comfort before his ordeal begins. The only sign of love between them is Marley's assertion, "I am here to-night to warn you, that you have yet a chance and hope of escaping my fate. A chance and hope of my procuring, Ebenezer." Scrooge's reply, "You were always a good friend to me" leaves the reader wondering whether either man has ever known true friendship.)*
3. Describe the relationship of Bob Cratchit and Tiny Tim.  
*(Bob Cratchit, father of Peter, Martha, Belinda, Tim, and two smaller Cratchits, seems unable to reconcile the suffering of his "little, little child." He is eager to bear the*

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undersized boy on his shoulders and to cater to his whims in an effort to make up for the pain of a crippling disease and Tim's inability to walk without a crutch. In the vision of the last spirit, Bob weeps openly before his family, vowing he will keep his promise to visit the child's grave every Sunday. He composes himself in the moments he spends with Tim's body and returns to his family, urging them all to remember "this first parting that there was among us.")

4. What reason does Belle give for breaking her engagement to Ebenezer Scrooge?

*(Belle appears to have learned distressing details about Ebenezer during their period of engagement. Teary-eyed and dressed in mourning "for the love of him you once were" and weeping with regret at the change in his outlook. In accusation she says, "I have seen your nobler aspirations fall off one by one, until the master passion, Gain, engrosses you." He does not deny the charge. She describes what she perceives as his greedy personality—one given to idolatry of gold. Because of his falseness to his "own guiding principle," she seems resigned to end their relationship. She wishes him well and urges him to seek a more suitable marriage with a woman who will be a better investment for him.)*

5. Why does Scrooge dismiss the Ghost of Christmas Past?

*(The anguish of past hurt and self-inflicted alienation causes Scrooge to search for release from the spirit's power over him. He realizes that the light which shines from the spirit's head, a symbol of Scrooge's awakening to self-knowledge, causes him to see the past more clearly, as though he were reliving it. The pain of regrets, unhappiness, and the lost love of Belle and his sister Fan presses him to seek release from the past. With all his might, he extinguishes the glow by replacing the cap upon its head. However, although the spirit vanishes, "he could not hide the light, which streamed from under it on an unbroken flood upon the ground." Release from the power of the Spirit of Christmas Past causes him to fall into a deep sleep, as though exhausted by the visions he has just experienced.)*

### Questions 6-8 Interpretive Level

6. How do the characters insult Scrooge without realizing it?

*(As Scrooge moves from vision to vision, he is able to overhear other people's opinions of him without their knowing it. Mrs. Cratchit, moved to angry words by the meagerness of the holiday meal her husband's wages have provided, calls his employer "an odious, stingy, hard, unfeeling man." Likewise, Fred's wife remarks, "I have no patience with him" in answer to her husband's pity for his uncle's joyless existence. Other scenes, such as the selling of Scrooge's belongings at Joe's secondhand shop and the discussions of people in the street about his sudden death, reveal the offense and anger that others feel at Scrooge's mean-spiritedness and lack of concern for his fellow beings.)*

7. How is Fezziwig a foil for Scrooge?

*(Round-bodied and ample of spirit, Fezziwig clearly lives a life that includes a business side and a personal side.*

*The jolly employer calls to Dick and Ebenezer in "a comfortable, oily, rich, fat, jovial voice" to shutter the office and insists that his two young employees enjoy a holiday respite. Mrs. Fezziwig follows his example and leads in young men and women employees, the housemaid, a neighbor boy, and the baker. In all there are twenty couples dancing a holiday jig.*

*In marked contrast to Scrooge's refusal to share Bob Cratchit's Christmas spirit, Mr. Fezziwig leads his workers in dancing and revelry. The party eats cake and drinks negus. Their meal includes cold roast, boiled meat, mince pie, and beer. At the end of the festivities, the Fezziwigs stand at the door and wish all a merry holiday. Scrooge notes the power of an employer to create happiness or burden. The contrast between Fezziwig and himself causes him to wish he could "say a word or two to my clerk just now.")*

8. What scene represents Dickens's attitude toward charity?

*(The end of Stave Three leaves little doubt that Dickens believed that people have a responsibility to those less fortunate, as represented by the destitute children. The spirit declares that the children belong to Man. He describes the pair in harsh words: "No change, no degradation, no perversion of humanity, in any grade, through all the mysteries of wonderful creation, has monsters half so horrible and dread." His message is even clearer in the spirit's warning to Scrooge: "This boy is Ignorance. This girl is Want. Beware of them both . . . but most of all beware this boy, for on his brow I see that written which is Doom, unless the writing be erased.")*

### Questions 9 and 10 Critical Level

9. What is Dickens's purpose in showing celebrations of Christmas even among people who suffer deprivation?

*(Dickens speaks through the Spirit of Christmas Present the joy of an old man singing carols and two men in a lighthouse sharing grog and a bit of holiday celebration. The author uses the lighthouse to suggest that the beam of holiday love shines out on the abyss as a guide to all. The sailors on watch hum tunes and think of Christmases past. Scrooge is surprised by the revelation.*

*Through the revelations to Scrooge, the author insists that people maintain a spirit of love even in want: "The Spirit stood beside sick-beds, and they were cheerful; on foreign lands, and they were close at home; by struggling men, and they were patient in their greater hope; by poverty, and it was rich. In almshouse, hospital, and jail, in misery's every refuge, where vain man in his little brief authority had not made fast the door, and barred the Spirit out, he left his blessing, and taught Scrooge his precepts.")*

10. What role do women play in the story?

*(The author sprinkles the remarks of female characters lightly through the commentary, noting the absence of the mother of Scrooge and Fan. Dickens highlights female attitudes in the impatience of Mrs. Cratchit and Fred's wife with Scrooge's penury; the disapproval of Belle, the charwoman, and the laundress at a life wasted in selfishness; and the outpouring of love offered by Fan,*

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*Belle, and even Mrs. Fezziwig, which is wasted on Scrooge's stony heart. Possibly the reason for Scrooge's wretched bachelorhood is his inability to give love without thought of a guaranteed return.)*

### Questions 11 and 12 Critical Level

11. Summarize the spirit of Christmas in an essay which captures the meaning of *agape*, the Greek term for spontaneous love which expects no reciprocation.
12. Read Cynthia Rylant's *The Children of Christmas*. Determine her attitude toward people who have difficulty embracing the loving spirit of the Christmas holiday. Compose a similar thumbnail story that imitates Rylant's light approach to revealing the holiday spirit to people who are too bowed down by sorrows, responsibilities, or business to be generous and loving.

### LITERARY TERMS AND APPLICATIONS

For a better understanding of Charles Dickens's style, present the following terms and applications to the novel:

**First-person narrative** is a story or series of actions told from the vantage point of an observer who observes the story and comments on the characters and their motives and behaviors. *A Christmas Carol* examines actions as though the narrator can see the entire story and know how it will end. The narrator speaks directly to the reader in a cozy, personal **tone** of voice. There is an additional separation from events as the narrator watches Scrooge, who in turn watches past, present, and future. This detachment from the plot introduces the atmosphere of **fable**, a tale told for the purpose of moral edification.

A **symbol** is a concrete object that stands for a complex or abstract idea or relationship. In *A Christmas Carol*, the title refers to sacred or holiday songs and allies his fables with Christmas music. Other items carry heavy significance, for example, the door knocker that looks like Marley's face and the chains and accounting paraphernalia that shackle his feet. At Scrooge's death, the charwoman removes his bed curtains, a suggestion of the veil that cordons off Scrooge's view of humankind. At the end of the story, a huge goose represents Scrooge's conversion to the celebration of the season and exemplifies his generosity to the Cratchits.

### ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

#### Math and Computers

1. Use a variety of shapes from a computer graphing program to contrast the lifespan of the workers of Dickens' time with those of England today. Graph additional material from other major industrial nations, especially Germany, Japan, Korea, and the United States.
2. Collect lines from the novel that disclose the relative ages of the characters. Use these figures to approximate the passage of time in past, present, and future.
3. Make a time line of Charles Dickens' life and career. Note the publication of each major work, his travels, his family development, and the growth of his reputation, particularly in the United States before and after the Civil War.

#### Social Studies

1. Create a time line of historical events influencing Dickens about the time the novel was written. For example, chart the passage of labor laws and note political figures who influenced Queen Victoria, such as the

Prime Minister and pro-labor members of Parliament.

2. Describe the nature and purpose of the nineteenth-century workhouse and prison. Comment on rampant prostitution, begging, and petty crime among runaways, juvenile delinquents, the homeless, insane, and handicapped.

#### Economics

1. Discuss the philosophies of Adam Smith, Thomas Carlyle, and Thomas Malthus as they apply to *A Christmas Carol*.
2. Explain why Dickens's working class characters are economically trapped. Discuss how changes in education might have liberated them by offering more choices and opportunities.
3. Make a poster explaining these terms: First of Exchange, counting-house, liberality, executor, residuary legatee, assign, and administrator. Include a sidebar defining English currency by name and value.

#### History and Economics

1. Discuss why Dickens emphasizes the oppressive, inhumane nature of industry and business. Compare conditions in Bob Cratchit's day with current problems faced by workers, such as downsizing, outplacing, and mechanization.
2. Explain the social outlook and significance of the Church of England during Dickens's day.
3. Locate figures expressing the number of holidays, paid and unpaid, that American workers celebrate. Compare these figures to similar studies of England. How has holiday pay changed since Dickens's time?
4. Compute the value of Bob Cratchit's raise in current terms. Use both American and English currency.

#### Cinema

1. Compare scenes of Victorian factories in the movie *The French Lieutenant's Woman* with descriptions from *A Christmas Carol*. Determine from the dramatized version the dehumanizing aspects of the Industrial Revolution.
2. Contrast Dickens's description of exploitation of the poor with the freak show in the movie *Elephant Man*.
3. Make a list of dramatic scenes from the novel that would require intense use of lighting, costume, makeup, music, props, and stunts, particularly the appearance of the three Christmas spirits, Marley's chains and jaw wrapper, Ebenezer enjoying a Christmas party in his youth, sale of the bed curtains, party guessing games, and the vision of the graveyard after his death.

#### Science

1. Discuss how abundant coal and the invention of the steam engine changed the lives of the English working class. Make schematic drawings illustrating the improvement in smokestacks since Dickens's day. Include such innovations as scrubbers and catalytic converters.
2. Explain to a small group the purpose of a nightcap and bed curtains. Discuss the types of heating and the absence of warmth in bedrooms.

#### Home Economics

1. Cite a Victorian recipe for Christmas pudding, suckling pigs, twelfth-cakes, Norfolk Biffins, mulled wine, punch, and roast goose. Contrast the current definition of pud-

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ding. Account for the popularity of turkey as a holiday entree.

2. Make sketches of home decorations that reflect Victorian influence, particularly the use of holly, mistletoe, and fresh fruit.

### Language Arts

1. Make a chalkboard list of unusual terms, such as Twelfth Night party, charwoman, and Union workhouses. Consult the *Oxford English Dictionary* for definitions.
2. Discuss the poetic implications of names such as Cratchit, Tiny Tim, Fezziwig, Fan, Mrs. Dilber, Dick Wilkins, Jacob Marley, Belle, and Ebenezer Scrooge. Indicate which names exemplify euphony, cacophony, and alliteration. Explain why Scrooge has become a synonym for mean-spiritedness.
3. Collect rituals and seasonal lore from books about Christmas, for example, yule logs, Christmas trees, and luminaria. Group those elements that began in England, particularly the baking of a Christmas pudding and the hanging of mistletoe. List separately events and symbols that came from France, Germany, Spain, Austria, and the United States.

### Art

1. Create numerous commercial and functional items: a hanging sign for the company of Scrooge and Marley, a poster welcoming homeless people, collection notices for charities, a family coat of arms for the Fezziwigs, a price list for Joe's secondhand store, a church bulletin board, headstones for Scrooge and Tiny Tim, an accounting book, an employment notice concerning holidays, a business card for Jacob Marley, and a memorial for Jacob Marley.
2. Join with a group to design a mural depicting contrasting costumes, such as children in winter hats and coats, clothes for the poulterer, Scrooge's bedclothes, Fan's holiday dress, Joe's rags, the spirits' costumes, and a wardrobe for an accountant and office hirelings.

### Health

Discuss the novel's emphasis on health problems, particularly eyestrain and Tiny Tim's crippling illness. Locate examples of poor health practices, such as a heavy diet, workplace hazards, smoke, poor lighting, overwork, and exposure. Comment on changes in medical procedures since Dickens's time by naming improvements in prevention and care for disease.

### STUDENT INVOLVEMENT ACTIVITIES

1. Compose a theme in which you compare Fan's love for her brother in *A Christmas Carol* with similar situations in Edgar Lee Masters's *Spoon River Anthology*, Cynthia Voigt's *Dacey's Song*, Carson McCullers's *A Member of the Wedding*, Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*, Barbara Kingsolver's *The Bean Trees*, William Armstrong's *Souder*, Maya Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, James Agee's *A Death in the Family*, Judith Guest's *Ordinary People*, and William Faulkner's *The Bear*.
2. Lead a discussion of literary and biblical allusions, for instance, the reference to Christ's miracles in "who made lame beggars walk, and blind men see." Include commentary on Pharaoh, Abraham, Belshazzar, a Golden One, Sir Roger de Coverley, Abel, Cain, Queen

of Sheba, Ali Baba, and Gate of Damascus.

3. Use scenes from *A Christmas Carol* to decorate Christmas cards, holiday place mats, or a mural. Focus on happy times at Fezziwig's dance and feast, families eating Christmas delicacies and playing games, children playing in the snow, children helping with preparations for a holiday meal, and Bob and Tiny Tim attending church.
4. Define the following literary terms using examples from *A Christmas Carol*: caricature, biblical allusion, social reform, parallel plots, literary foils, social consciousness, dialect, poetic justice, denouement, character flaw, fable, moral, metaphysical elements, didacticism, and stereotype.
5. Contrast everyday life for Ebenezer Scrooge, Bob Cratchit, Jacob Marley, Belle, Fred, Fezziwig, Fan, and Tiny Tim. Note the differences in their ability to cope with loneliness, fear, suffering, poverty, and loss.
6. Write a newspaper account of social conditions in London during Scrooge's lifetime. Include information about nineteenth-century styles of worship and charity.
7. Compose letters from Ebenezer to Fan. Ask about Belle and the Fezziwigs. Comment on plans for the accounting firm and the importance of doing well in business. Reply with warm, encouraging notes from Fan.
8. Write a paragraph in which you explain how people learn from their sufferings. Use as examples Jacob Marley, Tiny Tim, Bob Cratchit, and Ebenezer Scrooge.
9. Read Evelyn Waugh's "The Man Who Liked Dickens." Explain the irony found in the setting, the reader, and the effect of Dickens's works on the main character. Give a brief talk on the international popularity of Dickens's novels during his lifetime.
10. Establish a website introducing Dickens's works. Group them by size and purpose, for example, historical fiction, short holiday fables, and novels of social conscience. Note his most popular titles: *A Christmas Carol*, *Great Expectations*, *A Tale of Two Cities*, *David Copperfield*, and *Oliver Twist*.

### ALTERNATE ASSESSMENT

1. Compose a list of every death described in the novel. Give justification or explanation for each, including Tiny Tim and Fan's demise and Scrooge's death. Decide whether Dickens disposes of characters as a matter of convenience or as an essential outgrowth of the plot. Discuss how the story would change if Scrooge's sister were still alive at the time of his conversion.
2. Make a list of scenes from the novel that express contrasting attitudes toward frivolity, friendship, pride, work, motherhood, individuality, loyalty, forgiveness, compassion, charity, and mercy. Next to each, indicate what you think is the author's personal philosophy.
3. Compose an extended character sketch of Fred's wife or Mrs. Cratchit. Express how they relate to other literary wives and mothers, particularly William Shakespeare's Juliet, Nathaniel Hawthorne's Hester Prynne, Alice Walker's Celie, Pearl Buck's O-Lan, or Scott O'Dell's Sacajawea.
4. Make a list of details that contribute to the atmosphere of each ghostly visit. For example, note the source of light,

## A CHRISTMAS CAROL

the presence of rich delicacies, holly, music, dances, sweeping garments, moaning sounds, vignettes of want or desperation, hungry children, the lighthouse, a graveyard, bells, and a sensation of rapid transportation.

- Describe paired scenes from the story that are meant to reflect on each other. For example, note Tim's arrival on his father's shoulder and the empty place at the Cratchit hearth after his death. Mention Fred's family before and after Scrooge joins them. Describe the atmosphere in Scrooge's office before and after Christmas. Which scenes depict Scrooge's response to requests for donations?
- Note character flaws in Scrooge before the appearance of Jacob Marley's ghost. Enumerate the lapses of character that the spirits consider Scrooge's greatest faults. Comment on how Scrooge overcomes his weaknesses.
- Explain how Charles Dickens uses short fiction to didactic purpose. Name the lessons that readers are supposed to glean from Scrooge's unusual Christmas Eve visitations. Propose other ways that the author might have achieved his aim of converting Scrooge from mean-spiritedness to generosity and compassion.

### OTHER WORKS BY CHARLES DICKENS

*Sketches by Boz* (1836)  
*Pickwick Papers* (1837)  
*Oliver Twist* (1838)  
*Nicholas Nickleby* (1839)  
*Barnaby Rudge* (1841)  
*The Old Curiosity Shop* (1841)  
*American Notes for General Circulation* (1844)  
*The Chimes* (1844)  
*Martin Chuzzlewit* (1844)  
*The Cricket on the Hearth* (1845)  
*Pictures from Italy* (1846)  
*Dombey and Son* (1848)  
*David Copperfield* (1850)  
*Bleak House* (1853)  
*Hard Times* (1854)  
*Little Dorrit* (1857)  
*A Tale of Two Cities* (1859)  
*Great Expectations* (1861)  
*Our Mutual Friend* (1865)  
*Edwin Drood* (1870)

### RELATED READING

James Agee's *Now Let Us Praise Famous Men*  
Pearl Buck's *The Good Earth*  
Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie*  
George Eliot's *Silas Marner*  
Thomas Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge*  
Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables*  
Barbara Kingsolver's *The Bean Trees*  
Robert Newton Peck's *A Day No Pigs Would Die*  
Cynthia Rylant's *Missing May*  
John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*  
Cynthia Voigt's *Dacey's Song*

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## A CHRISTMAS CAROL

### VOCABULARY TEST

Match each underlined word with its **antonym** listed below. Write the letter of the definition in the space provided. You will have words left over when you finish.

- |                |                |                |               |
|----------------|----------------|----------------|---------------|
| A. approaching | F. freedom     | K. meager      | P. scarce     |
| B. comforting  | G. harmonizing | L. melancholy  | Q. softening  |
| C. confidence  | H. hurry       | M. gentlemanly | R. stinginess |
| D. darkening   | I. invoked     | N. relieved    | S. support    |
| E. fortune     | J. lavished    | O. rude        | T. unwilling  |

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. And Scrooge said often afterward, that of all the blithe sounds he had ever heard, those were the blithest in his ears.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. Such a mighty blaze went roaring up the chimney, as that dull petrification of a hearth had never known in Scrooge's time, or Marley's for many a winter season gone.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. I will not gainsay it, Spirit. God forbid!
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. Master Peter and the two ubiquitous young Cratchits went to fetch the goose, with which they soon returned in high procession.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. Eked out by apple sauce and mashed potatoes, it was a sufficient dinner for the whole family.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. We have no doubt his liberality is well represented by his surviving partner.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. No beggars implored him to bestow a trifle.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. The mention of his name cast a dark shadow on the party, which was not dispelled for full five minutes.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. The Spirit did not tarry here.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. He got her into a corner when there was no escape, then his conduct was the most execrable.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 11. Admit it for your factious purposes, and make it worse!
- \_\_\_\_\_ 12. The night is waning fast, and it is precious time to me, I know.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 13. This garment hung so loosely on the figure that its capacious breast was bare.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 14. The yard was so dark that even Scrooge, who knew its every stone, was fain to grope with his hands.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 15. He *did* pause, with a moment's irresolution, before he shut the door.



## A CHRISTMAS CAROL

### COMPREHENSION TEST A

#### Part I: Matching (20 points)

Match each quotation with the name of the speaker. You will have answers left over when you finish.

- |                 |                                   |                   |
|-----------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------|
| A. Belle        | E. Fred                           | I. Jacob Marley   |
| B. Bob Cratchit | F. Ghost of Christmas Past        | J. Mrs. Cratchit  |
| C. Fan          | G. Ghost of Christmas Present     | K. Peter Cratchit |
| D. Fezziwig     | H. Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come | L. Scrooge        |

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. I told you these were shadows of the things that have been. . . That they are what they are, do not blame me!
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. He has given us plenty of merriment. . . and it would be ungrateful not to drink his health.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Yo ho, my boys! . . . No more work to-night. Christmas Eve, Dick. Christmas, Ebenezer!
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. I don't make merry myself at Christmas, and I can't afford to make idle people merry.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. I promised him that I would walk there on a Sunday. My little, little child!
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. Another idol has displaced me; and if it can cheer and comfort you in time to come, as I would have tried to do, I have no just cause to grieve.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. Father is so much kinder than he used to be, that home's like Heaven!
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. My spirit never walked beyond our counting-house—mark me!—in life my spirit never roved beyond the narrow limits of our money-changing hole; and weary journeys lie before me!
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. There are some upon this earth of yours . . . who claim to know us, and who do their deeds of passion, pride, ill will, hatred, envy, bigotry, and selfishness in our name.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. I wish I had him here. I'd give him a piece of my mind to feast upon, and I hope he'd have a good appetite for it.

#### Part II: True/False (30 points)

In the space provided write T if the statement is completely true or F if any part of the statement is false.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. Bob Cratchit asks for extra time off from work at Christmas.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. After the appearance of the third spirit, Scrooge apologizes to the boy who tried to sing a carol at his door.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Bob Cratchit has hopes of finding a good job for Peter.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. Scrooge's nephew utters angry words at his sour old uncle.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. The answer to the game of Yes and No is Scrooge.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. Ebenezer is happy to see Fan coming to take him home for the holidays.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. Scrooge thinks a disorder of his stomach has caused the appearance of Jacob Marley.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. The face of Jacob Marley first appears in the side of the coal scuttle in Scrooge's office.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. The Ghost of Christmas Present expects his life on earth to end on the night of his appearance to Scrooge.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. Scrooge whispers his generous offering to the portly gentleman and begs him not to say anything aloud.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 11. Ebenezer must be guided down the path to his old school because he has forgotten the way.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 12. The house where Scrooge lives is filled with tenant families living in poverty and misery.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 13. Mrs. Dilber tries to hide from the rag merchant the source of the bed curtains she wants to sell.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 14. The Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come scolds Scrooge for abandoning Belle.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 15. On the neglected gravestone is Scrooge's own name.

## A CHRISTMAS CAROL

### Part III: Time Order (20 points)

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. Marley's jaw drops open.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. Scrooge watches Joe add up the value of the seal, pencil case, buttons, and a brooch.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. A claw appears at the foot of the spirit's skirt.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. Mr. and Mrs. Fezziwig dance to the fiddler's tune.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. The schoolmaster offers Scrooge and his sister some wine and cake.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. Scrooge orders his employee to be on time the day after Christmas.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. Scrooge heats a pan of gruel at his hearth.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. Martha hides from her father.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. Scrooge promises the spirit he will honor Christmas all the year.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. Bob Cratchit warms his hands by the fire of the candle.

### Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

1. Describe the holiday festivities at Fred's house.
2. Explain how Scrooge greets his employee with the news of a raise in salary.
3. Summarize information from Scrooge's past.
4. Account for the spirit of Christmas in needy people.

## A CHRISTMAS CAROL

### COMPREHENSION TEST B

#### Part I: Matching (20 points)

Match parts of quotations from the book. Write the letter of the correct answer in the blank provided.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. It was a long night, if it were only a night, but Scrooge had his doubts of this,  
\_\_\_\_\_ 2. In easy state upon this couch, there sat a jolly Giant, glorious to see who bore a glowing torch, in shape not unlike Plenty's horn,  
\_\_\_\_\_ 3. But, however and whenever we part from one another, I am sure  
\_\_\_\_\_ 4. Look to see me no more; and look that, for your own sake,  
\_\_\_\_\_ 5. The office was closed in a twinkling, and the clerk, with the long ends of his white comforter dangling below his waist. . . ,  
\_\_\_\_\_ 6. And even Scrooge was not so dreadfully cut up by the sad event,  
\_\_\_\_\_ 7. Somehow he gets thoughtful, sitting by himself, so much and  
\_\_\_\_\_ 8. 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,  
\_\_\_\_\_ 9. Make up the fires, and buy another coal-scuttle  
\_\_\_\_\_ 10. But if you were free to-day, to-morrow, yesterday, can even I believe that you would choose a dowerless girl—

- A. went down a slide on Cornhill, at the end of a lane of boys, twenty times, in honor of its being Christmas Eve.  
B. but that he was an excellent man of business on the very day of the funeral, and solemnized it with an undoubted bargain.  
C. you remember what has passed between us!  
D. and held it up, high up, to shed its light on Scrooge, as he came peeping round the door.  
E. thinks the strangest things you ever heard.  
F. you who, in your very confidence with her, weigh everything by Gain. . .  
G. because the Christmas holidays appeared to be condensed into the space of time they passed together.  
H. I am prepared to bear you company, and do it with a thankful heart.  
I. we shall none of us forget poor Tiny Tim—shall we?—or this first parting that there was among us?  
J. before you dot another *i*, Bob Cratchit!

#### Part II: Short Answer (20 points)

Place your answer to each of these questions in the blank provided at left.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. Who comes to take Scrooge home from school?  
\_\_\_\_\_ 2. Who becomes Tiny Tim's second father?  
\_\_\_\_\_ 3. Who shows kindness to Bob after Tiny Tim's death?  
\_\_\_\_\_ 4. Where does the third spirit show Scrooge his name?  
\_\_\_\_\_ 5. Under whose skirt do two wretched children appear?  
\_\_\_\_\_ 6. Who offers Scrooge and his sister some wine and cake?  
\_\_\_\_\_ 7. Who applauds Fred's speech about Christmas?  
\_\_\_\_\_ 8. Who urges Dick and Ebenezer to stop work for the day?  
\_\_\_\_\_ 9. What name does the plump sister cry out in answer to the game of Yes and No?  
\_\_\_\_\_ 10. Whose husband describes seeing Scrooge shut in his office on the day of Marley's death?

## A CHRISTMAS CAROL

### Part III: Multiple Choice (20 points)

Complete each of the following sentences with the best response. Write the letter of your answer in the spaces provided at left.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. Ebenezer Scrooge lives
  - A. in the same building his office is in.
  - B. in cramped rooms which used to be an office.
  - C. in Marley's former quarters.
  - D. over the poulterer's shop.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. Bob Cratchit returns from his solitary walk
  - A. with a goose for the holiday dinner.
  - B. and searches for Martha behind the curtain.
  - C. complaining of his lack of an overcoat.
  - D. with news of the green near Tiny Tim's burial place.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. After Marley's Ghost leaves him, Scrooge
  - A. sleeps until he is awakened by the sound of bells.
  - B. lies awake and counts the chimes of the clock.
  - C. opens his bed curtains and waits for the first spirit.
  - D. brushes aside his visit as an attack of indigestion.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. After the third spirit departs, Scrooge
  - A. finds his bed curtains are torn down, rings and all.
  - B. paces before the Cratchits' door before knocking.
  - C. asks a boy on the sidewalk what day it is.
  - D. dresses in his best and dashes out to his office.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. The last of the spirits
  - A. points but does not speak,
  - B. reveals Scrooge's unhappy childhood.
  - C. visits the coal miners' Christmas celebration.
  - D. reminds Scrooge of Fan's death.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. Scrooge uses his ruler to
  - A. drive away a caroler from his office door.
  - B. threaten a portly gentleman who is collecting for charity.
  - C. ward off Marley's Ghost.
  - D. tap on the glass and remind Bob he is late to work.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. Marley complains of his heavy punishment, which includes
  - A. weaving chains out of ledgers and money boxes.
  - B. wearing a bandage around his jaw.
  - C. doing penance for his former greed.
  - D. wandering the earth among his fellow-men.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. The second spirit resembles
  - A. the door-knocker.
  - B. a child and an old man.
  - C. a jolly Giant.
  - D. a phantom dressed in black.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. The body of the dead man
  - A. is mourned only by the housekeeper.
  - B. lies unwatched and uncared for.
  - C. brings tears to Caroline's eyes.
  - D. bears the face of Ebenezer Scrooge.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. The second spirit scolds Scrooge for
  - A. abandoning Belle.
  - B. encouraging death to decrease the surplus population.
  - C. working on the day of Marley's funeral.
  - D. rejecting Fred.

## **A CHRISTMAS CAROL**

### **Part IV: Identification (10 points)**

Explain why each of the following is important to the story:

1. Mrs. Dilber
2. Ali Baba
3. the warehouse
4. Peter
5. a crutch without an owner

### **Part V: Essay (30 points)**

Choose any two and answer in complete sentences.

1. Explain how Scrooge's own words come back to haunt him.
2. Compare Fred and Bob in their attitudes toward Scrooge.
3. Enumerate methods by which Scrooge makes up for past mistakes and lost time.
4. Contrast the spirits in their dress, behavior, and ability to convince Scrooge of his cold-heartedness.

## A CHRISTMAS CAROL

### ANSWER KEY

#### VOCABULARY TEST

- |      |       |       |
|------|-------|-------|
| 1. L | 6. R  | 11. G |
| 2. Q | 7. E  | 12. A |
| 3. S | 8. I  | 13. K |
| 4. P | 9. H  | 14. T |
| 5. J | 10. M | 15. C |

#### COMPREHENSION TEST A

##### Part I: Matching (20 points)

- |      |       |
|------|-------|
| 1. F | 6. A  |
| 2. E | 7. C  |
| 3. D | 8. I  |
| 4. L | 9. G  |
| 5. B | 10. J |

##### Part II: True/False (30 points)

- |      |       |       |
|------|-------|-------|
| 1. F | 6. T  | 11. F |
| 2. F | 7. T  | 12. F |
| 3. T | 8. F  | 13. F |
| 4. F | 9. T  | 14. F |
| 5. T | 10. T | 15. T |

##### Part III: Time Order (20 points)

- |       |       |
|-------|-------|
| 1. 10 | 6. 4  |
| 2. 6  | 7. 8  |
| 3. 7  | 8. 3  |
| 4. 1  | 9. 2  |
| 5. 5  | 10. 9 |

##### Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Answers will vary.

#### COMPREHENSION TEST B

##### Part I: Matching (20 points)

- |      |       |
|------|-------|
| 1. G | 6. B  |
| 2. D | 7. E  |
| 3. I | 8. H  |
| 4. C | 9. J  |
| 5. A | 10. F |

##### Part II: Short Answer (20 points)

- |                      |                     |
|----------------------|---------------------|
| 1. Fan               | 6. the schoolmaster |
| 2. Scrooge           | 7. Bob Cratchit     |
| 3. Bob Cratchit      | 8. Mr. Fezziwig     |
| 4. on a gravestone   | 9. Scrooge          |
| 5. the second spirit | 10. Belle           |

##### Part III: Multiple Choice (20 points)

- |      |       |
|------|-------|
| 1. C | 6. A  |
| 2. D | 7. D  |
| 3. B | 8. C  |
| 4. C | 9. B  |
| 5. A | 10. B |

##### Part IV: Identification (10 points)

- Scrooge's laundress, who sells linens and personal goods belonging to the deceased man to Joe, the secondhand dealer.
- Young Scrooge's friend from literature who eases the child's loneliness.
- Scene of Scrooge's first job and the location of the Fezziwig's party.
- Bob Cratchit's oldest son who hopes to find work so that he can assist his family.
- The spirit's answer to Scrooge's question about Tiny Tim's survival.

##### Part V: Essay (30 points)

Answers will vary.

**A CHRISTMAS CAROL**

**TEACHER'S NOTES**



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