***A Christmas Carol*, by Charles Dickens**

Exploring the Context of the Novel

**Poverty**

In 1834, an amendment to the original Poor Law of 1601 was introduced that reduced the amount of welfare available to those in need and made entry to a workhouse conditional. Food and shelter were not provided to those who did not work in these harsh places. In some cases, families were separated and made to live in different areas of their assigned building; they were essentially powerless. The flawed idea behind the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834 was to discourage those in poverty from relying on the state for support.

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| 1 | What personal experience did Dickens have of poverty? | [Link](https://www.historic-uk.com/CultureUK/Charles-Dickens/) |
| 2 | What was Dickens’ attitude towards the poor? | [Link](https://dickens.ucsc.edu/resources/faq/poor.html) |
| 3 | Why was the (new) Poor Law introduced in 1834 and why was it unpopular? | [Link](https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/resources/1834-poor-law/#background) |
| 4 | What do you learn about the conditions people experienced in workhouses | [Link](https://www.historic-uk.com/HistoryUK/HistoryofBritain/Victorian-Workhouse/) |

**London**

*A Christmas Carol* was published in 1843. At the time, London was rapidly expanding; between 1800 and 1900, the population grew from roughly one million people to over five million. As a result, overcrowding was a serious problem. The majority of Londoners lived in poverty, and crime and disease were rife. Dickens provides a miserable snapshot of this through Scrooge’s visit to ‘an obscure part of the town’ where he has never been before. The streets are ‘foul and narrow’ and house are ‘wretched’.

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| **5** | What sort of a city was London at the time Dickens was writing? | [Link](https://dickensmuseum.com/blogs/charles-dickens-museum/10-surprising-facts-about-victorian-london) |
| **6** | What was life like for people who lived in the London slums? | [Link](https://www.britishlibrary.cn/en/articles/slums/) |

**Christmas**

At the end of the novel, Ebenezer Scrooge finally understands that the wealth he has accumulated should be used to help alleviate the struggles of others and bring greater happiness to their lives. In this sense, he embodies the ideals of morality and social responsibility.

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| **7** | How did *A Christmas Carol* influence the idea that Christmas should be a time for giving? | [Link](https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2014/dec/21/dickens-christmas-carol-didnt-invent-holiday-help-revived-it-lauren-laverne) |

**Ghosts**

It was said that Dickens had ‘a hankering after ghosts.’ This isn’t to suggest that he believed in them, but it’s fair to say that he was interested by the literary possibilities they offered him. In the novel, ghosts have the capacity to be both frightening and comical. Jacob Marley’s ghost provides a good example of this: it has ‘death-cold eyes’ (frightening) and yet Scrooge also remarks that he is able to see ‘the two buttons on his coat’ through the transparent body (comical).

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| **8** | What factors made ghost stories so popular at the time Dicken was writing? | [Link](https://www.theguardian.com/books/2013/dec/23/ghost-stories-victorians-spookily-good) |