

Plot

Stave 1	Scrooge treats Bob, Fred, and others with contempt, only caring for money and himself. On Christmas Eve, he has a visit from Marley's Ghost, who warns Scrooge of his fate and the visit of the three spirits.
Stave 2	The Ghost of Christmas Past shows Scrooge scenes of himself as a young boy in school and as a young apprentice. They also witness Scrooge's breakup with his fiancée and the life and family he could have had. Scrooge reflects on how he has treated others.
Stave 3	The Ghost of Christmas Present shows Scrooge people celebrating Christmas: the Cratchit family, people in solitary places, and his nephew, Fred. Finally, Scrooge sees two monstrous children: Ignorance and Want.
Stave 4	The Ghost of Christmas Yet-to-Come shows Scrooge's reactions to his own death and how he is thought of after passing on. This is contrasted with the death of Tiny Tim.
Stave 5	Scrooge wakes on Christmas morning, reborn as a new man. He delights in putting right his wrongs from Stave 1 and opens himself up to helping others and celebrating Christmas.

Themes

Christmas	Children	Poverty
Generosity	Family	Responsibility
Forgiveness	Injustice	Redemption
Change	Supernatural	Death

Assessment Objectives

AO1	Respond to texts critically and imaginatively; select and evaluate relevant textual detail to illustrate and support interpretations.
AO2	Explain how language, structure and form contribute to writers' presentation of ideas, themes and settings.
AO4	Relate texts to their social, cultural and historical contexts; explain how texts have been influential and significant to self, and other readers in different contexts and at different times.

Vocabulary

Stave (chapter)	Metaphor	Third Person intrusive	Listing
Narrative	Pathetic fallacy	Exclamatory tone	Non-linear
Dramatic irony	Simile	Humour	Dialogue
Prose	Symbolism	Allegory	Genre
Hyperbole	Foreshadowing		

Context

Written by Dickens in 1843 as a direct comment on the **conditions endured by the poor** (particularly children) during the 'Hungry Forties'. Initially intending to write a pamphlet on the subject, Dickens felt the novel would have more impact and be a 'sledgehammer blow' on behalf of the poor.

Having known periods of poverty and hardship in his own childhood, Dickens was a fierce opponent of the Poor Law which advocated workhouses and prisons as a solution to the problem of **social inequality**.

Dickens saw a need for the wealthy to share their fortunes and help the most vulnerable in society. He directly references the views of **Thomas Malthus** who saw poverty as inevitable and a need to 'decrease the surplus population'.

Christmas had fallen out of favour by 1843 and was not universally celebrated. Although a Christian holiday, celebrating the birth of Jesus Christ, it also encompassed pagan traditions around the winter solstice and looked ahead to the coming spring. In addition, Dickens saw Christmas as a time of sharing food, gifts and time. For Dickens, the '**Christmas spirit**' is generosity and compassion for others. Dickens can be partially credited with cementing the popularity of the holiday.

Ghost stories were traditional at Christmas. These were often read aloud, and the novella format allows for this. The story uses many tropes of the ghost genre and combines these with a morality tale.

Tips

- In your essay support points with reference to characters and events and refer back to the question set.
- In your essay remember to integrate points of context into discussion of the characters, events and themes.

Character

Ebenezer Scrooge	The main character. He is miserable, miserly, tightfisted and horrid. He rejects Christmas and refuses to offer help to or kindness to anyone. The events of the novel change Scrooge completely into a generous, open-hearted man.
Bob Cratchit	Scrooge's clerk. Bob is hard-working, uncomplaining and loving to his family. He is humble and meek and grateful for all he has.
Fred	Scrooge's nephew. He is positive, kind and warm-hearted. He persists in inviting Scrooge to Christmas dinner as he realises it is Scrooge who misses out by refusing.
Tiny Tim	Bob Cratchit's youngest son. Tim is a 'cripple' and not likely to survive for long. Despite this, he is good natured and thinks of others. He says, 'God bless us, everyone!'
Marley's Ghost	Scrooge's dead business partner. He warns Scrooge of his fate after death if he does not change his ways.
Spirits of Christmas Past, Present and Yet-to-Come	These three ghosts all play a part in Scrooge's transformation. Each contribute by showing Scrooge key events in Scrooge's life and the lives of others.
Fan	Scrooge's sister and the (dead) mother of Fred. Fan is kind to Scrooge when he is a boy in school.
Fezziwig	Scrooge's old boss. He shows seasonal generosity to his workers, including Scrooge who is his apprentice.
Mrs Cratchit	Bob's wife. She makes the best of not having much money and makes the most of what she has for her family. She is slightly less forgiving of Scrooge than her husband.
Belle	Scrooge's fiancée. She breaks up with Scrooge as she can see that money means more to him than she does.

Structure and Form

Written in five chapters called 'staves' (after the musical staff which also has five lines).

The novel is cyclical in nature, with the last stave directly referencing the events of the first.

The stages of Scrooge's redemption are clear. His initial solitude in Stave 1; his gradual realisation and lessons learned in Staves 2-4; his rebirth in Stave 5.

You are advised to spend about 40 minutes on this question.

Charles Dickens writes about several families in A Christmas Carol, such as Scrooge's family when he was a boy, Fred and his family, and the Cratchits. Choose one of these families and explain why it is important to the novel. Remember to support your answer with reference to 'A Christmas Carol' and comment on its social, cultural and historical context. (20)

The Cratchit family are very important to 'A Christmas Carol' because they play a big part in the central story of Scrooge's redemption. They are also important because Dickens wanted to portray the poor of Victorian London in the 19th century in a positive way and they help him do achieve his aims.

We first encounter the father of the Cratchits, Bob, in the first chapter. He is not named by Dickens here, we only discover his name later in the book, and this is perhaps deliberate to show his lowly status. Scrooge only cares about him as a 'clerk' and not a human being. Bob is one of the first 'victims' we see of Scrooge's miserly ways; he only has 'one piece of coal' and has to 'warm himself on a candle', so he is important in establishing Scrooge's meanness and penny-pinching ways. Moreover, Bob reinforces the message of Christmas by 'applauding' Fred when he speaks on the benefits of Christmas. Scrooge doesn't want to give Bob Christmas Day off. This was not uncommon at the time and Bob is important in showing the audience how poorly employees were often treated. In the extract, Bob 'toasts' Scrooge with his family, which shows how grateful he is to Scrooge, despite being so badly treated by him. This was important for Dickens to show how grateful and humble the poor are and weren't the monsters they were thought of.

In Stave three, we see the rest of the Cratchit family. They are obviously poor (Mrs Cratchit is in her 'twice turned gown') and they have a small 'goose' for dinner. However, they are grateful and make the best of it. Mrs Cratchit and Belinda are 'brave in ribbons' and it is said that the goose was treated like a 'feathered phenomenon' or a 'black swan'. This shows how grateful they are and was central to the theme. They are also a loving family and the day is full of fun (they 'laughed tremendously'). Tiny Tim is a 'cripple' but is selfless and kind-hearted and cares about others as can be seen when he says 'God bless us everyone' and thinks of others when he goes to church. He is important because Scrooge has a face to put to his Malthusian comment of 'decrease the surplus population' and changes his mind. In fact, Tiny Tim's death shows a stark contrast to Scrooge's, the boy is mourned and will live on, whereas Scrooge will not.

Therefore, Tiny Tim plays a hugely important role in Scrooge's redemption. Finally, the Cratchits are important at the end of the novel, Scrooge buys them a 'turkey' and it is the 'biggest one in the shop'. This shows just how much Scrooge has changed. Overall, the Cratchits are essential in showing the 'grateful poor' as was Dickens' intention and also play a huge part in showing Scrooge's transformation.

Commentary

The opening sentence shows a clear focus on the question and addresses the 'importance'. The response then brings in contextual points and discusses Dickens' intentions in writing the novel. The second paragraph keeps the focus firmly on why Bob is important in the novel. It also brings in some points about technique as well as some context, discussing how employees were treated. The candidate also uses the extract here. Overall this response shows clear understanding of the demands of the task and covers all the Assessment Objectives in a sustained, integrated way.

You are advised to spend about 20 minutes on this question. Read the extract and then answer the following question:

What thoughts and feelings do you have as you read this extract? Give reasons for what you say, and remember to support your answer with words and phrases from the extract. [10]

'The school is not quite deserted,' said the Ghost. 'A solitary child, neglected by his friends, is left there still.'
Scrooge said he knew it. And he sobbed.

They left the high-road, by a well-remembered lane, and soon approached a mansion of dull red brick, with a little weathercock-surmounted cupola, on the roof, and a bell hanging in it. It was a large house, but one of broken fortunes; for the spacious offices were little used, their walls were damp and mossy, their windows broken, and their gates decayed. Fowls clucked and strutted in the stables; and the coach-houses and sheds were over-run with grass. Nor was it more retentive of its ancient state, within; for entering the dreary hall, and glancing through the open doors of many rooms, they found them poorly furnished, cold, and vast. There was an earthy savour in the air, a chilly bareness in the place, which associated itself somehow with too much getting up by candlelight, and not too much to eat.

They went, the Ghost and Scrooge, across the hall, to a door at the back of the house. It opened before them, and disclosed a long, bare, melancholy room, made barer still by lines of plain deal forms and desks. At one of these a lonely boy was reading near a feeble fire; and Scrooge sat down upon a form, and wept to see his poor forgotten self as he used to be. Not a latent echo in the house, not a squeak and scuffle from the mice behind the panelling, not a drip from the half-thawed water-spout in the dull yard behind, not a sigh among the leafless boughs of one despondent poplar, not the idle swinging of an empty store-house door, no, not a clicking in the fire, but fell upon the heart of Scrooge with a softening influence, and gave a freer passage to his tears.

The Spirit touched him on the arm, and pointed to his younger self, intent upon his reading. Suddenly a man, in foreign garments: wonderfully real and distinct to look at: stood outside the window, with an axe stuck in his belt, and leading by the bridle an ass laden with wood.

'Why, it's Ali Baba!' Scrooge exclaimed in ecstasy. 'It's dear old honest Ali Baba! Yes, yes, I know. One Christmas time, when yonder solitary child was left here all alone, he did come, for the first time, just like that. Poor boy! And Valentine,' said Scrooge, 'and his wild brother, Orson; there they go! And what's his name, who was put down in his drawers, asleep, at the Gate of Damascus; don't you see him! And the Sultan's Groom turned upside down by the Genii; there he is upon his head! Serve him right! I'm glad of it. What business had he to be married to the Princess!'

To hear Scrooge expending all the earnestness of his nature on such subjects, in a most extraordinary voice between laughing and crying; and to see his heightened and excited face; would have been a surprise to his business friends in the city indeed.

Sample response

The thoughts and feelings as I read this extract is that Scrooge lives a lonely life and he has no friends.

At the start of the extract, the Ghost takes him to his old school and Scrooge is described as 'a solitary child, neglected by his friends'. This shows that every single person in that school is at home on Christmas Day except him because his father didn't care about him. This makes me think that maybe this is why he becomes so cruel in the future, maybe he was doing to people what people did to him in the past.

The Ghost shows Scrooge still by himself with no friends to talk to, 'a lonely boy was reading near a feeble fire'. This emphasises how isolated he was in his early life and the adjective 'feeble' creates more sympathy for him as it is giving him little warmth. Scrooge 'wept to see his poor forgotten self as he used to be' and this shows he is upset when he remembers his earlier life. The house is described as 'melancholy' and 'bearer' making his situation seem even more bleak. The repetition of 'not a latent echo...not a squeak...not a drip...not a sigh' emphasises the total silence and this adds to his misery and loneliness.

Scrooge was so lonely that he made up imaginary friends and characters from the books that he was reading, 'it's Ali Baba'. When Scrooge is imagining the characters from books, he gets happy because he has someone to talk to and has a 'heightened and excited face'.

This extract makes me feel sorry for Scrooge because he is so isolated.

Commentary

This response shows an increasingly clear and detailed discussion of the extract. There is evidence of some lines being closely read, with thoughtful discussion of selected detail from across the extract.