# A Christmas Carol

**Charles Dickens**

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Adaptation, dossiers and activities
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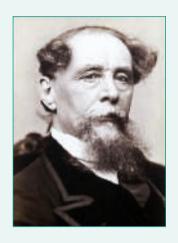Our website address: http://www.edisco.it

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# The Author
## Charles Dickens

Charles Dickens was born in 1812 near Portsmouth, in Great Britain. His father went to prison for debt[1] when Dickens was only a young boy. So he had to leave school and to start working in a factory[2]. This experience was traumatic[3] for him and influenced many of his future works.

Some years later he was able to go back to school. Then he became a reporter and journalist, and collaborated with magazines and newspapers of the time. Some of his stories were published in serial[4] form from 1836 with the title *The Pickwick Papers*.

Between 1837 and 1857 he published fourteen novels, all in the form of serial publications. They were adventure stories like *Nicholas Nickleby* (1838/9) and *Oliver Twist* (1838); or more autobiographical, like *David Copperfield* (1849/50). Their protagonists became symbols of exploited[5] childhood in the dark hard reality of factories and slums[6].

He was middle-aged when his novels became more critical of the Victorian society of his time. *Hard Times* (1854), *Great Expectations* (1860/61) and *Bleak House* (1853) are three of his masterpieces[7]. In these books he combines his ability to tell stories and his condemnation[8] of the negative effects of industrial society.

1. *debt:* money that you have to give back to a person who lent it to you.
2. *factory:* building where products are made in large quantities with the help of machines.
3. *traumatic:* quality of an event which causes a great shock or sadness.
4. *serial:* story that is told in a number of parts over a period of time.
5. *exploited:* used for someone else's advantage.
6. *slums:* areas of a city where living conditions are extremely bad.
7. *masterpieces:* best works.
8. *condemnation:* act of saying strongly that you think something is bad or wrong.

Dickens believed that industrialisation was too interested in material profit and wealth[9], and that it considered man as a machine, forgetting his humanity. So in his books he criticised the conditions of the poor and the working class in general.

*A Christmas Carol* is a short story that Dickens wrote in 1843. It represents the best example of his sentimentality. This love for feelings also emerges in his other works and combines with his sense of humour, satire[10] and irony which make his style unique.

Dickens spent his last years travelling to read his works to the public. He died in 1870 and was buried[11] in the Poets' Corner in Westminster Abbey, London.

9. *wealth:* state of being rich.
10. *satire:* use of humour to attack a person or an idea that you think is bad or stupid.
11. *buried:* place in a tomb when dead.



The first edition (1843)

# Marley's Ghost

## BEFORE READING

**1** Tick the correct answer.

**a.** What is a "carol"?
☐ A song ☐ A special car ☐ A present

**b.** Christmas is usually a … period.
☐ sad ☐ worrying ☐ happy

**c.** At Christmas, people usually become
☐ fatter ☐ more generous ☐ richer

**d.** Christmas celebrates
☐ the birth of Christ ☐ the baptism of Christ ☐ Christ's last dinner

**e.** At Christmas, people usually exchange
☐ gifts ☐ clothes ☐ shoes

**f.** At Christmas, people usually
☐ work ☐ celebrate ☐ sleep

**2** Circle the adjectives which best describe ghosts for you.

> *transparent – terrifying – old – scary – white – flying – noisy – bad – dead – unreal – nice – funny – immortal – sad – happy – spooky*

**3** Imagine and describe Marley's ghost. Use words from Activity 2 and some of the expressions below.

> *with chains – a white sheet – to pass through the door – to disappear – to laugh – to fly*

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# Marley's Ghost

Scrooge was an old, solitary, selfish[1], and greedy[2] man. His eyes and pointed nose were red, his cheeks were hollow[3], his thin lips were blue, his walk was rigid and his voice was rude. Nobody looked for him, spoke to him or liked him, but he liked that.

On a very cold Christmas Eve[4], Scrooge was sitting in his small office at Scrooge and Marley's. Marley, his partner, was dead, but his name was still on the office door.

"Merry Christmas, Uncle!" cried the happy voice of Scrooge's nephew, Fred.

"Bah!" said Scrooge, "Rubbish[5]!"

"Do you really think so, Uncle?"

"Of course, I do. What good or merry is there in Christmas? You are simply one year older and poorer. Christmas is rubbish!"

"Well, Uncle, Christmas is a kind and charitable[6] time. At this time of year men and women open their hearts to others. I believe it is a happy and good time. So, Merry Christmas! Come on, Uncle, come and have dinner with us tomorrow."

"I won't."

"Why not?"

"Why did you get married?"

"Because I fell in love."

"Good afternoon," said Scrooge rudely. For him, love was even more ridiculous than Christmas.

"I want nothing from you, Uncle, why can't we be friends?"

"Good afternoon," said Scrooge.

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1. *selfish:* thinking only about yourself, egoistic.
2. *greedy:* person who always wants more money even if they don't need it.

3. *hollow:*

4. *Eve:* day before a religious or important event.
5. *rubbish:* something useless, unwanted or of no value.
6. *charitable:* generous, ready to help the needy.

"I'm sorry. But I want to be happy in this period, so Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year, Uncle!"

"Good afternoon," answered Scrooge.

Fred stopped to wish the clerk Merry Christmas and then left without an angry word.

"Bah! Another silly man," muttered[7] Scrooge, "My clerk... with 15 shillings[8] a week and a family, he talks about Christmas... Bah!"

Then two gentlemen came in, with books and papers in their hands.

"Good afternoon," said one of the gentlemen, looking at his list. "Am I talking to Mr Scrooge or Mr Marley?"

"Mr Marley died exactly seven years ago today."

"We are sure you are as generous as he was," said the man.

At the sound of the word, Scrooge shook[9] his head. Marley and Scrooge were very similar in their lack[10] of generosity.

"At this particular time of year, Mr Scrooge," said the gentleman, "it is a wonderful idea to help the hundreds of thousands of poor people who suffer so much. So..."

"... aren't there any prisons? And the workhouses[11]?"

"Of course, there are many prisons and workhouses," replied the gentleman.

"Oh! I thought for a moment that something happened to stop those useful resources[12]. I'm glad to hear that they're still working."
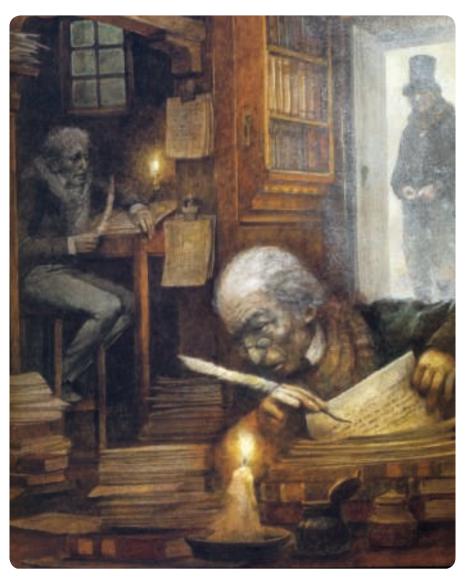
"Well, we simply thought that it is a good idea to buy the poor some meat and drink to celebrate this wonderful time of joy. So how much would you like to give?"

"Nothing!" replied Scrooge.

"Do you wish to be anonymous, sir?"

"I wish to be left alone!" said Scrooge. "You ask me what I wish? That is what I wish, gentlemen. I already help the poor, they cost

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7. *muttered:* spoke in a low voice.
8. *shillings:* coins in use until 1971.
9. *shook (shake-shook-shaken):* turned his head from side to side to say "no".
10. *lack:* when there is not something.

11. *workhouses:* government houses where poor people lived in very bad conditions.
12. *resources:* all the things that you have and that you can use when you need them.

"Good afternoon (…) Am I talking to Mr Scrooge or Mr Marley?"
(Illustration by R. Ingpen, Templar Publishing, 2008)

me a lot. I help the government with my taxes. I can't pay any more to make people merry, and I am not merry at Christmas. If they don't have what they need, then send them to the prisons and to the workhouses. That's what they're there for."

"Many can't go there, and many would prefer to die."

"Well, then, it's better if they die, so there are fewer problems for us. Anyway, I have many things to do and it's bad manners to interrupt somebody who is working. Good afternoon, gentlemen!"

The two men saw that it was useless to insist and left. Scrooge went back to work, happy with himself.

Outside the weather was getting very cold and the fog and the darkness covered everything, but everyone was getting ready for Christmas.

A young singer tried to sing a carol through the door to receive some charity, but Scrooge's hand with a stick[13] and his dark expression sent him away.

At last it was time to close the office. Scrooge wasn't very happy...

"You're staying at home tomorrow, but I'm paying you!"

The clerk explained that it happened only once a year, but for Scrooge it was a theft[14]. The clerk promised to be early at work the day after and ran home.

Scrooge ate his usual sad dinner at his usual sad place, read his bank book[15], and then went home. He lived in a dark, sad, grey house. That day it was also terribly foggy and cold.

The front door of his house had a large knocker[16]. Scrooge knew it well, and he wasn't thinking about Marley anymore when he got home, but Scrooge didn't see the knocker: he saw Marley's face.

Yes, Marley's face. It was not as dark as the other objects in the street, it had a kind of light around it. The face was not angry, but it looked just like old Marley: with ghostly glasses on his ghostly forehead[17]. His hair was moving, and his eyes were open: it was horrible. Seconds later the face was a knocker again.

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13. *stick:* a thin piece of wood.
14. *theft:* crime of stealing something.
15. *bank book:* book where all the transactions of a business are written down.
16. *knocker:* object used to knock at a door.
17. *forehead:*