

# A Christmas Carol

## Reading Comprehension - Symbolism

**Symbolism** occurs when a person, place or thing comes to represent an abstract idea or concept. (Example: The eagle is a symbol of The United States.)

What symbols can you identify in the story of *A Christmas Carol*? Fill the chart below with the different symbols found in the story. One example has been identified for you.

Symbol	Literal Meaning	Symbolic Meaning
The chain on Jacob's ghost's leg		

# A Christmas Carol

# Chains Activity

## Preparation:

(1) Before students start reading the novel (or before today's discussion), hang some kind of chain (a metal one would be awesome) across the front of your room. (2) Have some kind of bendable wire (twist ties might work nicely if you don't have legit wire). (3) Cut slips of paper to hand out to students later.

## Discussion Directions:

After finishing Stave 1, stop and discuss Marley's chains and what they represent.

*"I wear the chain I forged in life," replied the Ghost. "I made it link by link, and yard by yard; I girded it on my own free will, and of my own free will I wore it. Is its pattern strange to you?" Scrooge trembled more and more. "Or would you know," pursued the Ghost, "the weight and length of the strong coil you bear yourself? It was full as heavy and as long as this, seven Christmas Eves ago. You have laboured on it, since. It is a ponderous chain!"*

Talk about how the chain is described as being made up of the things Marley surrounded himself with in life:

*The chain he drew was clasped about his middle. It was long, and wound about him like a tail; and it was made (for Scrooge observed it closely) of cash-boxes, padlocks, ledgers, deeds, and heavy purses wrought in steel.*

Talk about the purpose of the chain: to weigh the person down and keep them from moving around and moving forward, and to eliminate their ability to be free in life.

Discuss the ghosts that Scrooge sees outside his window at the end of the Stave, ghosts that are all chained like Marley, but with all different types of things making up their chains: money, food, alcohol, etc.

*The air was filled with phantoms, wandering hither and thither in restless haste, and moaning as they went. Every one of them wore chains like Marley's Ghost; some few (they might be guilty governments) personally known to Scrooge in their lives.*

Go further and discuss the types of things that people weigh themselves in life that chain them and restrict them and limit their freedom, weighting them down and preventing them from moving forward in their lives.

## Activity:

Hand out three paper label slips and three wires to each student. Students attach a paper to each of their wires. On each paper, students identify a word or phrase that chains people in their lives, things that weigh them down and restrict them and stop them from living a healthy, fulfilling life. This will be anonymous, so encourage them to think in terms of their own lives, or the people they know, or just people in general. As they finish, each student will come up to the chain and tie each of their ideas to the chain in random spots.

## Next Day:

Teacher will approach the chain and read out many of the labels and discuss how these might be common to many people. Ask students to respectfully share if there are any that were read that surprised them.

## End of Novel:

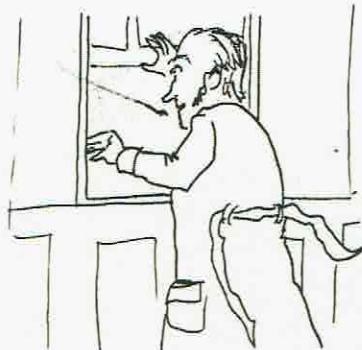
Now that they've seen Scrooge fully transformed, have every student go up and remove three labels off the chain and return to their seats. Here, you can choose a few options: (1) find a way for everyone to safely burn up their labels, (2) have everyone shred their labels and walk around with a trash can to collect them (then maybe burn them?), (3) some other option of your own creativity. After their burdens are gone, ask if any students have any final thoughts or inspiration.

*What if your chains were gone?*



*Some creative writing ideas*

1. *Write Scrooges first Christmas card. (Who does he send it too?)*
2. *Write about how you celebrate Christmas and compare it to Scrooge or the Cratchits.*
3. *Describe the scene when Christmas pudding arrives at the Cratchits or the family toast.*
4. *Describe Christmas day at Scrooges house before and after his night with the spirits.*
5. Ask them to rewrite the story of Tiny Tim from his point of view. What was daily life like for him? What did London look like? Sound like? Smell like? What challenges did any young person face on the streets of London? What further challenges would face a physically challenged individual? What sorts of dangers lurked in the city?
6. Students are to plan and implement in cooperative groups a Dickens's Christmas banquet. Research, via the Internet and textbooks, foods and dress from the Victorian Period. Each group is responsible for two dishes and two costumed characters for a classroom banquet.
7. Write a conversation or create a comic book about a meeting between all 3 spirits



# Praise Redemption

Dickens called his story *A Christmas Carol* because he expected the story to be repeated and shared and to bring people together just as the singing of Christmas carols spread joy and brought families together each season throughout London. His carol was a song of praise of the Christmas season and of the redemption of Ebenezer Scrooge.

Cleverly, Dickens called the five chapters of the book "staves." A musical stave is a stanza with a consistent theme and mood. Each stave in the story delivers a different message and each has a definite mood. As in a carol each stave can stand alone but each contributes to the carol's overall theme.

A good carol also contains a memorable refrain, repeated at appropriate times throughout. In Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* the refrain is no doubt the blessing from Tiny Tim, "God bless us every one!" It's a refrain that has been repeated countless times since the publishing of *A Christmas Carol*.



## A Victorian Christmas

Before Victoria's reign started in 1837 nobody in Britain had heard of Santa Claus or Christmas Crackers. The wealth and technologies generated by the industrial revolution of the Victorian era changed the face of Christmas forever. Charles Dickens wrote books like "Christmas Carol", published in 1843, which actually encouraged rich Victorians to redistribute their wealth by giving money and gifts to the poor.

**The holidays** - The wealth generated by the new factories and industries of the Victorian age allowed middle class families in England and Wales to take time off work and celebrate over two days, Christmas Day and Boxing Day. The invention of the railways allowed the country folk who had moved into the towns and cities in search of work to return home for a family Christmas.

**The Gifts** - At the start of Victoria's reign, children's toys tended to be handmade and hence expensive, generally restricting availability to those "rich folk" again. With factories however came mass production, which brought with it games, dolls, books and clockwork toys all at a more affordable price. Affordable that is to "middle class" children. In a "poor child's" Christmas stocking, which first became popular from around 1870, only an apple, orange and a few nuts could be found.

**Father Christmas** - Father Christmas was originally part of an old English midwinter festival, normally dressed in green, a sign of the returning spring.

**Turkey Time** - Turkeys had been brought to Britain from America hundreds of years before Victorian times. When Victoria first came to the throne however, both chicken and turkey were too expensive for most people to enjoy. In northern England roast beef was the traditional food for Christmas dinner while in London and the south, goose was favourite. Many poor people made do with rabbit.

**The Tree** - Queen Victoria's German husband Prince Albert helped to make the Christmas tree as popular in Britain as they were in his native Germany, when he brought one to Windsor Castle in the 1840's.

**The Crackers** - Invented by Tom Smith, a London sweet maker in 1846. The original idea was to wrap his sweets in a twist of fancy coloured paper, but this developed and sold much better when he added love notes, paper hats, small toys and made them go off BANG!

**Carol Singers** - Carol Singers and Musicians "The Waits" visited houses singing and playing the new popular carols.



18. Who else visits Scrooge before he leaves his counting-house for the day? And how does Scrooge react?



*Use your Graphic Organizer to answer the questions about Marley's Spooky Visit*



19. What does Marley tell Scrooge the reason is for “spirits walk[ing] the earth”?

20. What does Jacob Marley have on his chains? What do these items represent?

21. Instead of dedicating his life only to making money, what should have been Jacob Marley’s “business”?

22. **From the original text:** What is Jacob Marley’s punishment and what has him confused tonight?

23. Why will the spirits haunt Scrooge?

24. When will each spirit visit Scrooge? (time and date)

25. **From the original text:** What does Scrooge see outside of his window when Jacob Marley leaves?

26. **From the original text:** At the end of the stave, what does Scrooge do?

### CHARACTERIZATION

In your own words, describe Scrooge’s Personality.



Evidence (specific examples: speech, action, etc.) from the text to support your description:

Quote from the text to support your description:



NAME: \_\_\_\_\_ Today's Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Due Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Period: \_\_\_\_\_

## A Christmas Carol



by Charles Dickens

After viewing/reading, answer the following response questions on notebook paper. Only legible handwriting will be graded. Begin a new numbered paragraph for each question and write in complete sentences. All sentences should begin with either:

- a. AAWWUBBIS words or
- b. a sentence starter from your list or
- c. prepositional phrases

Examples:

When we see the Ghost of Christmas Past, she is wearing, ...

After the Ghost of Christmas Future visits Scrooge, ...

Even though Bob Cratchit's family is poor, ...

**Short answer questions: remember to include *text evidence* to support your statements.**

Grading scale: You may choose to answer 5, 6, or all 7 questions. If you answer 5/7 questions and all answers are satisfactory, the highest grade is 79; if you answer, 6/7 questions - 89; if you answer all 7 correctly, 100. All answers must be correct and sufficient to earn the highest grade in each category.

1. Compare the physical characteristics of the three ghosts. What do each of them look like? Is their appearance significant?
2. What do you think Scrooge regrets most about his past? Include both the events in his control and out of his control.
3. Think about his present day attitude toward people, money, Christmas, etc. What evidence did you see that may have caused his feelings about these things? Remember to include actual text evidence to support your statements.
4. Explain the significance of Marley's visit. What role does the visit play in the subsequent events?
5. In your opinion, where does the climax occur in the story?
6. Compare the character traits you noticed in Scrooge and Bob Cratchit.
7. How did the author portray the Cratchit family? What evidence supports your statements?

Extra credit: what themes do you see in the story? Give evidence to support your answer.



# A Christmas Carol

The works of Dickens in their original form (even short stories like A Christmas Carol) are difficult for primary school children to read and comprehend (*I think they'd also challenge most adults*) but luckily there are plenty of publishers who have abridged versions of his work that can be read as serials (even picture story books) and enjoyed. (Usborne books, Ready Read, Fast Track Classics and others all available from books shops and online) There are also DVD versions of most of Dickens's best known works by the BBC and there are also some animated versions available.



A whole class to study A Christmas Carol (What better way to lead into Christmas) is a perfect way to study Christmas. This unit is ideal in a small school setting using a personalized learning approach to finish off the school year with a 'flourish of Dickens' and can also be used as a whole class teaching unit with the story read as a serial.

By T. Shaw