A Christmas Carol

A Christmas Carol is a novella by Charles Dickens, published in 1843. It tells the story of a bitter, cold hearted, old miser – a stingy man – called Ebenezer Scrooge, who hates Christmas and poor people. He is visited by the ghost of his old business partner Jacob Marley, and then the ghosts of Christmas Past, Christmas Present, and Christmas Yet to Come. Over the course of the story, Scrooge's cold heart is softened and he transforms into a kinder man. Though the story is set during a Christian holiday, its message is one to which every person, everywhere can relate: relentless pursuit of wealth comes at a great price. The novella's lessons of charity, family, and a shared humanity spoke directly to a Victorian society that, in Dickens's view, oppressed the poor and the working class in the name of industry. The name “Scrooge” is now used in English to describe a person who is misanthropic (hates humanity), selfish about money, and does not enjoy Christmas, similar to the more recent “Grinch” character by Dr. Seuss. Scrooge's catchphrase “Bah, humbug!” is often used to express disgust with many modern Christmas traditions.

Read the extracts below.

External heat and cold had little influence on Scrooge. No warmth could warm, no wintry weather chill him. No wind that blew was bitterer than he, no falling snow was more intent upon its purpose, no pelting rain less open to entreaty.

“I will honour Christmas in my heart, and try to keep it all the year. I will live in the Past, the Present, and the Future. The Spirits of all Three shall strive within me. I will not shut out the lessons that they teach.”

He became as good a friend, as good a master, and as good a man, as the good old city knew, or any other good old city, town, or borough, in the good old world. Some people laughed to see the alteration in him, but he let them laugh, and little heeded them; for he was wise enough to know that nothing ever happened on this globe, for good, at which some people did not have their fill of laughter in the outset; and knowing that such as these would be blind anyway, he thought it quite as well that they should wrinkle up their eyes in grins, as have the malady in less attractive forms. His own heart laughed: and that was quite enough for him.

Discussion Questions

Is this story relevant to people today? Why/why not?

Compare the depiction of Scrooge to recent depictions of Wall Street bankers. How are they similar? How are they different?

Why do you think Dickens chose Christmas time as a setting for this plot?

In the first extract Dickens uses the weather to describe Scrooge's character. Do you think this is effective?

The second extract is Scrooge's turning point, and contains Dickens’ main moralising point. What do you think about it?

The third extract describes Scrooge at the end of the story. Do you think he is a more interesting character at the start or end of the tale? How has he changed?

Tasks

1) Write a description of a friend or family member using the weather as a literary device.

2) This story is set in Victorian England. Research Victorian Christmas traditions, then write about what has changed and what has stayed the same since then.