

BBC Bitesize - A Christmas Carol

Episode 2 – Characters – Scrooge and Bob Cratchit

Carl: Hello, and welcome to the BBC Bitesize English literature podcast. This is the series designed to help you tackle your GCSE in English literature.

Jean: So we take a look at a number of different texts that you might be studying and explore the characters, the plot, the context, the key things that you need to ace your exam. You can use this podcast however you like to help with your revision, whether that's listening on a walk, or making notes as you go - find what works for you. I'm Jean Menzies author and ancient historian.

Carl: I'm Carl Anka, journalist and author. And in this series, we're taking a closer look at Charles Dickens' novella A Christmas Carol.

Jean: So, we already discussed the plot in episode one. And in this episode, we're going to take a look at two of the characters starting, of course, with Ebenezer Scrooge. This is the narrator describing him.

EXTRACT

Narrator: Oh, but he was a tight-fisted hand at the grindstone, Scrooge.

Carl: I think that's a good quote to start with for Scrooge at the beginning of this novella, isn't it? Tight-fisted hand at the grindstone. Tight-fisted is a saying to describe someone who keeps all their money to themselves. A grindstone is used here as a metaphor for work.

Jean: Yep. Charles Dickens sets him up as a miserly man, meaning he spends as little money as possible. He's a very unpleasant man who really dislikes Christmas. In fact, one of the most famous literary quotes comes from Ebenezer Scrooge. Bah, humbug.

Carl: Bah, humbug indeed.

Jean: Bah, humbug has really come to mean someone who dislikes things are generally thought of as fun. For example, Christmas.

Carl: So true. This is where it came from. But, Scrooge doesn't stay as a miserly, tight old man all the way through A Christmas Carol, does he?

Jean: That is the point of the whole story, though. His change.

Carl: Yes, exactly. As we see with three ghosts who visit Scrooge, they show him the consequences of his actions and they show him the past, present, and future, and then we see

him start to soften. There's some great quotes in A Christmas Carol that illustrate the change that's happening in Scrooge.

EXTRACT

Narrator: And Scrooge sat down upon a form and wept to see his poor forgotten self as he had used to be.

Jean: So this is in stave, or chapter two, when Scrooge sees his younger self with the Ghost of Christmas Past, and we're seeing him start to thaw and show real emotion other than misery and annoyance, and that continues.

EXTRACT

Ebenezer Scrooge: No, no,

Narrator: said Scrooge.

Ebenezer Scrooge: Oh, no. Kind spirit, say we'll be spared.

Carl: This is from stave three, where the Ghost of Christmas Present shows Scrooge the Cratchits. And, Scrooge is very, very upset at the thought that Tiny Tim may die. He's becoming a very different man from the one of the beginning of the story, who had no pity for those who are suffering from poverty.

Jean: And, then the third ghost visits, the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come. This ghost shows Scrooge what a miserable life and death awaits him if he doesn't change. But he does, and we can hear that change in Scrooge in this quote here.

EXTRACT

Ebenezer Scrooge: I am as light as a feather. I am as happy as an angel. I am as merry as a schoolboy. I am as giddy as a drunken man. A merry Christmas to everybody. A happy new year to all the world. Hello, here. Whoa, hello.

Carl: Absolutely, he becomes a changed man. And, that's one of the reasons why this is a great novella by Charles Dickens. It really shows you how this man re-evaluates his life and makes changes from it. A good lesson for everyone, really. Now, let's move on to Bob Cratchit.

EXTRACT

Ebenezer Scrooge: There's another fellow,

Narrator: muttered Scrooge who overheard him.

Ebenezer Scrooge: My clerk with 15 shillings a week and her wife and family talking about a merry Christmas.

Jean: That's Scrooge talking about his clerk, meaning his member of staff, Bob Cratchit at the beginning of the novella. Scrooge is describing how he pays him poorly. And we also know that he works in cold, unpleasant conditions without complaining.

Carl: I like Bob. I do. He's a kind man, who wants to do the right thing. We see him not really wanting to ask Scrooge if he can leave early on Christmas Eve to go and see his family, because he's scared of losing his job. And Bob Cratchit cannot afford to lose his job. So he spends his life living quietly under Scrooge's rules, no matter what Scrooge says.

Jean: After this first interaction of seeing him in Scrooge's workplace, the next time that we read of him is when the Ghost of Christmas Present takes Scrooge to the Cratchit's on Christmas Day and Bob is carrying his very sick son, Tiny Tim, around.

Carl: Practising gratitude is clearly important to Bob. Dickens shows him as a hard worker and a caring man who is grateful for what he has. He even raises a toast to Scrooge for providing the feast through his wages. He does this even though he doesn't know that Scrooge can see him.

Jean: It's a pretty rubbish feast though, because Scrooge doesn't pay him enough. But like you said, Bob is so grateful.

Carl: That's when the Ghost of Christmas Yet To Come appears and he shows Scrooge the time where Tiny Tim has died. And here Bob Cratchit is grieving and showing so much love to his dearly passed son.

EXTRACT

Bob Cratchit: My little, little child,

Narrator: cried Bob.

Bob Cratchit: My little child.

Narrator: He broke down all at once, he couldn't help it.

Jean: So, this is after Tiny Tim's death. When he shows his emotions so easily and he speaks to his family about the death and how they'll move forward with love for Tiny Tim. It's really beautiful and such a contrast to the death that the Ghost of Christmas Yet To Come predicts for Scrooge.

Carl: Bob's a good man and he shows that more as well when Scrooge decides to change his ways for good. I think that's also quite important here. Bob could have easily seen Scrooge go 'I've changed my ways' and not believe him. And yet Bob Cratchit held no malice or resentment for the way he was treated before. He welcomed Scrooge and we find out that he allowed them to be part of Tiny Tim and the family's life.

EXTRACT

Narrator: And to Tiny Tim, who did not die, he was a second father.

Carl: A good ending all round, really.

Jean: Yeah. What's the point of having money if you can't share it?

Carl: There you go.

Jean: Thank you for listening to the BBC Bitesize English literature podcast. Remember, there's plenty more resources on the BBC Bitesize website too. And, you can find the rest of this podcast series right now on BBC Sounds.

Carl: In the next episode we're going to carry on looking at the characters of A Christmas Carol and we're going to find out more about the Ghost of Christmas Past, the Ghost of Christmas Present and the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come.