

BBC Bitesize - A Christmas Carol

Episode 4 – Characters – Fred and Tiny Tim

Jean: Hello and welcome to the BBC Bitesize English literature podcast. It's the series designed to help you tackle your GCSE in English Literature.

Carl: So, we take a look at a number of different texts that you might be studying and then go on to explore the characters, the plot, the context, some of the key things that you might need to ace your revision.

Jean: I'm Jean Menzies, author and ancient historian.

Carl: I'm Carl Anka, journalist and author. And today we are going to be exploring Charles Dickens' A Christmas Carol. It's worth noting here that there are plenty of resources online for A Christmas Carol. If you need them too, you can enter the BBC Bitesize website and even find more materials to help with your revision.

Jean: In this podcast, we've already discussed the plot and some of the characters and in this episode, we're going to carry on looking at the final characters in this novella - Scrooge's nephew Fred, and Tiny Tim. So, shall we start with Fred? This is how the narrator describes him.

EXTRACT

Narrator: If you should happen, by any unlikely chance, to know a man more blessed in a laugh than Scrooge's nephew, all I can say is, I should like to know him too.

Carl: I want to be friends with Fred. And what you just heard from the narrator is exactly the reason why.

Jean: Yeah, he's a good egg, isn't he? Although probably don't write that in your exam. I don't think it's a technical term that they will be looking for, but he is a good egg. If I was writing it in an exam, I'd describe him as a character that represents generous members of society and juxtaposes, which means they contrasts, Scrooge's miserly nature.

Carl: Now Fred is Scrooge's only family member, and as we learned from the Ghost of Christmas past, he's the son of Scrooge's sister. Now, you might remember Ebenezer Scrooge absolutely adored his sister.

Jean: I find that scene where we see Scrooge with a sister really touching, they're really loving to each other. And I do start to wonder how that all went wrong. Until we then hear that she died and that she left one son, his nephew.

Carl: Who was Fred, and perhaps is the pain of being reminded of his sister that makes Ebenezer Scrooge so unpleasant to him.

Jean: That's exactly how I read it. But how can you be miserable with Fred around? Scrooge is rude and unkind, but Fred is cheerful and wants his uncle to come to Christmas dinner even still. He even says himself in this quote, that he won't lose his Christmas cheer in the face of Scrooge's unkindness. This is Fred talking about Scrooge.

EXTRACT

Fred: But, I have made the trial in homage to Christmas. And I'll keep my Christmas humour to the last. So, a merry Christmas, uncle.

Jean: There, Fred is telling Scrooge that he won't give up his Christmas cheer, no matter what.

Carl: Then it's over to the Ghost of Christmas Present to show Scrooge exactly what he's missing by turning down the invitation to Fred's Christmas, when he shows him the party in full swing.

Jean: And Scrooge does start to feel like he's missing something. And he gets to hear Fred sticking up for him and saying that he won't give up on him, even if he didn't really deserve it. Here's Fred.

EXTRACT

Fred: I mean, to give him the same chance every year, whether he likes it or not. For I pity him.

Carl: There's no malice in that quote. Fred feels sorry for Scrooge and just wants to keep trying in the hope that Scrooge will one day come round to the idea of Christmas.

Jean: And, he does. At the end, when Scrooge has vowed to change, he accepts Fred's invitation and Fred is open and warm. Scrooge asks if he will let him in for dinner and this is Fred's response.

EXTRACT

Fred: Let him in. It is a mercy he didn't shake his arm off. He was at home in five minutes, nothing could be heartier.

Jean: So not only did Fred let him in, but he did it with all the enthusiasm and cheer we have come to expect from him in this novella.

Carl: Lovely, lovely Fred. And, from one good egg to another, it's time to talk about Tiny Tim.

EXTRACT

Tiny Tim: God bless everyone.

Jean: There it is – one of the most famous lines of this novella, and it comes from Tiny Tim, and it also sums him up really well, doesn't it? He's kind and generous and he wants everyone to be blessed, even though he hasn't had the easiest life at all for such a young child.

Carl: No, Tiny Tim is very unwell and he walks with a crutch and has an iron frame around his body, but despite all this he seems to smile his way through life and uses the frame as a sign of positivity. There's a quote that shows this really, really well. However, before I play this excerpt, I just want to flag that this includes an offensive word that we would not use now but was not viewed as offensive when Christmas Carol was published in 1843. This is Bob Cratchit.

EXTRACT

Bob Cratchit: He told me, coming home, that he hoped the people saw him in the church, because he was a cripple, and it might be pleasant to them to remember upon Christmas day who made lame beggars walk, and blind men see.

Carl: So, Tiny Tim wants to be seen as a reminder of all the good things that God can do. Tiny Tim also wants to be seen as a hopeful sign for people around him in the community.

Jean: And he really affects Scrooge. Scrooge, who at the beginning has no sympathy for poor or ill people, starts to worry that Tiny Tim might not live. And then, his fears are brought to life by the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come, who shows him a world where Tiny Tim has died.

Carl: He doesn't die in reality, though.

Jean: No.

Carl: No, he does not, because Scrooge changes his way as a direct result of seeing a world without Tiny Tim, and all the other things that he's been shown by the three ghosts. At the start of A Christmas Carol, you have to remember that Scrooge doesn't care for Bob Cratchit, Bob Cratchit's family, or Tiny Tim at all. But, at the very very end of A Christmas Carol things have completely changed. The way Scrooge feels about Bob Cratchit's family is perhaps the biggest change in the book altogether.

EXTRACT

Ebenezer Scrooge: He did it all and infinitely more. And to Tiny Tim, who did not die, he was a second father.

Carl: If you have seen A Muppet's Christmas Carol, you may remember that line a lot. And to Tiny Tim, who did not die is the point where everyone raised their fists in the air and goes 'Yes!', because Scrooge has gone from someone who did not care about Tiny Tim, barely gave Bob Cratchit a decent wage to look after his family, to someone who became like a second father to Tiny Tim.

Jean: I wonder what it would be like if everyone could see exactly where their actions might lead? I think we'd all make some different decisions, if we could see into the future and see any negative implications of our choices - like Scrooge has done.

Carl: Oh, absolutely. I know of some ghosts showed me the consequences of decisions I had made, or might make in the future, I might change them.

Jean: This story is really filled with characters to just fall in love with and Tiny Tim and Fred are absolutely two of those characters, who just shine through with positivity and happiness.

Carl: And ultimately, it's their example that helps Scrooge to change.

Jean: So thank you for listening to this episode of the BBC Bitesize English literature podcast. Remember, that you can go back and listen to this and other episodes anytime you want in BBC Sounds.

Carl: Please do. We'd love to see you again. We've also explored more texts including Blood Brothers, Macbeth, and An Inspector Calls, which you can also find in this feed on the BBC Sounds app.

Jean: And whilst you're in the BBC Sounds app there's also the Bitesize study support podcast, which is full of tips to help you stay focused during revision and get the best out of your exam day.

Carl: In the next episode, we're going to be exploring the themes in A Christmas Carol. We hope to see you there.