

## A Christmas Carol

Along the snow-laden streets of Victorian London, an old man wandered slowly. He pulled his cloak tighter around his shoulders; his only defence against the cold, wolf-toothed bite of the wind. When finally he reached his destination, he opened the heavy door and smiled at the frost forming on the furniture inside.

“Cratchit, go home.” The old man’s voice was even colder than the room, if possible. “Be back tomorrow at sunrise.”

“But sir, tomorrow is Christmas.” A bundle of ragged cloth in the corner turned out to be a small man.

“Bah, humbug!” The old man dismissed his clerk with a wave of his hand and made sure to lock the door behind him. With that done, he retired to his bedroom and drifted off into a fitful sleep.

Around midnight, the man awoke with a start. “Who’s there?” he whispered.

As if from nowhere, a small boy appeared at the foot of his bed. He didn’t say a word but beckoned the old man to join him at the window. There, he grabbed hold of his hand, and everything disappeared.

When the man opened his eyes, he was startled by what he saw. “Where am I?” he asked.

“Fezziwig’s. Over there, next to Belle. You loved her once.” The small boy spoke with a soft, kind voice.

“Who are you?” asked the old man.

“I am you, as you once were. You can still go back to being so kind. Think of me as the ghost of Christmas past. I am here to show you what might have been. Look at Belle, she always came second to gold. She left you the next week. Was it worth it?”

Scrooge frowned and pondered the scene in front of him. He remembered the party well: despite his cold heart, he’d wept when Belle had left him. Suddenly, the scene disappeared along with the small boy. Now, he was confronted with a towering ghost, twice as tall as himself and transparent as frosted glass.

Replacing the joy of the party was a more sombre scene. This time, a family were huddled around a meagre feast scattered across an old table. There was barely enough for one man, let alone the family of four trying their best to make it stretch.

“Bob Cratchit,” said Scrooge with resignation. “Where is his food?”

“He can’t afford any more than this, not on what you pay him. Look at his son.” Scrooge obliged, a rare

tear rolling down his wizened cheeks. The small boy was sick, even he could see that. As they watched, he collapsed in a fit of coughs.

“What will happen to him?”

“I cannot say, I am simply a vision of Christmas present. However...”

Once again the world spun, and now Ebenezer Scrooge found himself standing in a snow-covered graveyard. Ahead, he saw a family huddled around a gravestone. A deep sense of foreboding crept over him. Even so, he couldn't help but let out a sob when he realised what he was looking at. At the head of his son's grave, Bob Cratchit was laying a single flower in the snow.

“How can I change this?” he cried to the darkness that enveloped him. The scene swirled and vanished, but the aching in his heart remained along with the overwhelming feeling of guilt.

This time, when he was jolted awake, Scrooge had a plan. Driven by remorse, he set out to the butchers and then on to his clerk's house. From that day forward, Bob Cratchit had all the food and respect he deserved, as did everybody else who had the fortune to meet Mr Ebenezer Scrooge.



## VOCABULARY FOCUS

1. What does the phrase “snow-laden” tell you about the streets?
2. Which word tells us that Scrooge told Cratchit to go home?
3. Write a definition for **beckoned**. Write the word in another sentence.
4. What does the phrase “Scrooge obliged” mean?
5. Find a word that shows Scrooge knew something bad was about to happen.

## VIPERS QUESTIONS

**I** Why did Ebenezer Scrooge smile at the frost forming on the furniture?

**R** What date was it when Scrooge told Cratchit to go home?

**E** Explain using evidence from the text how Scrooge felt after his visits.

**P** How do you think the visits changed Scrooge's attitude?

**S** What happened after Scrooge asked about Cratchit's son?

Answers:

1. They are covered in snow
2. Dismissed
3. Any appropriate definition and sentence
4. He did as he had been told
5. Foreboding

I: He was pleased he wasn't spending money on coal

R: Christmas Eve

E: The aching in his heart remained along with the overwhelming feeling of guilt/driven by remorse

P: Any suitable prediction that shows him growing more generous or kind

S: The spirits showed him the future if he continued the way he was