

A CHRISTMAS CAROL

Charles Dickens

**Dossier pédagogique :
Isabelle Arnaud**

Collection Classiques VO

Studyrama
trouver son avenir

Sommaire

Repères	7
A short biography	9
▪ Life	9
▪ Career	10
▪ Works	11
Reading <i>A Christmas Carol</i>	12
▪ Historical and cultural context	12
▪ Theme and literary analysis	13
<i>A Christmas Carol</i>	15
Stave one – Marley’s Ghost	17
▪ Dossier pédagogique	45
▪ Exercices	48
Stave two – The First of the Three Spirits	52
▪ Dossier pédagogique	78
▪ Exercices	81
Stave three – The Second of the Three Spirits	86
▪ Dossier pédagogique	120
▪ Exercices	123
Stave four – The Last of the Spirits	128
▪ Dossier pédagogique	151
▪ Exercices	154
Stave five – The End of It	158
▪ Dossier pédagogique	168
▪ Exercices	171

Repères

A short biography

Life

Charles Dickens was born on 7 February 1812 in Portsmouth, England, and died on 9 June 1870. He is one of the most famous and influential English novelists of the Victorian era (1837-1901). Dickens is particularly known for his vivid characters, strong social criticism, and memorable storytelling, which often combines realism, humour, and emotion.

From an early age, he developed a sharp sense of compassion and moral responsibility, shaped by direct contact with hardship and social neglect.

Dickens's childhood had a profound influence on his writing. His father, John Dickens, worked as a clerk but struggled with debt. When Charles was only 12 years old, his father was sent to debtors' prison. As a result, the young boy had to leave school and work in a blacking factory, pasting labels on bottles for long hours in poor conditions. This traumatic experience left a deep mark on Dickens and made him very sensitive to social injustice, poverty, and child labour—themes that appear repeatedly in his novels. These early humiliations taught him how financial anxiety can isolate people, damage family bonds, and dull empathy—concerns that would later reappear in his fiction through images of coldness, fear and moral awakening. He never forgot the contrast between festive public life and the private distress of those who had nothing, a tension that he would explore through stories of transformation and generosity.

After his father's release, Dickens was able to return to school and later became a law clerk and then a journalist. His work as a reporter allowed him to observe London life closely, especially the living conditions of the poor.

Despite his success, his personal life was complex, marked by a difficult marriage and health problems later in life.

Married to Catherine Hogarth in 1836, he had ten children, but the relationship deteriorated over time due to strain, grief, and incompatible expectations; they formally separated in 1858. The separation was painful and public, and Dickens struggled to balance private responsibilities with intense professional demands and fame. In his later years, intense reading tours and relentless work aggravated his health, and he eventually died after a severe cerebral attack in 1870.

Career

Charles Dickens founded and directed two important weekly periodicals: *Household Words* and *All the Year Round*. As a journalist and editor, he investigated social realities such as slums, workhouses, and charitable institutions, transforming reportage into powerful narrative art.

Throughout his career, Dickens published many novels, most of them first released in monthly or weekly installments, which helped him reach a wide audience. These works often focus on the lives of orphans, the poor, and marginalised individuals, while criticising institutions such as factories, schools, and the legal system.

Dickens was also deeply involved in public life. He gave public readings of his works, supported charitable causes, and used his fame to raise awareness about social problems.

Works

In 1836, Charles Dickens achieved his first major success with *The Pickwick Papers*, published in serial form. The novel was extremely popular and made him famous almost overnight.

Among his most famous works are the novels *Oliver Twist* (1837-1839), *David Copperfield* (1849-1850), *Bleak House* (1852-1853), *Hard Times* (1854), and *Great Expectations* (1860-1861), but also short novels, including *A Christmas Carol* (1843).

Charles Dickens remains a central figure in English literature. His works continue to be widely read, studied, and adapted for theatre, film, and television. His ability to combine entertainment with moral and social reflection makes him especially relevant for young readers today. For modern audiences, his fiction offers both the pleasures of storytelling and a clear invitation to notice those who are overlooked, to measure wealth against kindness, and to imagine ethical change in everyday life.

Reading *A Christmas Carol*

Historical and cultural context

A Christmas Carol was written during the Victorian era, a period marked by rapid industrialisation, urban growth, and economic inequality in Britain. While the country was becoming wealthier, many people lived in extreme poverty. London had transformed into a bustling centre of commerce and industry, but working conditions were harsh and unsafe, and overcrowding was widespread. Political debates and social reforms were emerging as society struggled to address the growing gap between rich and poor.

The novella illustrates social realism, a literary approach that is characterised by realistic settings, ordinary or poor characters, social criticism, and a strong moral message. This movement developed during the Victorian era because industrialisation created severe social problems that many writers wanted to expose and reform. Dickens wrote the novella at a time when debates about poverty, charity, and social responsibility were very intense. He strongly opposed the idea that the poor were responsible for their own suffering, a belief represented in the novel by Scrooge's early attitudes. Instead, Dickens argued that society had a moral duty to help its most vulnerable members.

At the same time, Victorian literature included other movements such as Romanticism, Gothic fiction, and sentimental or didactic literature. The supernatural elements of the story reflect popular Victorian beliefs in ghosts and the

afterlife, while also serving a symbolic purpose: the spirits represent memory, awareness, and moral consequence. Through this blend of realism and fantasy, Dickens makes his social message both entertaining and emotionally powerful.

The book also reflects the revival of Christmas traditions in the 19th century. During Dickens's time, Christmas was becoming a family-centred celebration associated with generosity, warmth, and goodwill. *A Christmas Carol* played a major role in shaping the modern image of Christmas as a time for kindness, sharing, and compassion.

Theme and literary analysis

The novella delivers a powerful message about redemption, empathy, and the importance of caring for others. Its structure—one night, three visions, one conversion—creates a clear moral arc that shows how personal reflection can lead to social responsibility.

The story is told by a third-person omniscient narrator, who comments on events, guides the reader's moral judgement, and sometimes addresses the reader directly.

The musicality of *A Christmas Carol* is a central element of its structure and meaning. By choosing the word "carol" in the title and calling the chapters "staves", Dickens presents the novella as a Christmas song rather than a traditional novel. Each stave functions like a musical movement, contributing to a rhythmic progression that leads from moral discord to harmony.

A Christmas Carol

Stave one

Marley's Ghost

MARLEY was dead: to begin with. There is no doubt whatever about that. The register of his burial was signed by the clergyman, the clerk¹, the undertaker², and the chief mourner³. Scrooge signed it: and Scrooge's name was good upon 'Change, for anything he chose to put his hand to. Old Marley was as dead as a door-nail⁴.

Mind! I don't mean to say that I know, of my own knowledge, what there is particularly dead about a door-nail. I might have been inclined, myself, to regard a coffin-nail⁵ as the deadest piece of ironmongery⁶ in the trade. But the wisdom of our ancestors is in the simile; and my unhallowed⁷ hands shall not disturb it, or the Country's done for. You will therefore permit me to repeat, emphatically, that Marley was as dead as a door-nail.

Scrooge knew he was dead? Of course he did. How could it be otherwise? Scrooge and he were partners for I don't know how many years.

1. employé
de bureau

2. agent
des pompes
funèbres

3. personne qui
mène le deuil

4. clou de porte

5. clou de
cercueil

6. quincaillerie

7. profane

8. terriblement Scrooge was his sole executor, his sole administrator, his sole assign, his sole residuary legatee, his sole friend, and sole mourner. And even Scrooge was not so dreadfully⁸ cut up by the sad event, but that he was an excellent man of business on the very day of the funeral, and solemnised⁹ it with an undoubted bargain¹⁰.

9. commémoré
10. affaire indiscutable

The mention of Marley's funeral brings me back to the point I started from. There is no doubt that Marley was dead. This must be distinctly understood, or nothing wonderful can come of the story I am going to relate. If we were not perfectly convinced that Hamlet's Father died before the play began, there would be nothing more remarkable in his taking a stroll at night, in an easterly wind, upon his own ramparts, than there would be in any other middle-aged gentleman rashly¹¹ turning out after dark in a breezy spot—say Saint Paul's Churchyard for instance—literally to astonish his son's weak mind.

11. imprudemment

Scrooge never painted out Old Marley's name. There it stood, years afterwards, above the warehouse¹² door: Scrooge and Marley. The firm was known as Scrooge and Marley. Sometimes people new to the business called Scrooge Scrooge, and sometimes Marley, but he answered to both names. It was all the same to him.

12. entrepôt

Oh! But he was a tight-fisted¹³ hand at the grindstone¹⁴, Scrooge! a squeezing, wrenching, grasping, scraping, clutching, covetous¹⁵ old sinner!

13. avare
14. meule
15. cupide

Hard and sharp as **flint**¹⁶, from which no steel had ever struck out generous fire; secret, and self-contained, and solitary as an oyster. The cold within him froze his old features, nipped his pointed nose, **shrivelled**¹⁷ his cheek, stiffened his gait; made his eyes red, his thin lips blue; and spoke out shrewdly in his grating voice. A frosty rime was on his head, and on his eyebrows, and his wiry chin. He carried his own low temperature always about with him; he iced his office in the dog-days; and didn't **thaw**¹⁸ it one degree at Christmas.

16. silex

17. ratatiné

18. dégeler

External heat and cold had little influence on Scrooge. No warmth could warm, nor wintry weather chill him. No wind that blew was bitterer than he, no falling snow was more intent upon its purpose, no **pelting**¹⁹ rain less open to **entreaty**²⁰. Foul weather didn't know where to have him. The heaviest rain, and snow, and **hail**, and **sleet**²¹, could boast of the advantage over him in only one respect. They often "came down" handsomely, and Scrooge never did.

19. battante

20. supplication

21. grêle et grésil

Nobody ever stopped him in the street to say, with gladsome looks, "My dear Scrooge, how are you? when will you come to see me?" No beggars implored him to bestow a **trifle**²², no children asked him what it was o'clock, no man or woman ever once in all his life inquired the way to such and such a place, of Scrooge. Even the blindmen's dogs appeared to know him; and when they saw him coming on,

22. petite somme

23. tirer
brusquement

would tug²³ their owners into doorways and up courts; and then would wag their tails as though they said, “no eye at all is better than an evil eye, dark master!”

But what did Scrooge care! It was the very thing he liked. To edge his way along the crowded paths of life, warning all human sympathy to keep its distance, was what the knowing ones call “nuts” to Scrooge.

24. morne

Once upon a time—of all the good days in the year, on Christmas Eve—old Scrooge sat busy in his counting-house. It was cold, bleak²⁴, biting weather: foggy withal: and he could hear the people in the court outside go

25. soufflant

wheezing up and down²⁵, beating their hands upon their breasts, and stamping their feet upon the pavement-stones to warm them. The city clocks had only just gone three, but it was quite dark already: it had not been light all day:

26. vacillaient

and candles were flaring²⁶ in the windows of the neighbouring offices, like ruddy smears²⁷ upon the palpable brown air. The fog came pouring in at every chink and keyhole, and was so dense without, that although the court was

27. traînées
rougeâtres

of the narrowest, the houses opposite were mere phantoms. To see the dingy²⁸ cloud come drooping down²⁹, obscuring everything, one might have thought that Nature lived hard by, and was brewing on a large scale.

28. sombre

29. retombant
lourdement

The door of Scrooge’s counting-house was open that he might keep his eye upon his