



# A CHRISTMAS CAROL DIAGNOSTIC ASSESSMENT MODEL ANSWER

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## A CHRISTMAS CAROL DIAGNOSTIC ASSESSMENT

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Read the following passage and, in a separate document such as Google Docs, answer the questions that follow.

Oh! But he was a tight-fisted hand at the grindstone, Scrooge! a squeezing, wrenching, grasping, scraping, clutching, covetous, old sinner! Hard and sharp as flint, 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 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 it one degree at Christmas.

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. Foul weather didn't know where to have him. The heaviest rain, and snow, and hail, and sleet, could boast of the advantage over him in only one respect. They often "came down" handsomely, and Scrooge never did.

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, 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 blind men's dogs appeared to know him; and when they saw him coming on, would tug 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!"

How is Scrooge presented in this extract from Stave one

How is Scrooge presented in the novel as a whole?

400 – 450 words minimum





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## A CHRISTMAS CAROL DIAGNOSTIC ASSESSMENT 100% MODEL ANSWER

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There are a number of perspectives one can take when analysing 'A Christmas Carol', however, for the purpose of this essay, we will evaluate the novella as being a form of political and economic commentary. 'A Christmas Carol' can be seen as being reformist in nature and remains popular today, likely as a result of its contemporary relevance; a multitude of issues present during Dickens' time in the 1840s and stressed in his fable, are still in existence today.

In the first stave, Scrooge is, perhaps, constructed by Dickens in order to embody 'bad capitalism', capitalism in its most reduced or pure form, where money is seen as the absolute good and where morals and other human values are not seen as having any worth. In 1840s England, with industrialism in full swing and capitalism on the rise, Friedrich Engels wrote a book called "The Condition of The Working Class in England", based on his first-hand experience, published in 1845. In it, he says: "The middle classes have a truly extraordinary conception of society. They really believe that human beings... have real existence only if they make money or help to make it." In Stave 1, Dickens' portrayal of Scrooge appears to represent Engels' sentiments about the relationship between the middle and working classes, and money; Scrooge is presented as a man who lives for the sake of acquiring money, yet he cannot even enjoy it: 'a squeezing, wrenching, grasping, scraping, clutching, covetous old sinner'. Dickens' famous asyndetic list of six synonyms for greed not only places heavy emphasis on his selfishness, but it also details the extent and variety of ways in which his avarice manifests itself; for example, he 'squeezes' every penny's worth of work he can out of his sole employee, Bob Cratchit, forcing him to work long hours in a tiny room with such 'a very small fire ... that it looked like only one coal'. 'With a growl...', Scrooge 'grasps' onto everything he can, reluctantly giving Bob Cratchit one day off every year, Christmas, and even tells him to "be here all the earlier next morning." Despite the poor working conditions he subjects his employee to, Scrooge still 'clutches' onto his profits, doing nothing with them: "Nobody lived in..." the "... gloomy suite of rooms..." "...but Scrooge"; he lives alone, without any form of love and good will in his life.

In the second stave, however, Dickens offers a contrasting, more sympathetic perspective of Scrooge; 'the Ghost of Christmas Past' takes him on a journey to remind him of his childhood as well as his younger adult years, and it is in this stave that we learn about his own past tragic events which have caused him to become the unkind and unloving man we see in Stave 1. His ex-fiancée, Belle, famously says, "another idol has displaced me... a golden one", to which Scrooge cannot avoid denial because when he sees Belle, he is reminded of his greed. Here, Dickens uses a religious allusion (the golden calf created by the Israelites as an idol of worship) to describe how Scrooge's love for money meant that he lost Belle and therefore he lost the only happiness he had in his life. The religious allusion may also be symbolic of how capitalism might have reduced the influence of traditional institutions such as the church, as a moral guide. Instead, money is placed at the forefront of everything and for a capitalist, it seems, there is no other reason for existence. Then, as Belle is breaking off their engagement, she tells Scrooge, 'You fear the world too much'; what she means is that he fears human connection too much and it is implied by his sister's visit to his school that the roots of these fears can be found in a problematic and dysfunctional relationship with his father. We learn that Ebenezer did not have a homelife, as he was away at boarding school; we also get the impression he might have been there for an extended period of time. When his sister Fan comes to retrieve him she says that their father is "much kinder now," so much so that she thought she would try one more time to ask him if Ebenezer could come home for Christmas. This indicates that she has asked before and has been refused, which further highlights the strain in the relationship between at least father and son, if not the whole family.

In conclusion, we could look at "A Christmas Carol" not as expressing the idea that capitalism is bad, or that Dickens is calling for a socialist revolution (which some of his other works may be doing), as much as saying that capitalism needs to be improved and employers have the responsibility to do that. Instead, it seems as though he is offering a beacon of what a capitalist can actually achieve: he does this firstly through Fezziwig, Scrooge's old employer; while he is just as successful a





businessman as Scrooge, he is also complete contrast. For one thing, he is far more benevolent and treats his employees graciously. Through his words and actions, perhaps we may argue that Dickens is offering us the quintessential 'good capitalist'. For example, Dickens writes, "He rubbed his hands; adjusted his capacious waistcoat; laughed all over himself, from his shoes to his organ of benevolence; and called out in a comfortable, oily, rich, fat, jovial voice:" So, perhaps, Dickens is offering a kind of ultimatum to capitalists: one can be hard, cruel, unloved and disrespect their employees, like Scrooge or one can be "rich, fat and jovial" like Fezziwig. Scrooge eventually learns this lesson in the final stave; he raised Bob's salary, 'was better than his word ... 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.' However, the key to Scrooge's redemption is, perhaps, his realization that humanity is one big family, because 'to Tiny Tim, who did NOT die, he was a second father.' Therefore, perhaps, this is the lesson of the story, that capitalists can fulfill their purpose if they learn to see the less wealthy not as a 'surplus population', but as family that they need to reconnect to, because only then will they open their hand and gain true happiness, just as Scrooge does.

