A CHRISTMAS CAROL by C. Dickens

Teaching Materials - PART 1

Some background and the story

First some questions

• What do you already know about Charles Dickens?
• Can you name any novels from Charles Dickens? How many?
• What problem did the family have when Charles was twelve?
• In which years did Dickens write? a) 1780 – 1806 b) 1828 - c) 1894 - 1923
• How many children did he have? a) None b) 3 c) 10
• What is the name of his last novel?
  a) David Copperfield b) War and Peace c) The Mystery of Edwin Drood

(You can find the answers in the passage below.)

Charles Dickens – A background

Charles Dickens was born in 1812. He started at school when he was nine, but when he was twelve years old a disaster hit the family. His father was arrested for debt and put in prison along with the others. Charles had to live alone and work in a factory, putting labels on shoe-polish bottles. This terrible experience only lasted for a few months, but it made a strong impression on him. In his novels he focused a lot of attention on the stories of children and the bad conditions they lived in at the time. His story Oliver Twist was the first major English novel to have a child as its main character.

At the age of fifteen he started to work as a journalist and later made a reputation writing funny reports of what was happening in parliament. A collection of these stories called 'Sketches by Boz' became his first published work. He produced many novels over his busy career, including David Copperfield, Great Expectations, Nicolas Nickelby and The Pickwick Papers. He also had ten children with his wife Cathrine, although there are stories that he was quite mean to her and actually really loved her sister, Mary. This is not sure, but we do know that they separated after 22 years of marriage.

Dickens was always very popular, even in his day. He did tours of America and he used to sell out large theatres when he gave public readings of his stories. He died in the middle of writing a novel, 'The Mystery of Edwin Drood' and he is buried in the famous Westminster Abbey in London.
The story of A Christmas Carol

Section A

In the beginning of the story we meet Scrooge. Scrooge is a money lender and he is described as ‘hard and sharp as flint and solitary as an oyster’. In short he is the meanest old man in London. Scrooge used to have a partner called Jacob Marley, but Marley died seven years before the story begins. He does have a clerk called Bob Cratchit who has to work in a small cold room because Scrooge doesn’t want to pay for him to have a fire.

Mean - the opposite of generous.
Solitary - somebody who stays alone.
Clerk – an assistant in an office.

Section B

Scrooge’s nephew comes to visit him and wish him a Merry Christmas and invites him to their house for Christmas. The nephew is very friendly and good natured but Scrooge is very rude to him and he refuses to come. He then sends away a man who is trying to collect money for the poor and homeless. Scrooge says that the poor can go to prison or the workhouse and if they don’t want to then they should just die. Finally a boy comes with some carol singers. Scrooge sends them away too, without any money of course, and goes home to bed by himself.

Workhouse – a place where poor people used to work long hours for almost no money.
Carol – a special christmas song.

Section C

That night Scrooge is visited by the ghost of his old partner, Jacob Marley. Marley has to carry a heavy chain covered with safes and money boxes because when he was alive he only saved money for himself and didn’t help other people. Marley tells Scrooge that he finish the same if he doesn’t change his life. Three ghosts are going to visit Scrooge. They are the only ones who can help him.

Safe – a special strong box for keeping money in.

Section D

The first one of the three is the Ghost of Christmas Past. This ghost takes Scrooge back into the past to look at his earlier life, before he was so cold and mean. First we see Scrooge as a young boy alone, reading a book, in a cold school on Christmas day. He is reading a story book. Next we see him a few years later. His younger sister Fan comes to take him away from the school and home for Christmas. Scrooge loves Fan and is very happy to see her. The ghost reminds Scrooge that she is dead now, but that she had a son, the nephew that Scrooge was rude to before.

Remind – to help somebody remember something.
Section E

Next they visit the place where Scrooge first worked and his first boss Fezziwig. Fezziwig organises a great party with dancing and music and food. Scrooge remembers that Fezziwig was a great boss because of his good nature and his kind looks. Scrooge thinks of his own clerk Bob Cratchit and how badly he behaves towards him. Finally the ghost shows him a scene of Scrooge and his fiancee of that time. The fiancee is leaving Scrooge because she can see that he is already more interested in money than in the relationship. She does get married to another man though and has a family, while Scrooge stays alone.

Fiancée – the person that you are planning to marry.

Section F

The next Ghost, Christmas Present is a very good-natured ghost with a special torch that makes people happy when he touches them with it. He takes Scrooge to visit his clerk Bob Cratchit at Christmas time. The family is very poor, but they love each other and there is a nice atmosphere in the house. They have an ill crippled son called Tiny Tim. When Scrooge asks, the ghost tells him that Tim will die if nothing changes.

Section G

The ghost takes Scrooge around the country to visit a mine, a lighthouse and even a ship at sea. Scrooge sees that everywhere people are singing and celebrating Christmas. Finally we see the evening at Scrooge’s nephew’s house. There is a party and games and Scrooge feels so happy watching the party there that he doesn’t want to leave.

Mine – a place where men dig coal from under the ground.
Lighthouse – a tall building by the sea with a light that warns ships.

Section H

Finally the ghost of Christmas Present shows him two starving children, Want and Ignorance. They look hungry, dangerous and unhappy. When Scrooge asks if somebody can help them, the ghost reminds him of his own hard words, ‘the poor can go to prison or the workhouse and if they don’t want to then they should just die’. Scrooge feels ashamed at this.

Want – here the same as ‘need’. The child is probably starving.
Ignorance – having no education.
Ashamed – feeling bad because of something you have done.

Section I

The last ghost, Christmas future, is dark and silent. Scrooge is very afraid of him. This ghost shows Scrooge some businessmen talking with little interest about someone who has died. Scrooge doesn’t know who it is. Scrooge then sees two women stealing the clothes from a dead body, he is shocked, but understands that this could happen to him too as he has no friends. Then we visit the Cratchit family after Tiny Tim is dead. Of course they are very sad, finally the ghost forces Scrooge to look at the face of the dead man and he sees that this man really is him as he will be in the future, if nothing changes.
Section J

When he wakes up, Scrooge is a changed man. It is still Christmas Day and he realises that if he changes his ways then he can change the depressing picture of the future that he saw. He wishes everybody a merry Christmas, he buys the biggest turkey in the shop and sends it to Bob Cratchit’s house. He visits his nephew’s house and joins in the party there, he has a wonderful day. The next day at work the first thing he does is to promise his clerk more pay. He has changed from being the coldest and the meanest, to being the warmest and the most generous man in London.

Depressing – the opposite of positive or optimistic.

Questions to the sections of the story

Section A
Who is Jacob Marley?
Does Scrooge have a lot of friends?
Why is Bob Cratchit cold?

Section B
What is Scrooge’s nephew like?
Does Scrooge feel sorry for poor people?
How much money does Scrooge give to the carol-singers?

Section C
What is the ghost of Marley carrying?
Why does he have to carry this?
Who is going to visit Scrooge?

Section D
What does the Ghost of Christmas Past show Scrooge?
What was Scrooge doing on Christmas day when he was a young boy?
Does Scrooge like his sister, Fan?
Section E
Who is Fezziwig?
Why does Scrooge’s fiancee leave Scrooge?
What happens to her after she leaves him?

Section F
What is special about the Ghost of Christmas Present’s torch?
What is the name of Bob Cratchit’s crippled son?
What does the ghost tell Scrooge about this son?

Section G
Why does the ghost take Scrooge to visit the different places?
What is happening at the nephew’s house?
Is Scrooge interested in what is happening there?

Section H
Who are the two children that the ghost shows Scrooge?
Are they happy children?
What does the ghost say when Scrooge asks who can help them?

Section I
Does the ghost of Christmas Future talk a lot?
What are the two women doing?
Who is the dead man that the ghost shows Scrooge?

Section J
What day is it when Scrooge wakes up after seeing the last ghost?
What does he send to Bob Cratchit’s house?
How has Scrooge changed?