

Mr Bruff

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MR Bruff's Guide To

A CHRISTMAS CAROL



2nd Edition

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SAMPLE

CHARACTER ANALYSIS: Ebenezer Scrooge

Dickens uses Scrooge to criticise the divide between those who have money and those who do not, teaching us that it is not too late to alter our behaviour. We follow the journey of the protagonist Ebenezer Scrooge, who changes from a miserable penny-pincher into a more caring, compassionate citizen.

Dickens's use of repetition positions Scrooge as a lonely character at the start of the novella when he summarises his role in relation to Marley: 'Scrooge was the sole executor, his sole administrator, his sole assign, his sole residuary legatee, his sole friend, and sole mourner'. The repetition of the adjective 'sole' builds rhythm and momentum to emphasise the solitary nature of the lives led by both men.

Dickens quite openly expresses his opinion of Scrooge (this is called authorial intrusion) when he sums the money lender up as 'a squeezing, wrenching, grasping, scraping, clutching, covetous old sinner!'. The list (or asyndetic list because it has no conjunctions) of adjectives positions Scrooge as a character whose intention is to grab every last penny he can from anyone he encounters. The first five verbs are from the semantic field of touch, and they all have unpleasant connotations. They connote taking by force ('wrenching, grasping'); getting as much value out of money as he can ('squeezing' and 'scraping'); and refusing to share ('clutching'). The final words (or noun phrase) 'covetous old sinner!' have biblical connotations and remind us of God's Commandment: 'You shall not covet your neighbour's house. You shall not covet your neighbour's wife, or his male or female servant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbour'. From the start, Dickens judges Scrooge, aligning him with wickedness and influencing his readers to mistrust him.

Dickens also uses the simile 'hard and sharp as flint' to describe Scrooge. The adjective 'hard' suggests that he lacks warmth, empathy and compassion while the adjective 'sharp' suggests pain, implying that Scrooge has no mercy towards others. The comparison with 'flint' is interesting, however. Flint is used to create fire. Dickens might be implying that there is the potential for a spark of warmth within Scrooge, who might yet change.

Similarly, Scrooge is described with the simile as 'solitary as an oyster'. At first glance, we have the impression that Scrooge, like an oyster, has a tough, hard exterior and is closed to others. The simile is effective because it emphasises how he has chosen to isolate himself. It also suggests that there may be more to be discovered where Scrooge is concerned. Just as, when forced open, an oyster may contain a pearl, so Dickens suggests there may be something worthwhile to be found within Scrooge.

Dickens uses imagery of coldness in his early descriptions of Scrooge: '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'. Here, Dickens's use of metaphor emphasises Scrooge's cold-hearted nature and attitude towards others. The list (or syndetic listing because of the use of 'and') slows the pace. Dickens forces the reader to contemplate the metaphorical frost on every part of Scrooge's face. Scrooge's 'low temperature' is of course a metaphor for his attitude towards others: Scrooge is a cold-hearted man.

Yet Dickens also uses humour in relation to Scrooge's character. For example, Scrooge tells Marley's ghost: 'You may be an undigested bit of beef, a blot of mustard, a crumb of cheese, a fragment of an underdone potato. There's more of gravy than of grave about you, whatever you are!'. Dickens deliberately uses word play with the pun on 'grave' and 'gravy' to make Scrooge's character less two-dimensional. This makes the reader more likely to engage with Scrooge and celebrate his transformation at the end of the novella.

Dickens employs irony when, faced with Marley's Ghost, Scrooge implores him for help: 'Speak comfort to me, Jacob'. Scrooge receives a taste of his own medicine when the Ghost replies 'I have

none to give'. Scrooge is as vulnerable as those he has refused to help. From early in the novella, Dickens therefore makes it clear that we reap what we sow in life: for people to care about us, we must also care about them.

The reader begins to feel empathy for Scrooge when he returns to an almost childlike state in the presence of the Ghost of Christmas Past. When visiting Scrooge's old school, the Ghost describes Scrooge as a 'solitary child, neglected by his friends'. The adjective 'solitary' reminds us of the 'solitary as an oyster', simile except that the child Scrooge was literally alone, and this was not his choice. The juxtaposition of 'neglected' with 'friends' develops the reader's empathy towards Scrooge at this point in the novella, as we see that his schoolmates are not true friends. When Scrooge 'sobbed' in response to the Ghost noting the young Scrooge's neglect, the reader understands that empathy and compassion have the power to elicit an emotional response from Scrooge. This signifies the start of his transformation. (He is similarly moved when reminded of his sister, Fan, his former employer, Fezziwig, and his former fiancée, Belle.) It is apparent that Scrooge is starting to realise that relationships, not money, bring happiness. By encouraging the reader to feel sorry for Scrooge, Dickens is inviting us to develop an interest in his transformation and to celebrate with him at the end of the novella.

When the Ghost of Christmas Present appears, Dickens reminds us that Scrooge's attitude is changing: 'I went forth last night on compulsion, and I learnt a lesson which is working now. To-night, if you have aught to teach me, let me profit by it.' He is prepared for the lessons that await him. Interestingly, we still have imagery to do with money. The verb 'profit' links to financial transactions, so we are reminded that his transformation is still ongoing.

Dickens signals an important moment in Scrooge's character arc when he shows empathy towards Tiny Tim. The Ghost of Christmas Present takes Scrooge to the Cratchit household, and Scrooge implores the Ghost to tell him of the boy's future: 'tell me if Tiny Tim will live'. Dickens's use of the imperative signifies that Scrooge genuinely seems to care about the little boy's fate. This contrasts with his earlier comments about the poor and, how if they die, this will 'decrease the surplus population'. His attitude is certainly changing, and we now see his hard, rational attitude to the poor and needy being replaced with a genuine interest in their welfare.

The author continues to show the development of Scrooge's character by describing his actions at the house of his nephew, Fred. Scrooge enjoys the party so much that he 'begged like a boy to stay'. The simile implies that Scrooge is casting off his adult values, developing a fresher, younger outlook. A boy has a lot to learn, and we have the implication that Scrooge, now enjoying family and friendships, is learning their value. This contrasts with the earlier 'solitary as an oyster' imagery and provides hope that Scrooge will change. It is not too late for him to join his family and celebrate Christmas for the first time in many years.

As the rising action builds to the climax of the novella, Dickens uses the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come to warn Scrooge that he is facing a lonely end if he does not start thinking of others. Dickens employs dialogue to illustrate this point with the people at the Royal Exchange: 'It's likely to be a very cheap funeral, for upon my life I don't know of anybody to go to it'. Their casual discussion hammers home the message of a life that is worthless without family or friends.

As stave 4 unfolds, Dickens uses situational irony to engage the reader, who becomes increasingly aware that the dead man is Scrooge. The group of people at the thieves' den clearly aim to profit from his death. Their lack of respect for Scrooge, calling him 'a wicked old screw', and their lack of morals by stealing the shirt he was to be buried in, mirrors the callous attitude that Scrooge had towards others at the start of the novella. These people are now the 'squeezing, wrenching, grasping, scraping, clutching, covetous old sinner[s]!', and their behaviour is shocking to Scrooge. He realises that this could happen to him ('The case of this unhappy man might be my own') but still

does not understand that the dead man is Scrooge's future self. The situational irony develops anticipation for the reader, who engages more with the character, eagerly awaiting the moment that he realises the dead person is him.

The climax of the novella is when Scrooge reads his own name on a gravestone and realises that he is the person about whom everyone has been talking. Dickens employs statements (declarative sentences) when Scrooge vows to 'honour Christmas in my heart, and try to keep it all the year. I will live in the Past, the Present, and the Future. The Spirits of all Three shall strive within me. I will not shut out the lessons that they teach.' Dickens's use of statements emphasises the significance of this moment and adds a tone of solemnity. Instead of the three Spirits of Christmas being individual identities, he now embraces the 'Spirits of all Three' so that they become a collective group—he has learnt the lesson of every single Ghost, who will metaphorically live within him. The verb 'strive' implies that he will work hard to apply their 'lessons', imagery which reminds us of the schoolboy imagery discussed at Fred's party, signifying a fresh start for Scrooge.

In the final section of the novella, Dickens employs more similes to describe the change in Scrooge: 'I am as light as a feather, I am as happy as an angel, I am as merry as a school-boy'. These heighten the contrast with the 'oyster' and 'flint' similes discussed above. The simile 'as light as a feather' leads the reader to infer that he has cast off the chains of his earlier way of life (chains that are currently weighing Marley down). Feathers also connote freedom and flight, implying that he is closer to Heaven than he was previously. This links to the 'angel' simile, contrasting with the early description of Scrooge as a 'sinner'. Angels connote goodness, signifying that Scrooge has become a better person. Dickens extends the 'school-boy' imagery to symbolise that Scrooge is metaphorically reborn, a new person, set to change his ways and attitude to life. The adjectives 'light', 'happy' and 'merry' are from the semantic field of joy. Scrooge is no longer an 'old sinner': he has changed and is prepared to embrace life and the opportunities it provides in which to do good.

Dickens employs more contrast to draw the attention of the reader to the changes in Scrooge's character. In stave 1, the solitary Scrooge declined Fred's invitation to Christmas dinner; refused to give any money to the 'portly gentleman' who were collecting for the poor; and he resented giving his underpaid clerk Bob Cratchit a day off for Christmas. In stave 5, Scrooge mingles with people in the street, wishing them a 'merry Christmas' and, significantly, he goes to church, so we see the importance of religion and Christian values at Christmas. He celebrates Christmas at Fred's house; offers a sizeable donation with 'many back-payments' to one of the 'portly gentlemen'; buys a prize turkey and pays for a cab for it to be sent to the Cratchit family; gives Bob a pay rise; and becomes a 'second father' to Tiny Tim who, Dickens emphatically points out, 'did NOT die'. Dickens's use of contrast between Scrooge's miserly attitude at the start of the novella with his generosity at the end hammers home Dickens's message: it is not too late to change, and it is our duty and responsibility to help and appreciate others.

We see that Scrooge is indeed a changed man; his spiritual journey is complete and we, the readers, are left with the understanding that people can change. Society is a better place if we all look out for one another.