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SHARED READING

Extract 1

- In this extract from Stave One, Scrooge talks to a gentleman who has come unexpectedly to his office on Christmas Eve.
- Read aloud the lengthy opening speech. Comment on the gentleman's formal Victorian politeness, circling 'desirable', 'provision' and 'necessaries'. Underline 'usually' and the repeated 'common'. Ask: *What do these words emphasise?* (The poor lack what is normal for others.) Underline 'taking up a pen'. Ask: *What does the gentleman anticipate writing?* (An amount of money next to Scrooge's name.)
- Let the children read out paragraph two, Scrooge's reply. Ask: *How does it contrast with the gentleman's speech in form and meaning?* (It is brief and uncharitable.)
- Underline later references to punishment of the poor: 'prisons', 'union workhouses', 'Treadmill', 'Poor Law'. Ask: *What is the gentleman's attitude to these? What is Scrooge's? Which character's viewpoint does Dickens want the reader to agree with?*
- Investigate the gentleman's lengthy speech in the middle of the extract. Circle 'meat and drink' and 'means of warmth'. What effect does the gentleman expect these words to have? (Scrooge will feel shocked that people lack these.) Circle 'want' and 'keenly'. Can the children supply synonyms?
- Ask: *What does Scrooge mean by replying 'Nothing!' What does the gentleman mistakenly assume?* (That Scrooge wants to donate anonymously.)
- Investigate the extract's final three paragraphs. Ask: *How are the two characters' roles reversed?* (Scrooge becomes the dominant speaker.) *What is Scrooge trying to justify? What is his argument?* (He does not celebrate Christmas, so he should not pay for the poor to make merry.)

Extract 2

- This extract is from Stave Three, when the Cratchit family enjoy their Christmas Day lunch.
- Investigate the long first paragraph. Comment on the short, dramatic opening statement. Circle complimentary nouns linked to the goose: 'tenderness', 'flavour', 'size', 'cheapness' and 'admiration'. Ask: *What impression do these create?* (The family thinks the goose is perfect.) *Which words reveal that it is not very big for such a large family?* Circle 'Eked out' and 'sufficient'.
- Underline 'nervous'. Suggest that Dickens wants the reader to wonder why Mrs Cratchit should be worried about a pudding. Can the children suggest why?
- Point out that paragraph two answers the reader's question about why Mrs Cratchit is 'nervous'. Highlight 'Suppose' at the beginning of three sentences. Ask: *What punctuation mark is noticeable in paragraph two?* Circle the exclamation marks. *Why are they used?* (They emphasise the increasingly imagined disasters as everyone anticipates the Christmas pudding.)
- Ask: *What is the pudding compared to in paragraph three? Which word introduces the comparison?* ('like') *What literary device is Dickens using?* (a simile) Underline 'like a speckled cannon-ball' and circle 'speckled'. Ask: *Why is 'speckled' an appropriate description?* (The pudding is dotted with currants and other dried fruit.)
- Examine the final two sentences. Underline 'flat heresy' and discuss the meaning. (Heresy is an opinion contrary to what is normally accepted.) Ask: *What would it be wrong for a family member to say? What is emphasised about the Cratchits in the final sentence?* (The pudding was too small for their large family. Their gratitude for the little they have.)



Extract 1

Stave One

"At this festive season of the year, Mr Scrooge," said the gentleman, taking up a pen, "it is more than usually desirable that we should make some slight provision for the poor and destitute, who suffer greatly at the present time. Many thousands are in want of common necessaries; hundreds of thousands are in want of common comforts, sir."

"Are there no prisons?" asked Scrooge.

"Plenty of prisons," said the gentleman, laying down the pen again.

"And the union workhouses?" demanded Scrooge. "Are they still in operation?"

"They are. Still," returned the gentleman, "I wish I could say they were not."

"The Treadmill and the Poor Law are in full vigour, then?" said Scrooge.

"Both very busy, sir."

"Oh! I was afraid, from what you said at first, that something had occurred to stop them in their useful course," said Scrooge. "I am very glad to hear it."

"Under the impression that they scarcely furnish Christian cheer of mind or body to the multitude," returned the gentleman, "a few of us are endeavouring to raise a fund to buy the poor some meat and drink, and means of warmth. We choose this time, because it is a time, of all others, when want is keenly felt, and abundance rejoices. What shall I put you down for?"

"Nothing!" Scrooge replied.

"You wish to be anonymous?"

"I wish to be left alone," said Scrooge. "Since you ask me what I wish, gentlemen, that is my answer. I don't make merry myself at Christmas, and I can't afford to make idle people merry. I help to support the establishments I have mentioned – they cost enough; and those who are badly off must go there."

"Many can't go there; and many would rather die."

"If they would rather die," said Scrooge, "they had better do it, and decrease the surplus population."





7. Asking questions

Objective

To ask questions to improve their understanding of the text.

What you need

Copies of *A Christmas Carol*.

What to do

- Do this activity after finishing the book.
- Ask the children to write the headings 'Stave One, part 1', 'Stave One, part 2', 'Stave Two, part 1', 'Stave Two, part 2'.
- Guide the children through scanning Stave One, part 1. (See the text divisions in 'Guided reading' on page 9.) Ask: *What questions are in your mind by the end of this section?* Encourage partner discussion and share some ideas. Write one example question on the whiteboard: *Will something terrible happen in the fog?* Ask the children to write down their own two questions.
- Scan Stave One, part 2 together. Encourage partner discussion about questions they want answered by the end of the Stave. Ask the children to write down two questions. Repeat the scanning, thinking, talking and writing process for both parts of Stave Two.
- Suggest that by the end of the book, most questions should have been answered. Ask the children to write the answers, with book quotations or references. Are any questions left unanswered?
- Let the children consider the whole book and unanswered questions provoked earlier, for example, *Could Scrooge be dreaming?* Ask the children to write down two or three questions they still have. Ask: *How could these be answered now?* (in a sequel)

Differentiation

Support: Accept one question at each stage. Offer guidance with finding answers.

Extension: Expect more questions and specific location of answers.

8. Understanding characters

Objective

To infer characters' feelings, thoughts and motives from their actions.

What you need

Copies of *A Christmas Carol*, photocopiable page 31, 'Understanding characters'.

Cross curricular link

PSHE

What to do

- Complete this activity after finishing the book.
- Ask: *Who is the main character?* (Scrooge) Point out that the book moves between the present and the past. Ask: *Does Scrooge change?* Discuss the different pictures presented of the main character.
- Let partners discuss how writers can reveal a character's personality (through actions, dialogue, comments by other characters). Make a class list.
- Point out that Dickens often allows readers to form their own opinion, rather than telling them what to think. Refer the children to the scene in Stave One when Scrooge and his clerk discuss Christmas Day. The reader may infer that Scrooge is mean-spirited when he grumbles about the clerk having the whole of Christmas Day off. From the clerk's comment 'If quite convenient, sir' the reader infers humility and acceptance of such poor treatment.
- Give out copies of photocopiable page 31, 'Understanding characters'. Suggest that the children concentrate on one stage of Scrooge's life at a time, working with a partner and searching the text for the actions and words that allow the reader to infer characteristics. Encourage the children to make their own adjective selection. Finally, ask them to write four new adjectives, one for each stage of Scrooge's life.

Differentiation

Support: Reduce the choice of adjectives, leaving only the most appropriate.

Extension: Ask the children to use the chosen adjectives in a full sketch of one of the Scrooges.



Understanding characters

- Draw lines to join two appropriate adjectives to Scrooge at each stage of his life.
- Then write four adjectives of your own and join them.

high-spirited

selfish

hard-hearted

solitary

anti-social

melancholy

charitable

homesick

lonely

sad

caring

greedy

humble

bullying

loving

grateful

rude

polite

generous

friendly

miserable

happy

hospitable



1. _____

3. _____

2. _____

4. _____

