A CHRISTMAS CAROL

Plot

Stave 1	Scrooge treats Bob, Fred, and others with contempt, only caring for money and himself. On Christmas Eve, he has a visit from Marley's Ghost, who warns Scrooge of his fate of the visit of the three spirits.
Stave 2	The Ghost of Christmas Past shows Scrooge scenes of himself as a young boy in school and as a young apprentice. They also witness Scrooge's breakup with his fiancée and the life and family he could have had. Scrooge reflects on how he has treated others.
Stave 3	The Ghost of Christmas Present shows Scrooge people celebrating Christmas: the Cratchit family, people in solitary places and his nephew, Fred. Finally, Scrooge sees two monstrous children: Ignorance and Want.
Stave 4	The Ghost of Christmas Yet-to-Come shows Scrooge reactions to his own death and how he is thought of after passing on. This is contrasted with the death of Tiny Tim.
Stave 5	Scrooge wakes on Christmas morning, reborn as a new man. He delights in putting right his wrongs from Stave 1 and opens himself up to helping others and celebrating Christmas.

Themes

Christmas	Children	Poverty
Generosity	Family	Responsibility
Forgiveness	Injustice	Redemption
Change	Supernatural	Death

Assessment Objectives

AO1, AO2 and AO3 are equally weighted for this question

AO1	Read, understand and respond to texts. Students should be able to: • use textual references and quotations, to support and illustrate interpretations. • maintain a critical style and develop an informed personal response.
AO2	Analyse the language, form and structure used by a writer to create meanings and effects, using relevant subject terminology where appropriate.
AO3	Show understanding of the contexts in which the text was written.

Characters

Ebenezer Scrooge	The main character. He is miserable, miserly, tightfisted and horrid. He rejects Christmas and refuses to offer help or kindness to anyone. The events of the novel change Scrooge completely into a generous, open-hearted man.
Bob Cratchit	Scrooge's clerk. Bob is hard-working, uncomplaining and loving to his family. He is humble and meek and grateful for all he has.
Fred	Scrooge's nephew. He is positive, kind and warm-hearted. He persists in inviting Scrooge to Christmas dinner, as he realises it is Scrooge who misses out in refusing.
Tiny Tim	Bob Cratchit's youngest son. Tim is a "cripple" and not likely to survive for long. Despite this, he is good natured and thinks of others. He says, "God bless us, everyone!"
Marley's Ghost	Scrooge's dead business partner. He warns Scrooge of his fate after death, if he does not change his ways.
Spirits of Christmas Past, Present and Yet-to-Come	These three ghosts all play a part in Scrooge's transformation. Each contribute by showing Scrooge key events in Scrooge's life and the lives of others.
Fan	Scrooge's sister and the (dead) mother of Fred. Fan is kind to Scrooge when he is a boy in school.
Fezziwig	Scrooge's old boss. He shows seasonal generosity to his workers, including Scrooge who is his apprentice.
Mrs Cratchit	Bob's wife. She makes the best of not having much money and makes the most of what she has for her family. She is slightly less forgiving of Scrooge than her husband.
Belle	Scrooge's fiancée. She breaks up with Scrooge, as she can see that money means more to him than she does.

Vocabulary

- Stave (Chapter)
- Narrative
- Dramatic Irony
- Prose
- Hyperbole
- Metaphor
- Pathetic Fallacy
- Simile
- Symbolism
- Foreshadowing
- Third Person Intrusive
- Exclamatory Tone
- Humour
- Allegory
- Listing
- Non-linear
- Dialogue
- Genre

Structure and Form

Written in five chapters called 'staves' (after the musical stave which also has five lines).

The novel is cyclical in nature, with the last stave directly referencing the events of the first.

The stages of Scrooge's redemption are clear. His initial solitude in Stave 1; his gradual realisation and lessons learned in Staves 2-4; his rebirth in Stave 5.

Context

Written by Dickens in 1843 as a direct comment on the conditions endured by the poor (particularly children) during the 'Hungry Forties'. Initially intending to write a pamphlet on the subject, Dickens felt the novel would have more impact and be a "sledgehammer blow" on behalf of the poor.

Having known periods of poverty and hardship in his own childhood, Dickens was a fierce opponent of the Poor Law, which advocated workhouses and prisons as a solution to the problem of social inequality.

Dickens saw a need for the wealthy to share their fortunes and help the most vulnerable in society. He directly references the views of Thomas Malthus, who saw poverty as inevitable and a need to 'decrease the surplus population'.

Christmas had fallen out of favour by 1843 and was not universally celebrated. Although a Christian holiday, celebrating the birth of Jesus Christ, it also encompassed pagan traditions around the winter solstice and looked ahead to the coming spring. In addition, Dickens saw Christmas as a time of sharing food, gifts and time. For Dickens, the 'Christmas spirit' is generosity and compassion for others. Dickens can be partially credited with cementing the popularity of the holiday.

Ghost stories were traditional at Christmas. These were often read aloud, and the novella format allows for this. The story uses many tropes of the ghost genre and combines these with a morality tale.

Tips

- Support points with reference to characters and events and refer back to the question set.
- The provided extract can be useful for language analysis (AO2).
- Remember to integrate points of context into discussion of the characters, events and themes.

‘A Christmas Carol’ Sample Exam Question

A Christmas Carol

You are advised to spend about 45 minutes on this question.

You should us the extract below and you knowledge of the whole novel to answer the question.

Write about the some members of the Cratchit family and how they are important to the novel as a whole.

In your response you should:

- refer to the extract and the novel as a whole.
- show your understanding of characters and events in the novel.
- refer to contexts of the novel. [40]

The children drank the toast after her. It was the first of their proceedings which had no heartiness in it. Tiny Tim drank it last of all, but he didn’t care twopence for it. Scrooge was the ogre of the family. The mention of his name cast a dark shadow on the party, which was not dispelled for a full five minutes.

After it had passed away they were ten times merrier than before, from the mere relief of Scrooge the Baleful been done with. Bob Cratchit told them how he had a situation in his eye for Master Peter, which would bring in, if obtained, full five-and-sixpence weekly. The two young Cratchits laughed tremendously at the idea of Peter’s being a man of business; and Peter himself looked thoughfully at the fire from between his collars, as if they where deliberating what particular investments he should favour when he came into receipt of that bewildering income. Martha, who was a poor apprentice at a milliner’s, then told them what kind of work she had to do, and how many hours she worked at a stretch, and how she meant to lie a-bed tomorrow morning for a good long rest; tomorrow being a holiday she passed at home. Also how she had seen a countess and a lord some days before, and how the lord “was much about as tall as Peter”; at which Peter pulled up his collars so high that you couldn’t have seen his head if you had been there. All this time the chestnuts and the jug went round and round; and by and by they had a song, about a lost child travelling in the snow, from Tiny Tim, who had a plaintive little voice, and it very well indeed.

There was nothing of high mark in this. They were not a handsome family; they were not well dressed; their shoes were far from being waterproof; their clothes were scanty; and Peter might have known, and very likely he did, the inside of a pawnbroker’s. But they were very happy, grateful, pleased with one another, and contented with the time; and when they faded, and looked happier yet in the bright sprinklings of the Spirit’s torch at parting, Scrooge had his eye on them, and especially Tiny Tim, until the last.

Exemplar response

The Cratchit family are a very important to ‘A Christmas Carol’ because they play a big part in the central story of Scrooge’s redemption. They are also important because Dickens wanted to portray the poor of Victorian London in the 19th century in a positive way and they help him do achieve his aims.

We first encounter the father of the Cratchits, Bob, in the first chapter. He is not named by Dickens here – we only discover his name later in the book – and this is perhaps deliberate to show his lowly status – Scrooge only cares of him as a “clerk” and not a human being. Bob is one of the first ‘victims’ we see of Scrooge’s miserly ways – he only has “one piece of coal” and has to “warm himself on a candle” so he is important in establishing Scrooge’s meanness and penny-pinching ways. Moreover, Bob reinforces the message of Christmas by “applauding” Fred when he speaks on the benefits of Christmas. Scrooge doesn’t want to give Bob Christmas Day off. This was not uncommon at the time and Bob is important in showing the audience how poorly employees were often treated. In the extract, Bob “toasts” Scrooge with his family which shows how grateful he is to Scrooge, despite being so badly treated by him. This was important for Dickens to show how grateful and humble the poor are and weren’t the monsters they were thought of.

In Stave three, we see the rest of the Cratchit family. They are obviously poor (Mrs Cratchit is in her “twice turned gown”) and they have a small “goose” for dinner. However, they are grateful and make the best of it. Mrs Cratchit and Belinda are “brave in ribbons” and it is said that the goose was treated like a “feathered phenomenon” or a “black swan”. This shows how grateful they are and was central to the theme. They are also a loving family and the day is full of fun (they “laughed tremendously”).

Tiny Tim is a “cripple” but is selfless and kind-hearted and cares about others as can be seen when he says “God bless us everyone” and thinks of others when he goes to church. He is important because Scrooge has a face to put to his Malthusian comment of “decrease the surplus population” and changes his mind. In fact, Tiny Tim’s death shows a stark contrast to Scrooge’s – the boy is mourned and will live on, whereas Scrooge will not. Therefore, Tiny Tim plays a hugely important role in Scrooge’s redemption.

Finally, the Cratchits are important at the end of the novel – Scrooge buys them a “turkey” and it is the “biggest one in the shop”. This shows just how much Scrooge has changed.

Overall, the Cratchits are essential in showing the ‘grateful poor’ as was Dickens’ intention and also play a huge part in showing Scrooge’s transformation.

Commentary

The opening sentence shows a clear focus on the question and addresses the ‘importance’. The candidate then brings in contextual points and discusses Dickens’ intentions in writing the novel. The second paragraph keeps the focus firmly on why Bob is important in the novel. It also brings in some AO2 points about technique as well as some context – discussing how employees were treated.

The candidate also uses the extract here.

There are appropriate direct references from the extract and other parts of the text, used to support the candidate’s astute points. Overall this response shows assured understanding of the demands of the task and covers all the Assessment Objectives in a sustained, integrated way.