

‘A CHRISTMAS CAROL’

Character in the Corpus
Approaches and Resources

Introduction

Each of the 'Character in the Corpus' discussions in the [Virtue Insight](#) blog is supplemented by suggested questions based on previous character education pedagogical practice. These are inspired by resources created by the Jubilee Centre and those devised by teachers and by other teachers' reflections on effective teaching techniques.

Skills developed in literature require critical thinking that can be employed as a means to cultivate practical wisdom. Beyond the general benefit that character education has to educational attainment, teachers see character education and curriculum subjects as potentially mutually beneficial. Literature has a particular part to play here as a cornerstone of the humanities, one that explores human behaviour, demands critical, close analysis, and pays particular attention to literacy.

The aim is to offer teachers an introduction those virtues evident in the prose fiction studied in the classroom.

Teachers may wish to use the selected touchstone passages for close critical analysis exercises that look at character. Alternatively, teachers are encouraged to seek out such passages within their own selected set text and use the commentaries as guides to frame their own approach to character education and virtue literacy.

The approaches focus on close textual analysis but point towards discussions of character as a theme throughout the text as a whole. The commentaries therefore highlight the stylistic techniques used in relation to character to satisfy examination requirements that pupils understand how writers create certain effects. This 'critical' approach has the advantage of embedding reflection and reasoning alongside comprehension; all key components of virtue literacy.

Touchstones

The classroom resources and associated commentary are centred on a selection of 'touchstone' passages.

With regards to literary studies, the term 'touchstone' was coined by Matthew Arnold in 1853. The term was conferred on literary passages of significance in relation to their role in the development of literature or their affective qualities. The application of the term here therefore adopts Arnold's definition to the extent that it refers to selected short passages and their comparison but translates his method of evaluation to considering a passage's utility in the study of virtue. In this, it is meant rather in the Shakespearean sense of Touchstone as providing a degree of insight.

The touchstone passages below allow students to look at virtue and its stylistic features. For GCSE students, the touchstones offer a way by which to navigate these different instantiations of a virtues.

I. Fred visits his uncle

The first passage is taken from Stave I of the text's five 'staves' – Dickens choosing the word by which musical compositions (including carols) are segmented, instead of chapters. In it, Ebenezer Scrooge's nephew Fred, visits his uncle's counting-house to wish him a merry Christmas, only to be met with a rebuke from his uncle.

But what did Scrooge care! It was the very thing he liked. To edge his way along the crowded paths of life, warning all human sympathy to keep its distance, was what the knowing ones call "nuts" to Scrooge.

Once upon a time—of all the good days in the year, on Christmas Eve—old Scrooge sat busy in his counting-house. It was cold, bleak, biting weather: foggy withal: and he could hear the people in the court outside, go wheezing up and down, beating their hands upon their breasts, and stamping their feet upon the pavement stones to warm them. The city clocks had only just gone three, but it was quite dark already—it had not been light all day—and candles were flaring in the windows of the neighbouring offices, like ruddy smears upon the palpable brown air. The fog came pouring in at every chink and keyhole, and was so dense without, that although the court was of the narrowest, the houses opposite were mere phantoms. To see the dingy cloud come drooping down, obscuring everything, one might have thought that Nature lived hard by, and was brewing on a large scale.

The door of Scrooge's counting-house was open that he might keep his eye upon his clerk, who in a dismal little cell beyond, a sort of tank, was copying letters. Scrooge had a very small fire, but the clerk's fire was so very much smaller that it looked like one coal. But he couldn't replenish it, for Scrooge kept the coal-box in his own room; and so surely as the clerk came in with the shovel, the master predicted that it would be necessary for them to part. Wherefore the clerk put on his white comforter, and tried to warm himself at the candle; in which effort, not being a man of a strong imagination, he failed.

"A merry Christmas, uncle! God save you!" cried a cheerful voice. It was the voice of Scrooge's nephew, who came upon him so quickly that this was the first intimation he had of his approach.

"Bah!" said Scrooge, "Humbug!"

He had so heated himself with rapid walking in the fog and frost, this nephew of Scrooge's, that he was all in a glow; his face was ruddy and handsome; his eyes sparkled, and his breath smoked again.

"Christmas a humbug, uncle!" said Scrooge's nephew. "You don't mean that, I am sure?"

"I do," said Scrooge. "Merry Christmas! What right have you to be merry? What reason have you to be merry? You're poor enough."

"Come, then," returned the nephew gaily. "What right have you to be dismal? What reason have you to be morose? You're rich enough."

Scrooge having no better answer ready on the spur of the moment, said, "Bah!" again; and followed it up with "Humbug."

"Don't be cross, uncle!" said the nephew.

"What else can I be," returned the uncle, "when I live in such a world of fools as this? Merry Christmas! Out upon merry Christmas! What's Christmas time to you but a time for paying bills without money; a time for finding yourself a year older, but not an hour richer; a time for balancing your books and having every item in 'em through a round dozen of months presented dead against you? If I could work my will," said Scrooge indignantly, "every idiot who goes about with 'Merry Christmas' on his lips, should be boiled with his own pudding, and buried with a stake of holly through his heart. He should!"

"Uncle!" pleaded the nephew.

"Nephew!" returned the uncle sternly, "keep Christmas in your own way, and let me keep it in mine."

"Keep it!" repeated Scrooge's nephew. "But you don't keep it."

"Let me leave it alone, then," said Scrooge. "Much good may it do you! Much good it has ever done you!"

"There are many things from which I might have derived good, by which I have not profited, I dare say," returned the nephew. "Christmas among the rest. But I am sure I have always thought of Christmas time, when it has come round—apart from the veneration due to its sacred name and origin, if anything belonging to it can be apart from that—as a good time; a kind, forgiving, charitable, pleasant time; the only time I know of, in the long calendar of the year, when men and women seem by one consent to open their shut-up hearts freely, and to think of people below them as if they really

were fellow-passengers to the grave, and not another race of creatures bound on other journeys. And therefore, uncle, though it has never put a scrap of gold or silver in my pocket, I believe that it has done me good, and will do me good; and I say, God bless it!”

The clerk in the Tank involuntarily applauded. Becoming immediately sensible of the impropriety, he poked the fire, and extinguished the last frail spark for ever.

The narrative of the passage above effectively establishes Scrooge’s miserly character, in opposition to those around him and in opposition to the season of goodwill. It does so through a careful interweaving of plot, dialogue, imagery, and setting.

Of note is the use of and absence of light and warmth right through to the last line of the passage; a literary trope that signifies the absence of good. This type of symbolism extends to other spheres of moral discourse and across cultures. When we think about Christmastime it is difficult for us to do so without thinking about light: spiritually, the holiday marks the advent of Christ as light of the world and physically, in the form of candles, Christmas trees and log fires.

Indeed, it is the fact that this type of imagery is embedded in our cultural understanding of Christmas and concepts like goodness that enables readers to interpret the story’s subtext. Scrooge’s physical description as “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” establishes this metaphorical schema, creating what amounts to a personification of vice.

Dickens exploits the fact that it is Christmas and plunders the wintry weather for all its symbolic worth. This backdrop acts as another way by which Dickens highlights particular characteristics. We often use images about the weather to describe character seen in Fred’s question, “What right have you to be dismal?”

Setting also creates division, evoked by the juxtaposition of Scrooge and the rest of society, both in terms of physical space and in terms of moral character. As with the images of light and warmth, contrasted against the cold and dark, Fred acts as a kind of good-humoured foil against which Scrooge’s miserliness is contrasted.

Scrooge’s critique of Christmas principally takes aim via financial concerns. If you trace the monetary metaphors that feature in the passage, you will note that they are used by both Scrooge and Fred, but differently. That difference revealing their fundamentally different conceptualisations of the world. Particularly interesting is Fred’s adoption of financial discourse, when he says “There are many things from which I might have derived good, by which I have not profited, I dare say.” In essence, Fred appropriates the financial vocabulary of his uncle in an attempt to frame his own moral attitude in terms that his uncle will understand.

This speech of Fred’s includes what Dickens called his ‘Carol Philosophy’, which sees Christmastime as “a kind, forgiving, charitable, pleasant time” in which people display community spirit. To do so he uses the common metaphor of life as a journey: “when

men and women seem by one consent to open their shut-up hearts freely, and to think of people below them as if they really were fellow-passengers to the grave, and not another race of creatures bound on other journeys”.

What strikes Fred is the consideration that the virtue of sympathy gets at this time of year. All of this contrasts sharply with the opening of the scene in which we see Scrooge “edge his way along the crowded paths of life, warning all human sympathy to keep its distance”. Indeed, the passage shows Dickens’s use of images of closeness and distance when describing character and the virtues they embody (or not). Also within Fred’s (or Dickens’s) Carol Philosophy are the virtues of kindness, charity, and forgiveness. These share the characteristic of being ‘other-directed’ virtues, and which in turn have the ‘double benefit’ of being of good to the benefactor as well as the beneficiary.

A final note is warranted concerning the text’s canonical, seasonal status. The ‘Merry Christmas’ greeting, enacting as it does the community-focussed generosity of spirit, is repeated several times and even comes in for some harsh scrutiny from Scrooge. It’s worth remembering that ‘A Christmas Carol’ is often credited with popularising the greeting. Moreover, Dickens is often credited with many of the features associated with Christmas today. What makes for lucrative classroom discussion is exploring the text’s character, plot, setting and imagery to see how these are drawn from culturally embedded symbols. This in effect lends the text to discussions about how we talk about virtues today, and can be extended into discussions about what these terms and images manifest in other spheres of life (e.g., religion, politics, news media, etc.).

Suggested questions

- Identify all the virtues that are mentioned in the passage and see if you can define them. How does Fred portray these virtues and how does Scrooge not? Does Scrooge display any virtue?
- How does Dickens use setting to tell us something about Scrooge’s moral character? Are the images he uses found in other books that deal with character? Are these images used in books or other media today?
- What juxtapositions can you identify between Scrooge and other characters? How do Fred and Scrooge contrast?
- Why do you think Dickens chooses to set his tale at Christmas time? How does Dickens use the weather to reflect character in the passage?

2. Marley's Ghost

The second passage narrates the visit of the first of the spirits, Scrooge's deceased business partner Jacob Marley:

Scrooge fell upon his knees, and clasped his hands before his face.

"Mercy!" he said. "Dreadful apparition, why do you trouble me?"

"Man of the worldly mind!" replied the Ghost, "do you believe in me or not?"

"I do," said Scrooge. "I must. But why do spirits walk the earth, and why do they come to me?"

"It is required of every man," the Ghost returned, "that the spirit within him should walk abroad among his fellowmen, and travel far and wide; and if that spirit goes not forth in life, it is condemned to do so after death. It is doomed to wander through the world—oh, woe is me!—and witness what it cannot share, but might have shared on earth, and turned to happiness!"

Again the spectre raised a cry, and shook its chain and wrung its shadowy hands.

"You are fettered," said Scrooge, trembling. "Tell me why?"

"I wear the chain I forged in life," replied the Ghost. "I made it link by link, and yard by yard; I girded it on of my own free will, and of my own free will I wore it. Is its pattern strange to you?"

Scrooge trembled more and more.

"Or would you know," pursued the Ghost, "the weight and length of the strong coil you bear yourself? It was full as heavy and as long as this, seven Christmas Eves ago. You have laboured on it, since. It is a ponderous chain!"

Scrooge glanced about him on the floor, in the expectation of finding himself surrounded by some fifty or sixty fathoms of iron cable: but he could see nothing.

"Jacob," he said, imploringly. "Old Jacob Marley, tell me more. Speak comfort to me, Jacob!"

"I have none to give," the Ghost replied. "It comes from other regions, Ebenezer Scrooge, and is conveyed by other ministers, to other kinds of men. Nor can I tell you what I would. A very little more is all permitted to me. I cannot rest, I cannot stay, I cannot linger anywhere. My spirit never walked beyond our counting-house—mark

me!—in life my spirit never roved beyond the narrow limits of our money-changing hole; and weary journeys lie before me!”

It was a habit with Scrooge, whenever he became thoughtful, to put his hands in his breeches pockets. Pondering on what the Ghost had said, he did so now, but without lifting up his eyes, or getting off his knees.

“You must have been very slow about it, Jacob,” Scrooge observed, in a business-like manner, though with humility and deference.

“Slow!” the Ghost repeated.

“Seven years dead,” mused Scrooge. “And travelling all the time!”

“The whole time,” said the Ghost. “No rest, no peace. Incessant torture of remorse.”

“You travel fast?” said Scrooge.

“On the wings of the wind,” replied the Ghost.

“You might have got over a great quantity of ground in seven years,” said Scrooge.

The Ghost, on hearing this, set up another cry, and clanked its chain so hideously in the dead silence of the night, that the Ward would have been justified in indicting it for a nuisance.

“Oh! captive, bound, and double-ironed,” cried the phantom, “not to know, that ages of incessant labour by immortal creatures, for this earth must pass into eternity before the good of which it is susceptible is all developed. Not to know that any Christian spirit working kindly in its little sphere, whatever it may be, will find its mortal life too short for its vast means of usefulness. Not to know that no space of regret can make amends for one life’s opportunity misused! Yet such was I! Oh! such was I!”

“But you were always a good man of business, Jacob,” faltered Scrooge, who now began to apply this to himself.

“Business!” cried the Ghost, wringing its hands again. “Mankind was my business. The common welfare was my business; charity, mercy, forbearance, and benevolence, were, all, my business. The dealings of my trade were but a drop of water in the comprehensive ocean of my business!”

It held up its chain at arm’s length, as if that were the cause of all its unavailing grief, and flung it heavily upon the ground again.

“At this time of the rolling year,” the spectre said, “I suffer most. Why did I walk through crowds of fellow-beings with my eyes turned down, and never raise them to

that blessed Star which led the Wise Men to a poor abode! Were there no poor homes to which its light would have conducted me!”

Scrooge was very much dismayed to hear the spectre going on at this rate, and began to quake exceedingly.

Dickens describes ‘A Christmas Carol’ as a ghost story and this is the first of four spirits that haunt Scrooge. Aristotle claims fear as a literary conceit in his *Poetics*, instrumental in the positive social role that literature can have. Indeed, the passage demonstrates the power of fear in that it induces in Scrooge the virtue of humility and, falling to his knees, his plea for mercy. It is ultimately the Scrooge’s *fear* of the consequences of his actions that induce his reformation of character.

The ghost story frame creates a space in which Dickens can explore some of life’s deep questions, for instance, free-will. This is in itself disconcerting, for it asks the reader to address their own moral character. The transporting quality of fiction is particularly well suited to such an exercise as shifting the boundaries of reality takes readers out of their comfort zone.

Throughout the passage there are contrasts drawn between the earthly and the spiritual which contribute to Dickens’s use of juxtaposition throughout the text. These juxtapositions are particularly effective in moral discourse, establishing as they do dilemmas, debates, and contrastive role models. This role-modelling aspect is something inherited from the Everyman medieval tradition.

Here, Jacob Marley represents the vice-like figure and the consequences of leading a mercenary life. It is worth noting however that it is also the aspect that critics of ‘A Christmas Carol’ single out, with many finding his characterisation of Tiny Tim as being too morally good, too sentimental, and ultimately unbelievable. What such stark characterisation and juxtaposition does however is position the text as an explicitly moral text. Dickens, often attacked for caricature, here at least endows such caricature with the moral import of exemplars.

This is evident in Marley’s portrayal. Note, he is referred to simply as the Ghost: denying his character his name makes him more an Everyman, a symbol of those who have erred in life. In the description of Marley images of imprisonment are prominent. Scrooge notes that Marley is “fettered” which prompts the following elaborate image:

“I wear the chain I forged in life,” replied the Ghost. “I made it link by link, and yard by yard; I girded it on of my own free will, and of my own free will I wore it. Is its pattern strange to you?”

These images are infused with poignancy personal to Dickens, whose own father was imprisoned in one of the debtors’ prisons that housed those who defaulted throughout the nineteenth century. The passage is heavily metaphorical, also adopting the imagery of life as a journey, the schema of light and dark, as well as the language of transaction:

“Business!” cried the Ghost, wringing its hands again. “Mankind was my business. The common welfare was my business; charity, mercy, forbearance, and benevolence, were, all, my business. The dealings of my trade were but a drop of water in the comprehensive ocean of my business!”

The passage uses both metaphor and juxtaposition in conjunction, understanding two opposing spheres (the financial and the humanitarian) in terms of each other, ultimately reimagining the only business as mankind and common welfare. The chains no longer suggest connectivity but fettered imprisonment.

Beyond the exploration of imagery and virtue is the more immediate challenge of understanding those virtue terms employed directly, some of which may appear peculiarly Victorian. Words like *forbearance* and *benevolence* have declined in their general usage since the Victorian era – whether this means acts of forbearance and benevolence have declined also is a matter of some academic debate.

What is certainly true is that alternative labels that approximate these virtues (such as *self-control* and *kindness*) and a general growth in English vocabulary mean that the frequency of these words has declined (Google Ngrams shows both *forbearance* and *benevolence* decline by 87% since 1843 when the text was written).

However, in this an advantage of using the historical and fictional text in character education may be found. Because the text and its vocabulary are removed, it specifies and abstracts in such a way that these discussions can initiate an exploration of these virtues.

Suggested questions

- Why do you think Dickens chose to tell this? What do you think Marley means by referring to Scrooge as “Man of the worldly mind”?
- What does Marley mean here when he says humanity is his business? What technique is Dickens using here and for what effect? In your discussion consider irony, humour, satire, and social critique.
- Define the words *charity*, *mercy*, *forbearance*, and *benevolence*. Are there any other words that we use to describe these virtues?
- What examples are there of characters showing these virtues four throughout the text?
- Humility is considered a virtue. Why do you think Scrooge shows it here? Is it virtuous?
- Do you think the characterisation of Tiny Tim is realistic? Is Tiny Tim more of a symbol than a fully realised character?

3. Mr Fezziwig's Christmas Ball

The final passage selected relates a Christmas tradition of Scrooge's old employer, Mr Fezziwig:

The Ghost stopped at a certain warehouse door, and asked Scrooge if he knew it.

“Know it!” said Scrooge. “Was I apprenticed here!”

They went in. At sight of an old gentleman in a Welsh wig, sitting behind such a high desk, that if he had been two inches taller he must have knocked his head against the ceiling, Scrooge cried in great excitement:

“Why, it's old Fezziwig! Bless his heart; it's Fezziwig alive again!”

Old Fezziwig laid down his pen, and looked up at the clock, which pointed to the hour of seven. 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:

“Yo ho, there! Ebenezer! Dick!”

Scrooge's former self, now grown a young man, came briskly in, accompanied by his fellow-'prentice.

“Dick Wilkins, to be sure!” said Scrooge to the Ghost. “Bless me, yes. There he is. He was very much attached to me, was Dick. Poor Dick! Dear, dear!”

“Yo ho, my boys!” said Fezziwig. “No more work to-night. Christmas Eve, Dick. Christmas, Ebenezer! Let's have the shutters up,” cried old Fezziwig, with a sharp clap of his hands, “before a man can say Jack Robinson!”

You wouldn't believe how those two fellows went at it! They charged into the street with the shutters—one, two, three—had 'em up in their places—four, five, six—barred 'em and pinned 'em—seven, eight, nine—and came back before you could have got to twelve, panting like race-horses.

“Hilli-ho!” cried old Fezziwig, skipping down from the high desk, with wonderful agility. “Clear away, my lads, and let's have lots of room here! Hilli-ho, Dick! Chirrup, Ebenezer!”

Clear away! There was nothing they wouldn't have cleared away, or couldn't have cleared away, with old Fezziwig looking on. It was done in a minute. Every movable was packed off, as if it were dismissed from public life for evermore; the floor was swept

and watered, the lamps were trimmed, fuel was heaped upon the fire; and the warehouse was as snug, and warm, and dry, and bright a ball-room, as you would desire to see upon a winter's night.

In came a fiddler with a music-book, and went up to the lofty desk, and made an orchestra of it, and tuned like fifty stomach-aches. In came Mrs. Fezziwig, one vast substantial smile. In came the three Miss Fezziwigs, beaming and lovable. In came the six young followers whose hearts they broke. In came all the young men and women employed in the business. In came the housemaid, with her cousin, the baker. In came the cook, with her brother's particular friend, the milkman. In came the boy from over the way, who was suspected of not having board enough from his master; trying to hide himself behind the girl from next door but one, who was proved to have had her ears pulled by her mistress. In they all came, one after another; some shyly, some boldly, some gracefully, some awkwardly, some pushing, some pulling; in they all came, anyhow and everyhow. Away they all went, twenty couple at once; hands half round and back again the other way; down the middle and up again; round and round in various stages of affectionate grouping; old top couple always turning up in the wrong place; new top couple starting off again, as soon as they got there; all top couples at last, and not a bottom one to help them! When this result was brought about, old Fezziwig, clapping his hands to stop the dance, cried out, "Well done!" and the fiddler plunged his hot face into a pot of porter, especially provided for that purpose. But scorning rest, upon his reappearance, he instantly began again, though there were no dancers yet, as if the other fiddler had been carried home, exhausted, on a shutter, and he were a brand-new man resolved to beat him out of sight, or perish.

There were more dances, and there were forfeits, and more dances, and there was cake, and there was negus, and there was a great piece of Cold Roast, and there was a great piece of Cold Boiled, and there were mince-pies, and plenty of beer. But the great effect of the evening came after the Roast and Boiled, when the fiddler (an artful dog, mind! The sort of man who knew his business better than you or I could have told it him!) struck up "Sir Roger de Coverley." Then old Fezziwig stood out to dance with Mrs. Fezziwig. Top couple, too; with a good stiff piece of work cut out for them; three or four and twenty pair of partners; people who were not to be trifled with; people who would dance, and had no notion of walking.

But if they had been twice as many—ah, four times—old Fezziwig would have been a match for them, and so would Mrs. Fezziwig. As to her, she was worthy to be his partner in every sense of the term. If that's not high praise, tell me higher, and I'll use it. A positive light appeared to issue from Fezziwig's calves. They shone in every part of the dance like moons. You couldn't have predicted, at any given time, what would have become of them next. And when old Fezziwig and Mrs. Fezziwig had gone all through the dance; advance and retire, both hands to your partner, bow and curtsy, corkscrew, thread-the-needle, and back again to your place; Fezziwig "cut"—cut so deftly, that he appeared to wink with his legs, and came upon his feet again without a stagger.

When the clock struck eleven, this domestic ball broke up. Mr. and Mrs. Fezziwig took their stations, one on either side of the door, and shaking hands with every person individually as he or she went out, wished him or her a Merry Christmas. When everybody had retired but the two 'prentices, they did the same to them; and thus the cheerful voices died away, and the lads were left to their beds; which were under a counter in the back-shop.

During the whole of this time, Scrooge had acted like a man out of his wits. His heart and soul were in the scene, and with his former self. He corroborated everything, remembered everything, enjoyed everything, and underwent the strangest agitation. It was not until now, when the bright faces of his former self and Dick were turned from them, that he remembered the Ghost, and became conscious that it was looking full upon him, while the light upon its head burnt very clear.

"A small matter," said the Ghost, "to make these silly folks so full of gratitude."

"Small!" echoed Scrooge.

The Spirit signed to him to listen to the two apprentices, who were pouring out their hearts in praise of Fezziwig: and when he had done so, said,

"Why! Is it not? He has spent but a few pounds of your mortal money: three or four perhaps. Is that so much that he deserves this praise?"

"It isn't that," said Scrooge, heated by the remark, and speaking unconsciously like his former, not his latter, self. "It isn't that, Spirit. He has the power to render us happy or unhappy; to make our service light or burdensome; a pleasure or a toil. Say that his power lies in words and looks; in things so slight and insignificant that it is impossible to

add and count 'em up: what then? The happiness he gives, is quite as great as if it cost a fortune.”

A recurrent theme of the text is friendship – seen in the parties, what Dickens calls the “Friendly gatherings”, that typify the festive season. Like the common welfare that Fred mentions as part of his Carol Philosophy, Dickens is keen to stress how Christmastime is a time of coming together with one’s fellow man. It is notable that this passage is festooned with the ‘Merry Christmas’ greeting for which the text is famed. Thus, far from parties being the indulgent, expensive frivolities that Scrooges sees, they are important acts of generosity to one’s fellow man and spaces in which individuals can celebrate their common humanity.

Fezziwig’s Christmas party is a key moment in this regard. Yet here, unlike the first passage, there is not an explicit discussion of virtue. Rather, the scene (and the Fezziwigs) act as exemplars. What we see are the effects of people acting with generosity and gratitude in ways that chime with Christmastide activities. Fezziwig benefacts happiness – all activity is directed towards creating joy amongst his employees, in direct contrast to Scrooge and his workforce.

All of this implicit moral content therefore requires the reader to be attuned to the different stylistic tricks that Dickens employs. For example, personification. Throughout the text, Dickens has used the personification of setting to reflect Scrooge’s character. Here we see a variation on that technique when we are told Fezziwig “laughed all over himself, from his shoes to his organ of benevolence”. Embodying virtue in this way is critical to the novella’s use of characters as moral exemplars.

Another way in which Dickens evokes the communal virtues of Christmas is in his narrative technique. Here we get a rare incursion from the narrator. This is one of the few passages in which we see the narrator addressed as “I” and the reader as “you”. The combined effect is one of a personal immediacy – in essence, Dickens is reflecting at a narratorial style level collective, friendly, and communal virtues. Supporting this, the metaphors of light and warmth continue to be evidenced in the passage as do images of closeness.

One particular image of note concerns the virtue of gratitude: “A small matter,” said the Ghost, “to make these silly folks so full of gratitude.” Such a description construes individuals as containers and gratitude as quantifiable. It is a construal that reflects the ways in which we describe gratitude in everyday life, but here is given added significance in that it directly speaks to the ‘quantifying’ outlook Scrooge has in life:

“Small!” echoed Scrooge.

But if they had been twice as many—ah, four times—old Fezziwig would have been a match for them, and so would Mrs. Fezziwig. As to her, she was worthy to be his partner in every sense of the term. If that’s not high praise, tell me higher, and I’ll use it. A positive light appeared to issue from Fezziwig’s calves. They shone in every part of the dance like moons.

Here, the effect of Dickens combining counting-house vocabulary and virtue with the imagery of light is deliberate hyperbole: an excess that matches Fezziwig's generosity with prose style. This is not simply a literary flourish however, for such financial balancing ultimately underpins the narrative trajectory of the text, in which Scrooge is to be held to account.

With respect to that trajectory, it's worth remembering that this scene is a vision, the novella a ghost story. We are told: "During the whole of this time, Scrooge had acted like a man out of his wits. His heart and soul were in the scene, and with his former self." This is a curious description and goes to the heart of the text's central message about how characters can change. That this is a ghost story is not simply a Gothic ploy but invests in the genre a morally educative role about resurrection. Like Scrooge, the reader is plunged into this fictional world of apparitions in order that they too might recognise and learn something of their own moral character.

Suggested questions

- How is gratitude described? Does this reflect how we talk about gratitude today? How does the description reflect or contradict Scrooge's outlook on the world?
- What virtues do Fezziwig and his guests display? Are these particular to Christmas?
- Scrooge sees Fezziwig as "alive again": how do resurrection and renewal feature in the novella?
- In what ways does the fact that 'A Christmas Carol' is a ghost story help the reader to understand its central message?