A CHRISTMAS CAROL · YEAR 10 · LESSON 4

# Stave 1: Charity and the poor

“Decrease the surplus population”: Scrooge, Malthus and the Poor Law

- Analyse how Dickens presents attitudes to poverty
- Explain the significance of the Poor Law references
- Use context to deepen analysis

AO1 · AO2 · AO3

STARTER · 5 MINUTES · RETRIEVAL

# Quick-fire recall

1. Which two techniques make up Scrooge’s opening list?
2. Complete: hard and sharp as…
3. What is an intrusive narrator?
4. Who is Scrooge’s clerk?
5. What is Scrooge’s nephew called?

Type each answer in the chat on “send”, or write them in your book. Score out of 5.

CHECK YOUR ANSWERS

# Did you get them?

1. Which two techniques make up Scrooge’s opening list? **Listing / asyndeton**
2. Complete: hard and sharp as… **flint**
3. What is an intrusive narrator? **One who openly gives opinions**
4. Who is Scrooge’s clerk? **Bob Cratchit**
5. What is Scrooge’s nephew called? **Fred**

Tally your score. Anything missed becomes a revision target.

THE BIG QUESTION

# What message about Victorian society does Dickens give through Scrooge’s conversation with the charity gentlemen?

### Aim

Analyse how Dickens presents attitudes to poverty

### Aim

Explain the significance of the Poor Law references

### Aim

Use context to deepen analysis

**Success:** I can support a clear argument with short quotations, analyse word choices and link to context.

CONTEXT

# Malthus and the Poor Law

## Malthus

Thought that helping the poor only increased the population. “Surplus population” echoes this idea.

## The Poor Law

Workhouses and prisons were the official answer to poverty. Conditions were harsh.

## Dickens’s view

He believed the rich had a **duty** to help. Scrooge is the extreme of the opposite view.

## Treadmill

A punishment machine used in prisons. Scrooge mentions it casually.

EXTRACT · STAVE 1 · PART 1 OF 3

# The charity collectors

“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’m very glad to hear it.”

EXTRACT · STAVE 1 · PART 2 OF 3

# The charity collectors

“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. Besides—excuse me—I don’t know that.”

“But you might know it,” observed the gentleman.

EXTRACT · STAVE 1 · PART 3 OF 3

# The charity collectors

“It’s not my business,” Scrooge returned. “It’s enough for a man to understand his own business, and not to interfere with other people’s. Mine occupies me constantly. Good afternoon, gentlemen!”

Seeing clearly that it would be useless to pursue their point, the gentlemen withdrew. Scrooge resumed his labours with an improved opinion of himself, and in a more facetious temper than was usual with him.

Meanwhile the fog and darkness thickened so, that people ran about with flaring links, proffering their services to go before horses in carriages, and conduct them on their way.

TASK 1 · ANNOTATE

# Read again and annotate

1. Highlight evidence that **poverty** is a serious problem.
2. Find Scrooge’s **repeated rhetorical questions**. What do they show?
3. Underline where Scrooge says he supports the “establishments”. Is he **sincere** or **sarcastic**?
4. Find Scrooge’s **final reaction** after the gentlemen leave.
5. What is the effect of ending on the **fog and darkness**?

Post your best quotation and one word of analysis in the chat.

TASK 2 · ZOOM IN

# Key quotation

> “If they would rather die, they had better do it, and decrease the surplus population.”
>
> Stave 1

1. **Word:** what does “surplus” suggest about the poor?
2. **Tone:** how does “they had better do it” sound?
3. **Structure:** what happens in Stave 3 when this is repeated?
4. **Context:** Malthus, workhouses; which links best?

TASK 3 · MODEL

# Model: context and analysis together

| | |
|---|---|
| **Point** | Dickens uses Scrooge to criticise those who dismissed the poor as a burden. |
| **Evidence** | He says the poor “had better do it, and decrease the surplus population”. |
| **Analysis** | The word “surplus” reduces people to leftovers, suggesting Scrooge sees them as worthless, while “had better do it” gives a cold command rather than a thought. |
| **Context** | The phrase echoes Malthus’s theory and the harsh logic of the 1834 Poor Law. |
| **Link** | Dickens makes the opinion shocking so that readers question it. |

TASK 4 · WRITE (12 MINUTES)

# Write: Scrooge and poverty

Write **one paragraph** on how Dickens uses the charity gentlemen to criticise Victorian attitudes. Use two short quotations.

**Check yourself, then paste your paragraph into the chat**

- Clear point about Dickens’s message
- Two quotations, one from each speaker
- Word-level analysis
- Context woven in (Poor Law or Malthus)
- Link to your point

TASK 5 · WHOLE NOVEL · ONE LINKING SENTENCE FOR EACH

# Link it to the rest of the novella

“Are there no workhouses?”
Stave 3 · Scrooge’s words thrown back at him

“This boy is Ignorance. This girl is Want.”
Stave 3 · the cost of ignoring the poor

“Mankind was my business.”
Stave 1 · Marley sees where he went wrong

“I will honour Christmas in my heart”
Stave 4 · Scrooge changes

EXIT TICKET

# 3-2-1

1. **3** pieces of context linked to this scene
2. **2** words that show Scrooge’s attitude
3. **1** way the gentlemen are used as a contrast

Type your 3-2-1 in the chat.