A CHRISTMAS CAROL · YEAR 10 · LESSON 14

# Example essay: the Cratchits

A model answer to the practice question

- Read a high-level response
- Identify the frame in action
- Use it to improve your own writing

AO1 · AO2 · AO3

STARTER · 5 MINUTES · RETRIEVAL

# Quick-fire recall

1. Which AO is “context”?
2. How many paragraphs are in the frame (body)?
3. What is the job of a conclusion?
4. What does “embed” a quotation mean?
5. Name one pivot phrase.

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 AO is “context”? **AO3**
2. How many paragraphs are in the frame (body)? **Four (2 extract, 2 novel)**
3. What is the job of a conclusion? **Answer the question and state Dickens’s message**
4. What does “embed” a quotation mean? **Weave it into your own sentence**
5. Name one pivot phrase. **“This idea is developed later when…”**

Tally your score. Anything missed becomes a revision target.

THE TASK

# Today’s example essay

> Starting with this extract (Stave 3), explore how Dickens uses the Cratchit family to show the struggles of the poor.

This is a model written to show the **frame** in action. As you read each paragraph:

1. Find the **point**, the **quotation** and the **analysis**.
2. Underline one **word** that is analysed.
3. Find the context and the writer’s purpose.

## EXAMPLE ESSAY · INTRODUCTION

In A Christmas Carol, Dickens uses the Cratchit family to expose the hardship of the Victorian poor while insisting that they deserve compassion, not contempt. In this extract from Stave 3, the Ghost of Christmas Present shows Scrooge the family's Christmas dinner, a moment midway through the novella that begins to soften his heart. Writing in 1843, when the 1834 Poor Law pushed families like the Cratchits towards the workhouse, Dickens wants his readers to see poverty as a social failure rather than a personal one.

### Why it works

**AO1**
Clear "big idea" in the first sentence, answering the question directly.

**EXTRACT**
Places the extract in the novella: where it comes and why it matters.

**AO3**
Context woven in with a purpose (Poor Law, 1843), not added as a fact.

## EXAMPLE ESSAY · PARAGRAPH 1 · THE EXTRACT (BEGINNING)

Dickens presents the Cratchits’ poverty through the comic exaggeration of their dinner. The narrator claims that “you might have thought a goose the rarest of all birds; a feathered phenomenon”, which suggests that such a meal is a luxury for them. The hyperbole of “phenomenon” is gently ironic, because the goose is modest, yet the family treats it with awe, implying how little they normally have. Furthermore, the lively verbs in “made”, “mashed”, “sweetened” and “dusted” show every member contributing, which reveals a family bound by cooperation rather than wealth. Dickens perhaps does this so that comfortable readers, who might expect the poor to be lazy or bitter, see warmth and effort instead.

### Why it works

**AO1**
Point is supported by an exact, embedded quotation.

**AO2**
Single-word analysis (“phenomenon”) and a technique (hyperbole).

**READER**
“Dickens perhaps does this so that…” explains effect and purpose.

## EXAMPLE ESSAY · PARAGRAPH 2 · THE EXTRACT (TURNING POINT)

However, Dickens does not let the reader forget the reality behind the celebration. The narrator states that “they were not a handsome family; they were not well dressed; their shoes were far from being water-proof”, and the repeated negative structure builds a list of deprivation that accumulates like a burden. The reference to “the inside of a pawnbroker’s” suggests that the family has to pawn possessions to survive. Yet the conjunction “But” pivots the sentence towards “happy, grateful, pleased with one another”, a cumulative list that gives them dignity. The reader is encouraged to admire a family who have little but value each other, challenging the Malthusian belief that the poor are a burden on society.

### Why it works

**AO2**
Comments on structure inside a sentence: the pivot at “But”.

**LAYERS**
Gives two layers of meaning: material lack and emotional wealth.

**AO3**
Context used to explain Dickens’s attack on Malthusian ideas.

## EXAMPLE ESSAY · PARAGRAPH 3 · THE NOVEL (TINY TIM)

Dickens extends this presentation through Tiny Tim, whose illness shows the real danger of poverty. When the Ghost warns, “I see a vacant seat […] in the poor chimney-corner, and a crutch without an owner, carefully preserved”, the repetition of absence makes death feel already present. The adjective “poor” carries a double meaning of both poverty and pity, so the reader feels sympathy for the child and anger at the system that fails him. By showing a child’s survival depending on money the family does not have, Dickens suggests that poverty is a matter of life and death. The Ghost then returns Scrooge’s own words, “decrease the surplus population”, shaming the man who once dismissed families like this.

### Why it works

**WHOLE TEXT**
Moves to a different part of the novel to answer “in the novel as a whole”.

**AO2**
Explores a double meaning (“poor”) and links to an earlier quotation.

**WRITER**
Shows what Dickens wants readers to feel and why.

## EXAMPLE ESSAY · PARAGRAPH 4 · THE NOVEL (POWER AND CHANGE)

Elsewhere, Dickens links the Cratchits' hardship directly to Scrooge's power. Bob is paid only "fifteen 'Bob' a-week", and the pun on his nickname, which was also slang for a shilling, reduces a man's wages to his own name. In Stave 1, his fire "looked like one coal", controlled by his employer, which shows that the family's struggles are caused by those with power. This is why Stave 5 matters: Scrooge becomes "a second father" to Tiny Tim, who "did NOT die". The capitalised "NOT" triumphantly overturns the earlier prophecy and shows that Dickens believes wealthy individuals can save the poor if they choose to act.

### Why it works

**WHOLE TEXT**
Uses Stave 1 and Stave 5, so the answer covers the whole novella.

**AO2**
Typography ("NOT") and structure: prophecy overturned.

**AO1**
Builds a line of argument, from cause to solution.

## EXAMPLE ESSAY · CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Dickens uses the Cratchit family to show that the poor endure real suffering, yet remain loving and deserving of help. Through their joy and Tiny Tim’s fragility, he persuades readers, and Scrooge, that society has a duty to protect families like them, and that compassion can change lives.

### Why it works

**AO1**
Returns to the question and the “big idea”, without repeating the introduction.

**WRITER**
Ends on Dickens’s message and the effect on the reader.

EXAMINER’S VIEW

# Why this is a high-level response

## AO1

A clear, developing argument. Quotations are short, exact and embedded.

## AO2

Single words, devices and structure are analysed. Layers of meaning are explored.

## AO3

Context is woven in to explain Dickens’s purpose, not tacked on.

**Level guide (paraphrased; check against the official AQA mark scheme):** Level 6 convincing, critical exploration · Level 5 thoughtful, developed · Level 4 clear, consistent · Level 3 explained, structured · Level 2 some awareness · Level 1 simple.

TASK · SPOT IT

# Find the features

1. Find one **topic sentence** that answers the question directly.
2. Find a place where the writer moves from the extract to the **whole novel**.
3. Find a **layered** interpretation using “not only… but also…” or “perhaps”.
4. Find one sentence of **context** that explains **why** Dickens wrote this.
5. Which paragraph is **weakest**? How could you improve it?

Post your answers in the chat. We will compare them.

TASK · YOUR TURN

# Write your own paragraph

Choose a **different** quotation from the same extract. Write one paragraph in the same structure: **Point · Evidence · Analysis · Context · Link**.

**Check yourself**

- Point answers the question
- Short, embedded quotation
- Word-level analysis
- Effect on the reader
- Context and Dickens’s purpose

EXIT TICKET

# 3-2-1

1. **3** features of a high-level paragraph
2. **2** ways the essay links extract to novel
3. **1** target for your own writing

Type your 3-2-1 in the chat.