A Christmas Carol – Knowledge Organiser

1 Scrooge is in his counting-house on Christmas Eve. Scrooge is rude to Fred, refuses the charity collectors and reluctantly allows his clerk to take Christmas Day off.

2 The chain-wearing ghost of Jacob Marley visits to warn Scrooge that he will be visited by three spirits. The Ghost of Christmas Past takes him to his old schoolhouse. They visit young Scrooge at a Christmas party thrown by Mr Fezziwig.

3 We see Scrooge's fiancée, Belle, leaving him. Scrooge cannot bear anymore and trues to extinguishes the ghost's light. They visit nephew Fred's house. The Ghost of Christmas Present takes him to Bob Cratchit's home to show how the poor can still be happy.

4 The tone of the novella shifts with the arrival of the deathly Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come, who shows Scrooge a dark future where he has died a lonely man. Scrooge spots two impoverished children under the ghost's cloak. Scrooge sees his name on a grave and begs for salvation. The ghost relents and saves him.

5 Scrooge wakes on Christmas morning and is enlightened and transformed. Scrooge is forgiven: he goes for dinner at Fred's house. He is the saviour of himself and also of Tiny Tim (who now lives).

Stave	Key Quotation	Related themes/ideas
1: Marley's Ghost visits Scrooge	Marley was dead, to begin with	Intrigue and the unexpected
	Oh! But he was a tight-fisted hand at the grindstone, Scrooge! A squeezing, wrenching, grasping, scraping, clutching, covetous, old sinner!	A biased narrator
	Hard and sharp as flint (Flint = hard rock used to make tools)	Scrooge
	solitary as an oyster	Isolation
	"decrease the surplus population"	Attitudes to the poor; Malthus
	"Are there no prisons? Are there no workhouses?	Attitudes to the poor
	"It's enough for a man to mind his own business, and not to interfere with other people's."	Greed and benevolence
	"Are there no prisons? Are there no workhouses?"	Cold logic
	"I wear the chain I forged in life" *Jacob Marley*	Consequences and fate
	"There is no light part of my penance" *Jacob Marley*	Punishment
2: Ghost of Christmas Past	From the crown of its head there sprung a bright clear jet of light	Symbols
	"Your reclamation, then. Take heed!" *Ghost of Christmas Past*	Transformation
	"Your lip is trembling," said the Ghost. "And what is that upon your cheek?"	Transformation and emotions
	A solitary child, neglected by his friends, is left there still	Childhood and determinism
	"The happiness he gives is quite as much as if it cost a fortune." *about Fezziwig*	Generosity and leadership
	"You weigh everything by gain." *Belle*	Obsession and avarice
3: Ghost of Christmas Present	Scrooge entered timidly, and hung his head before this Spirit	Transformation
	They had smelled the goose and known it for their own… these young Cratchits danced about the table.	Poverty and family
	With an interest he had never felt before…"No,no…Oh no, kind Spirit! Say he will be spared'	Transformation and empathy
	"If he die, he better do it, and decrease the surplus population" *Ghost of Christmas Present reminds Scrooge of something he said in Stave One*	Attitudes to the poor (and the Malthusian Catastrophe)
	"I am sorry for him […] Who suffers by his ill whims? Himself, always." *Fred*	Forgiveness and isolation
	Uncle Scrooge had imperceptibly become so gay and light of heart	Family and isolation
	"This boy is Ignorance. This girl is Want. Beware them both […] They are Man's" *Ghost of Christmas Present*	Mankind's responsibility
4: Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come	"unwatched, unwept, uncared for, was the body of this man"	Isolation
	"Avarice, hard dealing, griping cares? They have brought him to a rich end, truly!"	Wealth versus poverty
	"Are these the shadows of the things that Will be, or are they the shadows of the things that May be only?"	Transformation
	"Tell me I may sponge away the writing on this stone!"	Redemption, regret, change
5: Scrooge transformed	No fog, no mist; clear, bright, jovial…heavenly sky, sweet, fresh air	Transformation
	"I am as light as a feather, I am as happy as an angel, I am as merry as a schoolboy…I am as giddy as a drunken man"	Transformation and childhood, change
	"I don't know how long I have been among the Spirits. I don't know anything. I'm quite a baby."	Logic
	Scrooge regarded everyone with a delighted smile.	Transformation
	"As good a friend, as good a master, and as good a man as the good old city knew"	Change, happiness, hope

Key Vocabulary

Novella
Parable
Supernatural
Avaricious
Isolated
Logical
Misanthropic
Dynamic character
Transformation
Enlightenment
Compassion
Forgiveness
Didactic
Deterministic
Adversity
Abundance
Malthusian
Catastrophe

Context	
Poverty	Dickens experienced poverty as a child when his father was sent to a debtors' prison and young Charles had to work in a factory. The harsh conditions made a lasting impression: he sought to draw attention to the plight of the poor by setting the novella against a grim background of Victorian poverty.
London and inequality	The frequent and abrupt jumping between scenes of middle class comfort (Fred) and grinding poverty (The Cratchits, Beetling shop) emphasises the close proximity and **contrast** of the different classes, and highlights the Christian concept of 'love thy neighbour'. The **urban setting** allows Dickens to exercise his fondness for **hyperbole**, with the exaggerated extremes of poverty adding to the effect of the 'plight of the poor'.
The New Poor Law, 1834	In order to deter poor people from claiming financial help, the government made claimants live in workhouses: essentially, prisons for the poor. Dickens hated this law. He spent 1843 touring factories and mines in England and wished to highlight the situation facing poor people. A Christmas Carol was published soon after – in December 1843.
The ingredients for a hit novella	Dickens previous novel had not sold well and so he needed a hit. He deliberately combined elements that he knew would appeal to Victorian readers: a **parable**; the **supernatural** in the form of a ghost story; a **happy conclusion**; and **Christmas**.
Dickens' construction of secular Christmas values	Until the mid-1800s, Christmas was solely a religious festival. Dickens helped to popularise many of the cultural elements that we now associate with Christmas. This **imagery** (food, decorations, music) is used throughout the novella. This has contributed to a more **secular** (non-religious) Christmas, based on the values of goodwill, benevolence and forgiveness.

Key Themes	
Transformation	The novella contains many examples of transformation: the transformation of young Scrooge into an embittered old man; his transformation to a benevolent man; transformation of Marley from selfish human to eternally-suffering ghost; the transformation of the future – to save Scrooge and Tiny Tim. Dickens' basic message may have been that it is never too late to change; people can take control of their own destiny.
Compassion, Forgiveness and Reclamation	Dickens uses different characters to demonstrate compassion and forgiveness (Fred and Bob who feel pity for him, and then forgive him) and how these people lead happy lives. In contrast, he shows the selfish nature of mankind in the dark and sinister Stave Four. Scrooge's reform is a result of his newfound capacity for compassion and kindness.
Poverty and Greed	Dickens wanted to highlight the plight of the poor in Victorian England, and how they were exploited by the capitalist wealthy. ***He uses Scrooge as a vehicle to show that financial wealth does not mean contentment.*** Scrooge is impoverished in other ways (family, friends, happiness). Dickens created a wealthy man who doesn't allow himself to enjoy any benefits of wealth versus the Cratchits: a family who are happy despite their poverty.
Isolation versus Family	We quickly learn that Scrooge ('solitary as an oyster') and Marley are isolated, and unhappy, characters. The warmth and emotional richness of families (Bob Cratchitt's, Fred's, his ex-fiancée's) serve as a contrast to Scrooge's self-determined isolation. ***Scrooge's unhappy childhood may have contributed to his future behaviour (deterministic***). The message may be that family is the cornerstone of a happy society.
Logic and the passage of time	Scrooge's cold sense of logic is continually disrupted, helping to dismantle his cold and rational view of society. He initially dismisses the supernatural appearances, before then submitting to them. The ghosts are late to visit him, and then distort time as they seem to visit him all in one night – not over three nights as promised. This discarding of logic reflects Dickens' criticism of the heartless economical logic of the New Poor Law.
The Malthusian Catastrophe	Robert Malthus was a controversial economist who warned that the industrial revolution would lead to population growth; this population growth could then lead only to starvation and disease as there would not be enough resource for everyone. This concept was named the 'Malthusian Catastrophe'. Malthus therefore opposed the poor laws as they aimed to get people into factories to increase productivity. **Dickens highlights the Malthusian Catastrophe** when Scrooge refers to the workhouses as a logical solution for the poor.

Character Summaries	*Remember – each character is **constructed** by the writer for a purpose*
The character of Scrooge…	***…represents avarice (greed), cold logic and the negative effects of isolation.*** The protagonist initially dismisses the goodwill and generosity associated with Christmas. After being forced to transform, he becomes a symbol of Christmas spirit in Stave Five. He is a dynamic character (a character who changes). A man who seems to embody everything about relentlessly striving capitalist spirit of the time.
The Cratchit family…	***…symbolise poverty, the power of family and cheerfulness in adversity.*** Bob is Scrooge's downtrodden but loyal employee. His family are a symbol of Victorian poverty, cheerfulness in adversity, togetherness and Christmas Spirit. Bob shows pity for Scrooge, and provides a contrast to Scrooge's isolation and meanness. Tiny Tim is an emblem for noble poverty; he accepts his disability without complaint.
The character of Fred…	***…represents compassion, forgiveness and the power of family. He serves as a contrast to Scrooge.*** Fred epitomises the concept of goodwill and forgiveness, refusing to be discouraged by his uncle's misery. People (such as the Cratchits) speak highly of Fred and his generosity, in contrast to how they speak of Scrooge. Fred shows that Scrooge has chosen isolation and shows forgiveness to Scrooge, welcoming him in Stave Five.
The Ghosts are	***…supernatural mechanisms, directing Scrooge on a journey of reflection and reclamation.***
The Ghost of Christmas Past…	***…is a symbol of childhood, truth and enlightenment.*** The spirit forces Scrooge to reflect on painful memories of childhood and his youth in order to properly understanding his self. The bright light which emanates from his head represents truth. The cap which Scrooge uses to try to extinguish the light is a symbol ignoble human desires and ignorance.
The Ghost of Christmas Present…	***…represents goodwill, plenty and the festival of Christmas.*** He is the symbol of abundance. He holds a cornucopia (a horn of plenty). He represents Christmas, saying that he has "More than 1,800" brothers (each Christmas since Christ). When Scrooge declares that this is a 'tremendous family to provide for," the ghost is angry because Scrooge's only concern is the ***cost*** of this festival of goodwill.
The Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come…	***…symbolises a catastrophic future for mankind.*** The spirit resembles the figure of the 'grim reaper' in his description, or Death. His silent characterisation and ominous atmosphere create the idea of an unknowable and threatening future. He makes the final decision to show mercy towards Scrooge ("The kind hand trembled" when pointing to grave) and complete his 'reclamation'.

Form and Structure

- The **novella** is narrated by a **didactic third-person narrator**, who manipulates our impression of Scrooge with scathing descriptions of him.
- We sometimes hear Dickens' voice when he adds a touch of comedy: this **authorial intrusion** is designed to win over the reader, making them more agreeable to Dickens' message.
- It is a **parable**: a moral story with a strong message; it is a simple didactic tale.
- It's arranged in **five staves** (not chapters) as a **metaphor** for an actual Christmas carol. It contains musical imagery throughout (eg. church bells)
- Many of the characters are **allegorical figures**: characters who stand for ideas (Eg. Fred stands for tolerance and forgiveness)
- **Gothic imagery** creates feelings of suspense, fear and tension
- **Circular structure:** Scrooge's change is emphasised. In Stave 5 he makes amends with all those he rejected in Stave 1: charity collectors, caroller in first stave to boy in Sunday clothes, Bob Cratchit (haggling over coal to giving him a raise)