A Christmas Carol

The Case of Ebenezer Scrooge

An Interactive Literary Investigation



A CHRISTMAS CAROL
THE CASE OF EBENEZER SCROOGE



Created by Teach Beside Me ©2026
All rights reserved. Not to be edited, shared, resold or hosted online elsewhere. For personal or individual classroom use.

TEACH BESIDE ME

BEFORE YOU BEGIN: A CHRISTMAS CAROL

BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR LITERARY INVESTIGATORS



ABOUT THE STORY

A Christmas Carol was written by Charles Dickens and published in England in 1843. The story follows Ebenezer Scrooge, a wealthy but bitter businessman who experiences a series of extraordinary events on Christmas Eve.

Dickens divided the story into five sections called staves. A stave is a set of lines used to write music. The name fits a story called A Christmas Carol.

LIFE IN VICTORIAN ENGLAND

When Dickens wrote A Christmas Carol, England was experiencing major changes. Factories and growing cities created new opportunities, but many people lived in terrible poverty.

Children from poor families sometimes had to work instead of attending school. Families struggled to afford food, housing, and heat. People who could not support themselves might end up in workhouses, where conditions were often harsh.

Dickens was deeply concerned about poverty and the way society treated those who were struggling. He used his stories to encourage readers to think about kindness, generosity, and responsibility toward others.

WHAT TO WATCH FOR AS YOU READ



As you investigate the story, pay attention to:

Character: What do Scrooge's words and actions reveal about him?
Choices: How do his decisions affect himself and others?
Symbols: What objects or events might represent larger ideas?
Change: What experiences challenge Scrooge's beliefs?
Evidence: Which details help explain his transformation?



BEFORE OPENING THE CASE

Consider this question:
Can people truly change, or do they remain essentially the same throughout their lives?

Keep your initial thoughts in mind. You will return to this question at the end of the investigation.

THE CASE OF EBENEZER SCROOGE
AN INTERACTIVE LITERARY INVESTIGATION

THE MYSTERY

Something extraordinary has happened in London.

Ebenezer Scrooge, a wealthy businessman known for his cold manner, dislike of Christmas, and lack of generosity, has reportedly undergone an astonishing transformation.
Those who have known him for years can scarcely believe he is the same man! What could have caused such a dramatic change?

Your mission is to investigate the events surrounding Ebenezer Scrooge's transformation. As you read Charles Dickens's A Christmas Carol, you will examine evidence, investigate relationships, uncover important clues, and consider several possible explanations.

By the end of the investigation, you must determine what caused Scrooge to change and whether his transformation was genuine.

CASE FILE #01: ESTABLISH THE FACTS
STAVE ONE: MARLEY'S GHOST

Before investigating what caused Scrooge's transformation, you must establish what kind of man he was before the extraordinary events began.

READ: Read Stave One through the scene where Scrooge and his clerk leave the counting-house on Christmas Eve.

SUBJECT UNDER INVESTIGATION

Name: Ebenezer Scrooge
Occupation: _____
Former business partner: _____
Living family member mentioned: _____
Employee: _____

INITIAL OBSERVATIONS

1. How does Dickens describe Scrooge's personality at the beginning of the story? Identify two descriptive words or phrases from the text.

2. What is Scrooge's attitude toward Christmas? Give one example from the story that reveals his feelings.

CASE FILE #01 EXAMINE THE EVIDENCE: SCROOGE'S BEHAVIOR

STAVE ONE: MARLEY'S GHOST

A person's character is often revealed through the way they treat other people. Before investigating Scrooge's transformation, examine how he behaves toward those around him.

READ: Return to Scrooge's conversations with his nephew Fred, his employee Bob Cratchit, and the gentlemen collecting donations for the poor in Stave One.

EVIDENCE LOG

Record what Scrooge says or does in each encounter. Then consider what his behavior reveals about his character.

PERSON	WHAT SCROOGE SAYS OR DOES	WHAT THIS REVEALS
Fred (his nephew)		
Bob Cratchit (Scrooge's clerk)		
The charity collectors		

EXAMINE HIS MOTIVES

1. Scrooge is wealthy, yet he seems unwilling to share his money. What does the evidence suggest he values most? Explain your reasoning.

2. Is Scrooge simply an unpleasant man, or do his words suggest that he holds deeper beliefs about other people and society? Identify one belief and support it with evidence.

QUESTION YOUR ASSUMPTIONS

Are we assuming that Scrooge has always been this way?

What information would you need to determine whether Scrooge's personality has changed over time?



CASE FILE #01 EXAMINE THE WARNING: MARLEY'S GHOST

STAVE ONE: MARLEY'S GHOST

Scrooge's former business partner, Jacob Marley, has been dead for seven years. Yet on Christmas Eve, Marley appears with a troubling warning.

READ: Finish Stave One, paying close attention to Marley's appearance, his regrets, and the warning he gives Scrooge.

EVIDENCE #01: THE CHAIN

Marley's ghost carries a heavy chain made of objects associated with his former business.

1. What objects make up Marley's chain, and what does he say about how he made it?

2. What might the chain symbolize about the way Marley lived his life?

EVIDENCE #02: THE WARNING

Marley tells Scrooge that he will be visited by three Spirits.

3. What does Marley regret about his life? How does this challenge the values Scrooge has shown so far?

4. Why does Marley believe Scrooge is in danger of suffering a similar fate?

INITIAL THEORY: WHAT COULD CHANGE SCROOGE?

You have now examined Scrooge's behavior and heard Marley's warning. But the cause of Scrooge's reported transformation remains unknown.

Based on the evidence so far, what do you predict might cause Scrooge to change? Explain your reasoning.



CASE FILE #02 RECONSTRUCT THE PAST

STAVE TWO: THE FIRST OF THE THREE SPIRITS



EVIDENCE #03: MEMORIES OF THE PAST

The Ghost of Christmas Past takes Scrooge back to scenes from his younger years. These memories reveal a very different side of the man under investigation.

Your task is to reconstruct Scrooge's past and identify the experiences and decisions that may have shaped his character.

READ: Begin Stave Two. Read through Scrooge's reaction to Fezziwig's party, including his wish to speak to his clerk. Stop before the next memory begins.

RECONSTRUCT THE TIMELINE

Examine each memory and record what it reveals about Scrooge.

MEMORY	WHAT HAPPENED?	WHAT DOES IT REVEAL ABOUT SCROOGE?
A lonely schoolboy		
A visit from his sister, Fan		
Fezziwig's Christmas party		

EXAMINE THE EVIDENCE

1. How does the young Scrooge differ from the man you met in Stave One? Identify one important difference and support it with evidence.

2. Fezziwig and Scrooge are both employers. How does Fezziwig's treatment of his employees compare with Scrooge's treatment of Bob Cratchit?

AN IMPORTANT CLUE

Watching Fezziwig's celebration causes Scrooge to think about his own employee.
What does this reaction suggest about Scrooge's ability to recognize his own mistakes?

CASE FILE #02 INVESTIGATE THE TURNING POINT

STAVE TWO: THE FIRST OF THE THREE SPIRITS

Scrooge's earlier memories reveal that he once experienced friendship, affection, and happiness. But something changed.

READ: Finish Stave Two, paying particular attention to Scrooge's relationship with Belle and the memories that follow.

EVIDENCE #04: A BROKEN RELATIONSHIP

1. Why does Belle end their engagement? What has become more important to Scrooge?

2. What does the later scene of Belle with her family reveal about the life Scrooge might have had?

CIRCUMSTANCES OR CHOICES?

Some of Scrooge's experiences were beyond his control. Others resulted from decisions he made. Examine the evidence from his past.

One experience that may have shaped Scrooge but was beyond his control:

One choice Scrooge made that affected his future:

REVISIT YOUR THEORY

At the end of Case File #01, you predicted what might cause Scrooge to change.

How does this new evidence about his past affect your understanding of him? Does it strengthen or challenge your original theory? Explain.



CASE FILE #03: EXAMINE THE WITNESSES

STAVE THREE: THE SECOND OF THE THREE SPIRITS

The Ghost of Christmas Present shows Scrooge how others are spending Christmas. These scenes offer new evidence about happiness, wealth, and the effect Scrooge has on those around him.

READ: Begin Stave Three and continue through the end of Fred's Christmas gathering.

EVIDENCE #05: CHRISTMAS THROUGH OTHER EYES

Examine the people Scrooge observes. What do their experiences reveal about the beliefs he expressed in Stave One?

WITNESS / GROUP	WHAT DOES SCROOGE OBSERVE?	WHAT BELIEF DOES THIS CHALLENGE?
The Cratchit family		
Tiny Tim		
Fred and his guests		

EXAMINE THE CONTRADICTIONS

1. The Cratchit family has very little money, yet their Christmas celebration is filled with affection. How does this challenge Scrooge's understanding of wealth and happiness?

2. Fred continues to speak kindly of Scrooge despite his uncle's treatment of him. What does this reveal about Fred's character? How might his attitude influence Scrooge?

AN IMPORTANT CLUE

When Scrooge asks about Tiny Tim, the Spirit repeats Scrooge's earlier words about the 'surplus population. Why might hearing his words repeated in a different situation affect Scrooge more than hearing someone simply tell him he is wrong?

CASE FILE #03: INVESTIGATE THE HIDDEN MESSAGE

STAVE THREE: THE SECOND OF THE THREE SPIRITS

As the Ghost of Christmas Present's journey continues, Scrooge encounters scenes that reveal both the joys and hardships of Christmas. The Spirit eventually introduces two frightening children who represent a much larger problem.

READ: Finish Stave Three, paying particular attention to the children revealed beneath the Spirit's robe.

EVIDENCE #06: IGNORANCE AND WANT

1. The Spirit names the two children Ignorance and Want. What does each child represent?

Ignorance: _____

Want: _____

2. Why do you think Dickens chose to represent these problems as children rather than simply describing them?

EXAMINE THE MESSAGE

3. Which of Scrooge's earlier words does the Spirit repeat? How do those words connect to Ignorance and Want?

4. What warning do you think Dickens wanted his readers to understand through this scene? Support your interpretation with evidence.

REVISIT YOUR THEORY

Scrooge has now witnessed the lives of people he previously ignored or dismissed.
Which experience from Stave Three do you think has the greatest potential to change Scrooge's beliefs? Explain why.

CASE FILE #04: INVESTIGATE THE UNKNOWN DEATH

STAVE FOUR: THE LAST OF THE SPIRITS

The Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come shows Scrooge disturbing scenes from a possible future. A mysterious man has died, but his identity remains unknown. Your task is to examine the evidence surrounding his death and determine who he might be—and why his death matters.

READ: Begin Stave Four. Read through the Cratchit family's grief over Tiny Tim and the scene where Scrooge looks into his former office. Stop before he and the Spirit enter the churchyard.

EVIDENCE #07: A DEATH WITHOUT MOURNERS

Examine the reactions of those who discuss the mysterious man's death.

1. How do the businessmen respond to the news of his death? What does their conversation suggest about how he was regarded?

2. What happens to the dead man's belongings? What does this reveal about the way others treated him?

EXAMINE THE CONTRAST

Scrooge also witnesses the Cratchit family grieving the death of Tiny Tim.

3. How does the Cratchit family's response to Tiny Tim's death contrast with the reactions to the unknown man's death?

DEVELOP A THEORY

4. Who do you believe the unknown man might be? Identify two clues from the story that support your theory.

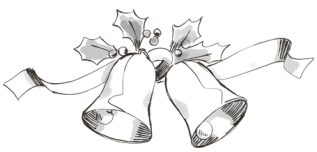
My theory: _____

Clue #1: _____

Clue #2: _____

WHAT DOESN'T ADD UP?

5. What question about the dead man's life or the reactions to his death still remains?



CASE FILE #04: UNCOVER THE IDENTITY

STAVE FOUR: THE LAST OF THE SPIRITS

The final clues reveal the identity of the mysterious man. Scrooge must now confront what his life may become if nothing changes.

READ: Finish Stave Four, including the scene in the churchyard.

EVIDENCE #08: THE FINAL CLUE

1. Whose name appears on the gravestone? How does this discovery confirm or challenge your earlier theory?

2. Why do you think the Spirit allowed Scrooge to witness the reactions to this man's death before revealing his identity?

EXAMINE THE CONSEQUENCES

3. What does the possible future reveal about the lasting effects of Scrooge's choices and relationships?

QUESTION YOUR ASSUMPTIONS

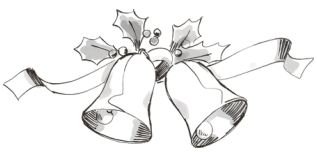
Are we assuming that the future cannot be changed?

4. What does Scrooge promise, and what does that promise reveal about his willingness to change?

REVISIT YOUR THEORY

Scrooge has now confronted his past, witnessed the present, and seen a possible future.

5. Which do you think has had the greatest influence on him so far: regret about his past, compassion for others, or fear of his future? Support your answer with evidence.



CASE FILE #05: TEST THE TRANSFORMATION

STAVE FIVE: THE END OF IT

Scrooge awakens on Christmas morning with a new outlook on life. But has he truly changed, or is he simply reacting to the frightening experiences of the night?

Your task is to examine his actions and determine whether his transformation is genuine.

READ: Finish the story by reading all of Stave Five.

EVIDENCE #09: BEFORE AND AFTER

Compare Scrooge's behavior at the beginning and end of the story. Record specific examples from the text.

AREA OF HIS LIFE	STAVE ONE	STAVE FIVE
Attitude toward Christmas		
Treatment of Bob Cratchit		
Relationship with Fred		
Generosity toward others		

EXAMINE THE CHANGE

1. Which of Scrooge's actions provides the strongest evidence that he has genuinely changed? Explain your choice.

2. Is saying you have changed the same as proving it through your actions? How does Dickens address this difference in Stave Five?



CASE FILE #05: TEST THE THEORIES

STAVE FIVE: THE END OF IT



Now you must evaluate the evidence and explanations for Scrooge's extraordinary transformation.

EVIDENCE #10: WHAT CAUSED THE CHANGE?

For each theory, record one supporting detail and one detail or question the theory leaves unexplained.

THEORY	EVIDENCE FOR	WHAT THIS THEORY LEAVES OUT
Fear: Scrooge changed because he was frightened by his possible future.		
Regret: Scrooge changed because he recognized the mistakes of his past.		
Compassion: Scrooge changed because he began to care about others.		
A combination: Several experiences influenced Scrooge, and he chose to act differently.		

COULD MORE THAN ONE THEORY BE TRUE?

1. Can fear, regret, and compassion all contribute to a person's decision to change? Which combination best explains Scrooge's transformation?

REVISIT YOUR ORIGINAL THEORY

Return to the prediction you recorded in Case File #01.

2. How does your original theory compare with your conclusion now? What evidence most influenced your thinking?

PREPARE YOUR VERDICT

3. What is the most important piece of evidence you will use to defend your final conclusion?

FINAL CASE REPORT

The Case of Ebenezer Scrooge



INVESTIGATOR: _____

CASE STATUS: READY FOR FINAL VERDICT

It is now time to
present your findings.

MY VERDICT: WHAT CAUSED SCROOGE TO CHANGE?

Explain what you believe caused Scrooge's extraordinary transformation. Consider the experiences he witnessed and the choices he made.

THE STRONGEST EVIDENCE

Choose two details from different staves. Explain how each detail supports your verdict.
Evidence #1 (Stave ___):

Evidence #2 (Stave ___):

WAS THE TRANSFORMATION GENUINE?

Do Scrooge's actions at the end of the story prove that he has truly changed? Defend your conclusion using evidence.

THE AUTHOR'S MESSAGE

Revisit the opening question about whether people can truly change. What answer does Dickens suggest through Scrooge’s story?

TEACHER'S GUIDE

The Case of Ebenezer Scrooge: An Interactive Literary Investigation

OVERVIEW

Students investigate the transformation of Ebenezer Scrooge in Charles Dickens's A Christmas Carol. Through five case files, they examine textual evidence, analyze character motivations, explore symbolism, and develop a final verdict about what caused Scrooge to change.

Grades: 5–8
Time: 5–10 class sessions
Materials: Student investigation pages, a copy of A Christmas Carol, pencil

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Students will practice character analysis, making inferences, interpreting symbolism, evaluating textual evidence, and supporting conclusions with reasoning.

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

- Briefly introduce Victorian England, including poverty, child labor, and workhouses.
- Explain that Dickens called the five sections of his story staves, a musical term connected to the title.
- Prepare students for unfamiliar vocabulary and older language. Read challenging passages together as needed.
- Encourage students to distinguish facts from inferences and revise their theories when new evidence emerges.

READING & PACING GUIDE

Free Original Text: https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/46

The original, unabridged text is recommended. Reading time will vary, and some classes may benefit from assigning portions of the story before class.

For five sessions, cover one stave per session and pause at the checkpoint on the next page. For ten sessions, use the checkpoints to split Staves One through Four. Use the final two sessions for reading Stave Five and comparing Scrooge's actions, then evaluating theories and completing the Final Case Report.

TEACHER'S GUIDE

The Case of Ebenezer Scrooge: An Interactive Literary Investigation

CASE FILE READING CHECKPOINTS

#01: Establish the Facts
Stave One: Stop after Scrooge and his clerk leave the counting-house. Complete the profile and behavior analysis, then finish the stave for Marley's warning and the initial theory.

#02: Reconstruct the Past
Stave Two: Stop after Scrooge says he wishes he could speak to his clerk. Finish the stave for Belle and Scrooge's changing priorities.

#03: Examine the Witnesses
Stave Three: Stop at the end of Fred's Christmas gathering. Finish the stave for Ignorance and Want.

#04: Investigate the Unknown Death
Stave Four: Read through the Cratchits' grief and Scrooge's return to his former office. Stop before he enters the churchyard and have students record their predictions. Then finish the stave.

#05: Test the Transformation
Stave Five: Read the entire stave. Compare Scrooge's behavior, evaluate competing theories, and complete the Final Case Report.

Important: Do not reveal the identity of the unknown man in Stave Four before students record their predictions.

TEACHER'S GUIDE

The Case of Ebenezer Scrooge: An Interactive Literary Investigation

SUGGESTED ANSWERS & TEACHING NOTES

The Case of Ebenezer Scrooge
Student responses will vary. Look for accurate textual evidence, thoughtful interpretations, and clear reasoning rather than identical answers.

CASE FILE #01: ESTABLISH THE FACTS
Scrooge's Character: Scrooge is a wealthy, miserly businessman who rejects Christmas, treats Bob Cratchit harshly, dismisses Fred's kindness, and refuses to help the poor.

Marley's Warning: Marley's chain symbolizes the selfish choices he made during life. He regrets neglecting the needs of others and warns Scrooge that he faces a similar fate.

Initial Theory: Accept reasonable predictions supported by the evidence gathered so far.

CASE FILE #02: RECONSTRUCT THE PAST
Childhood and Memories: Scrooge's loneliness, his sister Fan's affection, and Fezziwig's generosity reveal that he was not always cold and unfeeling.

The Turning Point: Belle ends their relationship because Scrooge has increasingly valued money over love. His circumstances influenced him, but his choices also shaped the man he became.

Teaching Note: Encourage students to distinguish between experiences beyond Scrooge's control and decisions for which he is responsible.

CASE FILE #03: EXAMINE THE WITNESSES
Contrasting Perspectives: The Cratchits and Fred demonstrate generosity, affection, and happiness despite limited wealth or Scrooge's unkindness. These scenes challenge Scrooge's beliefs about money and poverty.

Ignorance and Want: Ignorance represents lack of knowledge or education. Want represents poverty and unmet basic needs. The Spirit singles out Ignorance as especially dangerous and echoes Scrooge’s earlier questions about prisons and workhouses.

Teaching Note: The Cratchits show that affection and celebration can coexist with poverty. Fred keeps welcoming Scrooge despite his uncle’s rejection.

CASE FILE #04: INVESTIGATE THE UNKNOWN DEATH

The Mystery: The businessmen's indifference and the theft of the dead man's possessions suggest he was unloved and isolated. This contrasts with the Cratchit family's grief over Tiny Tim.

The Revelation: The dead man is Scrooge. His possible future reveals the consequences of continuing to live selfishly.

Teaching Note: The future is presented as a warning, not an unavoidable outcome. Scrooge recognizes that his choices may change what happens.

CASE FILE #05: TEST THE TRANSFORMATION

Evidence of Change: Scrooge celebrates Christmas, visits Fred, helps the Cratchits, raises Bob's salary, and becomes generous and compassionate The narrator tells us that Tiny Tim survives and Scrooge becomes like a second father to him..

Possible Explanations:

- Fear: He sees the consequences of his possible future.
- Regret: He recognizes mistakes and lost relationships.
- Compassion: He develops concern for others.
- Combination: His experiences work together, leading him to choose a different way of living.

FINAL CASE REPORT

A strong verdict explains what caused Scrooge to change, why the transformation appears genuine, and how the text supports that conclusion.

Dickens presents Scrooge's change as lasting and meaningful. Students may reasonably emphasize different influences, provided they support their interpretations with evidence.

Assessment: Look for two accurate details from different staves, an explanation of how each supports the verdict, evidence about whether the change lasts, and an interpretation of Dickens’s message.