



A Christmas Carol

Lesson 1: The Ghost of Christmas Past

Lesson Plan and Resources

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Clip Resources

The Ghost of Christmas Past takes Scrooge back in time to his childhood.

Clip 1:
A Christmas Carol (2019)

Written by Steven Knight

[▶ Watch here](#) 

Clip 2:
A Christmas Carol (2018)

Written by Simon Callow & Tom Cairns

[▶ Watch here](#) 

Health warning: aspects of the Knight adaptation are dark but the clips chosen for these resources are suitable for a Year 9 audience. However, please be aware, if planning to watch the adaptation as a whole that it includes a scene of suggested sexual humiliation, child abuse and occasional bad language.

Skills and Objectives

GCSE Literature Assessment Objectives

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| AO1 | Read, understand and respond to texts |
| AO2 | Analyse the language, form and structure used by a writer to create meanings and effects, using relevant subject terminology where appropriate |
| AO3 | Show understanding of the relationships between texts and the contexts in which they were written |

GCSE Language Assessment Objectives

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|---------------------|--|
| Reading AO2 | Explain, comment on and analyse how writers use language and structure to achieve effects and influence readers, using relevant subject terminology to support their views |
| Reading AO3 | Compare writers' ideas and perspectives, as well as how these are conveyed, across two or more texts |
| Writing AO5 | Communicate clearly, effectively and imaginatively, selecting and adapting tone, style and register for different forms, purposes and audiences |
| Spoken Language AO8 | Listen and respond appropriately to spoken language, including to questions and feedback to presentations |

Scene Setting

Where we are in the novel and television adaptation:

This is the readers' (and Scrooge's) introduction to the first of the ghosts, as foretold by Jacob Marley: the Ghost of Christmas Past. The extract which could be read before the lesson is from Stave 2, from 'The curtains of his bed were drawn aside...' to '...to see his heightened and excited face; would have been a surprise to his business friends in the city, indeed'.

Starting Points

Pre-reading

Introduce the novella's Preface with **Resource 1.1**. Explore the contrast of 'ghostly' and 'pleasantly' in Dickens' description of the story. Why would someone set a ghost story at Christmas? What is the 'Idea'? After watching either the Callow clip or the Knight clip, discuss what makes the filmed version 'ghostly'?

Post-reading option

Are ghost stories scarier when spoken aloud? Watch the Simon Callow clip and decide how his storytelling creates the atmosphere. Consider how he uses tone, pace, changes of voice, gesture, etc.

Revision

Revisit the definition of 'uncanny'. This might either mean 'something that creates an eerie or unnerving atmosphere' or 'the way familiar things or settings are presented in an unnerving or strange way'. Discuss with students how this feeling is expressed visually in either adaptation?

Main Activities

Novel-to-script bingo

As they watch the Knight adaptation clip, ask students think about the way the Ghost of Christmas Past is described. When they watch a second time, invite them to match the quotes from the novella to the adaptation (using the template provided in **Resource 1.2**). They can tick off the descriptions like a bingo card. Afterwards, students could reflect in writing using the following questions as a starting point:

- What does the adaptation retain from the Dickens? And why? For example: The light coming from the ghost's head becomes the spinning lighted hat; the ghost's changing body shape.
- What does the adaptation omit from the Dickens? And why? For example: the ghost's shining lustrous belt.

Alternatively, this could be delivered as a Speaking and Listening task – after watching the clip, students in teams, each have contrasting quotes of the features of the Ghost of Christmas Past. (Examples of contrasting pairs are matched by colour in **Resource 1.2**.) They must debate which quotes from the original text are reflected in the adaptation. Of course, this will ignite a discussion about why Dickens describes the Ghost of Christmas Past in contradictions and why Knight has only included some details. Students can then compare with the original description from Stave 2 in **Resource 1.3**.

Character and performance

Build up the stage directions of a script from the scene where Scrooge is taken back to his childhood.

- Watch the scene from the Knight adaptation again.
- Then, model script writing, including scene setting and performance-related stage directions .For example:

A snowy road.

Several carts drive in between Scrooge and the Ghost of Christmas Past. With each passing wheel, the Ghost changes appearance.

GHOST: Look again.

The final cart moves on.

SCROOGE: My God.

The final cart moves on.

SCROOGE: (amazed) You are Ali Baba.

- Students then choose their own 5-6 lines of dialogue from the Knight clip and write their own script with stage directions.
- Ask a few students to share their scripts with the class, explaining what stage directions they added and why.
- Finally, re-watch the adaptation clip – compare the students' key moments with what was chosen by the filmmakers. What did they leave out? What did they add? Why



Creative writing

Ask students to travel, as Scrooge does, back through time to their Primary School days: revisiting classrooms, the playground, watching an important event reoccur or imagining an event. If, unlike Scrooge, they had the power to change the past or talk to someone from the past, what would they do or say?

Ask students to write a magazine article explaining that they were given the opportunity to revisit their past at their Primary School, using **Resource 1.4** and the following headings:

- **Introduction** – explain the opportunity given to time travel
- **The Past (main paragraph)** – explain what the school or classroom looked like, who was there, etc.
- **The Event (main paragraph)** – explain what happened during an important event or experience.
- **Conclusion** – explain what they would change things or not and why. Encourage students to consider and reflect in this section

Share key elements of magazine articles e.g. headlines subheadings. In keeping with an explanation, encourage students to write in an unbiased, straightforward way.

Extensions

Advice letter – Ask students ‘How does Scrooge express his feelings/reactions when transported back to his childhood? In the Knight adaptation, for example he tries to rationalise it, even though his reaction represents the start of him feeling again. Invite students to use their empathy and inference skills and put themselves in Scrooge’s shoes, who is grappling with these confused emotions. Once students have made some notes, share with them the key elements of advice writing, e.g. balanced tone and content, modal verbs, use of direct address: ‘you’.

Then ask pairs to complete the following tasks:

- Write a letter from Scrooge to an advice column using the information in the clip about his feelings and reactions and asking for advice. (See model opening of Scrooge’s letter in **Resource 1.5**).
- Swap letters with their partner and write the reply to their letter, giving Scrooge advice and guidance.
- Discuss the letters of reply in terms of what they have learnt about Scrooge and how successfully the advice is expressed.

Symbolism – The use of props and costumes in the adaptations can help to take ideas from the text onto the screen e.g. a chair or a hat. Ask students to identify key props and items of costume from the Knight clip. Are they included in the original text? What do they represent? How do they add to the ‘unearthly’ presentation of the ghost? What do they make the audience think, feel or wonder?

Structure – Students discuss why Dickens begins with the Ghost of Christmas Past. Does it simply make sense chronologically or are there other reasons? What do they expect Scrooge will learn from his past behaviour? What do they predict he has done in the past and does he regret it?

Discuss why Knight introduces the character of Ali Baba as one version of the Ghost of Christmas past: as the youthful side of the ghost; as the lighter version of the sinister older ghost; to make more of the reference to the Ali Baba story than the novella does?

Compare and contrast – Contrast the two adaptation clips with the original text extract from *A Christmas Carol*. What does each one add or subtract from the original story and why? Students might consider setting, props, costume and dialogue.

Intertextuality – Watch the version of this scene in **Mark Gatiss’ 2022 adaptation on ERA**. As this is a theatre production, what considerations have they made that the other adaptations have not needed to? What difference does a live audience make? For example, the ghost’s entrance onto the stage.

Language – Invite students to take a closer look at the description of the ghost in the Callow adaptation. Exactly which details does this leave out from Dickens’ description? For example, the vivid detail about its muscularity, its dress, the light from its head and what it carries. What effects does this have on the impression given of the ghost?

Glossary

From the novella

jocund – cheerful and lighthearted

reverently – with deep respect

vestige – a trace of something that is disappearing

lustrous – shining, gleaming

supplication – a humble request

instantaneous – done in a moment

half-recumbent – partly lying down

From the adaptation

Consumption – a disease, now called tuberculosis

A Christmas Carol Resources for Lesson 1

1.1 Preface to Dickens' A Christmas Carol

Consider why Dickens introduces his tale as 'ghostly' and 'pleasant'.

PREFACE.



I HAVE endeavoured in this Ghostly little book, to raise the Ghost of an Idea, which shall not put my readers out of humour with themselves, with each other, with the season, or with me. May it haunt their houses pleasantly, and no one wish to lay it.

Their faithful Friend and Servant,

C. D.

December, 1843.

1.2 Ghost of Christmas Past description

Play novel-to-script bingo with these descriptions.

| | | |
|-------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|
| like a child | like an old man | not so like a child |
| receded from view | supernatural | strange |
| diminished | a child's proportions | tenderest bloom |
| had not a wrinkle on it | white as if with age | muscular |
| uncommon strength | delicately formed | purest white |
| lustrous belt | wintry emblem | summer flowers |

1.3 Stave 2: the description of the Ghost of Christmas Past

Read how Dickens describes the ghost in the novella.

The curtains of the bed were drawn aside; and Scrooge, starting up into a half-recumbent attitude, found himself face to face with the unearthly visitor who drew them: as close to it as I am now to you, and I am standing in the spirit at your elbow.

It was a strange figure – like a child; yet not so like a child as like an old man, viewed through some supernatural medium, which gave him the appearance of having receded from the view, and being diminished to a child's proportions. Its hair, which hung about its neck and down its back, was white, as if with age; and yet the face had not a wrinkle in it, and the tenderest bloom was on the skin. The arms were very long and muscular; the hands the same, as if its hold were of uncommon strength. Its legs and feet, most delicately formed, were, like those upper members, bare. It wore a tunic of the purest white; and round its waist was bound a lustrous belt, the sheen of which was beautiful. It held a bunch of fresh green holly in its hand; and, in singular contradiction of that wintry emblem, had its dress trimmed with summer flowers. But the strangest thing about it was, that from the crown of its head there sprang a bright clear jet of light, by which all this was visible; and which was doubtless the occasion of its using; in its duller moments, a great extinguisher for a cap, which it now held under its arm.

Even this, though, when Scrooge looked at it with increasing steadiness, was not the strangest quality. For, as it belt sparkled and glittered, now in one part and now in another, and what was light one instant at another time was dark, so the figure itself fluctuated in its distinctness; being now a thing with one arm, now with one leg, now with twenty legs, now a pair of legs without a head, now a head without a body: of which dissolving parts no outline would be visible in the dense gloom wherein they melted away. And, in the very wonder of this, it would be itself again, distinct and clear as ever.



1.4 Time Travel magazine article

Use this structure and these sentence starters to plan and draft your article.

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| Introduction | <i>Recently, I was given the opportunity to...</i> |
| The Past (main paragraph) | <i>My classroom is how I left it all those years ago...</i> |
| The Event (main paragraph) | <i>On the day I revisit the past, I see a scene I will never forget.</i> |
| Conclusion | <i>I chose to change the past...</i> or <i>I chose to leave the past where it is...</i> |

1.5 Letter from Scrooge

Finish Scrooge's letter asking for advice, based on his trip back to his childhood.

Dear Advice Column,

I had a very strange night last night and I would like your advice about what happened.

A 'ghost' appeared. They refused to let me go back to sleep and then showed me a strange whirling contraption.

All of a sudden, there were children running around the walls of my room and...