

**Charles Dickens: A Christmas Carol**

Read this extract from the start of *A Christmas Carol* and then answer the question that follows.

In this extract, Scrooge has been asked to donate some money to charity – he has refused.

*“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.*

*“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.*

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Starting with this extract, how does Dickens portray cruelty in *A Christmas Carol*?

Write about:

- how Dickens presents Scrooge in this extract
- how Dickens presents cruelty and meanness in the novel as a whole.

**[30 marks]**

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## To think about...

### Context

Dickens felt strongly that Victorian society ignored the poverty of its underclass. On the one hand were the rich who enjoyed comfort and feasting at Christmas, and on the other were the poor, including children forced to live in dreadful conditions in workhouses.

### How Dickens presents cruelty and meanness in the novel as a whole – example extract from *Stave 3: The Second of the Three Spirits*

*'Forgive me if I am not justified in what I ask,' said Scrooge, looking intently at the Spirit's robe, 'but I see something strange, and not belonging to yourself, protruding from your skirts. Is it a foot or a claw.'*

*'It might be a claw, for the flesh there is upon it,' was the Spirit's sorrowful reply. 'Look here.'*

*From the foldings of its robe, it brought two children; wretched, abject, frightful, hideous, miserable. They knelt down at its feet, and clung upon the outside of its garment.*

*'Oh, Man. look here. Look, look, down here.' exclaimed the Ghost.*

*They were a boy and a girl. Yellow, meagre, ragged, scowling, wolfish; but prostrate, too, in their humility. Where graceful youth should have filled their features out, and touched them with its freshest tints, a stale and shrivelled hand, like that of age, had pinched, and twisted them, and pulled them into shreds. Where angels might have sat enthroned, devils lurked, and glared out menacing. No change, no degradation, no perversion of humanity, in any grade, through all the mysteries of wonderful creation, has monsters half so horrible and dread.*

*Scrooge started back, appalled. Having them shown to him in this way, he tried to say they were fine children, but the words choked themselves, rather than be parties to a lie of such enormous magnitude.*

*'Spirit. are they yours.' Scrooge could say no more.*

*'They are Man's,' said the Spirit, looking down upon them. 'And they cling to me, appealing from their fathers. This boy is Ignorance. This girl is Want. Beware them both, and all of their degree, but most of all beware this boy, for on his brow I see that written which is Doom, unless the writing be erased. Deny it.' cried the Spirit, stretching out its hand towards the city. 'Slander those who tell it ye. Admit it for your factious purposes, and make it worse.*

*And abide the end.'*

*'Have they no refuge or resource.'* cried Scrooge.

*'Are there no prisons.'* said the Spirit, turning on him  
*for the last time with his own words. 'Are there no workhouses.'*