

How does Charles Dickens present (give) a picture of Victorian society through *A Christmas Carol*, with particular reference to chapter 1 – ‘Marley’s Ghost’?

Understanding the question:

Look at the question a number of times before you start writing; underline or highlight the key words in the question and make sure you understand what is being asked. The question asks what information we discover about Victorian society from reading the book. Remember, it is Charles Dickens’ view of society and we should not make sweeping generalisations about life in Victorian times from reading this one book. Take note of the fact that this essay asks you to focus on one chapter although you should draw on information from elsewhere in the book to back up your points and to show that you have read, and understood, the entire novel.

Making a plan:

Write yourself a list of points before you start and use this as a checklist; remember that the order in which you first note down ideas is not necessarily going to be the right order for your essay so leave space for numbering down the left hand side. Here’s the start of one that you could use:

Order	Point	Example from novel
	Working conditions and employment rights were often bad	Bob Cratchett, Scrooge’s clerk, works with hardly any heat and is threatened with having his pay stopped for taking the day off on Christmas Day.
	Charities existed and were often supported by wealthy, philanthropic businessmen.	A group of men ask Scrooge for a donation to the poor at the beginning of the novel.

Giving an overview:

You don’t need to re-tell the story of *A Christmas Carol* to the examiner – you can assume they already know it – but in the introduction you do need to summarise the ways in which Dickens shows up aspects of Victorian society through the novel.

Writing about social and historical context:

This isn't a history essay so you don't need paragraphs of factual information with statistics but you do need to give some information about Victorian times and link it with the points about the novel. There is no point writing: 'Many people in Victorian times were poor. Scrooge is not poor but he is very mean and nobody likes him.' Think about how you could link these two sentences together so they make sense and add information to your essay.

Don't generalise: examiners often comment that candidates write such statements as, 'Everyone was poor and nobody had enough food.' Again, think about how you can improve that statement so it is true and adds information to your essay. How can you link a statement about food to the story of *A Christmas Carol*? You might look at the episode in which the second ghost (the ghost of Christmas Present) appears; the description of the Cratchetts' Christmas dinner; Scrooge's purchase of the turkey at the end.

Some aspects you might like to comment on:

Although you need to focus on the first chapter don't just write about the opening of the novel – look through and find relevant information from throughout the story.

- You could mention the settings – the area in which Scrooge lives (described in the first chapter) in contrast to his nephew's house.
- Education – look again at the scene in which Scrooge sees himself as a child.
- Childhood – look at some of the other children in the novel and descriptions of their activities.
- Healthcare – what will happen to Tiny Tim if Scrooge does not help?
- The role of the family – numerous examples of a variety of families and their lives in the novel.
- The tradition of Christmas – again there are several Christmases that Scrooge sees on his travels.
- Crime – Scrooge's behaviour at the beginning and the behavior of those in the chapter, 'The Last of It'.

This isn't an exhaustive list ... you think of some more ideas if you can and add to the list here. Use your ideas to fill in your planning table.

Word length:

You should write at least

Deadline:

The first draft of your essay is due in on

Final words.

Good luck.