Development

Dickens introduces Scrooge as isolated, harsh and apparently fixed in his habits. Marley's warning exposes the moral failure behind his claim that business excuses indifference.

Journey through the act or stave

Opening: cold and hard imagery makes his selfishness visible.

At work: he begrudges Bob warmth and Christmas leave.

Visitors: he rejects Fred's invitation and the charity collectors.

At home: Marley's ghost challenges his understanding of responsibility.

1. "solitary as an oyster"

Narrator, Stave 1

Method: Simile

The closed shell suggests isolation and a hard exterior. A hidden capacity for change is a possible reading, not a stated guarantee that every oyster contains a pearl.

2. "squeezing, wrenching, grasping"

Narrator, Stave 1

Method: Accumulation of participles

The crowded active words make money-making feel like predatory physical pressure. This is the narrator's critical description, not Scrooge praising himself.

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3. “Are there no prisons?”

Scrooge, Stave 1

Method: Rhetorical question

He substitutes punishment and institutions for personal compassion. The question lets him avoid imagining the lives of people who need help.

4. “decrease the surplus population”

Scrooge, Stave 1

Method: Dehumanising economic language

People become an excess number rather than individuals. His claim will later return to him when he fears for Tiny Tim.

5. “Mankind was my business”

Marley, Stave 1

Method: Repetition and redefinition of business

Marley’s warning broadens business into responsibility for others. Scrooge is offered a chance to learn what his former partner recognises too late.

Connections to other characters

Bob exposes the power an employer holds over daily comfort and family life.

Fred offers belonging without demanding that Scrooge first earn it.

Marley is both a former partner and a frightening possible future: shared habits can lead to shared consequences.

Develop your interpretation

Basic: Scrooge is selfish and isolated.

Further: the narrator's caricature encourages moral judgement while the ghost story creates an opening for change.

Advanced: his cruelty is personal but also uses a wider social language that treats poverty as somebody else's problem.

Pair the evidence

"surplus population" (Stave 1) ↔ concern for Tiny Tim (Stave 3): an abstract judgement becomes difficult when poverty has a face.

Context

The novella was published in 1843. Dickens challenges harsh attitudes to poverty and the belief that institutions alone discharge an individual's obligations.

Recall questions

What does the oyster comparison suggest without proving?

How does Marley change the meaning of "business"?

Writing task

How does Dickens establish Scrooge's attitudes towards other people in Stave 1?