

In 1860 there lived a mean, cheap old man named Ebenezer Scrooge. This man owned a business in London, England. He was very rich, but he didn't spend his money or give it away—he was a miser. Almost everyone who knew him hated Scrooge.

This year, on the day before Christmas, Scrooge was working in his small office. In the next room was his secretary, Bob Cratchit, who had been working for Scrooge for many years. Bob asked Scrooge if he could put another piece of coal on the fire since it was very cold in the office. Scrooge said he couldn't; he didn't want to have to spend money buying more coal. So Cratchit shivered as he worked. Scrooge didn't care.

Scrooge's nephew came by to see him. His nephew was happy and excited about Christmas and said, "Merry Christmas, Uncle Scrooge!" But Scrooge didn't want to hear it. He said, "Bah, humbug!" He said that Christmas was a waste of time and told his nephew to get out.

A little later two men came into the office. They were trying to raise money to give as a special Christmas gift to the poor people in the city of London. Even though he had plenty of money to give, Scrooge didn't give them a penny. He said it was the fault of the poor people that they were poor, not his.

At the end of the day, Bob Cratchit put on his hat and coat and wished Scrooge a Merry Christmas. Scrooge was angry because he couldn't make Cratchit work on Christmas Day. He said, "Bah, humbug!" and told Cratchit to forget Christmas.

Scrooge walked to his small apartment. He could have lived in a big house, but he didn't want to spend any of his money. There were no lights on in the house, so it was dark and spooky. Scrooge didn't want to pay for lights either.

As Scrooge was unlocking the front door, he looked at the brass knocker. Suddenly he saw the face of his old friend, Jacob Marley, instead of the knocker. Marley had died seven years before. Then the face disappeared.

The face scared Scrooge a little. He went in and upstairs and tried to forget the strange incident. Later he heard bells ringing all over the house, and then there was a clanking of chains coming up the stairs from the cellar.

(continued)

1. How long ago did this story take place?

2. Why didn't Scrooge spend his money if he was so rich?

3. How did people feel about Scrooge?

4. Who was Bob Cratchit?

5. Why did Cratchit have to work in a freezing-cold office?

6. Why was Scrooge's nephew so happy?

7. Describe how Scrooge treated his nephew.

8. Why didn't Scrooge give money to the poor?

9. Why did Scrooge live in a small apartment?

10. What happened when he looked at the brass knocker?

11. Why was Scrooge scared by this?

12. What did Scrooge hear on the stairs?

The sound of clanking chains slowly came up the stairs, closer and closer to the door of Scrooge's apartment. Scrooge knew that the door was locked, but as he watched, a ghost dragging a long chain walked right through the door. It was the ghost of his old friend, Jacob Marley. The chain was made of all the things that Marley (and Scrooge) cared about: money boxes, deeds, safes, and padlocks.

"What do you want with me?" Scrooge asked the ghost. The spirit shook the long chain and told Scrooge that he too would have to drag a chain behind him when he died unless he stopped being so mean and cheap. The ghost said that people who were bad during their lives had to wander after death dragging chains made of the things they had done wrong during life.

Then the ghost said that Scrooge still had a chance to escape such a fate. It said that Scrooge would be visited by three other ghosts—the Ghost of Christmas Past, the Ghost of Christmas Present, and the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come. Then it flew out the open window. As Scrooge looked out the window after it, he saw hundreds of other unhappy ghosts flying around in the night, dragging chains that they had made for themselves during their evil lives. Scrooge was scared, but he wasn't about to change. "Humbug," he said to himself and went to bed.

He woke up just as the church bell was striking twelve o'clock. Standing by the bed was the Ghost of Christmas Past. It took Scrooge back in time to the place where he had grown up as a boy. Scrooge was happy to see the place again until he saw himself as a young boy and remembered how unhappy he had been. His father hadn't loved him and hadn't wanted him at home. Nobody had cared about him. He saw himself on the night before Christmas sitting alone in school reading books.

The ghost then showed Scrooge the place where he had worked as a young man. This had been a happy time in his life. Then the ghost showed him his younger sister, who had died years before. All the things the ghost showed him made Scrooge feel sad that he had grown up to be such a mean old man. He began to think a little about changing.

(continued)

1. How did the ghost of Jacob Marley get into Scrooge's apartment?

2. How was this possible?

3. What was the ghost's chain made of?

4. Why did the ghost say that Scrooge would have to drag a chain after him when he died?

5. Did the ghost say that there was any hope for Scrooge?

6. Did the ghost of Jacob Marley convince Scrooge to change his ways?

7. After Jacob Marley, what was the first ghost to visit Scrooge?

8. Who was the child in school that the ghost showed Scrooge?

9. Why did Scrooge have an unhappy childhood?

10. Why was Scrooge sad when he saw his sister?

11. How did seeing his past make Scrooge feel?

Scrooge fell asleep right away after the first ghost brought him back to his apartment. Later he woke up with a start. A bell was striking, and he knew it was time for the second ghost to appear. For half an hour nothing happened. Then Scrooge noticed that light was coming under the door from his living room.

He walked into the living room and was amazed by what he saw. The Ghost of Christmas Present was sitting in a chair in the corner. He was a big, jolly fellow having a good time waiting for Scrooge. There was a big fire roaring in the fireplace. Scrooge hadn't had a big fire for years. All around the room were Christmas presents and food and decorations. Scrooge knew that the ghost was showing him how he should be enjoying Christmas, instead of being so stingy.

The ghost made Scrooge invisible and took him out around the city of London to show him how other people were enjoying themselves at Christmas time. First they went to Bob Cratchit's house. Even though the Cratchit family was very poor — mainly because Scrooge didn't pay Bob enough — and even though the youngest child, Tiny Tim, was crippled, the family was happy. They were singing, playing, and full of love, and that made Scrooge feel strange to see these poor people having so much fun while he was so unhappy.

Next the ghost took Scrooge to the house of the nephew who had visited his office. Scrooge's nephew and his family were having a big party, playing games, drinking, and laughing. What they laughed about the most was Scrooge — what a mean old man he was. They all thought it was funny that Scrooge was so cheap and unhappy when other people were spending their money and enjoying life.

Scrooge was upset when he heard these people say such things about him. He felt guilty for treating Bob Cratchit the way he did and paying him so little. He felt bad that he had been so rude to his nephew, and that he hadn't given any money to the two men who were collecting for the poor. Scrooge began to wonder whether saving all his money was worth it. What good would it do him if he didn't spend it?

When the second ghost dropped him off in his apartment, Scrooge wondered whether it was too late to change himself and become a better person. While he was thinking, he fell asleep.

(continued)

1. What woke Scrooge up?

2. Where did he find the Ghost of Christmas Present?

3. How had the ghost changed the room?

4. Why do you think Scrooge didn't have big fires in his fireplace?

5. By fixing up the room, what was the ghost trying to tell Scrooge?

6. Why was the Cratchit family so poor?

7. What was wrong with Tiny Tim?

8. How did the Cratchit family act on Christmas?

9. What was the biggest joke at Scrooge's nephew's house?

10. How did Scrooge feel when he heard this?

11. Why did Scrooge begin to think about changing?

When Scrooge woke up again, he saw a dark, frightening ghost standing by his bed. It was the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come. The ghost said nothing but made a gesture with its hand telling Scrooge to get up and follow. The ghost took him into the future. Scrooge knew it would be bad.

First the ghost showed Scrooge a house where a man was dying. Scrooge didn't know who the dying man was, and the ghost wouldn't tell him. They walked up to a group of men and women who were talking about the man. They were all saying unpleasant things about him—that this man had been evil, stingy, and mean all his life. Some women were bragging that they had gone into the dying man's bedroom and stolen the sheets and curtains.

Next the ghost took Scrooge to the house of Bob Cratchit. Scrooge realized that Tiny Tim, the crippled child, had died. The whole Cratchit family was terribly sad. All the happiness that Scrooge had seen in the house with the Ghost of Christmas Present was gone. Scrooge realized that Tiny Tim died because the Cratchits didn't have enough money for doctors.

Finally the ghost took Scrooge to a lonely cemetery and pointed to a gravestone all covered with weeds and grass; no one had taken care of it. Scrooge looked down and saw the words "Ebenezer Scrooge." It was his grave! Suddenly he knew that he was the dying man in the house that he had seen earlier. He also knew what would happen to him if he didn't change his actions.

Then Scrooge found himself back in his apartment and discovered that it was the morning of Christmas day. Somehow the three ghosts had done their work all in one night! Scrooge knew that he still had a chance to change the horrible future he had just seen.

Scrooge rushed out and bought an enormous turkey for Bob Cratchit's family and sent it to their house without saying who it was from. Then he went to his nephew's house and laughed and sang and drank with the family. They could hardly believe the change in Scrooge. Later he gave money to the two men collecting for the poor.

The next morning Scrooge got to the office before Bob Cratchit. He told him he was raising his salary and getting a doctor for Tiny Tim. For the first time in years, Scrooge felt happy with himself.

1. What was the third ghost like?

2. Where in time did it take Scrooge?

3. What were the people outside the house saying about the dying man?

4. What had some of the women done?

5. Why were the Cratchits sad?

6. Why had this happened to Tiny Tim?

7. What did Scrooge see in the cemetery?

8. Who was the dying man in the house?

9. How did Scrooge think he could stop all these things from happening?

10. How long had the three ghosts taken to work on Scrooge?

11. What did Scrooge's nephew and his family think when Scrooge had such fun at the party?

12. What do you think is the moral of this story?

