

Why did Charles Dickens write 'A Christmas Carol'?
Be able to explain Dickens' views and how they differed to some other middle class Victorians.

Charles Dickens wrote 'A Christmas Carol' in 1843. This was the Victorian era.

To understand 'A Christmas Carol', you need to understand Dickens' beliefs about society at the time he was writing.

In the exam, you get marks for knowing the beliefs of the Victorian readers and Dickens' views. This is AO3. However, you need to link the context to your analysis of the text rather than giving the examiner some historical facts.

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We are going to look at three areas today:

- The Poor Law
- Religion (Christianity)
- Education

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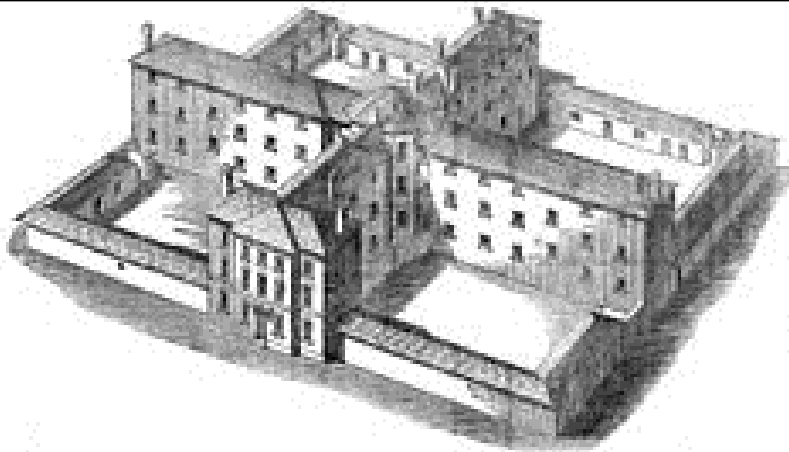
- **The Poor Law**

In 1834, a new Poor Law was introduced. The law stated that people who could not afford to live independently would have to go to the workhouse.

The conditions in the workhouse were harsh: families were split up, and people were forced to work for long hours. It was a last resort for many families.

Some people believed that giving financial help to the poor made them lazy and unwilling to work, so they welcomed the harsh conditions of the workhouse.

Dickens disagreed with this view. He was a philanthropist and cared about the welfare of others.



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- **Religion (Christianity)**

Dickens was a Christian. He believed that being a Christian meant doing good deeds to help others.

However, many Victorians believed that being a good Christian meant they had to follow a strict moral code. For example, shops were closed on a Sunday. This is called Sabbatarianism. Dickens disagreed with this as it didn't help the poor who had no means of having a hot meal on a Sunday if the shops closed.

Victorians believed that God was all-seeing (omnipresent) and all-powerful (omnipotent). They believed that their actions on Earth determined what would happen to them when they died. They believed in hell and punishment.

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- **Education**

Dickens thought that education was extremely important as he thought that ignorance led to crime, disease and poverty - three of the problems in Victorian Britain.

Dickens supported Ragged Schools. These were charities which offered an education to poor children. Dickens wrote 'A Christmas Carol' after visiting a Ragged School.

Dickens knew what it was like to have to leave education. Dickens' father went to prison for debt, so Dickens was forced to leave school at the age of 12 and work to support his family.

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Dickens wrote 'A Christmas Carol' as a morality tale. He wanted his middle-class readers to see themselves in Ebenezer Scrooge and change their ways. He wanted people to see the plight of the poor and do more to help them.

- What's a moral?
- What's a plight?

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Task:

What influenced Charles Dickens to write 'A Christmas Carol'?

Success criteria: Can you use the following vocabulary in your answer?

- poor law
- religion
- education
- moral
- plight

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Answer:

Dickens wrote the novel to educate Victorian readers, who had similar beliefs to Scrooge. They were capitalist and treated the poor badly; Dickens wanted them to change to be more philanthropic and less capitalist. Dickens opposed the poor law, and he thought education and being socially responsible were key to improving society.

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What is a capitalist? What does it mean to be philanthropic?

A capitalist is someone who uses their wealth for profit. Scrooge is a capitalist because he owns a business and pays Bob Cratchit a low wage, so Scrooge can make the most profit.

A philanthropist is someone who seeks to promote the welfare of others, especially through the donation of money to good causes.