Analytical Essay Samples

Sample Written Analysis—*A Christmas Carol*

(Quadrant 1)

A Christmas Carol, **by** Charles Dickens, **tells the story of** a coldhearted, tight-fisted man named Ebenezer Scrooge who is haunted by the ghost of his only friend, Jacob Marley. The story takes place on Christmas Eve, which for many is a joyous, cheerful time of year. Scrooge's nephew, Fred, comes to the counting house to wish his uncle a merry Christmas and invite him to dinner. Instead of being kind to Fred, Scrooge says, "Bah! Humbug!" and asks to be left alone. Later, when two gentlemen come to ask for money for the poor, Scrooge sends them away angrily. That night, when Scrooge returns to his dark, gloomy, and empty house, he is frightened to see the ghost of Jacob Marley weighted down by chains. Marley warns Scrooge that the selfish choices he makes in life will become the chains that will bind him in the afterlife. At first, Scrooge doesn't believe that what he sees and hears is real, but **at the first plot point** he believes Marley's ghost **and** begs for mercy.

Throughout the first quadrant, **the author creates a mood** that is both positive and negative by setting the story on Christmas Eve, on a cold, dark, and threatening foggy night. The night is "foggier yet, and colder! Piercing, searching, biting cold" (p. 10). In fact, the fog is so thick that people are guiding horse-drawn carriages through the streets with lanterns. But even as the night grows darker with each passing hour, there is a hopeful, optimistic mood as well. The lamplit windows and holiday cheer are a sharp contrast to the gloomy night. This optimism foreshadows the eventual transformation of Ebenezer Scrooge from "a bitter old miser into a charitable and compassionate man" (blurb). **It is only a matter of time before Scrooge will learn to step out of the shadows and into the light!**

(Quadrants 2 and 3)

The first spirit to visit Scrooge is the Ghost of Christmas Past. He is taken back to a painful memory of his childhood when he lived at a boardinghouse school and was repeatedly not invited home for Christmas. Scrooge weeps when he remembers his loneliness. The spirit then takes Scrooge to happier Christmases, first when his sister Fran comes to take him away from the boarding school, and then when he is an apprentice and his boss invites him to celebrate Christmas by hosting a ball. Scrooge fondly remembers how Mr. Fezziwig made him happy through things "so slight and insignificant that it [was] impossible to add and count 'em up" (p. 40). Unfortunately, the rest of Scrooge's memories are less cheerful; the spirit reminds him of the loneliness he felt after a broken engagement and after the death of his only friend, Jacob Marley. **At the midpoint,** Scrooge is so disturbed and haunted by these memories, he attempts to extinguish the light of the ghost by covering it with its cap. "Though Scrooge pressed down with all his force, he could not hide the light" (p. 47).

The second spirit to visit Scrooge is the Ghost of Christmas Present. As the spirit takes him through his own neighborhood streets on Christmas day, he observes how cheerful everyone is and how kind and generous they are to each other. The spirit takes him to the home of Bob Cratchit, Scrooge's clerk. Though the family is living in poverty, they are grateful for and content with what they have. Though they are not rich in wealth, they are rich in spirit. This seems to be the theme of all the places the spirit takes him; he visits his nephew's home, a mining camp, a solitary lighthouse, and a ship on the sea. Scrooge begins to soften more and regrets not "[cultivating] kindnesses of life for his own happiness . . ." (p. 71). Just before the second spirit departs, Scrooge sees what looks

like a claw sticking out from the bottom of the spirit's robe. When he opens the robe, the spirit reveals two wretched, miserable, and starving children. Scrooge is so appalled and overcome with feeling that he cannot speak. **This is the turning point,** the moment when he realizes that there are consequences to living a solitary life focused on one's own gain and ignoring the needs of others.

Throughout the story, the author uses ghosts and shadows of the past, present, and future as **symbols of** Scrooge's coldhearted nature and his greed. The ghosts warn Scrooge that if he does not change his ways, the consequences will have a ripple effect. Although shadows are mentioned all throughout the book, there is also light. The light of the first spirit exposes Scrooge's loneliness, and the light of the second spirit brings blessing to others. Light symbolizes hope and reminds us that it is not too late for Scrooge to change his ways and change the future.

(Quadrant 4)

The final spirit to visit Scrooge takes him into the near future. This ghost is much more ominous; he is "shrouded in a deep black garment which [conceals] its head, its face, its form, and [leaves] nothing of it visible save one outstretched hand" (p. 78). Scrooge asks the ghost many questions and each time is met with silence. Scrooge follows the shadow of the ghost into the future, where he learns that a man has died who had great wealth but no friends. When the spirit takes Scrooge to see the dead man, Scrooge is too afraid to lift the cover from the dead man's face. When he visits the cemetery, Scrooge sees his own name carved into the headstone and begs for a second chance to change his life and the shadows the spirit has shown him. He promises he will not be the same man. **As the story resolves,** Scrooge wakes up on Christmas morning to find everything as it was. He dresses in his best clothes, has the prize turkey delivered to the Cratchits' home, and attends the Christmas dinner festivities as his nephew's home. He gives money to the poor and gives Bob Cratchit a raise, all in the spirit of benevolence. For the first time, Ebenezer Scrooge is "as happy as an angel" (p. 99).

A Christmas Carol **is a** rebirth **story, starting with** death, greed, and bitterness **and ending with** the spirit of life, hopefulness, and kindness. **Across the story, the mood changes from** an atmosphere of solitary gloom, **to** one of joy and community. **The message of the story is** that we all must step out of the shadows and walk in the light to find true happiness.