

Worksheet 2 – Context: Part One

Review: Lecture 1

In the first lecture of the unit, Prof. John McRae gave an introduction to *A Christmas Carol* and discussed the language in the opening first two paragraphs of the novella.

- ✓ Who did Prof. McRae say was narrating *A Christmas Carol*? Why was this important to note?

Recall: Lecture 2

Answer these questions after watching the video lecture to check how much you remember.

1. When did Dickens write *A Christmas Carol*?
a) 1811
b) 1812
c) 1842
d) 1843
2. Which statement about Dickens's childhood is *not* true?
a) He grew up in London
b) He had to work in a factory as a child
c) He was poor
d) He went to prison
3. What type of writing does Prof. McRae say Dickens wrote at the start of his career?
a) Short stories
b) Investigative journalism
c) Satirical political sketches
d) Novels

Analysis

4. In the lecture Prof. McRae explains that, unlike Dickens's other novels, *A Christmas Carol* was not serialised, but was published as a whole. Answer the questions below to consider the significance of this:
a) What might be some of the benefits and drawbacks of publishing a story in installments?
b) Serialised novels were very popular in Victorian England. Why do you think that was?
c) Why do you think Dickens chose instead to publish *A Christmas Carol* as a whole?

Challenge: Research Victorian serial novels in order to include some historical context in your answers to questions a) and b).

<https://www.uvic.ca/library/featured/collections/serials/VictorianSerialNovels.php>

Super Challenge: Read this article on the BBC website about Dickens's motivation behind publishing *A Christmas Carol*. Use it to include historical context in your answer to question c).

<https://www.bbc.com/culture/article/20171215-how-did-a-christmas-carol-come-to-be>

Evaluation

5. Read the extract from 'Christmas festivities', a short piece of satirical writing published by Dickens in 1835 as part of Dickens's *Sketches by Boz*. Then answer the questions below.

Christmas time! That man must be a misanthrope indeed, in whose breast something like a jovial feeling is not roused—in whose mind some pleasant associations are not

awakened—by the recurrence of Christmas. There are people who will tell you that Christmas is not to them what it used to be; that each succeeding Christmas has found some cherished hope, or happy prospect, of the year before, dimmed or passed away; that the present only serves to remind them of reduced circumstances and straitened incomes—of the feasts they once bestowed on hollow friends, and of the cold looks that meet them now, in adversity and misfortune. Never heed such dismal reminiscences. There are few men who have lived long enough in the world who cannot call up such thoughts any day of the year. Then do not select the merriest of the three hundred and sixty-five for your doleful recollections, but draw your chair nearer the blazing fire—fill the glass and send round the song—and if your room be smaller than it was a dozen years ago, or if your glass be filled with reeking punch, instead of sparkling wine, put a good face on the matter, and empty it offhand, and fill another, and troll off the old ditty you used to sing, and thank God it's no worse.

- a) How has Dickens structured the extract to engage his reader? (*Consider the beginning, middle and end*)
- b) 'Christmas festivities' was written almost ten years before *A Christmas Carol*. What connections can you see between the two texts?

Glossary

- **Shoe-blackening** – shoe-polish.
- **Bankruptcy** – is a legal process through which people who cannot repay debts can seek relief from some or all of their debts. In the 19th century people who were bankrupt were sent to a debtors prison where they were expected to work off their debt through labour.
- **Serialisation** – to publish a story in regular installments. Dickens serialised his novels in newspapers, so that a new installment would be published weekly or monthly.
- **Misanthrope** – someone who dislikes or distrusts other people.