Grade 9 :In this extract, Scrooge has been watching his former self as an apprentice for his previous employer, Mr. Fezziwig, accompanied by the ghost of Christmas Past.

[Fezziwig’s from During the whole of this time, Scrooge had acted like a man out of his wits to The happiness he gives, is quite as great as if it cost a fortune.']

Starting with this extract, explore how Dickens presents the purpose of education in A Christmas Carol.
Write about:
·         how Dickens presents the purpose of education in this extract
·         how Dickens presents education in the novella as a whole.                               [30 marks]

Dickens’ decision to write a short novel rather than a non-fiction text stemmed from his desire to strike a ‘sledgehammer blow’ at the apathetic attitudes in society that allowed the extremes of poverty and social injustice to co-exist with the wealth of the middle and business classes. His decision was an educative one.
The key means by which Dickens’ educative purpose is realised in the novella is through the characterisation of Scrooge and his redemptive journey from misanthropy to philanthropy, albeit towards only one family. At the beginning of the novella, Scrooge ‘edges his way’ through life, separate from all around him. This absence of concern for others in society is brought into relief through the mortal visitation from the two ‘portly gentleman’ collecting for the homeless. This allows Dickens to set up a parallel for the turning point of the novella at the end of Stave Three when Scrooge finally feels pity for others in the form of the children Ignorance and Want. In response to the small charitable request, Dickens chooses his protagonist to respond with a Malthusian retort that they poor had ‘better die and reduce the surplus population’. This extreme, inhuman response to the kindly benevolence of what we might assume are the old aristocracy believing their Christian duty is to show kindness to the poor reveals Dickens’ explicit educational aim: for polite Victorian society - the readers of this humorous Christmas ghost story - to see the harsh beneath the dehumanisation of the poor.  As a fierce opponent of Malthusianism and the workhouse, Dickens’ symbolic representation of this unedited self-interest is hard-hitting. It would be hard to imagine a reader who outwardly agrees with Scrooge here. However, we know that many Victorians did support the implementation of the 1834 Poor Law Reform Act and removal of outdoor relief.  If Scrooge is this sector of Victorian society, Dickens has to educate him and, in doing so, educate his Victorian readers.
It is not only the suffering of the homeless poor that Dickens wants to educate his readers about. Through Bob Cratchit’s characterisation as virtuous, stoical and above all benevolent in the face of the poverty imposed upon him by his miserly employer, Dickens shows us that capitalist self-interest affects even the educated (which as a clerk, Bob would have been): this is the working poor.  Bob is established as an early foil\* for Scrooge, being extremely poor but extremely cheery. Whenever we see Bob enter or leave, his is wearing his ‘white comforter (for he had no greatcoat)’. This seems to act as a metaphorical blanket shielding Bob from the harshness of the world and the poverty he cannot protect his family from. Wearing only this pure and light-filled scarf, Bob can slide ‘twenty times down Cornhill’ on Christmas Eve in the -presumably white – snow and ice. Bob is epitomised by brightness and light as Scrooge is epitomised by darkness and fog. Scrooge leaves in the dark and lives in the dark, literally and metaphorically for ‘darkness is cheap’. Dickens sets up this contrast to teach readers that if kindness and purity of spirit can be dispensed by even the poorest of workers, it can by the richest in society. On Christmas Day in Stave Three, Bob toasts Scrooge as ‘the founder of the feast’, showing a true Christian attitude towards others; even those who actually cause his poverty. This is a mirror of Fezziwig’s benevolence. Whereas Scrooge argues that a day’s holiday for Christmas is ‘a poor excuse for picking a man’s pocket’, we see Fezziwig lavish his staff with a party; abundant with food, drink and dancing. Dickens is teaching us how employers can be and how employees are when freed from an oppressive employer.
In the extract from Stave Two, Dickens shows us how happy Fezziwig’s employee was. And that it doesn’t take very much to change the minds of the miserly class. The current Scrooge’s education is well under way as he has undergone something of a transformation showing ‘the strangest agitation’, as he looks at the ‘bright faces of his former self’ and his colleague. Former Scrooge is the antithesis of darkness here and is like Bob. Present Scrooge cannot avoid being influenced by the infectious pleasure created by the generosity of spirit of his former employer.  The shadow of the past has shone a light within Scrooge and at this point and the light on the top of the spirit’s head ‘burn[s] very clear’. This symbolic clarity of mind reveals that once, Scrooge understood the responsibility of an employer as nothing to do with money. The ‘power to render us happy or unhappy’ is the real ‘business’ of an employer that Marley refers to in Stave One. As Dickens wrote this narrative partly in response to a Parliamentary report into the working conditions of women and children, his message to society, industrialists, the wealthy and to those with political power is explicit. In case we are not yet sure of Dickens’ lesson, he clarifies this further through three juxtaposed concepts: happiness and unhappiness, lightness and burden, pleasure and toil. Dickens’ purpose is explicitly didactic: employers have a direct responsibility for the wellbeing of their employees. If people continue to be treated in the way that Scrooge treats Bob, the effects will be far-reaching. Bob’s children are either already in employment at a young age or so sick and without the money to afford healthcare. All suffer, young and old. Not acting in the present ‘forges’ a ‘chain’ of eternal burden. Dickens is instructing us through his allegory that employers do have the power and the responsibility to promote the health and happiness of their workers if only they will learn.
Dickens is also clear that learning this lesson to take responsibility for others costs little in comparison to the happiness it gives. Happiness, Dickens is teaching us, is not something to ‘add and count’. It renders faces ‘bright’, metaphorically joyful, and Scrooge’s argument against the spirit’s ironic rhetoric even ‘heated’ him. Already, Scrooge is being thawed by what he has learned through this shadow of the past which is infiltrating his present. He is becoming enlightened. By stepping outside of his current self and empathising with his former self, Dickens has created a small moment of epiphany for Scrooge. Eventually, these small moments of realisation accumulate to create the dramatic reversal. At the end, Scrooge ‘knew how to keep Christmas’ as he ‘possessed the knowledge’ that he himself has ‘the power to render [others] happy or unhappy’. He increases Bob’s wages and regard Bob’s family as his surrogate family, acting as a father figure much like the Victorian aristocracy in taking on wards. If Scrooge was intended as a representation of those in power with the power to effect change, Dickens seems to be suggesting that all it takes is to be educated by seeing what is before them.
Of course it takes more than a glance at a few emotional scenes for the hardened ‘oysters’ of the powerful to learn the lesson. It takes the poignant confrontation with man’s metaphorical children, Ignorance and Want, for Scrooge to eat his own words; to turn his own ideology against himself. Dickens makes sure that Scrooge does this independently with the spirit only clarifying what he has learned. He no longer needs Marley to mediate the message. Dickens uses this climactic moment to leave us in no doubt that Ignorance is to be feared the most ‘for on his forehead is the word Doom’. Dickens is pulling no punches in telling us that society is has no hope at all if people refuse to allow themselves to become enlightened. The message seems to be that unless we accept the reality of poverty, know the impact of the misanthropy of those who can but don’t improve the conditions of England, everyone loses. In case the powerful can think only of themselves, the warning is that they will become Scrooge-like in the future: isolated and lonely, destined to purgatory in the hereafter.
However, this hard-hitting allegorical message about the severity of the problem of poverty has not led to the eradication of poverty, or of unscrupulous employers. Perhaps it takes more than the education of the individual to affect real and permanent change. Perhaps individuals should be more concerned with more than individuals. In spite of the introduction of the Welfare State a century after the novel was written, we now have foodbanks, the homeless dying of cold weather and severely malnourished schoolchildren. Perhaps we need another ‘sledgehammer blow’ that will haunt us permanently this time

**Grade 9 :​Starting with this extract, explore how Dickens uses the Cratchit family to show the struggles of the poor.**

Dickens uses the plight and poverty of the Cratchit family to attempt to shed light on the lives of the poor, in contrast to the lives of the rich aristocrats in Victorian society, like Scrooge.

The first exclamatory sentence of the extract stated by Bob Cratchit that it was a “wonderful pudding!” immediately implies that they are grateful and easily excited.  Despite it being a “small pudding” for a “large family”, they all regarded it as a “success”.  Perhaps this is because they usually did not have the luxury of a pudding, so any pudding at all was seen as a blessing.  The adverb “calmly” also creates an aura of excitement in the atmosphere, as it implies that there is an apprehensive glee about the family.

Again, in the extract, Dickens has included the fact that they only possessed “Two tumblers, and a custard-cup” for which the whole family shared.  He then juxtaposes this with the idea of “golden goblets”, which only serve to emphasise the Cratchits’ lack of wealth and widens the gap between society’s rich and poor, that during the Victorian era, was wide and obvious.

We see the Cratchits as a unit – a real family who is bonded by shared affection and strengthened with love, as opposed to money, status and wealth.  The personal pronouns “my”, “us” and “all” paired with the terms of endearment, such as “dears”, indicates to the reader that the Cratchit family are a united force that stands up and rejoices in happiness and joy, despite facing the rough shame of poverty that flooded Victorian London.  The fact that even Tiny Tim, who “bore a little crutch” and was held up by an “iron frame”, stated, “God bless us every one!”, only proves to the reader that the Cratchits still remain in high spirits, regardless of their unfortunate circumstances.

The use of the verbs “wished” and “dreaded” sum up the attitude of the poor and in particular the Crachits.  They were hopeful and positive, as if they “wished” and expected their lives to improve, but also “dreaded the future, as they recognised that if the rich were unwilling to help, they would suffer and even have their son “taken” by death.  Scrooge, a wealthy, well-off, privileged businessman, refused to donate to the “portly” charity collectors as he, like many others in the context of the novella, assumed and believed that the poor were “idle”, as if they were poor from their own laziness and lack of ambition.  Many in Victorian society thought that they were a nuisance.  In fact, Scrooge even went so far as to say that if they were to “die”, they’d better do it quickly and “decrease the surplus population”.  This attitude was the one that Dickens was looking to expose and combat with the publication of ‘A Christmas Carol’ in the Industrial Revolution.  It is speculated that it was written in staves, like a Christian carol, and published as a book cheaply, rather than advertised as a play, because in this form it would reach more people.  Dickens probably assumed that a short, witty story would last longer as a Christmas tale, than a play would – and he was correct.

Throughout the novella, Dickens portrays Scrooge and Bob as opposites who directly contrast with each other.  For instance, as Bob retires to his “dismal little cell” where the “single coal” that his cruel employer allows him burns, he is still grateful and thankful for allowing him one day off and in high spirits as he returns home.  This “gratitude” over such as simple, almost necessary, act of decency from Scrooge shows his “meagre” conditions.  Bob is able to rejoice in the spirit of Christmas far more openly than Scrooge.

This directly contrasts with Scrooge’s flippant, dismissive attitude towards the struggles of the poor, as when approached by some charity collectors if he would consider placing a small donation, he replies with the predictably cold, callous questions, “are there no prisons?” and “union workhouses?”  These rhetorical questions could either signify his ignorance to the issue at hand, or simply his refusal to engage in helping.  Either way, Scrooge demonstrates a distinct lack of empathy towards the poor and instead returns to his “comfortable” “set of rooms” where he goes about his daily routine – stopping not even for a second to think of those who were less fortunate than he.

Dickens also mentions the Cratchit family in some of the visions or ghostly encounters that Scrooge experiences.  For example, when the Ghost of Christmas Yet To Come – an ominous figure “shrouded in a deep black garment” that easily “moved like mist”, showed Scrooge the Cratchit family mourning the loss of Tiny Tim, Scrooge cannot help but to hang his head in penance and guilt.  This suggests that he feels great shame towards his actions.  Similarly, when shown “Ignorance and Want” by the “jovial” giant Ghost of Christmas Present, Scrooge was taken aback when his own miserly phrase “are there no prisons” was used against him to educate him on his wrong doings.  Scrooge feels a “pang” of guilt across his heart.  This indicates that from seeing the effects of the plight of the poor, causes him such grief that he feels it emotionally and physically.  As if the pain is so strong that it can cross over from the emotional to the physical, like the message he learns comes over from the supernatural to the real world.

In effect, Dickens contrasts the lives of the Cratchits to the life Scrooge lives and highlights how despite their obvious misfortunes, they are the ones who carry the Christmas spirit.

**Grade 7: Starting with this extract, explore how Dickens uses the ghosts to help Scrooge change his attitudes and behaviour.**Dickens, in his political diatribe, ‘A Christmas Carol’, introduces the gothic element of ghosts to bring about a transformation in Scrooge, while subsequently subverting the notion of an ideal Christmas to haunt his readers ‘pleasantly’.

At the beginning of Stave 1, Marley and Scrooge are described as “kindred spirits”.  The adjective “kindred” suggests ‘two of a kind’ or in general suggests the similarities between Scrooge and his colleague.  Scrooge is described as “hard and sharp as flint”.  The simile expresses Scrooge to have the characteristics of a flint – dull and ugly, which reflects his personality too.  Flints are common rocks, which suggests that he is a representation of the masses: for example, the upper class of 19th century Victorian England.  The adjective “hard” suggests that he is impenetrable or difficult to change.  It also suggests that Scrooge is cold-hearted and reserved.  In addition, the adjective-suffix “sharp” has connotations of jagged or scabrous, which make Scrooge seem very unpleasant.  However, flints have the ability to ignite, which may hint at his ability to spread warmth or become open-minded.

As readers, we would expect Marley to be very much alike.  In the extract, however, we see Marley as a ghost, suffering the consequences of his uncharitable actions in an eternal purgatory.  He is bound by “chains” that are “wrought in steel”, attached to various locks, ledgers and purses.  While these objects suggest his line of work (a money lender) it also hints at the Industrial Revolution and the poor conditions people were forced to work in.  The word “steel” represents the factories and workhouses in 1843 and symbolically represents the ignorance of the rich in relation to improving the lives of the urban poor.  Marley is more relatable to Scrooge and hence acts as a warning to the possible suffering Scrooge may too have to endure after his death if he does not change his morose and misanthropic behaviours.

In Stave four, the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come is described as a “phantom”.  This noun has connotations of the Grim Reaper or death.  The spectre is the only one of the three ghosts that does not carry a light source – perhaps to suggest that Scrooge may not have “hope”, as light usually symbolises, or a future at all.  The ghost does not speak which reflects that the future is unknown and that only Scrooge has the power to change it.

The ultimate role of the ghost is to instil fear in Scrooge to catalyse his change.  The ghost does this by showing Scrooge the body of a man (which is himself) that is “unwatched, unkept or uncared for”.  The listing and the use of assonance suggest to Scrooge the loneliness he will face at his death, or perhaps the lack of respect he will be shown.  Mrs Dilber and Joe display obscene vulgarity by stealing his “bedcurtains and sheets”, leaving Scrooge almost naked, vulnerable and shaken in the vision.  This possible ill-treatment results in Scrooge changing.  He is described to be “holding up his hands in a last prayer”.  The verb “hold” suggests he begins to amend his ways by perhaps surrendering himself and his faults.  Moreover, “to pray” suggests that he truly is asking forgiveness or perhaps repenting.  One can suggest that he is also thankful to have been given a second chance at helping those around him.

Grade 8-9: Starting with this extract, explore how far Dickens presents Christmas as a joyful time. (30 marks)

Throughout Dickens’ allegorical novella, his aim is to passionately highlight how such a joyful season can create positive role models for Scrooge. The constant succession of images relating to joy around Christmas may well have been utilised to demonstrate how readers too can learn and improve from the inspirational characters during the novella.

Primarily, within stave 1 of the novella, Dickens utilises the characterisation of Fred as the embodiment of the Christmas spirit with all the positive virtues associated with Christmas. This is evidenced when Fred is described as coming in ‘all in a glow’ with ‘his face ruddy and handsome; his eyes sparkled.’ Here the use of the noun ‘glow’ connotes light and warmth which is strongly linked to hope and purity. This highlights the contrast between Fred and his uncle Scrooge, who was described as ‘hard and sharp as flint.’ Structurally, introducing Fred immediately after Scrooge focuses the reader’s attention on the clear variation between the two and all of the positive qualities that Scrooge lacks. Furthermore, Fred highlights the belief that Christmas is a time for unity within the social hierarchy although it ‘never puts a scrap of gold or silver’ in his pocket and he frowns upon his uncle, completely consumed in the greed for money. Dickens may have done this to foreshadow Scrooge’s transformation into a better man as a result of the inspirational role models around him during the novella. Alternatively, Dickens may have used Fred and Scrooge together to challenge the situation in Victorian Britain during the Industrial Revolution. Scrooge highlights all of the negative traits of upper class men during this time and Fred is a caring and benevolent character, who cares for people lower down on the social hierarchy.

Secondly, within the extract, Dickens utilises the characterisation of Fezziwig to suggest a clear contrast in the two employers. This is evidenced when Fezziwig ‘laughed all over himself, from his shoes to his organ of benevolence.’ The use of the abstract noun ‘benevolence’ suggests the joy and love Fezziwig has for Christmas time. Fezziwig’s kind, caring personality is another role model and catalyst for Scrooge’s transformation. Furthermore, Dickens presents Christmas as a joyful time through Fezziwig’s Christmas party. ‘Fuel was heaped upon the fire’ and the warehouse was transformed into a ‘snug, and warm’ ballroom filled with light. The use of the adjective ‘warm’ connotes kindness and comfort. The detail here in Fezziwig’s scene overwhelms the senses; his generosity is physical, emotional and palpable. As an employer he is the foil of Scrooge and presents all of the positive virtues that Scrooge lacks. Dickens may have done this to highlight a different side to capitalism. Alternatively, presenting Fezziwig as the embodiment of Christmas suggests the importance of Christmas and all of its positive qualities on everyone in society.

Thirdly, within the novella, Dickens utilises the Ghost of Christmas Present to personify Christmas itself. When the ghost appears it has set up an impressive feast of lights and food. This is evidenced when Scrooge’s room is filled with ‘the crisp leaves of holly, mistletoe and ivy reflected back the light, as if so many little mirrors had been scattered there, and such a mighty blaze went roaring up the chimney.’ The scene is hyperbolic and creates a clear contrast with the frugal state of Scrooge’s past Christmases. The use of the light imagery here provides a clear and undeniable tableau of the joyful Christmases Scrooge can afford but chooses to shun. Dickens may have done this to portray Christmas as a bright and familiar celebration which everyone should celebrate in harmony. A modern reader may feel hope that Scrooge will use his wealth to celebrate Christmas with all of the festivities that Christmas should include and celebrate it with the people that care for him, like his nephew Fred.

Finally, in ‘A Christmas Carol’ Dickens reinforces the theme of Christmas spirit through the Cratchit family. Dickens utilises Bob Cratchit to symbolise the true spirit of Christmas and the importance of family. This is evidenced at the Cratchit’s dinner where nobody remarked that it was ‘a small pudding for a large family’. The adjective ‘small’ emphasises the Cratchit’s lack of luxury and yet their enthusiasm in the scene is palpable. This highlights that this ‘small’ pudding was seen as an indulgence to them which is something Scrooge takes for granted. Furthermore, the Cratchit’s ‘four roomed house’ is filled with an overwhelming sense of energy and excitement, which exists as an antithesis of Scrooge’s ‘old…dreary’ abode. This is evidenced as the youngest Cratchit children ‘danced about the table’ this suggests the sense of energy despite their lowly status in society on this festive day. Dickens may have done this to suggest the importance of Christmas to all members of society. Although the Cratchit family are less fortunate than Scrooge or Fred their Christmas is filled with the love they have for each other. A reader may feel delighted to see this family enjoying Christmas day, contented with what they own and hope that Scrooge will see this family as a role model for his transformation.

Grade 8-9: The characterisation of Fred

Within his festive, allegorical novella, Dickens crafts Scrooge’s only nephew Fred to function as a model for embracing Christmas. Most importantly, he demonstrates the virtues associated with this time of year, namely goodwill, benevolence, family and community.

Primarily, the first time the reader meets Fred he is depicted as an embodiment of the Christmas spirit. Fred is ‘all in a glow’ when he comes to meet his uncle. The lexical choice ‘glow’ connotes light which is often linked with purity and hope, emphasising that Fred acts as a role model for Scrooge to learn from. Fred spreads his Christmas cheer and is happy despite not being wealthy. Additionally, Fred is said to have walked through the ‘fog and frost’; the fog could symbolise the lingering presence of the Industrial Revolution in the 1800s and all the negativity it brought such as apathy and ignorance. The ‘fog’ blinkered many capitalists from the fact that the people of London were suffering greatly due to the functions of power failing to protect them and for choosing capitalism over socialism. Fred being ‘all in a glow’, stands out from this metaphorical atmosphere of capitalism and material gain; whilst doing so, he clears a path for goodness and cheerfulness to seep into Scrooge’s melancholy life. He therefore paints himself as selfless and caring – qualities that were quite rare in the 1800s.

Secondly, Dickens cleverly utilises structure to illustrate the weak relationship between Fred and Scrooge. Throughout the extract the terms ‘nephew’ and ‘uncle’ are repeated several times. Dickens intention for this technique may have been to remind the reader that Scrooge and Fred are blood relatives; therefore they should have a familial connection. This is extremely ironic considering the way Scrooge communicates with his ‘nephew’ by calling him ‘poor enough’. This remark can be perceived as very rude, dismissive, ignorant and derogatory to a reader; one may even say their conversation resembles two strangers conversing. Dickens does this to highlight the distance between the two, one whose ‘eyes sparkled’ and one who is ‘hard and sharp as flint’. However, despite this obstacle, Fred continually tried to bridge the gap between them by inviting Scrooge to his annual Christmas dinner every year. From this we can infer that Fred is persistent in ensuring that his uncle stops marginalising himself and is included in familial engagements. This is because Fred understands the importance of community and how one can benefit spiritually from it, something Dickens strongly believed people needed to have.

In stave 3, the ghost of Christmas present takes Scrooge to a ‘bright, dry and gleaming room’, which we soon learn to be part of Fred’s home. The description of this setting is essential in understanding the character is Fred. The adjective ‘gleaming’ implies that Christmas spirit is almost leaking out of Fred’s house as it is so full of joy and benevolence. This proves that Fred’s house stands out, drastically, from the cold darkness that many people, like Scrooge, fall into on special occasions like Christmas. Here Dickens shows the vast division between those who are wealthy in the Christmas spirit and those who are wealthy but lack the spiritual benefits of Christmas through imagery. Therefore urging readers to understand that importance of family and relationships in order to avoid isolation.

In essence, Dickens utilises Fred to jolt Scrooge and his targeted capitalist readers out of this apathetic ways via his thoughtfulness, cheerfulness and ‘extraordinary kindness’.

**Grade 9: Starting with this extract, explore how Dickens uses the ghosts to help Scrooge transform his beliefs and actions.**

The four ghosts each play a vital role in helping to change Scrooge’s attitudes and behaviour. Dickens makes use of the supernatural to make Scrooge the alienating effects of capitalism and the beneficial effects of being part of a community. Therefore it could be argued Dickens’ wider message is to show how everyone has inherent goodness and therefore possesses the capacity to transform themselves. Comment on the use of Gothic horror conventions and how Victorian society were so attracted to ghost stories – high mortality- loss of religious conviction.

Marley’s ghost appears first to begin the process of transforming Scrooge. While the final ghost helps Scrooge to make the final leap of transformation, Marley’s ghost plants the initial seeds of change in Scrooge’s psyche. Prior to the given extract, Dickens establishes the idea that Marley is paying for his sins in life by describing his chain in extreme detail. Firstly, the verb ‘clasped’ creates an image of restriction and confinement while the simile ‘like a tail’ gives the impression that Marley has been punished after death by being rendered into some kind of debased animal. The description of the chain is developed through the subsequent sentence which uses a semantic field of money to cumulatively list the objects ‘cash-boxes, keys, padlocks, ledgers, deeds, and heavy purses wrought in steel’ which are tied to Marley’s chain. The fact Marley ghost must drag these steel symbols of greed around with him in the afterlife startles Scrooge into seeing that the money he cherishes in his current life will provide no comfort or solace after death. In the extract, a semantic field of exhaustion through lexical choices such as ‘weary’, ‘ponderous’ and ‘laboured’ highlights Marley’s struggle to cope with his punishment. Marley is clearly successful in making Scrooge both curious and uncomfortable. The fact Scrooge ‘trembled’ shows he has been startled while the exclamation ‘Speak comfort to me, Jacob!’ is a turning point as for the first time in the novella Scrooge is openly expressing his vulnerability and need for help. Marley’s ghost also induces fear in Scrooge as he feels ‘the chilling influence of its death-cold eyes’. This metaphor proves that Marley’s ghost has been successful in initiating Scrooge’s transformation because at the start of the novella ‘External heat and cold had little influence on Scrooge’. In his presentation of Marley’s ghost, Dickens’ purpose was to show the consequences of capitalism and greed in the Victorian era by showing how it can lead to isolation and alienation in both life and, more disturbingly, in death.

In Stave two the ghost of Christmas Present continues Marley’s Ghost’s ground work by continuing to take out of his comfort zone of selfishness and ignorance towards humanity. This ghost uses memories as a catalyst for change; this is most powerfully done as the end of the stave. After Belle cancels the engagement, Scrooge is then forced to confront the image of the life he could have had when the ghost shows him Belle’s children who ‘might have been the spring-time in the haggard winter of his life’. The

juxtaposition is used by Dickens to highlight the importance of family in humanising an individual. Springtime has obvious connotations with joy, happiness and growth which contrast heavily with ‘haggard winter’ suggesting Scrooge is exhausted as he reaches a sad end to his existence. This weary image links back to the extract and the semantic field of exhaustion associated with Marley’s ghost. This image of domestic familial bliss is too much for Scrooge to process at the end of Stave 2 as he uses abrupt exclamatory imperatives to ask the ghost to ‘Leave me! Haunt me no longer’. At this point in the novel, Scrooge is beginning to realise his greed throughout his adult life has prevented him from enjoying the benefits of being included within society.

The role of the ghost of Christmas Present offers a more positive and optimistic message compared to the other three ghosts. This ghost’s predominant role is to teach Scrooge the importance of family and community. He does this by showing Scrooge an intimate vision of how his lowly clerk Bob Cratchit spends Christmas Day with his family. Here seemingly negative imagery is transformed into positive imagery to present the Cratchit family as an exemplary family who extol noble virtues Dickens wanted to celebrate. The famous image of the ‘custard-cup without a handle’ initially evokes a sense of poverty because the family do not have enough money to replace it. In a deeper sense, this conveys their optimistic outlook towards their dire financial situation. Similarly, rather than complain about the ‘small pudding for a large family’ Bob Cratchit is full of gratitude and appreciation for what they do have by exclaiming ‘Oh, a wonderful pudding!’ However, Dickens is still keen to point out, that despite making the best of what they have, poor families like the Cratchit’s are still in desperate need of assistance from the rich. ‘In the poor chimney-corner’ of the Cratchit’s house, Dickens describes how there is ‘a crutch without an owner, carefully preserved.’ This desolate image evokes great pathos on the reader when they learn Tiny Tim, like so many poor children in the 1840s, would not survive into adulthood due to the debilitating effects of poverty. Similarly, this moment evokes a strong response in Scrooge and is an importance milestone on his process of transformation. The depressing tone of this image demonstrates that even the optimistic Cratchit family are unable to overcome the ultimate by-product of poverty: death therefore this passage is vital in helping Scrooge to gain to awareness and empathy towards the poorest members of society who suffer due the indifference of the rich.

While the first three ghosts all play a vital role, it could be argued the ghost of Christmas Yet to Come’s visitation in Stave four is the most importance paranormal visitor because this this phantom gives Scrooge the final decisive push towards his character transformation. Immediately Dickens wants to reader to see that the final spirit has a terminal message for Scrooge which contrasts with the friendliness of previous ghosts. The trio of adverbs ‘slowly, gravely, silently’ build tension as Scrooge awaits his spiritual lesson. It is clear that Scrooge has learned lessons from the previous ghosts as he bends ‘down upon his knee’ to show deference and supplication towards the spirit. A semantic field of the unknown is created through words such as ‘gloom’, ‘mystery’, ‘shrouded’, ‘concealed’ and ‘black’. These lexical choices combine to unsettle and disorientate Scrooge in order to render him more receptive to the spirit’s visions and more susceptible to transformation. The spirit’s deathly appearance and silence induces a ‘solemn dread’ in Scrooge’s mind. The adjective ‘solemn’ signifies the seriousness in which Scrooge will heed the ghost’s impending message while the abstract noun ‘dread’ indicates his extreme trepidation at what he is about to be shown. Scrooge’s fears reach a climax at the end of Stave 4 when the ghost of Christmas Yet to Come shows Scrooge a ‘neglected grave’ that bears the words ‘Ebeneezer Scrooge’. This marks the moment when Scrooge realises the dead man that had discussed through the Stave was in fact himself. Dickens’ deliberately withholds this realisation until the end of the Stave to increase its impact on Scrooge. The adjective ‘neglected’ further heightens the pathos as Scrooge contemplates the stark desolation of his own lonely death. It can be argued that this moment in the play is the most effective in making Scrooge complete his supernatural transformation.

The supernatural miracle of Scrooge’s behavioural transformation acts as an allegory for extolling Dickens’ belief in the importance of the Christian values of mercy and charity at a time when society was becoming more fragmented and secularised. (29/30)