Staves #2-5 Summary and Themes

Stave 2

Scrooge awakes and finds his room as dark as when he fell asleep at two o’clock. He listens for the church bell but when it comes, it strikes twelve. He must have slept through a whole day and half a night. He doesn’t believe it, but when he goes to the window, the street is deserted and dark as nighttime. He is glad of this, because it means that night and day have not entirely merged – he fears the disruption to trade.

Scrooge goes back to bed and thinks, but the more he thinks that the episode with Marley was all in his head, the more the visions spring up in his mind and convince him otherwise. Then he remembers that Marley’s ghost had said one o’clock was the hour to expect the first spirit. Scrooge listens for the chime of the quarters and is relieved when he hears the single note marking the hour and sees no ghost. But he rejoices too soon – the curtains at his window are drawn by the hand of a strange new ghost.

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| This ghost appears as if through “some supernatural medium”, giving his aged features child-like proportions. He has white hair, but smooth skin. He wears a glowing white robe, decorated with summer flowers that contrast with the holly branch he carries. From the top of his head a stream of light shines forth, but the figure’s robe comes in and out of shadow, makings its limbs seem to dissolve and reappear in many different combinations. He carries an extinguisher cap like a candle-snuffer for putting out his own flame. |  |
| The ghost introduces itself, in a low, faraway voice, as the Ghost of Christmas Past. Scrooge’s past, in particular. Scrooge gets an urge to shy away from the ghost’s light and begs him to disappear, but the ghost insists that it is Scrooge’s own fault that he is here. Scrooge apologizes for offending the ghost and asks what he wants. The ghost says he has come to help him. Scrooge can’t help thinking he’d rather do without this kind of help, but the ghost hears his thought and takes him by the arm. |  |
| The ghost leads Scrooge to the window. Scrooge tries to resist, thinking he will fall out of the window, but the ghost tells him to merely touch his hand and he won’t fall. They fly through the wall and are suddenly passing over the scenes of Scrooge’s boyhood. The ghost is wise and motherly, and Scrooge becomes childlike in his care. He feels like he is surrounded by ghostly “odours”, full of hopes and memories just like he is. |  |
| Scrooge recognizes everything he sees, and names the members of a crowd of passing youths excitedly, but he can tell that he is invisible to these apparitions. He can’t explain why he is so pleased to hear their shouts of “Merry Christmas!”, and remembers his own present miserliness. They pass by a deserted, overgrown school room and see a lonely boy neglected for the holidays, with a tiny fire and not much to eat. Scrooge recognizes the boy as his young self and cries. Every sensation and detail of the scene softens and saddens Scrooge further. |  |
| As the boy is reading, a man in a funny costume appears outside the window with a donkey loaded with wood. Scrooge recognizes the man as Ali Baba. He rejoices to remember all the fictional adventure characters of his boyhood, but then catches himself and mourns his poor childhood self again. The thought of his own loneliness reminds him of the boy singing a carol he’d sent away from his own office door the previous night. |  |
| The ghost brings forth other visions. Scrooge is now older, alone for another Christmas holiday, but this time a young girl comes into the schoolroom. She is Scrooge’s sister, Fan, and she announces that she is taking him home. Home, for good, she says happily. She says that their father is kinder now and has asked for his son to be brought home to become a man and never return to the schoolroom. Then a man’s voice is heard booming down the hall – it is the fierce schoolmaster who shakes Scrooge's hand and gives them wine and cake before their journey. The ghost reminds Scrooge that Fan died as a woman, with one child, Scrooge’s nephew, Fred. |  |
| They go to another Christmas, where Young Scrooge is apprenticed at a warehouse. He sees his old bossFezziwig, a fat, jovial man, whom Scrooge is very fond of. Fezziwig calls to his apprentices. Young Scrooge and another apprentice called Dick answer and Fezziwig tells them it’s time to shut up shop for Christmas. The two young men hurriedly closed the shutters and cleared everything away. The warehouse is a cozy place, warmed by a large fire. |  |
| Mrs. Fezziwig enters followed by many townsfolk, all kinds of couples and friends from the town, and the place is turned into a ballroom and they all dance to the sound of a very determined fiddler. Mr. and Mrs. Fezziwig take to the floor and are a wonderful dancing pair, with energy and lightness defying their ages. After the dancing they see their guests to the door, and Scrooge and Dick go to their beds. Scrooge has been watching this display in a frenzy of excitement. The ghost makes a comment that it is a small thing to be so grateful about, and Scrooge answers that the Fezziwigs’ effect on his happiness was huge. The ghost then notices a change in Scrooge’s mood and Scrooge says he wishes he could see his clerk. |  |
| The ghost announces that he is running out of time and the vision changes again – now Scrooge is “in the prime of life” next to a weeping girl, who believes she has been displaced by money, Scrooge’s golden idol. She says the hope of being beyond poverty has taken over all his other ambitions. She says they were young, poor, and content when they got engaged. She is grateful to know his feelings so that she can release him from the engagement. Scrooge claims he has not asked for release, but the girl tells him that his changed nature has asked for release without words. She says goodbye and wishes his new self luck in the life of profit he has chosen. Hearing this conversation torments Scrooge but the ghost has one more vision to impart. |  |
| They are now in a cozy room. The same girl, Belle, now a mother, with her daughter and a herd of other children, boisterously running around. The mother and daughter laugh. Scrooge looks with envy at how the young boys play with their sister, without getting punished. He wishes he could have the carelessness of childhood, with the wisdom that he brings to the scene now. |  |
| Then there is a knock at the door and Belle’s husband enters with his arms full of Christmas presents. Happy chaos ensues as the children affectionately wrestle the presents from him and all laugh until bedtime. Then the man sits down with his wife and remembers meeting an old friend of hers earlier. Belle guesses that it was Mr. Scrooge. Her husband tells her how he seemed “quite alone in the world”. At hearing this, Scrooge demands to be removed from the scene. He tries to seize the ghost and the ghost puts up little resistance so he takes the extinguisher cap and tries to push it onto the ghost’s head, but he becomes drowsy as he does so and falls asleep. |  |
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Stave 3

Scrooge wakes up the following night, ready to be greeted by the second spirit. He does not wish to be taken by surprise this time and opens the curtains. He is prepared for the ghost to take any shape. But when the clock strikes one and he is still alone, he becomes nervous. But soon a reddish light appears. At first the light scares Scrooge more than any ghost could have, but he realizes the obvious, that the light must be coming from elsewhere—and as it turns out it is coming from the adjoining room. As he approaches it, he hears the booming voice of the second spirit calling for him.

The room next-door has been transformed into a festive cavern, full to the brim with food and greenery. Amid all this sits the second spirit, who lifts up a glowing torch as Scrooge enters and introduces himself as the Ghost of Christmas Present. His eyes are kind, but Scrooge is scared to look in them. The ghost is dressed in a green robe with a wreath of holly round his head – he is the personification of Christmas.

The ghost is surprised that Scrooge has not met a spirit like him before, because he has more than eighteen hundred brothers. Scrooge apologizes. He tells the ghost that he learned a valuable lesson from the previous spirit and to show him whatever he needs to. The ghost asks Scrooge to touch his robe. The instant Scrooge does, they are transported out of the room into the cold Christmas street, where many neighbors are scraping and shoveling the snow from their roofs, and talking to each other merrily, despite the gloomy weather.

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| The street and shop fronts are a glorious display of foods, towering, brightly colored. Smells of figs and spices fill the air. Everybody is rushing about buying things for the season and the shopkeepers are too busy making merry to worry about getting the right prices. Then the church bells ring and the flocks of people go off to church. As the people pass, the spirit is entranced by them, and sprinkles incense from his torch on their food, which has a magical effect of making any disagreements vanish. He tells Scrooge that the incense is a particular flavor, and is best given to a poor dinner.   |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | | They travel on, toward the outskirts of the city. The ghost has a magic ability to fit into any space, despite his giant size, and as they enter Bob Cratchit’s tiny lodgings, this is especially wondrous. The ghost sprinkles some of his incense. They see Mrs. Cratchit, in an old dress but making it merry with ribbons, and the many Cratchit children, all helping to ready the house for Christmas dinner. | | | | | | | | | | | |  | | | Martha, a daughter, arrives home late—she has been working and has brought the goose. Mrs. Cratchit is ecstatic to see her. But just as Martha has greeted them, they see Mr. Cratchit arrive, carrying the youngest of their children, Tiny Tim, and Martha goes to hide to surprise him. She doesn’t let the joke go on long, seeing her father’s upset face, and comes out to surprise him and is tightly hugged in return. Bob tells his wife, while Tim is being shown the pudding by his siblings, how much better their son’s health is becoming. Bob is tearful when he relates Tim’s wish that passers-by should see his crippled state and be reminded of the miracles of Jesus, who helped the sick. | |  | | | | | | | | | | | | | Then Tim comes back into the room and the goose is brought out. All the trimmings are readied and placed around it, a prayer is said and then they carve the bird and are full of joy at the lovely smell and how lucky they are. When they have eaten every morsel, Mrs. Cratchit goes nervously to get the pudding. She brings back the flaming round pudding and they all agree it is her greatest success yet. Nobody mentions how small it is. | | | |  | | | | | | | | | | | | After dinner they have hot drinks by the fire and toast to Christmas. Tiny Tim sits next to his father and says heartily, “God bless us every one”. Scrooge eagerly asks the spirit if Tim will survive. The spirit responds that if the future is unaltered, the boy will die. He condemns Scrooge, saying that he is less fit to live than poor children like Tim – he compares Scrooge to an insect on a leaf complaining about his brothers in the dust. | | | | | |  | | | | | | | | | | | Just then, Scrooge jumps—Bob Cratchit has said Scrooge's name, in a toast. Mrs. Cratchit says she doesn’t understand how her husband can act so grateful to that miser. She says that it's only on Christmas that someone so cruel can be toasted. But Bob responds that he forgives everything on Christmas and gently scolds her for talking negatively on Christmas day. She drinks the toast for her husband’s sake, and, after the thought of Scrooge has died away, the family is even merrier. | | | | | | | |  | | | | | | | | | | They talk about employment, and Mr. Cratchit says that Scrooge might have work for Peter, the eldest. Martha Cratchit tells them about her hard work at the milliners, from which she is so tired that she might sleep all day tomorrow. Then they listen to Tiny Tim sing a song. And though they don’t have much, they seem contented, as if they don’t even need the spirit’s incense. | | | | | | | | | |  | | | | | | | | | As Scrooge and the spirit wander on through the city, they see wonderful sights like this all over town. So many people are on their way to see family that Scrooge wonders if there is anybody inside at all. The ghost rejoices in this display. They are suddenly transported to a far different place, a deserted moor where the miners live—the ghost shows Scrooge where they sit beside a fire singing a song with their women and children. Next the ghost takes Scrooge even further afield, over the sea, wild and unfriendly, and finds two men celebrating Christmas in a lighthouse on a remote shore. Then, even further into the wild, they find the crew of a ship, humming together a Christmas tune. Scrooge is astonished at the kindness he finds in such a lonely place. | | | | | | | | | | | |  | | | | | | | | Scrooge is interrupted in his vision by a hearty laugh. All of a sudden they are transported to his nephew’s house. There are few things better than a good laugh, says the narrator, and Fred’s is contagious. As Scrooge listens to the party, laughing together, he realizes that they are laughing at him. They are laughing at his saying “Humbug!” to Christmas. Fred’s wife, who is described as exceedingly pleasant-looking, thinks he should be ashamed of himself. Fred says that he doesn’t get anything from his wealth anyway, because he doesn’t do any good with it. Fred feels sorry for his Uncle, because he is missing many pleasant moments, and he decides to keep pestering him every year in the hope that one day, he’ll get to him. They all laugh again at this notion. | | | | | | | | | | | | | |  | | | | | | | Scrooge’s niece plays a tune on the harp that Scrooge remembers fondly. It makes him feel sentimental, and he thinks that perhaps if he had heard it more often in his young life, things would have turned out differently. Then, the family plays games. First, is blind-man’s buff, which one of the guests uses as an opportunity to hug again and again the woman at the party whom he has a thing for. | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |  | | | | | | As Scrooge watches, he joins in the games, making unheard guesses and contributions. He begs to spirit to let him stay for one more game. It is called “Yes and No”. Fred thinks of something and the players have to guess what it is. After a barrage of questions, they find out that the thing is an animal, who grunts and growls. It turns out to be Uncle Scrooge. They all laugh hysterically, and say a toast to Scrooge for giving them so much fun. | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |  | | | | | Scrooge has been so enlivened by the evening that he is very sorry to go, but the spirit tells him they must journey on, and they visit many more Christmas scenes with the same happy endings, no matter what conditions the revelers are in. But as they travel, the Ghost of Christmas Present is noticeably aging. He says his brief life will be over at midnight. | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |  | | | | As the bells chime and time passes, Scrooge notices something strange under the ghost’s robe. Two children creep out. They are miserable animals, so sick and shriveled that they look old instead of young. Scrooge asks the spirit if they are his. The spirit replies that they are Man’s. They represent Ignorance and Want. He tells Scrooge to beware them both, but mostly the boy, Ignorance. Scrooge asks if there is no refuge for these poor children, but the spirit answers with Scrooge’s own words, “Are there no workhouses?” As the bell strikes midnight, the ghost disappears and Scrooge sees another ghost coming towards him, a “solemn Phantom." | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |  | | |  |

Stave 4

The last ghost approaches, but is shrouded in a black garment so that all Scrooge can see of it is an outstretched hand and a mass of black. This figure fills him with greater dread than the other ghosts. It does not speak to him and beckons mysteriously with its hand. Scrooge guesses aloud that it is the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come and the ghost replies with a slight movement of its head. Though he fears the ghost, Scrooge urges it desperately to show him what it has for him.

Scrooge follows the spirit and suddenly they are in the midst of a street, busy with trade. Scrooge stops by a group of businessmen and hears them gossip about the long-awaited death of one of their contemporaries, whom they say is bound to have a cheap funeral. One gentleman comments that he will only go to the funeral if lunch is provided.

Scrooge looks questioningly to the spirit, but it just moves on to another group. Scrooge recognizes these men. This time the men merely mention the death of the mysterious man, and don’t seem to care at all. Scrooge puzzles through what he has heard. He knows that he is hearing these comments for a reason, but he can’t figure out whose death they are discussing. He waits to see himself appear in the vision, as he did in the scenes of Christmas past, but when they arrive at the corner where Scrooge usually stands, another man has taken his place. Scrooge hopes that this is because his future self has taken a new turn in life.

Scrooge realizes the ghost is looking at him again, and feels a new surge of terror. The ghost leads him to an infamous part of town, full of misery and crime. Here, in a grimy rag-and-bone den, they find an old man trying to keep warm in his meager lodgings. He is soon joined by three others and the group start to laugh together. The old man, Joe, invites his friends into the parlor and the three men offer to trade him bundles of things they have come into possession of after a rich man’s death. They agree that it is no sin to take these things without permission, since their owner was so unkind in life.

The first opens the first bundle and finds a few small items of not much worth. Joe totals up the value for its owner. The next woman opens her bundle and reveals some silver and fabrics. The next reveals a pair of bed curtains and blankets, which the woman says she unwrapped from the dead corpse. It would have been wasted, she adds, by wrapping him in it. Scrooge listens, appalled.

The room changes; now in dim light, there is a bed and on top, a body, covered in a sheet. The ghost points ominously towards the head but Scrooge finds he can't make himself remove the cloth. The narrator recites a lesson about death—that the good-natured body cannot suffer from death and will instead “sow the world with life immortal.” This lesson is what Scrooge hears in his mind when he looks at the body, and imagines the wicked thoughts that have led him to being rich and not good. He considers the awful prospect of dying alone.

Scrooge assures the ghost that he is aware of the lesson he is being taught and begs to leave, but the spirit will not rest and seems to be staring at him. Scrooge begs him to show one person who is sorry for this dead man. They are instantly transported to the home of a young family. The husband comes home, burdened by bad news, but he says there is hope. He tells his wife that the man they are indebted to is dead. His wife can’t help but be thankful. They don’t know who will take over their debt but it’s very unlikely that he should be such an incredible miser as the last. The house becomes a little lighter and happier for the man’s death.

But Scrooge wishes to see some scrap of tenderness to dim even slightly the terrible image of the body lying alone in that house. The ghost takes him to Bob Cratchit’s house, where the Cratchits are unusually silent, waiting for Bob to come home. Mrs. Cratchit is sewing but stops because the color is making her eyes tired. As Scrooge enters with the spirit he hears a phrase as if in a dream, “And he took a child, and set him in the midst of them.” Scrooge realizes that Tiny Tim has died. Bob is due home but one of the children says he’s been walking slower recently, and they all agree that he used to go more quickly with Tiny Tim on his shoulders.

At that moment, Bob enters, wrapped in his blanket. His family helps him to tea and his children gather around him to comfort him. Bob is pleasant with everybody. He has been to see the place where Tim will be buried – he is pleased to find it green. He promised Tim he would walk there every Sunday. At the thought of his promise, he breaks down into tears. He goes upstairs to the room where Tim has been laid down on a bed. He composes himself, kisses Tim's little face, then goes downstairs again.

Bob then tells his family of the beautiful kindness of Scrooge’s nephew, whom he met in the street. Fred noticed that Bob looked sad and gave him sincere condolences, and sent his love to his family and gave him his address, so that they could be in touch if they need anything. Bob thinks he might even be able to get Peter, the eldest, a job. One of the other children says that Peter will soon leave them and set up with a family of his own. Bob admits that this may be so, but that they will never forget this time together, and their first loss, of Tiny Tim, and how very good he was.

Scrooge can tell that the ghost is about to leave him. He wants to know finally who the dead man is. The ghost takes Scrooge to his office, but they seem to be passing through it. Scrooge asks to see himself inside his house, but the spirit points in another direction. He joins the spirit again at the iron gate of a churchyard, a wretched, lifeless place.

The spirit keeps pointing, now it is clear that he is directing Scrooge to one grave in particular. Scrooge desperately asks whether the things the spirit has shown him can be changed or whether they are set in stone, but the spirit only points with more determination. Scrooge goes to the gravestone indicated by the spirit. It is neglected, and Scrooge's own name is inscribed on it. Scrooge cries out, knowing that he is the dead man on the bed, alone and unloved. He gets down on his knees before the spirit and begs him to reassure him that an altered life will produce an altered fate. He vows to honor Christmas and learn all his lessons. He catches the spirit’s hand, and squeezes, and the spirit floats down into the ground and disappears.

Stave 5

Scrooge wakes to find himself back in bed, in his rooms, his face wet with tears. He is so grateful to see everything, and to know that he has time ahead of him to make things right. He jumps out of bed and puts on his clothes and declares that he is “happy as an angel.” He laughs like he hasn’t laughed in years. He doesn’t even know how long he has been asleep or what has occurred here, but he feels like a baby.

The church bells start chiming. Scrooge runs to the window and sees a beautifully clear, cold day. He shouts out to ayoung boy on the street what day it is. The boy replies that it is Christmas Day. Scrooge is ecstatic not to have missed it. He asks the boy to go to the nearby shop with the huge prize turkey in the window and to buy it, and offers him half a crown if he comes back quickly. The grateful boy dashes off. As he waits for the turkey, he sees his door knocker again, and exclaims how thankful he is to it for showing him Jacob Marley’s face.

The turkey arrives and Scrooge delights in sending it to the Cratchit house, paying everyone handsomely for the job. He can’t stop chuckling, so much so that he has trouble shaving and dressing. He goes into the street and greets everybody warmly. Some even greet him back. He meets one of the gentlemen who had come to see him the day before and wishes him Merry Christmas. He tells the man that he knows that his name is not pleasant to him, but asks to be forgiven and gives him a large donation for the poor. He says he won't accept the man's surprised offer of thanks, but asks the gentleman to come and visit him.

All morning, Scrooge walks through the town, greeting and talking to people. Then he goes to his nephew’s house and summons up the courage to knock. He is met by thehousekeeper and asks kindly to come upstairs. He stuns everyone when he arrives and announces he has come to dinner, but they rapidly make him feel at home, and he enjoys an evening that is just as wonderful as it was in the spirit’s vision.

The next day, Scrooge goes to the office, in the hope of catching Bob Cratchit coming in late. Sure enough, Cratchit arrives late, and Scrooge pretends to be his old self and growls at him. He starts as if to punish Bob, but then shocks Cratchit by telling him that he is going to raise his salary. He laughs with joy and promises to help Cratchit and his family.

The narrator ends by saying that Scrooge does all that he promises, and more. Tiny Tim survives and thrives. Scrooge is popular with many, and it doesn't bother him that some people still remember and mistrust him because he was once such an old miser. He becomes known for his Christmas spirit, and the story ends with Tiny Tim’s words, “God bless us, every one!”

Critical Themes (class work):

1. Poverty and unjust treatment of the poor
2. Greediness
3. Forgiveness
4. Redemption
5. Tradition
6. Family
7. Threat of Time