

Tiny Tim and the theme of kindness

Assessment objectives

- AO1, AO2

Text references

You will have read from:

- 'Let me see some tenderness...' to '...thy childish essence was from God!'

How does Dickens explore the theme of kindness in this scene?

When Scrooge asked, in the previous scene, to witness some 'emotion' over the dead man, what he sees from the debtor and his wife is happiness and relief at the death. This time Scrooge adapts his question and asks: 'Let me see some tenderness connected with a death.' He still holds out some hope that the dead man – awful though he was – inspired some love or kindness. But, yet again, what the Third Ghost shows Scrooge brings little relief.

How are the Cratchits presented?

What evidence is there of the Cratchit family's kindness and dignity in the face of Tiny Tim's death? Consider these extracts from this section:

- 'Quiet. Very quiet. The noisy little Cratchits were still as statues in one corner.'
- 'His [Bob's] tea was ready for him on the hob, and they all tried who should help him to it most.'
- 'Then the two young Cratchits got upon his knees and laid, each child a little cheek, against his face.'

- 1 Take each extract in turn, and explain the effect of particular details on how we view the Cratchit family. For example, why is the observation that the children were 'still as statues' so moving?
- 2 When Bob goes upstairs, Dickens says:

Poor Bob sat down [in the chair] and when he had thought a little and composed himself, he kissed the little face. He was reconciled to what had happened, and went down again quite happy.

The word 'happy' is used to describe Bob here – and he is also described as being 'cheerful' with the children. Mrs Cratchit speaks in a 'cheerful voice' about Bob carrying Tim home. What point do you think Dickens is making about the Cratchit family by using this word?

Key context

There is a convention in ghost stories of supernatural forces wilfully twisting what a mortal person says. For example, in 'The Monkey's Paw' by W.W. Jacobs, a family is granted three wishes. Their first wish is for money to pay off a loan – they get it, but it is in the form of financial compensation, after their son is killed in a factory accident. Each wish brings something more terrible.

