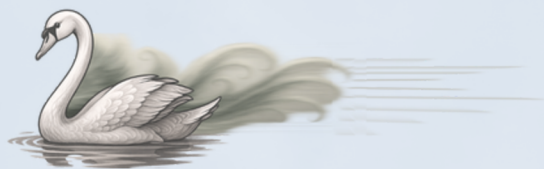


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Classroom resources



A CHRISTMAS CAROL: IN PROSE

CHARLES DICKENS

Introduction

- PART ONE: *Synopsis and Cultural and Historical Background*
- PART TWO: *Chapter One*
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About the author





Introduction

This guide has been designed to offer ideas for exploring Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*, his best-known and most often adapted story from the Victorian period. While familiar to many, the novella rewards a closer look, as it combines social criticism with one of literature's most memorable tales of transformation.

We begin with a synopsis and a short overview of the cultural and historical background, helping to set the scene for readers. From there, Chapter One can be read and discussed on its own, guided by the questions provided. Once the book has been read in full, the guide looks more closely at the key characters, central themes, and important scenes. Each of these sections is accompanied by questions and carefully selected quotations, intended to encourage discussion, prompt reflection, and provide material for both conversation and written tasks.

The intention is that these resources will support teachers and students alike in finding new insights, sparking debate, and deepening enjoyment of Dickens' classic.





Part One: Synopsis and Background

Synopsis

A Christmas Carol tells the story of Ebenezer Scrooge, a miserly old man known for his bitterness and unkindness. On Christmas Eve, he is confronted by the ghost of his former business partner, Jacob Marley, who warns that Scrooge has only one chance to change before he faces a dreadful fate in the afterlife. What follows is a series of visitations by three further spirits: the Ghost of Christmas Past, the Ghost of Christmas Present, and the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come. Each of them shows Scrooge the consequences of his behaviour—how it harms those close to him, how it neglects those less fortunate, and how it will shape his own lonely future. When he wakes on Christmas morning, Scrooge understands that he must alter his course while there is still time.

Cultural & Historical Background

Charles Dickens published A Christmas Carol in 1843, and it quickly became his most famous book. Even today, nearly two centuries later, people all over the world still read it, watch it, and love it.

It isn't just a story about one grumpy old man. It's a warning about what happens when greed and selfishness take over. Dickens knew what real poverty looked like—he'd lived through it himself—and he was angry at how badly the poor were treated in Victorian Britain. That anger runs through the book: Scrooge shows us the cold heart of greed, while the Cratchit family remind us how hard life was for the poor, yet also how much love and hope could survive in the toughest times.

The story also helped shape Christmas as we know it. In the 1800s, new traditions were catching on: decorated Christmas trees, carol singing, and even spooky ghost stories by candlelight. Dickens took all these and wove them into his tale, mixing festive cheer with a good scare.

Since its first printing, A Christmas Carol has never gone out of print. It has been retold on stage and screen countless times—from grand operas to cartoons, and even by The Muppets. Its message of kindness, generosity, and change is as powerful now as it was when Dickens first wrote it.

Before diving into the novel with the class, warm them up with a few quick-fire questions:

- If they haven't heard of it: What do you think the story might be about just from the title A Christmas Carol? Looking at the cover, what sort of mood or feeling does it give you? Do you think it's going to be cheerful, spooky, or something else?
- If they already know it: Have you read the book before, or only seen one of the films, plays, or TV versions? If you've seen an adaptation, what stuck with you the most?





Part Two: Chapter One

Read the first chapter together as a group before moving on. Use these questions and quotes to spark discussion about how Dickens sets things up. Some of these will come back later in the story.

STAVES

- Do you know what a “stave” is? (Tip: it’s connected to music.)
- Why do you think Dickens gave his chapters this name? (Hint: link it to the word carol in the title!)
- What does this choice suggest about the way Dickens wanted us to experience the story?

•

SETTING AND ATMOSPHERE

“The city clocks had only just gone three, but it was quite dark already – it had not been light all day – and candles were flaring in the windows of the neighbouring offices, like ruddy smears upon the palpable brown air. The fog came pouring in at every chink and keyhole, and was so dense without, that although the court was of the narrowest, the houses opposite were mere phantoms.” (pp. 7–8)

- *Where is the story taking place?*
- *When is it set?*
- *What do you know about life in this period? Why might it matter?*
- *How does Dickens describe the city here? Can you find words or images that stand out?*
- *What kind of mood or atmosphere does this description create? Does it feel gloomy, eerie, lively—or something else?*
- *Do you think Dickens successfully builds atmosphere? Why?*





Part Two: Chapter One

EBENEZER SCROOGE

“But he was a tight-fisted hand at the grindstone, Scrooge! A squeezing, wrenching, grasping, scraping, clutching, covetous old sinner! Hard and sharp as flint... secret, and self-contained, and solitary as an oyster [...] External heat and cold had little influence on Scrooge. No warmth could warm, no wintry weather chill him. No wind that blew was bitterer than he...” (pp. 4–5)

Questions to Discuss

-
- **What picture of Scrooge do we get from this introduction?**
- **What kind of man does he seem to be? Why?**
- **What words or phrases does Dickens use to describe him? Which stand out?**
- **How does Dickens’ choice of language make you feel about Scrooge?**
- **What images or comparisons (similes, metaphors) does Dickens use? What do they suggest?**
- **What do we learn about Scrooge’s values or beliefs? What seems important to him?**
- **Choose three words to sum up Scrooge.**
- **How does the opening chapter make you feel about him—do you like him, dislike him, pity him?**
- **What kind of life do you think Scrooge leads? Does it sound happy?**

Does the opening chapter to A Christmas Carol make you want to keep reading the book? If So, Why?





Part Three: The Key Characters

In this section we zoom back in on Scrooge, but he's not hogging the stage alone. The other characters step forward too — and they're not just there for decoration. Each one throws light on Scrooge, testing him, challenging him, and showing what Dickens really wants us to see. Together they drive the big themes and power the story's most important moments.

Returning To Ebenezer Scrooge

- After reading the whole story, has your opinion of Scrooge shifted?
- In what way? Did he behave how you thought he would, or did he surprise you?
- What's your final verdict on Scrooge as a person?
- Compare him now to Chapter One: how is he different?
- What fresh details did Dickens drop in as the story went on? Can you give examples?
- Did your feelings about him change? When did that happen in the story?
- Do you think he's actually sympathetic in the end? Why or why not?
- How does Dickens want us to see him by the final pages?

How would you describe Ebenezer Scrooge? What do you think are his most prominent characteristics?

Describe him in your own words. Focus on his personality, the way he acts, and his flaws and strengths. Try not to focus on his physical description. You may use examples from the text to support your description.





Fred

“A merry Christmas, uncle! God save you!” cried a cheerful voice [...] He had so heated himself with rapid walking in the fog and frost, this nephew of Scrooge’s, that he was all in a glow; his face was ruddy and handsome; his eyes sparkled, and his breath smoked again. [page 9]

“If you should happen, by any unlikely chance, to know a man more blest in a laugh than Scrooge’s nephew, all I can say is, I should like to know him too.” [page 152]

- What kind of person is Fred? Do you actually like him, or is he too cheerful?
- What part does Fred play in the story – why is he more than just background noise?
- How do other characters treat Fred? What does their reaction tell us about him?
- How does Fred talk about Scrooge? What does this reveal about his character?
- Which words or images does Dickens use to show Fred’s main traits?
- Is Fred genuinely “good”? Point to actions or moments in the text to prove it.
- If you had to pick three words to describe Fred, which would you choose?

When Fred first appears, Dickens sets him up as the opposite of Scrooge.

- In what ways are Fred and Scrooge different? Look at personality, behaviour, even the way they’re described.
- Which phrases or images highlight these contrasts? Compare directly.
- By the end of the novel, do Fred and Scrooge share any similarities at all?





Bob Cratchit

“The office was closed in a twinkling, and the clerk, with the long ends of his white comforter dangling below his waist (for he boasted no great-coat), went down a slide on Cornhill, at the end of a lane of boys, twenty times, in honour of its being Christmas Eve, and then ran home to Camden Town as hard as he could pelt, to play at blind-man’s buff.” [pages 25–26]

“Bob, the father, with at least three feet of comforter exclusive of the fringe, hanging down before him; and his threadbare clothes darned up and brushed, to look seasonable; and Tiny Tim upon his shoulder.” [page 129]

- What sort of person is Bob? Do you like him?
- Why is Bob important in the story – what does he represent?
- How do other characters see Bob?
- How does Bob speak about Scrooge? What does this show about his nature?
- What are Bob’s main qualities? Which words or images from Dickens highlight them?
- Is Bob a genuinely “good” man? Which actions prove it?
- If you had to sum Bob up in three words, which would you choose?

When Dickens shows us Bob’s home and family in Chapter Three:

- Why does Dickens spend so much time describing Bob’s home life?
- What extra layers of Bob’s character do we see through his family scenes?
- How does Bob’s warm, noisy household compare with Scrooge’s cold, empty one? Use examples.

Tiny Tim

“Alas for Tiny Tim, he bore a little crutch, and had his limbs supported by an iron frame!”

“As good as gold,” said Bob, “and better. Somehow he gets thoughtful, sitting by himself so much, and thinks the strangest things you ever heard. He told me, coming home, that he hoped the people saw him in the church, because he was a cripple, and it might be pleasant to them to remember upon Christmas Day, who made lame beggars walk, and blind men see.”

- What role does Tiny Tim play in the story – why is he so central to Dickens’ message?
- How do other characters react to Tim? What does their love for him show us?
- How does Scrooge talk about Tiny Tim? What does that reveal about Scrooge’s change?
- What are Tiny Tim’s key traits? Which words and images from Dickens highlight them?
- Why is Tiny Tim’s disability significant in the story?
- What does Tiny Tim stand for symbolically, and how is this made clear in the text?
- If you had to sum him up in three words, which would you choose?





THE GHOSTS OF CHRISTMAS PAST, PRESENT AND YET TO COME

Christmas Past

"It was a strange figure – like a child: yet not so like a child as like an old man, viewed through some supernatural medium, which gave him the appearance of having receded from the view, and being diminished to a child's proportions. Its hair, which hung about its neck and down its back, was white as if with age; and yet the face had not a wrinkle in it, and the tenderest bloom was on the skin."

Christmas Present

"In easy state upon this couch, there sat a jolly Giant, glorious to see ... It was clothed in one simple green robe, or mantle, bordered with white fur. This garment hung so loosely on the figure, that its capacious breast was bare, as if disdaining to be warded or concealed by any artifice. Its feet, observable beneath the ample folds of the garment, were also bare; and on its head it wore no other covering than a holly wreath, set here and there with shining icicles. Its dark brown curls were long and free; free as its genial face, its sparkling eye, its open hand, its cheery voice, its unconstrained demeanour, and its joyful air."

Christmas Yet To Come

"The Phantom slowly, gravely, silently, approached. When it came near him, Scrooge bent down upon his knee; for in the very air through which this Spirit moved it seemed to scatter gloom and mystery. It was shrouded in a deep black garment, which concealed its head, its face, its form, and left nothing of it visible save one outstretched hand. But for this it would have been difficult to detach its figure from the night, and separate it from the darkness by which it was surrounded."

Take each ghost in turn: ° What do you think the ghost is there to represent or symbolise? ° What from the ghost's description or from Scrooge's experience is evidence of this? ° What language and imagery does Dickens employ to help communicate this symbolism? ° How does the description of this ghost relate to its name? ° Does this ghost remind you of anything, in the way it looks or its characteristics? ° Why do you think Dickens creates this association?





Part Four: Themes

Before taking the class through this section and the key themes of the text ask them:

° **What do you think the major themes of A Christmas Carol are? Why? (Give evidence to support your answers)**

THEME 1 : GREED

"A few of us are endeavouring to raise a fund to buy the Poor some meat and drink, and means of warmth. We choose this time, because it is a time, of all others, when Want is keenly felt, and Abundance rejoices. What shall I put you down for?"

"Nothing!" Scrooge replied. "You wish to be anonymous?" "I wish to be left alone," said Scrooge. "Since you ask me what I wish, gentlemen, that is my answer. I don't make merry myself at Christmas and I can't afford to make idle people merry. I help to support the establishments I have mentioned – they cost enough; and those who are badly off must go there."

"Every one of them wore chains like Marley's Ghost; some few (they might be guilty governments) were linked together; none were free. Many had been personally known to Scrooge in their lives. He had been quite familiar with one old ghost, in a white waistcoat, with a monstrous iron safe attached to its ankle, who cried piteously at being unable to assist a wretched woman with an infant, whom it saw below, upon a door-step."

"All your other hopes have merged into the hope of being beyond the chance of its sordid reproach. I have seen your nobler aspirations fall off one by one, until the master-passion, Gain, engrosses you ..." Scrooge listened to this dialogue in horror. As they sat grouped about their spoil, in the scanty light afforded by the old man's lamp, he viewed them with a detestation and disgust, which could hardly have been greater, though they had been obscene demons, marketing the corpse itself. "Ha, ha!" laughed the same woman, when old Joe, producing a flannel bag with money in it, told out their several gains upon the ground. "This is the end of it, you see! He frightened every one away from him when he was alive, to profit us when he was dead! Ha, ha, ha!"





Part Four: Themes

THEME 2: SOCIAL INEQUALITY

“The door of Scrooge’s counting-house was open that he might keep his eye upon his clerk, who in a dismal little cell beyond, a sort of tank, was copying letters. Scrooge had a very small fire, but the clerk’s fire was so very much smaller that it looked like one coal. But he couldn’t replenish it, for Scrooge kept the coal-box in his own room; and so surely as the clerk came in with the shovel, the master predicted that it would be necessary for them to part.”

“At this festive season of the year, Mr Scrooge,” said the gentleman, taking up a pen, “it is more than usually desirable that we should make some slight provision for the poor and destitute, who suffer greatly at the present time. Many thousands are in want of common necessities; hundreds of thousands are in want of common comforts, sir.” “Are there no prisons?” asked Scrooge. “Plenty of prisons,” said the gentleman, laying down the pen again. “And the Union workhouses?” demanded Scrooge. “Are they still in operation?” “They are. Still,” returned the gentleman, “I wish I could say they were not.”

“Bob had but fifteen “Bob” a-week himself; he pocketed on Saturdays but fifteen copies of his Christian name ...”

“The ways were foul and narrow; the shops and houses wretched; the people half-naked, drunken, slipshod, ugly. Alleys and archways, like so many cesspools, disgorged their offences of smell, and dirt, and life, upon the stragglng streets; and the whole quarter reeked with crime, with filth, and misery.”

THEME 3: REMORSE AND REDEMPTION

“Then, with a rapidity of transition very foreign to his usual character, he said, in pity for his former self, “Poor boy!” and cried again. “I wish,” Scrooge muttered, putting his hand in his pocket, and looking about him, after drying his eyes with his cuff: “but it’s too late now.” “What is the matter?” asked the Spirit. “Nothing,” said Scrooge. “Nothing. There was a boy singing a Christmas Carol at my door last night. I should like to have given him something: that’s all.”

“Good Spirit,” he pursued, as down upon the ground he fell before it. “Your nature intercedes for me, and pities me. Assure me that I yet may change these shadows you have shown me, by an altered life!” The kind hand trembled. “I will honour Christmas in my heart, and try to keep it all the year. I will live in the Past, the Present, and the Future. The Spirits of all Three shall strive within me. I will not shut out the lessons that they teach. Oh, tell me I may sponge away the writing on this stone!”

“Scrooge was better than his word. He did it all, and infinitely more; and to Tiny Tim, who did NOT die, he was a second father. He became as good a friend, as good a master, and as good a man, as the good old city knew, or any other good old city, town, or borough, in the good old world... His own heart laughed: and that was quite enough for him.”



Part Four: Themes

All of the characters and pivotal moments in the book are connected to and shaped by these themes. For each theme and its supporting quotations, consider the following key questions:

- 1. In what ways does Dickens present this theme across the text?*
- 2. How do the selected quotations demonstrate the theme in action?*
- 3. Which characters are most strongly influenced or defined by this theme?*
- 4. How does the theme influence their development and overall character arc?*
- 5. What might have motivated Dickens to focus on this theme?*





Part Five: The Key Scenes

Written to be read aloud as a Christmas ghost story and set out like a sung Christmas carol, each chapter (or stave) plays an important part in the whole story. We've picked out quotes and highlighted key scenes from each stave that show the main themes in action and help us understand the most important traits of the main and supporting characters.

Key Scene 1: A Visit From Jacob Marley

"The chain he drew was clasped about his middle. It was long, and wound about him like a tail; and it was made (for Scrooge observed it closely) of cash-boxes, keys, padlocks, ledgers, deeds, and heavy purses wrought in steel."

"I wear the chain I forged in life," replied the Ghost. "I made it link by link, and yard by yard; I girded it on of my own free will, and of my own free will I wore it. Is its pattern strange to you?" Scrooge trembled more and more. "Or would you know," pursued the Ghost, "the weight and length of the strong coil you bear yourself? It was full as heavy and as long as this, seven Christmas Eves ago. You have laboured on it, since. It is a ponderous chain!"

"Oh! captive, bound, and double-ironed [...] Not to know that no space of regret can make amends for one life's opportunity misused! Yet such was I! Oh! Such was I!" "But you were always a good man of business, Jacob," faltered Scrooge, who now began to apply this to himself. "Business!" cried the Ghost, wringing its hands again. "Mankind was my business. The common welfare was my business; charity, mercy, forbearance, and benevolence, were, all, my business. The dealings of my trade were but a drop of water in the comprehensive ocean of my business!"





Key Scene 2: The Ghost of Christmas Past

"It isn't that, Spirit. He has the power to render us happy or unhappy; to make our service light or burdensome; a pleasure or a toil. Say that his power lies in words and looks; in things so slight and insignificant that it is impossible to add and count 'em up: what then? The happiness he gives, is quite as great as if it cost a fortune."

"What Idol has displaced you?" he rejoined. "A golden one." "This is the even-handed dealing of the world!" he said. "There is nothing on which it is so hard as poverty; and there is nothing it professes to condemn with such severity as the pursuit of wealth!" "You fear the world so much," she answered, gently.... "May you be happy in the life you have chosen!"

Key Scene 3: The Ghost of Christmas Present

"If these shadows remain unaltered by the Future, none other of my race," returned the Ghost, "will find him here. What then? If he be like to die, he had better do it, and decrease the surplus population."

"Man," said the Ghost, "if man you be in heart, not adamant, forbear that wicked cant until you have discovered What the surplus is, and Where it is. Will you decide what men shall live, what men shall die? It may be, that in the sight of Heaven, you are more worthless and less fit to live than millions like this poor man's child."

"There was nothing of high mark in this. They were not a handsome family; they were not well dressed; their shoes were far from being water-proof; their clothes were scanty; and Peter might have known, and very likely did, the inside of a pawnbroker's. But, they were happy, grateful, pleased with one another, and contented with the time; and when they faded, and looked happier yet in the bright sprinklings of the Spirit's torch at parting, Scrooge had his eye upon them, and especially on Tiny Tim, until the last."

"They are Man's," said the Spirit, looking down upon them. "And they cling to me, appealing from their fathers. This boy is Ignorance. This girl is Want. Beware them both, and all of their degree, but most of all beware this boy, for on his brow I see that written which is Doom, unless the writing be erased. Deny it!" cried the Spirit, stretching out its hand towards the city. "Slander those who tell it ye! Admit it for your factious purposes, and make it worse. And bide the end!"





Key Scene 4: The Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come

“Ghost of the Future!” he exclaimed. “I fear you more than any Spectre I have seen. But as I know your purpose is to do me good, and as I hope to live to be another man from what I was, I am prepared to bear you company, and do it with a thankful heart ...”

“What has he done with his money?” asked a red-faced gentleman with a pendulous excrescence on the end of his nose, that shook like the gills of a turkey-cock. “I haven’t heard,” said the man with the large chin, yawning again. “Left it to his Company, perhaps. He hasn’t left it to me. That’s all I know.” This pleasantry was received with a general laugh. It’s likely to be a very cheap funeral,” said the same speaker; “for upon my life I don’t know of anybody to go to it.”

“It was a happier house for this man’s death! The only emotion that the Ghost could show him, caused by the event, was one of pleasure. “Let me see some tenderness connected with a death,” said Scrooge; “or that dark chamber, Spirit, which we left just now, will be for ever present to me.”

“A churchyard. Here, then, the wretched man whose name he had now to learn, lay underneath the ground. It was a worthy place. Walled in by houses; overrun by grass and weeds, the growth of vegetation’s death, not life; choked up with too much burying; fat with repleted appetite. A worthy place! “

Key Scene 5: Redemption!

“I am as light as a feather, I am as happy as an angel, I am as merry as a school-boy. I am as giddy as a drunken man. A merry Christmas to everybody! A happy New Year to all the world ...I don’t know what day of the month it is!” said Scrooge. “I don’t know how long I’ve been among the Spirits. I don’t know anything. I’m quite a baby. Never mind. I don’t care. I’d rather be a baby.”

“Lord bless me!” cried the gentleman, as if his breath were gone. “My dear Mr Scrooge, are you serious?” “If you please,” said Scrooge. “Not a farthing less. A great many back-payments are included in it, I assure you. Will you do me that favour?” “My dear sir,” said the other, shaking hands with him. “I don’t know what to say to such munifi–” “Don’t say anything, please,” retorted Scrooge.”





“In the afternoon he turned his steps towards his nephew’s house. He passed the door a dozen times, before he had the courage to go up and knock. But he made a dash, and did it...“Why bless my soul!” cried Fred, “who’s that?” “It’s I. Your uncle Scrooge. I have come to dinner. Will you let me in, Fred?” Let him in! It is a mercy he didn’t shake his arm off. He was at home in five minutes. Nothing could be heartier.”

“A merry Christmas, Bob!” said Scrooge, with an earnestness that could not be mistaken, as he clapped him on the back. “A merrier Christmas, Bob, my good fellow, than I have given you, for many a year!”

You will already have looked at parts of these scenes when talking about the characters and themes of the book. But it’s important (and useful practice!) to come back to them now and keep thinking about how the story works as a whole.

Read the scenes above and discuss them using the following questions:

1. How does this scene make you feel? Can you explain why?
2. What themes is Dickens showing us in this part of the story?
3. How is Scrooge changed or influenced here? What do we learn about him and the other characters?
4. Choose five words or phrases Dickens uses very carefully. What do they tell us about the themes, symbols, or characters?
5. How does this scene affect the story as a whole?

Tip: Always back up your answers with evidence from the text!





About the Author



*Charles Dickens (1812–1870) is one of the most celebrated writers of the Victorian age, remembered for novels such as *Oliver Twist*, *Great Expectations*, and *David Copperfield*. He grew up in difficult circumstances, spending part of his childhood working in a factory after his father was sent to prison for debt. This early experience of hardship gave Dickens a lifelong concern with poverty, inequality, and the struggles of ordinary people. In 1843, Dickens wrote *A Christmas Carol* in just a few weeks, partly to earn money, but also to draw attention to the problems faced by the poor in Victorian Britain.*

He was inspired by both his social campaigning and his own memories of Christmas. The story mixes ghostly adventure with a strong moral message about generosity, kindness, and social responsibility.

The novella was an instant success and has never been out of print. It helped popularise many traditions we now associate with Christmas—festive meals, family gatherings, charity, and goodwill. More than just a seasonal tale, it showed that stories could make readers laugh, cry, and change the way they thought about the world. Scrooge's transformation remains one of literature's most powerful examples of redemption.



Over are Two hand-outs on How to Use Annotations



HOW TO USE ANNOTATIONS

“

This book has wide margins and spaced text to make marking your ideas and annotations easy. Always use a pencil when you first annotate in case you change your mind or find out something new!

”



“

Remember to use highlighters and different colored pens for different characters, ideas or themes.

”

- Use the top of the page for notes as well as the margin – perhaps a summary of the chapter would be useful?
- By referencing key scenes from the plot at the top of every chapter, it will make it much easier to find things when you are looking for them!
- Use the top of the page for notes as well as the margin – perhaps a summary of the chapter would be useful?
- Remember to mark any questions you may have in the margins with a question mark. Use pencil at first!
- Underline any words you do not recognise in the text and when you find out what they are, write the word – or phrase – in the space between the lines.

DON'T FORGET – ANNOTATIONS ARE THERE TO HELP YOU MAKE SENSE OF THE TEXT!

“Using simple symbols for each quote, theme or character helps you keep track!”



“Using down arrows allows you to mark a section, whether it is important thematically, you want to learn it to use as a quotation, or it is a key character or plot moment.”

YOUR ANNOTATIONS ARE IMPORTANT FOR REVISION TOO!

In conclusion, always use your annotations when revising. This is why it is so important to plan exactly how you are going to annotate the book – so that you can find things quickly and easily when revising. For this reason, stay consistent, whether it is in the use of symbols, colours or highlights. And by the way – don't go too mad with the highlighters – it makes the text hard to read if there is too much of it, and it will hinder your revising rather than helping. Good luck!