

## A Christmas Carol

by Charles Dickens

This is one of the most famous stories of all time. Many people know the name of Scrooge, even they haven't read the book. Have you come across Scrooge before? Perhaps it was just the name that was familiar – or perhaps you've seen one of the countless film adaptations. If so, what do you remember of it?

Dickens wrote *A Christmas Carol* in 1843, when people didn't celebrate Christmas as much as we do now. But things were changing: Christmas cards and Christmas trees were starting to be popular. Dickens wanted his book to look beautiful, and had the illustrations coloured by hand, as you can see from this one:



- *A Christmas Carol* was an instant hit, and is still famous all over the world. Why do you think it has been so popular?
- Dickens came to be called The Man Who Invented Christmas. I wonder what he would have thought of the way Christmas is marketed these days?
- At the time he was writing the book Dickens had been very disturbed by reports about the ill-treatment of young children sent to work down the coal-mines. He would also walk for hours at night through the poorest parts of London. He said he wanted to speak up for 'the poor man's child'. Do you think he does in this story?

- Dickens knew prison life at first hand. When he was about twelve years old, his father was imprisoned for debt, and as was the custom in those days, his family moved into prison with him. Do you think this childhood experience has left its mark on the *Carol*?
  
- The subtitle of *A Christmas Carol* is 'A Ghost Story of Christmas'. Is it scary?
  
- A few years ago a version of *A Christmas Carol* was put on in prison: it was called *Scrooge in the Scrubs*. Prisoners took on the different parts, and also performed their own songs. What part might you have enjoyed playing?
  
- Do you have a favourite Christmas film or song? What is it?

### **Other books to explore:**

More Dickens, such as *Oliver Twist*. Or his wonderful essay about walking in London at night, called 'Night Walks'.

You might also enjoy more ghost stories – which people traditionally read at Christmas. Try Susan Hill's classic *The Woman in Black*, or collections of ghost stories in your library.

Finally, Happy Christmas, and God bless us, every one!