

Paper 1A: Reading fiction texts

A Christmas Carol



Reading comprehension activities

AQA Paper 1A: 'A Christmas Carol'

***The following extract is taken from Charles Dickens' novel, A Christmas Carol, written in 1843.
In this extract, Ebenezer Scrooge is visited by the ghost of his old business partner, Jacob Marley.***

Now, it is a fact, that there was nothing at all unusual about the knocker on the door, except that it was very large. It is also a fact, that Scrooge had seen it, night and morning, during his whole residence in that place. Let it also be remembered that Scrooge had not once thought about his dead business partner Jacob Marley since he died seven years ago. So then, can any man explain to me, how it happened that Scrooge, putting his key in the lock of the door, saw in the door-knocker Jacob Marley's face?

Marley's face. It had a strange glow about it, like a bad lobster in a dark cellar. It was not angry or ferocious, but looked at Scrooge as Marley used to look: with ghostly spectacles upon its ghostly forehead. Its hair moved, as if blown by breath or by hot-air; and, though its eyes were wide open, they were perfectly still. That, and its pale colour, made it seem horrible. As Scrooge looked fixedly at this phenomenon, it was a door-knocker again.

To say that Scrooge was not startled would be untrue. But he put his hand upon the key, turned it sturdily, walked in, and lit a candle. He **did** pause, with a moment's hesitation, before he shut the door; and he **did** look cautiously behind the door first, as if he half expected to be terrified by the sight of the back of Marley's head sticking out into the hall. But there was nothing on the back of the door, except the screws and nuts that held the door-knocker on, so he said "Pooh, pooh!" and closed it with a bang. He locked the door, and walked across the hall, and up the stairs, slowly too.

Before he shut his heavy door, Scrooge walked through his rooms to check that all was right. He had just enough recollection of the face on the door-knocker to want to do that. Sitting-room, bed-room, utility room. All as they should be. Nobody under the table, nobody under the sofa; a small fire in the grate; nobody under the bed; nobody in the closet; nobody in his dressing-gown, which was hanging up in a suspicious manner against the wall.

Quite satisfied, Scrooge closed his door, and locked himself in; double-locked himself in, which was not his usual habit. Thus secured against surprise, he took off his cravat; put on his dressing-gown and slippers, and his night-cap; and sat down before the fire to eat his gruel. As he tipped his head back in the chair, he happened to notice a bell, an old, disused bell that hung in the room. It was with great astonishment, and with a strange feeling of dread, that as Scrooge looked, he saw this bell begin to swing. It swung so softly at first that it hardly made a sound; but soon it rang out loudly, and so did every bell in the house. This might have lasted half a minute, or a minute, but it seemed to last an hour. The bells stopped as they had begun, all together. They were followed by a clanking noise, deep down below; as if some person were dragging a heavy chain over the barrels in the cellar. Scrooge then remembered to have heard that ghosts in haunted houses were described as dragging chains. The cellar-door flew open with a booming sound, and then he heard the clanking noise much louder, coming up the stairs; then coming straight towards his door.

"It's humbug still!" said Scrooge. "I won't believe it."

His colour changed though, when, without a pause, Jacob Marley's ghost walked through the heavy door, and passed into the room before his eyes.

Q1: Read the **second paragraph** again.

List **four details** given about the **door-knocker**.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

EXTENSION:

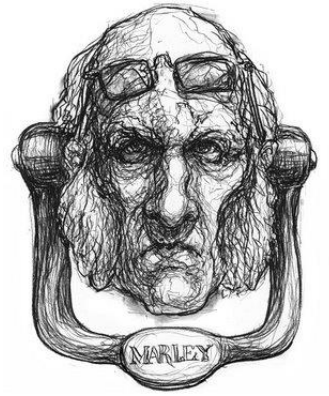
Label the image below with **quotations** from the **second paragraph**.

Use **four quotations**.



Q2: Read **paragraphs four and five** again.

How does the writer use **language** to show **Scrooge is frightened**?



What to do:

- (1) **Read** the sentences below.
- (2) **Fill in the gaps.** Choose the correct word from the *Word Box* at the bottom.

The _____ uses a variety of interesting language to suggest to the reader that Scrooge is _____. One feature of language that the writer uses is repetition of the word “_____” in the phrase: “**nobody** under the bed, **nobody** in the closet, **nobody** in his dressing gown.” Repeating the word “nobody” helps the reader to understand that Scrooge is frightened because he is checking that there is nobody else in his _____.

Another interesting feature of language Dickens uses to show that Scrooge is frightened is the _____ Scrooge gets when the _____ begin to ring in his house. Dickens explains that Scrooge had a “**strange feeling of dread.**” The word “**dread**” helps the reader to understand that Scrooge is so nervous that he feels _____.

WORD BOX: Use each word only once.

feeling

sick

author

frightened

nobody

house

bells

Q3a: Now you think about the **whole** of the source.

How has the writer **structured** the text to interest you?

What to do:

(1) Read the sentences below.

(2) Number them in the correct order to show your understanding of the story.

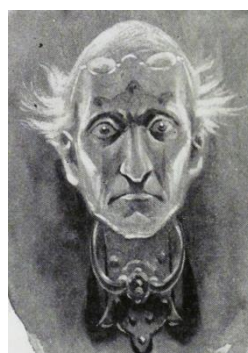
- What follows is a description of Scrooge searching all the rooms of his house to make sure that he is alone. Clearly, Marley's face on the door knocker has frightened Scrooge.

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- What follows is a detailed description of Jacob Marley's ghostly face on the door knocker. The author explains that it glows in the dark, has spectacles on its forehead and its hair is moving about as if blown by hot air.

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- The climax of the episode is when the bells start ringing, followed by the sound of chains dragging on the floor. Marley's ghost walks through the door and into the room to talk to Scrooge.

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- The writer begins by describing Scrooge returning home, putting his key in the door and noticing the door knocker. Marley's face appears on the door knocker.

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- The narrative focus then shifts to Scrooge, entering his home and looking behind the door, half expecting to see the back of Marley's head. He thinks he has just imagined it and locks the door behind him.
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Q3b: Write up.

What to do:

- (1) **Read the sentences below.**
- (2) **Fill in the gaps.** Choose the correct word from the *Word Box* at the bottom.

The writer begins by describing _____ returning home, putting his key in the door and noticing the door knocker. _____ face appears on the door knocker.

What follows is a detailed description of Jacob Marley's ghostly face on the door knocker. The author explains that it _____ in the dark, has spectacles on its forehead and its _____ is moving about as if blown by hot air.

The narrative focus then shifts to Scrooge, entering his home and looking behind the door, half expecting to see the back of Marley's head. He thinks he has just _____ the whole thing and locks the door behind him.

What follows is a description of Scrooge _____ all the rooms of his house to make sure that he is alone. Clearly, Marley's face on the door knocker has _____ Scrooge.

The climax of the episode is when the _____ start ringing, followed by the sound of _____ dragging on the floor. Marley's ghost walks through the door and into the room to talk to Scrooge.

WORD BOX: Use each word only once.

<i>imagined</i>	chains	<i>searching</i>	Marley's	<i>hair</i>
Scrooge	<i>glows</i>	bells	<i>frightened</i>	