

A Christmas Carol | Context Clues

Pre-Show Activity | Grades 6-12

Alignment

- Learning Objective
 - Students will analyze historical, social, and moral contexts from *A Christmas Carol* by matching textual evidence with historical clues.
- Demonstration of Learning
 - Students will use research and reasoning to articulate in writing or speech how each selected quote reflects Victorian culture, morality, or Dickens' lived experience.

NOTE: This activity has been aligned with TEKS and [Universal Design for Learning](#). TEKS can be found at the end of this document.

Materials

- Christmas Carol: Clues and Quotes handout (one full set per group).
- Chart paper or whiteboard space for each group.
- Research devices (optional – for digital reasoning extension).
- Access to Alley Re-Sourced guide.

Introduction

- Begin with a discussion: “How does an author’s world impact how they write? How does an author’s writing tell us about their world?”
 - Use this abbreviated exchange between Freddy and Scrooge as an example:
 - **SCROOGE:** What right have you to be merry?... You're poor enough.
 - **FRED:** What right have you to be dismal?... You're rich enough.
 - Ask: “What might have inspired Dickens to write that?”

Note for UDL alignment: Students can Think-Pair-Share, write answers in a journal, or discuss answers in small groups before sharing with the class.

Step 1 | Reviewing the Clues

- Students can work in pairs or small groups. Each group should receive a few “Clue” cards from the handout. If working in groups, each group may receive their own complete set.
- Give students a few minutes to examine their cards, using “See-Think-Wonder” as a framework.
 - *What do you see?*
 - *What do you think this tells you about life in Dickens' time?*
 - *What do you wonder?*

Step 2 | Matching Clues with Quotes

- Give each group a set of “Quote” cards from the included handout.

- Students match each quote with one or more clues they believe align thematically.
- They use reasoning or additional research to justify their pairing. Example:
 - Clue: “Workhouses were pretty grim...”
 - Quote: “Are there no prisons?...And the Union workhouses? Are they still in operation?”
 - Reasoning: Dickens critiqued harsh welfare systems of his time through his work, with characters explicitly referencing how awful they were.

Step 3 | Reflection and Reasoning

- Each group selects one or two pairings to present.
- Use the Artful Thinking Routine “*What makes you say that?*” to encourage critical reasoning.
 - “What evidence supports your match?”
 - “How does this reflect Dickens’ message or time period?”

Note for UDL alignment: Encourage multiple expression modes: oral presentations, visual charts, digital slides, 1-on-1 reports.

Closure

- Revisit: “How does an author’s world impact how they write? How does an author’s writing tell us about their world?”
- Invite brief, one-sentence reflections from each group using one of these sentence frames:
 - “I used to think...now I think...”
 - “The story connects to history because....”
 - “What surprised me was....”

Optional Extensions

- Gallery Walk: Display quote–clue pairings; students use sticky notes to leave feedback or alternative interpretations.
- Research Challenge: Students choose one category from the “Clue” cards (Industrial Revolution, Victorian Morality, Christmas Traditions, etc.) and find one new fact that deepens understanding.
- Performance Connection: Have students stage a brief tableau illustrating one of their matched quote–clue pairs

TEKS

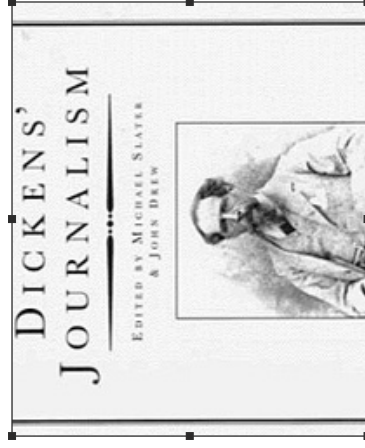
- ELA 6–12: (6A–C), (7A–B), (8A–C) – Analyze how historical, cultural, and social contexts influence literature; draw connections between themes and author perspective; use textual evidence to support interpretation and discussion.
- Theatre I–IV: (2A–B), (3A–C), (4A–B), (5A–B) – Interpret characters and social context through performance; collaborate to express narrative meaning; analyze dramatic structure and moral themes.

CLUE

from the

Life of Charles Dickens

Dickens was a journalist...



... and a keen observer of human behavior. He reported on poverty, child labor, and government reforms. He also wrote pieces that depicted different aspects of everyday life in London.

CLUE

from the

Life of Charles Dickens

Dickens worked in a factory...



... after his dad was imprisoned for debt. He worked 10 hours a day to help support his family, and it was noted to be a traumatic and humiliating experience. Prisons and debt appear often in his novels.

CLUE

from the

Life of Charles Dickens

He experienced poverty...



His father struggled with debt and was sent to a debtor's prison when Dickens was 12. Under English law, the whole family could have been imprisoned, too, if they couldn't support themselves.

CLUE

from the

Life of Charles Dickens

Dickens needed a comeback...



He was a working author, but had a bad year in 1842 and was broke. He planned to write a pamphlet about child poverty, but chose to show his concerns in story form - which was an immediate hit.

CLUE

from some

Victorian Morals

Thomas Malthus was harsh...



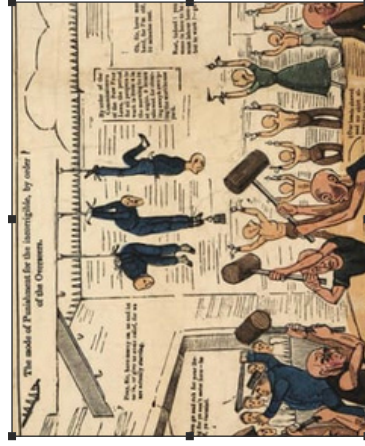
Economist Thomas Malthus made popular the idea that poverty was bound to happen with overpopulation. This led to some harsh politics, seeing to starving people as “nature’s way” of restoring balance.

CLUE

from some

Victorian Morals

Workhouses were pretty grim...



...and they were meant to be that way. The goal was discipline and deterrence, not welfare. They disciplined harshly, separated families, gave minimal food, and the work was exhausting.

CLUE

from some

Victorian Morals

Evangelical charity caught on...



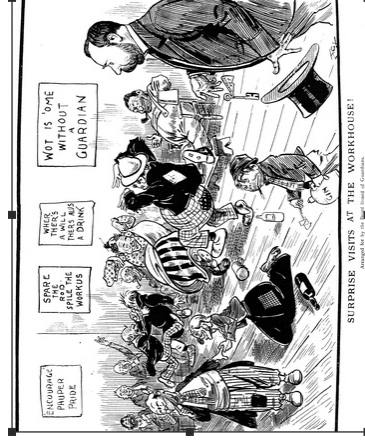
and inspired a lot of middle and upper class people to emphasize Christian duty: morality, self-discipline, and charitable acts. Philanthropy grew, but could not outpace the growing poverty divide.

CLUE

from some

Victorian Morals

Poverty was a moral failure...



As shown in this political cartoon, a common belief was that if you were poor, it meant you were either lazy, irresponsible, or had some other vice. This led to stigma instead of compassion.



CLUE

from

Christmas Culture

Prince Albert and Queen Victoria...



...made Christmas trees popular in Britain. Prince Albert was German - as was the tradition of decorating a tree at Christmas. Once the royal family started doing it, it quickly became an English tradition as well.



CLUE

from

Christmas Culture

Carols made a comeback...



Christmas carols had fallen out of fashion, but experienced a new popularity during the Victorian period. Carol-singing, party games, and shared meals became "must haves" for holiday celebrations.



CLUE

from

Christmas Culture

The first Christmas card...



The first commercial Christmas card was printed and sold the same year *A Christmas Carol* was published. The invention may not have influenced Dickens directly, but it does point to society's keen Christmas spirit.



CLUE

from

Christmas Culture

A time for giving...



Victorians began framing Christmas as a season of giving to the poor and needy. Churches and groups organized collections, and people were encouraged to share food or gifts with those less fortunate.



CLUE

from the

Industrial Revolution

Child labor laws did not exist...



Wages were too low for just one or two people in a family to work. But there were a lot of jobs. Children as young as five worked in factories, mines, and as chimney sweeps to help keep the family afloat.



CLUE

from the

Industrial Revolution

Nice work if you can get it...



The wealth generated by the booming new industry went to the factory owners and financiers. The workers crowded outside factory gates at dawn to begin 12-16 hour shifts - and were paid barely enough to survive on.

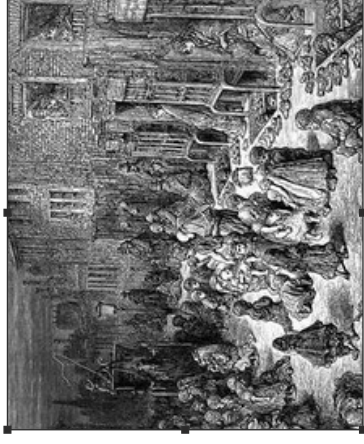


CLUE

from the

Industrial Revolution

Where there are factories...



...there are jobs. People moved to industrial cities in masses looking for work, and the city didn't have the infrastructure to support them. The result? Overcrowded housing, poor sanitation, and growing slums.



CLUE

from the

Industrial Revolution

Safety? Never heard of it...



Factories hunted for ways to stay competitive and keep profits up. That universally meant bad news for workers - long hours, low wages, and little concern for health and safety.

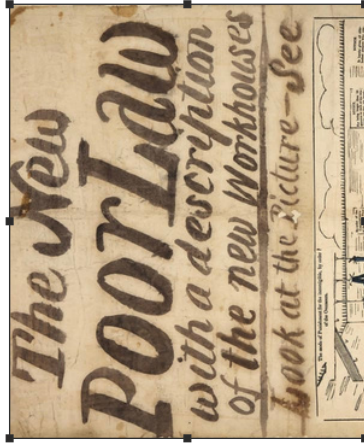


CLUE

from

Class Warfare

The Poor Law was a rough law...



It enshrined in law the idea that if society provides relief for poverty, it has to be worse than the lowest-paid job. This led to an expansion of harsh workhouses, intended as a deterrent rather than help.



CLUE

from

Class Warfare

Most were making do...



Rather than buy anything new, the poor patched bedding, clothing, or shelter from scraps. It was a daily struggle for dignity at a time when factories were making luxury items more accessible for those with money.



CLUE

from

Class Warfare

A scandal was building...



Workhouses expanded after the Poor Law, but so did criticism for their conditions. Andover became a national scandal in 1845, after starving inmates were caught gnawing marrow from animal bones to survive.

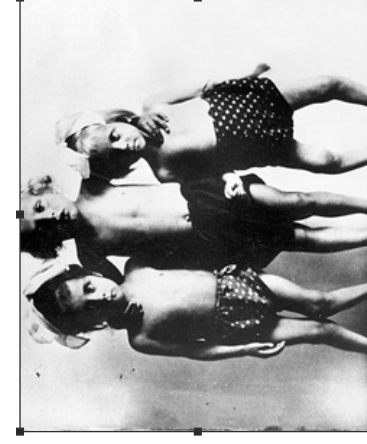


CLUE

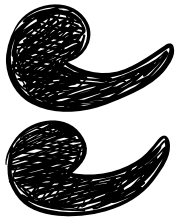
from

Class Warfare

Preventable suffering...



Diseases like rickets were common among poor children. Families couldn't afford medical care or the healthy diets that might have prevented such illnesses. Poverty turned simple ailments into death sentences.

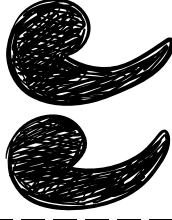
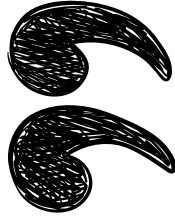


QUOTE

from

A Christmas Carol

FRED: ...I have always thought of Christmas time as a good time; a kind, forgiving, charitable, pleasant time; the only time...when men and women seem to open their shut-up hearts freely, and to think of people below them as if they really were fellow passengers to the grave, and not another species of creatures bound on other journeys.

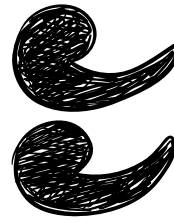


QUOTE

from

A Christmas Carol

SCROOGE: ...I don't make merry myself at Christmas, and I can't afford to make idle people merry.

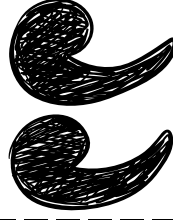
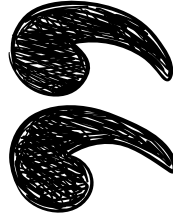


QUOTE

from

A Christmas Carol

SCROOGE: Bob Cratchit! You put one more coal on that fire, and I'll dock two bob from your pay.
BOB: But Mr. Scrooge, it's terribly cold.
SCROOGE: And dock you three bob for your complaints, Bob Cratchit.



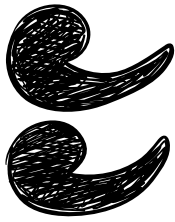
QUOTE

from

A Christmas Carol

SCROOGE: ...What right have you to be merry?... You're poor enough.
FRED: ...Come, then. What right have you to be dismal?... You're rich enough.



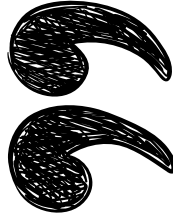


QUOTE

from

A Christmas Carol

SCROOGE: This is the even-handed dealing of the world! 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!

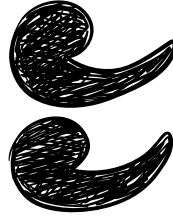


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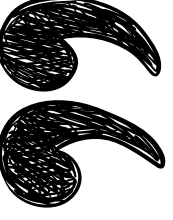


QUOTE

from

A Christmas Carol

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENT: 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.

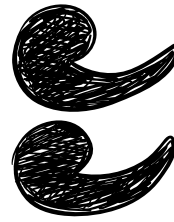


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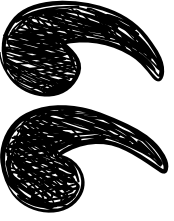


QUOTE

from

A Christmas Carol

(speaking of workhouses)
GENTLEMAN: Many can't go there; and many would rather die.
SCROOGE: If they would rather die, they had better do it, and decrease the surplus population.

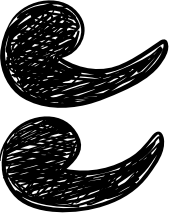


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QUOTE

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A Christmas Carol

SCROOGE: But you were always a good man of business, Jacob.
MARLEY: Business! Mankind was my business. The common welfare was my business; charity, mercy, forbearance, and benevolence, were, all, my business.

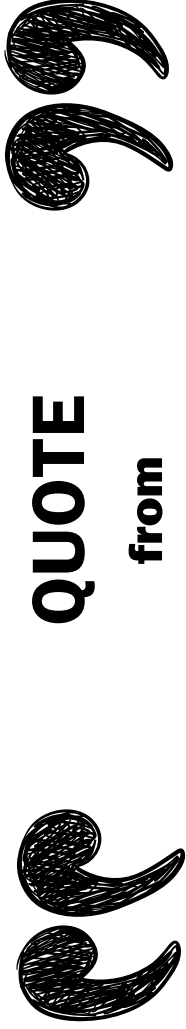


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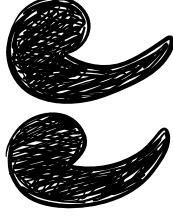
QUOTE

from

A Christmas Carol

(while selling a wealthy dead man's clothes)

DOLL: ...You may look through that shirt till your eyes ache; but you won't find a hole in it, nor a threadbare place. It's the best he had, and a fine one too.

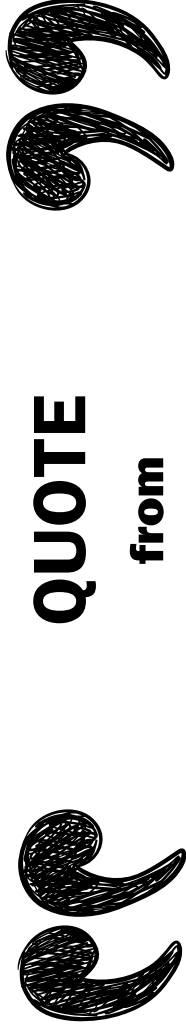


QUOTE

from

A Christmas Carol

NARRATOR: He became as good a friend, as good an employer, 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.

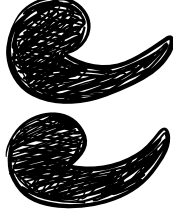


QUOTE

from

A Christmas Carol

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENT: They are Mankind's [children]. This boy is Ignorance. This girl is Want. Beware them both, but most of all beware this boy, for on his brow I see that written which is Doom, unless the writing be erased.

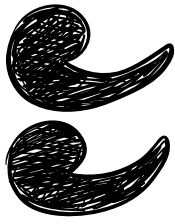


QUOTE

from

A Christmas Carol

SCROOGE: ...Heaven, and the Christmas Time be praised for this!... I will honor Christmas in my heart, and try to keep it all the year.

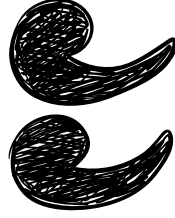
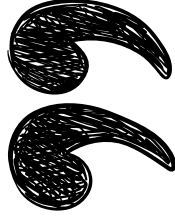


QUOTE

from

A Christmas Carol

CHARITY WORKER: It is more than usually desirable that we should make some slight provision for the Poor and Destitute...many thousands are in want of common necessities...

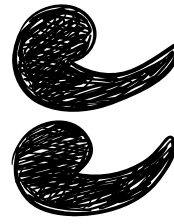


QUOTE

from

A Christmas Carol

NARRATOR: Darkness is cheap, and Scrooge liked it...[It] suited Scrooge's disposition, and he was not one to waste candles...he sat in the dark, eating his gruel alone, without a thought of company or cheer.

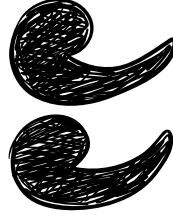


QUOTE

from

A Christmas Carol

NARRATOR: They were not a handsome family; they were not well dressed; their shoes were far from being water-proof; their clothes were scanty...but they were happy...



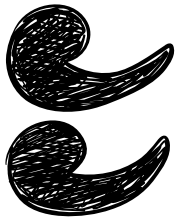
QUOTE

from

A Christmas Carol

SCROOGE: Are there no prisons?... And the Union workhouses? Are they still in operation?
CHARITY WORKER: They are. Still, I wish I could say they were not.



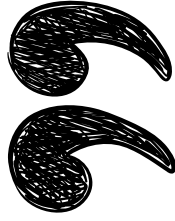


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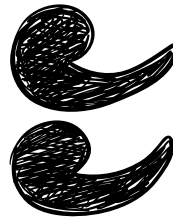
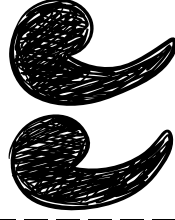
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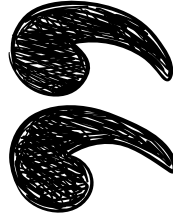
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SCROOGE: If they would rather die, they had better do it, and decrease the surplus population.



QUOTE

from

A Christmas Carol

SCROOGE: Spirit...tell me if Tiny Tim will live.

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENT: I see a vacant seat in the poor chimney-corner, and a cruth without an owner, carefully preserved. If these shadows remain unaltered by the Future, the child will die.

