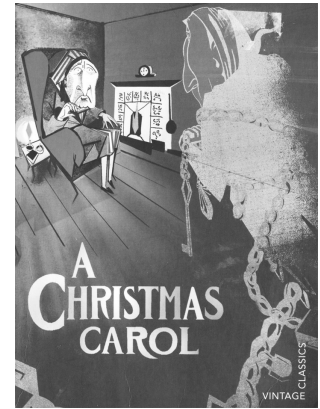


Story Model 2

“A Christmas Carol” by Charles Dickens

Ebenezer Scrooge, Dicken’s protagonist, is a miserly and mean-spirited business-man, a “covetous old sinner”, who leads a solitary life, obsessed with money. He begrudges his employee any sort of comfort and shows no sympathy towards the struggles of others. Scrooge’s philosophy of life is summed up at Christmas time: “I wish to be left alone.” “I don’t make merry myself at Christmas, and I can’t afford to make idle people merry.”



Fred and Scrooge discuss the meaning of Christmas. Dickens uses a third-person “limited” perspective. It is restricted to Scrooge’s outlook. The reader finds out about the thoughts of other characters through dialogue or mediated interactions.

We hear Fred’s cheerful voice before we see him.

The use of dialogue enables Dickens to “show not tell”; the nephew’s comments, his tone and manner of speaking - the glowing cheeks and sparkling eyes — provide an insight into his cheerful attitude to Christmas.

Note the idiomatic phrase that typifies Scrooge’s attitude to Christmas and to life. It reoccurs throughout the story.

Note the style: the series of contrasting questions, Scrooge’s puns and his indignant tone of voice.

Dickens also uses dialogue to convey his message about Christmas as an opportune time to show some fellowship towards others.

Note the rules for dialogue: each speaker has a new line.

“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. Wherefore the clerk put on his white comforter and tried to warm himself at the candle; in which effort, not being a man of strong imagination, he failed. “A Merry Christmas, Uncle! God save you!” cried a cheerful voice. It was the voice of Scrooge’s nephew, who came upon him so quickly that this was the first intimation he had of his approach.

“Bah!” said Scrooge, “Humbug!”

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.

“Christmas a humbug, uncle!” said Scrooge’s nephew. “You don’t mean that, I am sure?”

“I do,” said Scrooge. “Merry Christmas! What right have you to be merry? What reason have you to be merry? You’re poor enough.”

“Come, then,” returned the nephew gaily. “What right have you to be dismal? What reason have you to be morose? You’re rich enough.”

Scrooge having no better answer ready on the spur of the moment, said “Bah!” again, and followed it up with “Humbug”

...

“What’s Christmas time to you but a time for paying bills without money; a time for finding yourself a year older, and not an hour richer; a time for balancing your books and having every item in ‘em through a round dozen of months presented dead against you? If I could work my will,” said Scrooge indignantly, “every idiot who goes about with ‘Merry Christmas’ on his lips, should be boiled with his own pudding, and buried with a stake of holly through his heart. He should!”

“Uncle!” pleaded the nephew.

“Nephew!” returned the uncle, sternly, “keep Christmas in your own way, but let me keep it in mine.”

“Keep it!” repeated Scrooge’s nephew. “But you don’t keep it.”
“Much good has it ever done you!” (said Scrooge)

A Christmas Carol:

transformation and change

Scrooge's reckoning at the end (115)

The chuckle with which he said this, and the chuckle with which he paid for the Turkey, and the chuckle with which he paid for the cab, and the chuckle with which he recompensed the boy, were only to be exceeded by the chuckle with which he sat down breathless in his chair again, and chuckled till he cried.

"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. His niece looked just the same. So did Topper when he came. So did the plump sister, when she came. So did every one when they came. Wonderful party, wonderful games, wonderful unanimity, wonderful happiness!

But he was early at the office next morning. Oh he was early there. If he could only be there first, and catch Bob Cratchit coming late! That was the thing he had set his heart up.

And he did it; yes, he did. The clock struck nine. No Bob .. He was full eighteen minutes and a half, behind his time.

"Hallo!" growled Scrooge, in his accustomed voice as near as he could feign it. "What do you mean by coming here at this time of day?"

"I am very sorry, sir," said Bob. "I am behind my time."

"You are?" repeated Scrooge. "Yes. I think you are. Step this way, if you please."

"Now I'll tell you what, my friend," said Scrooge, "I am not going to stand this sort of thing any longer. And therefore," he continued leaping from his stool and giving Bob such a dig in the waistcoat that he staggered back into the Tank again: "and therefore I am about to raise your salary!" ... I'll raise your salary, and endeavour to assist your struggling family, and we will discuss your affairs this very afternoon, over a Christmas bowl of smoking bishop, Bob! Make up the fires, and buy another coal-scuttle before you dot another i, Bob Cratchit!" (116)

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. (116) Some people laughed to see the alteration in him, but he let them laugh and little heeded them; for he was wise enough to know that nothing ever happened on this globe, for good, at which some people did not have their fill of laughter in the outset; and knowing as well that they should wrinkle up their eyes in grins, as have the malady in less attractive forms. His own heart laughed; and that was quite enough for him.

He had no further intercourse with Spirits, but lived upon the Total Abstinence Principle, ever afterwards, and it was always said of him that he knew how to keep Christmas well, and if any man alive possessed the knowledge.

Reference: Dickens, Charles. *A Christmas Carol*, London: Penguin Books, 2003.



Note the change in Scrooge's tone and mannerisms.

Dickens uses repetitive devices as well as irony to add depth and suspense.

Drawing upon the model story plan and the tips for writing dialogue, write your own conversation between two characters with opposing views. What is the outcome?

See the Tips for Dialogue, p. 69.

6. The use of dialogue

Using dialogue in a creative piece can bring your characters to life and gives readers a glimpse into their mindset. Moreover, a conversation may reveal tension between your main characters, which helps to move the plot along, while adding, where possible, some humour.

Dialogue also places readers right in the middle of the action, enabling you to “show”, rather than “tell” your readers what is going on in the mind of your characters.

Practice eavesdropping on conversations — on buses, in the park, in shopping centers, at home and at school. How do different people talk and what do they say? What is the topic of conversation?



◆ **Remember the rules! Each speaker has a new line. Note also the rules for punctuation.**

◆ **What do they say? Dialogue helps to make characters relatable and personal**

» When writing dialogue try to paint a picture of real people talking to each other. Listen to how people talk. Capture their words, intonation, speech patterns and quirky idioms. Characters often talk in the vernacular, which refers to the commonly spoken language or dialect of a particular person or place.

» In *Squeaker’s Mate*, the “mate” has broken her back and lies in bed. Barbara Baynton captures the inflexions of a broad Australian accent used typically by bush settlers:

» “Yer won’t. Yer back’s broke,” said Squeaker laconically. “That’s wot’s wrong er yer; injoory t’ th’ spine. Doctor says that means back’s broke, and yer won’t never walk no more. No good not t’ tell yer, cos I can’t be doin’ everythin’.”

» Dialogue should reflect a character’s age, education, and/or social status. In the conversation below, Scout uses slang and non-standard grammar; Atticus speaks with an air of authority.

“Atticus said I had learned many things today, and Miss Caroline had learned several things herself ...

‘I’ll be dogged,’ I said. ‘I didn’t know no better than not to read to her, and she held me responsible – listen Atticus, I don’t have to go to school.’ I was bursting with a sudden thought. ‘Burriss Ewell, remember? He just goes to school the first day. The truant lady reckons she’s carried out the law when she gets his name on the roll –’

‘You can’t do that, Scout,’ Atticus said. ‘Sometimes it’s better to bend the law a little in special cases. In your case, the law remains rigid. So to school you must go.’

Alan Bennett, who wrote *The Lady in the Van* in 1974 about an eccentric old lady who was living in a van in his front garden in Camden Town, had a knack of looking for the tragic and the comic in ordinary everyday life experiences. Bennett’s ear for the way people speak was honed early on by copying down phrases he heard as he made his trolleybus journey to school.

◆ **How do they talk? Through descriptions of the way a person talks, authors “show” a character’s feelings and mood.**

» When using dialogue, describe each character’s body language, their tone and mannerisms. This enables you to “show” a person’s emotional response. Are they friendly, agreeable, angry, sad, frustrated, annoyed or resentful?

- » In *Animal Farm*, the tension between Snowball and Napoleon drives the plot. Boxer has a different view about violence which is evident in his tone of voice and mannerisms as he talks with Snowball after the Battle of the Cowshed.

“He is dead,” said Boxer sorrowfully. “I had no intention of doing that. I forgot that I was wearing iron shoes. Who will believe that I did not do this on purpose?”

“No sentimentality, comrade!” cried Snowball, from whose wounds the blood was still dripping. “War is war. The only good human being is a dead one.”

“I have no wish to take life, not even human life,” repeated Boxer, and his eyes were full of tears.”

◆ **A conversation captures tension by conveying people’s interaction and their idiosyncracies.**

- » A conversation between protagonists often leads to painful emotions. In “Baked Beans and Burnt Toast”, Jacqui Larkin uses dialogue to show the young girl’s acute sense of embarrassment as she is singled out by her teacher because of her ethnic difference.

“Good morning girls and boys,” says the teacher in that sing-song way that kindy teachers do. “My name is Mrs Barton.

I will be your teacher for the year.”

Mrs Barton starts marking the roll. Everyone sticks their hand up as their name is called and I feel every single eye trained on me when it’s my turn.

“Jacqui?” continues Mrs Barton and, for the first time, but certainly not the last, I feel myself turning red. She doesn’t do a doubletake on anyone else’s name, so why mine?

“Yes,” I reply.

She looks closer at the roll and adjusts her glasses.

“Jacqui Five Hundred?” ...

“No,” I offer tentatively.

“Well is that *you* or isn’t it?” she snaps and then holds up the roll so that we can all see.

My friend Jo-Ann, who I’ve known since preschool, puts up her hand. “It’s Soo, Miss. Not Five-Hundred. Her name’s Jacqui Soo.”

Dialogue enables you to “show” not “tell”.

Notice Jacqui Larkin does not tell readers that the young child feels uneasy and uncomfortable. This becomes evident in the interaction between the teacher and the child, who feels embarrassed on her first day at school.

◆ **Opening your creative piece with a conversation or reported speech gives a sense of immediacy and creates suspense. It places readers right in the middle of the action.**

- » Henry Lawson uses dialogue to create a lively scenario at the beginning of his story.

“Four ragged, dried up-looking children are playing about the house. Suddenly one of them yells: “Snake! Mother, here’s a snake!” (See *The Drover’s Wife*)

- » Dmetri Kakmi’s use of reported speech in “Night of the Living Wog”, gives readers an insight into his identity problems in the 1970s at school in Melbourne. As the conversation unfolds and the tension escalates, you can include some “back” story or explanation.

“Things got worse when I enrolled at Westgarth Primary School. After filling in the appropriate paperwork, the headmaster gazed at me across the large desk and said: ‘In Australia, we can’t pronounce your name. From now on your name is Jim.’

This resulted in an existential dilemma. From then on, not only did I not know where I was but I was no longer who I had been.”

- » Kakmi also uses self-talk strategies: “To cope, I began to refer to myself in the third person — ‘Jim likes this but Dmetri doesn’t, I’d say. People thought I was either bonkers or pretentious.”