

Starting with this extract, explore the ways Dickens presents the importance of Christmas in the novel. (40)

- **Explore how Dickens presents Christmas in this extract**
- **Explore how Dickens presents Christmas in the novel as a whole**

It was his own room. There was no doubt about that. But it had undergone a surprising transformation. The walls and ceiling were so hung with living green, that it looked a perfect grove; from every part of which, bright gleaming berries glistened. The crisp leaves of holly, mistletoe, and ivy reflected back the light, as if so many little mirrors had been scattered there; and such a mighty blaze went roaring up the chimney, as that dull petrification of a hearth had never known in Scrooge's time, or Marley's, or for many and many a winter season gone. Heaped up on the floor, to form a kind of throne, were turkeys, geese, game, poultry, brawn, great joints of meat, sucking-pigs, long wreaths of sausages, mince-pies, plum-puddings, barrels of oysters, red-hot chestnuts, cherry-cheeked apples, juicy oranges, luscious pears, immense twelfth-cakes, and seething bowls of punch, that made the chamber dim with their delicious steam. In easy state upon this couch, there sat a jolly Giant, glorious to see; who bore a glowing torch, in shape not unlike Plenty's horn, and held it up, high up, to shed its light on Scrooge, as he came peeping round the door.

MODEL ANSWER

At the start of Stave 3, the 'jovial' Ghost of Christmas Present transforms Dickens' 'melancholy' room into an idyllic Christmas scene by the spirit. A sense of prosperity, extravagance and splendour is shown through the highly sensuous depiction of the room. List sentences build up the sense of luxury and indulgence. Food nouns such as 'poultry, game, great joints of meat' appeal to the reader's sense of taste while the verb phrase 'a mighty blaze went roaring up the chimney' creates a cosy image which appeals to the sense of touch. Finally, bright imagery is used to make the scene visually appealing through phrases such as 'bright gleaming berries glistened' and 'glowing torch'. The abundance of light imagery could also convey the idea that Christmas is associated with hope or magic. Dickens helped to shape the modern view of Christmas as a time for both displaying and, more importantly, sharing one's riches and prosperity with others.

Later in Stave 3 when he presents The Cratchit's Christmas lunch, Dickens establishes the importance of spending time with family at Christmas time which reflects his belief that Christmas should be a time to cherish time with loved ones. Bob's hyperbolic exclamatory sentence 'Oh, a wonderful setting' sets a tone of positivity, gratitude and thankfulness which is further emphasised by his use of a superlative 'the greatest success' to describe the meal as a whole. Later in the extract, Dickens juxtaposes what the family are not 'handsome', 'well-dressed' with what they are 'happy, grateful, pleased with one another'. The contrasting list emphasises Dickens' belief that the virtues of love and gratitude are far more important at Christmas time than any material possessions the family could possess. This serves Dickens' wider purpose to show that love and family matter much more than money at Christmas.

Also in Stave 3, Dickens shows that people can celebrate the spirit of goodwill at Christmas even when they are away from home. At the start of the extract, a dark and inhospitable setting is described through the noun phrase 'dark and heaving sea'. The adjective 'dark' has connotations of being unenlightened and gloomy while the verb 'heaving' connotes laborious work. The reader may expect that the unfriendly conditions to dampen the spirit of Christmas. However, Dickens is keen to demonstrate how the spirit of Christmas empowers 'every man on board' the ship to say a 'kinder word for another on that day'. The adjective 'kinder' helps Dickens show how benevolence is infectious and can help spread 'delight at Christmas time.

Earlier in Stave 3, Dickens presents a lively street scene on the morning of Christmas day. Words such as 'jovial, glee, jest, heartily, radiant and jolly' combine to capture the excitement and pleasure that people experience. The verbs such as 'shovelling', 'laughing', 'lolling' and 'calling' also add a sense of energy to the happy scene. Perhaps most interesting is the use of oxymoron to describe a snowball as a 'better-natured missile'. The noun 'missile' normally has associations with war and conflict. However, by combining it with the compound adjective 'better-natured' Dickens is fulfilling his purpose of emphasising Christmas Day as a special day in which everyone should strive to get on with each other in order to joy. The excitement associated with a snowball fight echoes Dickens' belief that people should feel euphoric joy in sharing one's emotional riches with the community of man.

Near the end of Stave 3, Dickens emphasises that Christmas should be a time full of music, games and festive celebrations in his presentation of Fred's family. The phrase 'it is good to be children sometimes' indicates the idea that Christmas should be a time for casting away adult concerns to reconnect with the excitement every child will feel at Christmas. The power of Christmas to transform people and reawaken their conscience is suggested by Scrooge's reaction to hearing Fred's niece play a 'simple little air' on a harp. Hearing this music stirs Scrooge's repressed memories of hearing the same tune as a child. As a result, Scrooge reflects that 'he might have cultivated the kindnesses of life' more if he had heard the music more often as a child. This moment helps Dickens to emphasise the magical qualities of the spirit of Christmas and its ability to infect even the most miserly of people with a new energy and purpose in life.