

Sample Answer

Read the following extract from 'A Christmas Carol' (Stave Two, pages 33-40)

In this extract, the Ghost of Christmas Past is discussing Fezziwig's party with Scrooge.

'A small matter,' said the Ghost, 'to make these silly folks so full of gratitude.'

'Small!' echoed Scrooge.

The spirit signed to him to listen to the two apprentices, who were pouring out their hearts in praise of Fezziwig: and when he had done so, said,

'Why! Is it not? He has spent but a few pounds of your mortal money: three or four perhaps. Is that so much that he deserves this praise?'

'It is that,' Said Scrooge, heated by the remark, and speaking unconsciously like his former. Not his latter, self. 'It isn't that, Spirit. He has the power to render us happy or unhappy; to make our service light or burdensome; a pleasure or a toil. Say that his power lies in words and looks; in things so slight and insignificant that it is impossible to add and count 'em up: what then? The happiness he gives, is quite as great as if it cost a fortune.'

He felt the spirit glance, and stopped.

'What is the matter?' asked the Ghost.

'Nothing particular,' said Scrooge.

'Something, I think?' the Ghost insisted.

'No,' said Scrooge, 'No. I should like to be able to say a word or two to my clerk just now! That's all.'

Starting with this extract, explore how Dickens presents ideas about responsibility.

Write about:

- How Dickens uses Fezziwig to present ideas about responsibility in this extract
- How Dickens presents ideas about responsibility in the novel as a whole.
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[30 marks]

AO4 [4 marks]

Sample Answer

AO1: Strongly analytical opening with a clear focus on the question

AO1: Useful quotation from earlier in the novel

This passage represents a turning point in Dickens's development of the theme of responsibility, as Dickens shows the spirit drawing out Scrooge's regret over his treatment of Bob Crotchet and therefore showing awareness of his duty to others.

The passage reveals some change in Scrooge, since he is open to the lesson from Fezziwig, in contrast with his earlier assessment of Marley as a 'good man of business', where Dickens shows that this is all Scrooge values. We now see a shift in emphasis in the phrase 'as if it cost a fortune', revealing a blossoming understanding that value is not only measured in cost. This contrasts with Scrooge's earlier conversation with Fred, where he complained about Christmas as a time that made people 'a year older, and not an hour richer', juxtaposing the two nouns of time, 'year' and 'hour', to make a grand comparison. Dickens showed that Scrooge could only measure anything by its monetary value but already by this point he begins showing an awareness of other values, including social responsibility.

AO2: Subject terminology explained with effect

AO1: Focus on writer controlling text, not characters as real people

Earlier in the text, Dickens uses Fred's character to link Christmas to the idea of social responsibility when he shows Fred arguing for the value of Christmas as a time when people 'think of people below them as if they really were fellow-passengers to the grave'. This establishes a clear connection between the season and ideas of fellowship and community, despite Fred's explicit reference to social hierarchy with the word 'below'. This suggests that people are able at Christmas to behave more charitably to those in a different social class from them. This idea of reaching out to one's fellow man is a key part of Dickens' message in this text; his sense is that the impact of industrialisation has widened the gap between the rich and the poor in Victorian society.

AO3: Reference to social context and author's intent

AO1: Analysing in detail the effect of a specific word

In this extract, Dickens juxtaposes pairs of opposites such as 'happy' and 'unhappy' and 'light or burdensome' in Scrooge's description of Fezziwig's work. In this way, Dickens implies that Fezziwig has control over his apprentices' full range of emotions: 'he has the power to render us happy or unhappy' and can affect every aspect of their work, making their 'service light or burdensome'. This hyperbolic description utilising antonyms suggest that Fezziwig is completely responsible for the apprentices' experiences and welfare, and not just for their work.

AO2: Focused analysis on subject terminology

This sense of moral duty is also seen just before this extract as the Ghost and Scrooge watch the party when Dickens lists all the guests. As the narrator describes local apprentices by their ill-treatment-a boy 'suspected' of not being fed well, and a girl who has her 'ears pulled' - it is implied that Fezziwig invites other people's apprentices precisely because they are not so well treated as his, showing that he intends to improve lives in the whole community.

AO2: Continues to analyse in detail particular words and subject terminology

The verb 'suspected' indicates that Fezziwig is keen to help others without needing proof of injustice, demonstrating his determination to fulfil his social responsibility by supporting others when those who are supposed to be responsible for them do not.

Fezziwig is a role model for social responsibility and this scene demonstrates the structure that Dickens sets us in this stave: Scrooge observes something, remarks on it and applies it to his own life. Here, it prompts him to wish to 'say a word or two to [his] clerk', realising that as an employer he falls short of Fezziwig's example. It is clear that Dickens intends the reader to learn from his text in a similar way. He uses the narrator and the Ghosts didactic prompting to ensure a clear message.

AO2: Analysis of form and structure as well as language

The repeated structure of short sentences at the end of the passage contrasts strongly with Scrooge's long speech immediately before, while also providing a shift in tone as the Ghost insist[s] on Scrooge's admission. This shows that Scrooge still needs help to accept responsibility at this stage, just as he does at the end of the next Stave when the second spirit repeats his own Malthusian views back to him about the 'surplus population'.

AO3: Brief and relevant contextual reference

Overall, Dickens presents the theme of responsibility chiefly through the Ghosts' teachings, and through Scrooge's gradual acceptance of his need to act in a more community-minded way. This passage is typical of Dickens' structural technique throughout the novel, demonstrating how Scrooge learns from observation, and how Dickens intends the reader to further extrapolate from Scrooge's education.

AO3: Clear contextualisation of the extract showing overall knowledge of the whole text to close

Comment: Very High Level

This is a convincing answer which shows clear understanding of the whole text and draws confidently from it throughout. Quotations are embedded, well selected and analysed effectively. With effective labelling of techniques combined with thoughtful; explanation of effect and relation to theme. There is a sustained focus on task, and the response is extremely well structured, with the useful overview at both start and end revealing a rounded, complete answer.