

Sample Answer

Read the following extract from 'A Christmas Carol' (Stave Three, page 51)

In this extract, the Ghost of Christmas Present is showing Scrooge the Cratchit family's Christmas dinner.

Oh, a wonderful pudding! Bob Cratchit said, and calmly too, that he regarded it as the greatest success achieved by Mrs Cratchit since their marriage. Mrs Cratchit said that now the weight was off her mind, she would confess she had had her doubts about the quantity of flour. Everybody had something to say about it, but nobody said or thought it was at all a small pudding for a large family. It would have been flat heresy to do so. Any Cratchit would have blushed to hint at such a thing.

At last the dinner was done, the cloth was cleared, the hearth swept, and the fire made up. The compound in the jug being tasted, and considered perfect, apples and oranges were put upon the table, and a shovel-full of chestnuts on the fire. Then all the Cratchit family drew round the hearth, in what Bob Cratchit called a circle, meaning half a one; and at Bob Cratchit's elbow stood the family display of glass; two tumblers, and a custard-cup without a handle.

These held the hot stuff from the jug, however, as well as golden goblets would have done; and Bob served it out with beaming looks, while the chestnuts on the fire spluttered and cracked noisily. Then Bob proposed:

'A Merry Christmas to us all, my dears. God bless us!'

Which all the family re-echoed.

'God bless us every one!' said Tiny Tim, the last of all.

He sat very close to his father's side, upon his little stool. Bob held his withered little hand in his, as if he loved the child, and wished to keep him by his side, and dreaded that he might be taken from him.

Starting with this extract, how does Dickens present Bob Cratchit as a sympathetic character?

Write about:

- How Dickens presents Bob Cratchit in this extract
- How Dickens presents Bob Cratchit in the novel as a whole
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[30 marks]

AO4 [4 marks]

Sample Answer

AO1: Strong opening focusing on the question and hinting at an answer with an overview of the novel

AO1: Effective brief references to elsewhere with embedded quotations although these are not analysed at this point

Although we are yet to learn his name, Dickens establishes Bob Cratchit as a sympathetic character in Stave One. This effect is created when he introduces him as Scrooge's clerk who is denied coal, threatened with losing his situation for 'unintentionally [applauding]' Fred's speech on the value of Christmas and is metaphorically accused of 'picking a man's pocket' for taking a day off for Christmas.

AO1: clearly linked paragraphs

At this earlier point in the novel, Dickens uses Bob to demonstrate Scrooge's behaviour as an employer, but the reader is also driven to develop sympathy for Bob himself. Comic touches help to round out his character, making him more human. One such moment in the first Stave occurs after his involuntary applause, when Bob pokes at the fire to distract attention and accidentally extinguishes it. Similarly, in the extract depicting the Cratchits' Christmas dinner, Dickens uses a comic style in places such as the narrator's comment 'what Bob Cratchit called a circle, meaning half a one', which gently mocks Bob. This comic tone is an important part of Bob's characterisation and a key means of increasing likeability to him amongst readers.

AO1: Clear links between different parts of the novel

In this extract, the phrase, 'flat heresy' demonstrates the close bond with the Cratchit family. Creating such a strong sense of solidarity shows the love that exists between these characters, thus making each of them more sympathetic. The noun 'heresy' implies that the feelings the Cratchits have for the family are akin to religious faith and cannot easily be shaken. At the same time, the hyperbolic nature of the language adds to the scene's humour and gives it a mock-epic quality.

AO2: Close analysis of an individual word with relevant subject terminology

Further, Dickens uses a grand style of description for poor things to carefully craft the reader's sympathy for Bob in the construction of the phrase 'the family's display of glass'. Using a sentence break before actually listing the objects here adds to the slightly comic effect by delaying the bathos of 'Two tumblers, and a custard cup without a handle.'

AO2: Thorough analysis of effect of punctuation

Additionally, the reader's sympathy for Bob's ability to take pride and pleasure in the simplest of things is developed in the phrase 'with beaming looks'. This also serves as a contrast to Scrooge who at this point in the story takes no pleasure in anything despite being able to afford luxury. This shows how Dickens uses Bob to develop themes of poverty and social responsibility, through juxtaposing Bob's gratitude for his humble possessions with Scrooge's avarice.

AO1: Students shows a strong understanding of the novel as a whole

A further way in which Dickens develops Bob's character as a sympathetic one in his role as a loving father. At the end of this extract, the triadic list details Bob's sentiments towards Tiny Tim: 'he loved the child, and wished to keep him by his side, and dreaded that he might be taken from him. The repeated connective 'and' is used here to emphasise that Bob feels all these emotions simultaneously, underlying the complexity and depth of his feelings. Moreover, it establishes him as a complex character beyond the stock conventions of a poor man, typical perhaps of some Victorian depictions.

AO2: Identification of subject terminology and detailed analysis

Just after this extract, Dickens presents Bob as generous in spirit when he proposes a toast to Scrooge, labelling him 'the Founder of the Feast'. Dickens highlights Bob's magnanimous attitude through Mrs Cratchit's reaction to Cratchit's toast, using her character to position the reader against Scrooge, but without harming Bob's 'mild' personality as he reminds his wife about Christmas and the presence of the children.

AO2: Detailed analysis of characterisation and excellent knowledge of text

At the end of the novel, Bob again brings humour to the text in his reaction to Scrooge's transformation when he considers calling for the police and a 'strait-waistcoat'. This light, almost slapstick moment, shows Bob once more fulfilling the role of lifting the mood after the seriousness of Scrooge's journey. This enables the reader to feel warmth towards him, as well as being a traditional function for lower class characters to fulfil inn art.

AO3: Relevant reference to literary context

Overall, Dickens presents Bob sympathetically in a range of ways, through the structure and language of the text, as well as the specifics of his role. He exists as a counterpoint in Scrooge in personality and attitude, allowing the reader to sympathise with him.

AO1: Excellent conclusion summarising and bringing the essay's arguments together

Comment: Very High Level

A convincing and thorough answer which explores a range of very high-level ideas by combining language analysis with a clear focus on the question. The idea of how readers will respond to Bob Cratchit remains in focus throughout and various different techniques that Dickens uses to manipulate reader sympathy are considered and analysed in some depth, with relevant brief references to the novel's social context and literary tradition.