

Talking about *A Christmas Carol*

by Charles Dickens · the free ebook lives at youngreaderguide.org/books/christmas-carol/

Warming *up*

Easy openers. Anyone at the table can answer these, including the youngest.

1. Three spirits are coming tonight: one shows your past, one shows your present, one shows your future. Which one would you least want to meet?
2. Scrooge's nephew invites him to Christmas dinner every single year, and every year Scrooge says 'Bah! Humbug!' Would you keep inviting him? For how many years?
3. Old Fezziwig throws the best party in the book with one fiddler, a lot of dancing, and a big cold roast. What's the one thing a party absolutely needs to be great?

The real *conversation*

Pick two or three, not all of them. Parents answer too, honestly.

1. Marley's chain is made of the things he cared about most — cash-boxes, ledgers, padlocks — forged link by link without him ever noticing the weight. If chains work like that, what would yours be made of? What about the grown-ups' at this table?
2. The first spirit doesn't argue with Scrooge or scold him — it just shows him the boy he used to be, alone at school with his books, and Scrooge starts to cry. Why does seeing your old self work when being told off doesn't?
3. Scrooge asks the last spirit whether he's seeing what WILL happen or only what MIGHT happen, and the spirit refuses to answer. Which future would you rather live in — one that's already fixed, or one that depends entirely on you? Which is scarier?
4. Bob Cratchit raises a toast to Scrooge, who underpays him; Mrs. Cratchit calls Scrooge 'an odious, stingy, hard, unfeeling man' — and then drinks the toast anyway, for Bob's sake. Who got it more right: the one who forgives too easily, or the one who says the true thing at the wrong moment?
5. Scrooge turns generous only after seeing his own grave. His nephew Fred was generous all along, for nothing. Does it matter why someone is kind, if the kindness is real? Would a present from Fred and a present from brand-new Scrooge feel the same?

The big *one*

Save it for last.

Scrooge doesn't get a new life at the end — he gets the same streets, the same office, the same clerk, and walks into them as a different man. If nothing about your life changed tomorrow morning except you, what's the first thing the people at this table would notice?

Do it *together*

Do the Dickens. Dickens performed this book aloud for paying crowds for years — he marked up his own copy, cut it down, and did all the voices himself. Stage the family version: pick one scene (Fezziwig's party and Marley's ghost are the crowd-pleasers), cut it to five minutes together deciding what survives, hand out the parts, and perform it after dark by the tree lights or a candle. Chains, blanket-hoods, and a rattled jar of coins are the entire special-effects budget.