Why Charles Dickens wrote "A Christmas Carol"

By ThoughtCo.com, adapted by Newsela staff on 12.15.17

"A Christmas Carol" by Charles Dickens is one of the most beloved books of British literature. The story became enormously popular and helped to make Christmas a major holiday.

When Dickens wrote "A Christmas Carol" in 1843, he never imagined the impact his story would have. Dickens had already achieved great fame as a writer. However, his last novel was not selling well, and he feared his success was over.

Beyond his own worries, Dickens was sensitive to the misery of people in England who worked hard but were still poor, called "the working poor."

He paid a visit to the grimy industrial city of Manchester and its factories. The trip led him to create the story of a greedy businessman, Ebenezer Scrooge, who would be transformed by the Christmas spirit.
"A Christmas Carol" Under The Tree

Dickens rushed "A Christmas Carol" into print by Christmas 1843, and it was immediately popular. It became perhaps the most famous work of literature about Christmas and helped to make Christmas into a major holiday.

Dickens wanted the story to strongly condemn greed. It established the idea of Christmas charity toward the less fortunate.

Ebenezer Scrooge became one of the most famous characters in literature. The book was transformed into stage plays, and later films and television productions.
Dickens' Readers Wanted More

Dickens became popular with his first novel, "The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club." Known today as "The Pickwick Papers," the novel appeared in many installments beginning in 1836.

In the following years, Dickens wrote more novels, including "Oliver Twist," "Nicholas Nickleby" and "The Old Curiosity Shop."

With "The Old Curiosity Shop," Dickens became a literary superstar. Readers became obsessed with a character in it named Little Nell.

According to legend, New Yorkers could not wait to find out what would happen next in the story. So, they would go to the dock and yell to passengers on British ships, asking if Little Nell was still alive.

Dickens visited the United States for several months in 1842. He did not enjoy it very much, and wrote negatively about his visit in his book about the trip called "American Notes."

Back in England, he began writing a new novel called "Martin Chuzzlewit." Dickens owed money to his publisher, and the book was not selling well.

Dickens desperately wanted to write something that would be very popular with the public.

Dickens Wrote "A Christmas Carol" As A Kind of Protest

Dickens felt strongly about the enormous gap between the rich and poor in Britain.
On the night of October 5, 1843, Dickens gave a speech in Manchester, England. It was to raise money for an organization that brought education and culture to the working masses.
The working-class residents of Manchester affected Dickens deeply. After his speech, he took a long walk. He thought about the plight of child workers and came up with the idea for "A Christmas Carol."

In London, Dickens took walks late at night and worked out the story in his head. The book is about a miser named Ebenezer Scrooge who hates Christmas. He is visited by the ghost of his former business partner, Marley. He is also visited by the Ghosts of Christmases Past, Present, and Yet to Come.

Scrooge wakes up on Christmas morning a much kinder man. He celebrates Christmas and gives a raise to an employee he had treated badly.

Dickens wanted the book to be available by Christmas and finished it in six weeks.

**Critics Liked The Book As Much As Readers**

When the book appeared, it was immediately popular with the public as well as with critics.

William Makepeace Thackeray was a famous British writer of the period. He wrote that "A Christmas Carol" was "a national benefit, and to every man or woman who reads it, a personal kindness."

The story of Ebenezer Scrooge touched readers deeply. People were moved by Dickens' message of concern for the less fortunate. The Christmas holiday began to be seen as a time for family celebrations and charitable giving.

Before Dickens' story, Christmas was not the major holiday it is today.

**Scrooge's Story Has Remained Popular**

"A Christmas Carol" has never gone out of print. Beginning in the 1840s it began to be adapted for the stage, and Dickens himself performed public readings of it.

Dickens died in 1870, but of course, "A Christmas Carol" has lived on. Stage plays based on it were produced for decades. Eventually, films and television productions kept the story of Scrooge alive for generations to know.