**What was crime like in Victorian London?**

Victorians were worried about the rising crime rate: offences went up from about 5,000 per year in 1800 to about 20,000 per year in 1840.

**What was life in prison like in Victorian London?**

Once inside, prisoners were made to do hard, boring work. Walking a treadwheel or picking oakum (separating strands of rope) were the most common forms of hard labour.

**What was the Poor Law?**

The Poor Law was the way that the poor were helped in 1815. The law said that each parish had to look after its own poor. If you were unable to work then you were given some money to help you survive. However, the cost of the Poor Law was increasing every year. By 1830 it cost about £7 million and criticism of the law was mounting.

**What was the ‘Poor Law Amendment Act’?**

In 1834 the Poor Law Amendment Act was passed by Parliament. This was designed to reduce the cost of looking after the poor as it stopped money going to poor people except in exceptional circumstances. Now if people wanted help they had to go into a workhouse to get it.

**What is a political diatribe?**

A ‘diatribe’ is a verbal attack on something. ‘A Christmas Carol’ is a political diatribe. Dickens is attacking the politics of the time, saying that the rich was not doing enough to help the poor.

**What is an allegory?**

‘A Christmas Carol’ is an example of an allegory. An allegory is a story that can be interpreted to reveal a hidden meaning, usually a moral or political one?

**What inspired Dickens to write ‘A Christmas Carol’?**

Dickens read a report detailing the harsh and poor conditions in which women and children were made to work. They were made to work underground or in appalling conditions in factories. Dickens said he was ‘entirely stricken down’ by the report.

**What is a miser?**

A miser is someone who earns a lot of money but does not spend any of it.

**What is ‘social injustice’?**

Social injustice is a huge theme in the novel. It is a situation where unfair practices are being carried out in society. Whatever unjust is happening it might not be something that is considered moral practice.

**What was happening to the population in England at the time ‘A Christmas Carol’ is set?**

The population of England had grown 64% between Dickens’ birth in 1812 and the year of 1843. Workers were leaving the countryside to crowd into new manufacturing centres and cities.

**How were workers treated when they were employed?**

More and more, employers thought of their workers as tools as interchangeable as any nail or gluepot. Workers were becoming like commodities: not individual humans, but mere resources, their value measured to the ha-penny by how many nails they could hammer in an hour. But in a time of dearth—the 1840s earned the nickname “The Hungry ‘40s”—the poor took what work they could arrange. And who worked for the lowest wages? Children.

**What was Charles Dickens’ early life like?**

* Charles Dickens came from a poor family, but he was lucky enough to attend school.
* Unfortunately, after his father was jailed for having ‘bad debts’, Charles Dickens was forced to leave school and start work in a blacking factory (a boot polish factory). He worked there for three years. The conditions were very poor and Charles Dickens suffered from loneliness.

**What does ‘zeitgeist’ mean?**

With *A Christmas Carol*, Dickens captured the zeitgeist of the mid-Victorian revival of the Christmas holiday. The ***Zeitgeist*** (**spirit of the age** or **spirit of the time**) is the dominant set of ideals and beliefs that motivate the actions of the members of a society in a particular period in time.

**What was the view of poor people at this time?**

Popular theories about how—or whether—to help the poor often made things worse. The first was the widespread sense that poor people tended to be so because they were lazy and immoral, and that helping them would only encourage their malingering. If they were to be helped, it should be under conditions so awful as to discouraged people from seeking that help. The new workhouses were seen as the perfect solution—where families were split up, food was minimal and work painful. "Those who are badly off,” says the unreformed Scrooge, “must go there.”

**In what year did Charles Dickens publish ‘A Christmas Carol’?**

‘A Christmas Carol’ was first published in 1843.