



The man who invented Christmas books



The novels of Charles Dickens are still hugely popular after almost 200 years.

In 1843, Charles Dickens could never have known that his festive tale, *A Christmas Carol*, would still be popular more than 175 years later. It is regarded as the first novel with Christmas as its theme, creating a new genre (category) of books that still exists today. With Christmas Eve fast approaching (when the ghosts of Christmas past, present and future visit Ebenezer Scrooge), it's the perfect time to take a look at the life of the famous author.

A Christmas Carol was first published in 1843.

A bumpy childhood

Dickens, who was born in Portsmouth in 1812, had an unusual upbringing – at times enjoying the comfort of a rich life in London, and at other times overcoming extreme difficulties when his father was sent to prison. When his father was jailed, in 1824, Dickens was sent to work in a factory and could no longer go to school. This experience would inspire his books such as *Oliver Twist*. He also fell out with his mother, who wanted him to stay at work when his father was released from prison. Eventually he was allowed to return to school.



Dickens did tough work in a factory.

A career begins

By 1833, Dickens began writing short stories, often published under a nickname, Boz. His first big success was *The Pickwick Papers* – funny stories about a character called Samuel Pickwick, in 1836. It became popular and Dickens decided to edit a magazine in which he wrote more stories. In the following years, Dickens created hit after hit, and many of the stories were printed in episodes in magazines. Stage productions of his tales were shown in London's theatres, with up to 20 Dickens shows appearing at the same time. Even those who didn't read the books were soon very familiar with his stories.



A scene from The Pickwick Papers.



Dickens in 1839.

DID YOU KNOW?
The first time people could buy Christmas cards was in 1843, the year that *A Christmas Carol* was published.



Crazy for Christmas

In 1843, Dickens came up with an idea for a story about a grumpy character called Ebenezer Scrooge who was taught to enjoy the spirit of the season by three ghosts. He sees how his life up until that point has turned him into a miserable man who doesn't have any friends, and by being given a glimpse into his future, he sees the importance of being a better person. *A Christmas Carol* is undoubtedly Dickens's most successful festive tale, but it is by no means his only book on the subject. He wrote a festive book, essay or short story every year except one between 1843 and 1867. None of them were as popular as *A Christmas Carol*, but they made Dickens a central part of festive celebrations across the country.

Scrooge is visited by Marley's ghost.



What else did Dickens write?

Over his career, Dickens worked as a journalist and editor, but it was his books that made the biggest impact. Some, such as *David Copperfield*, drew attention to poverty and inequality. Many of his creations, including *A Tale of Two Cities* and *Great Expectations*, remain hugely popular today. In his final years he toured the world to give speeches. He died suddenly in June 1870.

A Christmas Carol today

With plenty of adaptations on stage and screen, *A Christmas Carol* has never been more popular. If reading the original book doesn't take your fancy, read a shorter version or watch one of the many films. Among the best are *The Muppet Christmas Carol* and Disney's 2009 animated version. Another way to learn more is to visit the Dickens Museum in London, which has a special exhibition about the author and Christmas. *Beautiful Books: Dickens and the Business of Christmas* is open until 19 April 2020.

The Muppet Christmas Carol is a popular version.

