

Stave 1. *A Christmas Carol*

In the opening stave or chapter of *A Christmas Carol*, Charles Dickens included some words and phrases that may be unfamiliar to you, but it is usually possible to deduce their meaning based on context clues.

The following ten examples are in the order in which they appear in the story. Find them, and fill in the second column with textual evidence that suggests meaning; in the third column, identify the meaning.

Word/phrase	Textual clues	Meaning
Hamlet's father	"died before the play began"; "a stroll at night"; "ramparts"; "astonish his son's weak mind"	This interpretation makes it clear that Hamlet is a character in a play. His father died, but returns at night as a ghost, much to Hamlet's amazement and confusion. The family must be powerful, as ramparts are usually associated with castles or fortresses. Hamlet sees a ghost, just as Scrooge does later in the first stave.
covetous	"squeezing, wrenching, grasping, scraping, clutching"; "sinner"; "hard and sharp as flint"	The participles make it clear that "covetous" is a negative trait involving selfish and ruthless desire for acquisitions; the simile conveys complete lack of compassion.
dismal	"little cell"; "one coal"; "tried to warm himself"	The clerk's work area is a cold and pathetic little area. "Dismal" means "depressing" or "gloomy."
resolute	"he would see him in extremity first"; Good afternoon ... Good afternoon ... Good afternoon"	Despite the nephew's repeated invitations, Scrooge stubbornly refuses. He is absolutely determined (resolute) in his response.

destitute	“poor ... who suffer greatly”; “in want of common necessities”	Destitute people suffer from severe poverty and lack things that make life even reasonably comfortable.
tremulous	“gruff old bell”; “as if teeth were chattering”	The simile makes it clear that the bell’s sound is shaky and uneven. It trembles. “Tremulous” means “quivering” and often suggests fear, sadness, or uncertainty.
tacitly	“Scrooge dismounted ... expectant clerk ... who instantly”	Scrooge does not speak to the clerk; the indication that the day’s work is over is not verbalized. “Tacitly” means “silently.”
not caring a button	“darkness is cheap, and Scrooge liked it”	This is an expression that means Scrooge did not care if the stairway was dark; he was not worried about tripping; the phrase has many variations still in use today, such as “not caring a bit.”
incredulous	“he had never believed it until now”; “nor did he believe it”; “fought against his senses”	“Incredulous” means “disbelieving” or “skeptical.” The word suggest both an inability and a refusal to believe.
repose	“fatigues of the day”; “lateness of the hour”; “went straight to bed”	Repose is a state of peace or sleep. Today the word is often connected with death.