



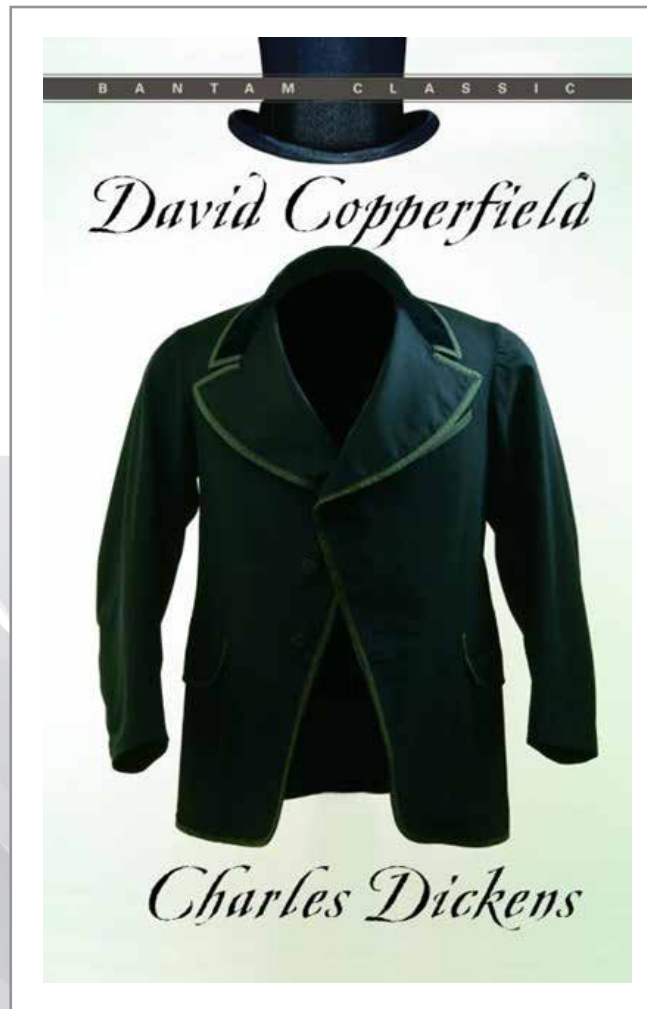
TEACHER GUIDE

GRADES 9-12

COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM BASED LESSON PLANS

David Copperfield

Charles Dickens



READ, WRITE, THINK, DISCUSS AND CONNECT

David Copperfield

Charles Dickens

TEACHER GUIDE

NOTE:

The trade book edition of the novel used to prepare this guide is found in the Novel Units catalog and on the Novel Units website. Using other editions may have varied page references.

Please note: We have assigned Interest Levels based on our knowledge of the themes and ideas of the books included in the Novel Units sets, however, please assess the appropriateness of this novel or trade book for the age level and maturity of your students prior to reading with them. You know your students best!

ISBN 978-1-50203-727-5

Copyright infringement is a violation of Federal Law.

© 2020 by Novel Units, Inc., St. Louis, MO. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, translated, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any way or by any means (electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise) without prior written permission from Novel Units, Inc.

Reproduction of any part of this publication for an entire school or for a school system, by for-profit institutions and tutoring centers, or for commercial sale is strictly prohibited.

Novel Units is a registered trademark of Conn Education.

Printed in the United States of America.

To order, contact your
local school supply store, or:

Toll-Free Fax: 877.716.7272

Phone: 888.650.4224

3901 Union Blvd., Suite 155

St. Louis, MO 63115

sales@novelunits.com

novelunits.com

Table of Contents

Introduction	3
Summary	4
About the Author	6
Initiating Activities	7
Ten Sections	14
Each section contains: Vocabulary, Discussion Questions, Writing Suggestions, Activities	
Post-reading Discussion Questions	39
Post-reading Extension Activities	42

Introduction

"But, like many fond parents, I have in my heart of hearts a favorite child. And his name is David Copperfield." —Charles Dickens

David Copperfield was written when Dickens was in his mid-thirties, at a time when his popularity with his countrymen was already well-established. It was issued in serial form from May 1849, through November 1850, in twenty installments, each one awaited with greater anticipation than the last by a thoroughly enchanted public. The novel has delighted countless readers since. It is one of the "must-reads" of English literature.

Dickens' talent for creating realistic, enduring characters has been compared to Shakespeare's, as have his stylistic genius, his wit, and his prolificacy. The characters in *David Copperfield* seem ready to walk off the pages, and even after the final page has been turned, the self-serving Murdstones, unearthly Uriah Heep, the eloquent and usually penniless Mr. Micawber, innocent Little Em'ly, practical but kindly Aunt Betsey, hopelessly childish Dora, and the angelic Agnes Wickfield live on in the reader's memory.

David Copperfield is written in the first-person, a long retrospective that is autobiographical in many respects. Noting the differences and similarities in how the plot of the novel compares to the events of Dickens' own life is an interesting activity for students. While David's problems began when his widowed mother married the villainous Murdstone and then died, Dickens' problems were the result of his living father's improvidence. Both Dickens and David spent grim and frightening periods as child laborers—David in a wine merchants' warehouse and Dickens in a shoeblacking factory. Dickens' romantic attraction to Maria Beadnell was ended by her parents, who felt he was beneath their daughter. David's similar attraction to Dora was almost squashed by her father—but he conveniently died, leaving his daughter, with limited assets, in the care of two maiden aunts who doted on David and happily gave their permission for the marriage. Like Dickens, David worked in an attorney's office after completing school, then became a newspaper reporter and later a novelist. It seems that Mr. Micawber was based on Dickens' father, and that Dora's difficulties with housekeeping were modeled on similar problems Dickens experienced in his marriage to Catherine Hogarth.

In the course of the novel, David experiences feelings in his "undisciplined heart" that are universally human—fear, loneliness, grief, joy, friendship, romantic love. His candor about these feelings endears him to us. By the end of the novel, David has matured through his various experiences with his own goodness and decency intact, finally deserving of the angelic Agnes. In true Dickensian style, David's triumph is one of the individual over the system—of generosity and warmth of spirit over greed and dishonesty.

Summary

The night David Copperfield was born at Blunderstone, Suffolk, his great-aunt, Miss Betsey Trotwood, left the house abruptly because she had been hoping for a girl who would bear her name. David's father had died six months before he was born. David's young mother, Clara, and devoted nurse, Peggotty, cared for him tenderly.

Mr. Murdstone courted David's mother, and after they married, Murdstone proved to be stingy and cruel. To make matters worse, Mr. Murdstone's sister, Jane, came to take charge of the household. The one bright spot in David's unhappy childhood was a trip with Peggotty to Yarmouth, where her brother lived with two adopted children, Little Em'ly and Ham, in a boat that had been converted into a little house.

After an altercation with Murdstone, David was sent off to Salem House, a miserable school near London overseen by a consummately unfair and unfeeling headmaster, Creakle. David's stay at Salem House was tolerable only because of his friendships with Tommy Traddles and James Steerforth.

When David's mother and her infant died, Murdstone put David to work in the warehouse of Murdstone and Grinby, Wine Merchants. With too much work to do, and never enough to eat, 10-year-old David was grateful for the kindnesses of his landlord, Wilkins Micawber. But Micawber, haunted by creditors, moved to Plymouth and David decided to run away to Betsey Trotwood's home in Dover.

He was soon robbed of all his possessions and money, but struggled to Dover anyway. Miss Betsey, still a bit angry at David for not being a girl, sought the advice of her lodger, the simple-minded Mr. Dick, who suggested they begin by giving David a bath. Miss Betsey wrote to Murdstone to claim his stepson, but upon meeting the Murdstones and realizing how detestable they were, she refused to let David leave.

Aunt Betsey sent David to a school in Canterbury, where he boarded with Aunt Betsey's lawyer, Mr. Wickfield, and his daughter, Agnes, who quickly became David's dear friend. Also at the Wickfield's was Uriah Heep, Wickfield's clerk, whose strange appearance and obsequious manner disgusted David. School at Canterbury was much different than at Salem House, and David developed a great respect for the headmaster, Dr. Strong.

After graduating at 17, David took some time to decide on a profession. He renewed acquaintance with Steerforth, visiting his home and meeting his mother and a girl named Rosa Dartle, who was obviously in love with Steerforth. Afterwards, Steerforth and David went to Yarmouth. In spite of Em'ly's engagement to Ham, she and Steerforth were instantly attracted to one another, although David didn't seem to notice.

When David saw Agnes Wickfield, she warned him that Steerforth should not be trusted, and confessed that she feared Uriah Heep was taking over her father's business as he began to show signs of senility. Later on, David encountered Uriah, who offered the information that someday he hoped to marry Agnes.

When David decided he wanted to be a lawyer, he was articled to the firm of Spenlow and Jorkins. When he was invited to the Spenlow home and met Dora, his employer's daughter, he fell completely in love. The attraction was mutual, and they became secretly engaged.

David's happiness over his relationship with Dora was marred by the news of several crises: Steerforth and Little Em'ly had run away together, David's Aunt Betsey had lost all her money, and Uriah Heep had become Mr. Wickfield's partner.

Aunt Betsey moved in with David, with Mr. Dick renting a room close by, and David took a part-time job as Dr. Strong's secretary to help out with tight finances. Mr. Dick helped out, too, as a copy clerk for Tommy Traddles, now a lawyer. David also studied shorthand so he could become a parliamentary reporter.

When Miss Murdstone, employed as a companion to Dora, found David's love letters to the young lady, she promptly showed them to Mr. Spenlow. Spenlow accused David of going after Dora for the money she would inherit, and told him he forbade the match. On Spenlow's subsequent sudden death, it was learned that he had lived beyond his means and that Dora was almost penniless.

At 21, David and Dora married, but David's hope that marriage would cause Dora to grow up proved fruitless. After numerous attempts to improve Dora's housekeeping, and the loss of their baby, David decided to accept Dora exactly as she was. After the miscarriage, Dora's health began to decline steadily, though her spirits remained as high as ever. During this time, David published his first novel.

Mr. Micawber had crossed David's path several times by now, and David was surprised to learn that Micawber was now employed as Uriah Heep's clerk. Micawber, who had always been honest and full of warmth and friendship in the past, had now become mysteriously unlike himself.

The mystery was soon solved—Micawber revealed to Agnes, Aunt Betsey, David, and Traddles that Heep had been cheating Mr. Wickfield for years, and that Aunt Betsey's financial losses were also his fault. On exposure, Heep soon made restitution, and Mr. Wickfield even seemed more like he had years before.

Meanwhile, David had learned that Steerforth had deserted Little Em'ly somewhere in Europe. Mr. Peggotty had been traveling all over trying to find her, and with the help of Martha, a "fallen woman" to whom Em'ly had once been kind, she was found. Mr. Peggotty decided to take Em'ly to Australia, where they could make a new start. The Micawbers accompany them, thanks to a "loan" from Aunt Betsey.

Dora's health continued to fail, and David grew despondent. With Agnes' help, David somehow got through the last stages of Dora's illness. It was Agnes who told him that she was gone, and Agnes who suggested that David go abroad to recover from the trauma.

He went to Yarmouth first to deliver a letter from Em'ly to Ham, but a terrible storm came up, and Ham made a valiant but unsuccessful attempt to rescue a seaman clinging to a ship in distress off the coast. The seaman Ham died trying to save was Steerforth.

Chapters LVI-LXIV

Vocabulary

emigrants 744	desolate 754	despondency 754	sustaining 755
perplexities 759	aggregate 759	obscurity 761	indomitable 762
decamped 764	negus 772	perdition 774	loquacious 774
magistrate 786	repasts 788	admonitions 789	neophytes 790
indignant 792	discomfiture 801	robust 803	patriarch 814

Discussion Questions

1. Why does David go to see Mrs. Steerforth? (*He feels it's his responsibility to tell her about her son's death.*) What is her reaction to the news? (*She doesn't seem to understand, and is in shock.*) Is Rosa Dartle supportive? (*Not at first; she attacks Mrs. Steerforth, accusing her of making her son into a monster, and saying that she always loved him better. Finally, Rosa collapses into tears and tries to comfort Mrs. Steerforth.*)
2. David might have reacted angrily to Steerforth's death, blaming him for Ham's death. What do you suppose Dickens was saying about David's character? (*David has worshipped Steerforth from the beginning, and his feelings for him have never really changed. He will always "think of him at his best."*)
3. Do you think David was right to withhold the news of Ham's death from Mr. Peggotty and Emily? Why or why not? What might the consequences have been if he had told them?
4. As the Micawbers prepare for their journey to Australia, how do they change? (*They are all clothed as if they are going off to the wilds, and Mr. Micawber looks quite at home in his new oilcloth suit and straw hat.*)
5. What happens to Micawber as he is making the punch for the farewell toast? (*He is arrested because of Heep turning him in again for debt.*) How is the problem solved? (*David pays the money to get him out of jail.*)
6. The Micawbers' mode of dress has changed—but what about them has stayed the same? (*As usual, they are filled with hope and confidence about the new venture.*) As you read Chapter 57, did you imagine they would do well in Australia?
7. What surprise traveler does David meet at the boat? (*Martha*) What does this tell you about Mr. Peggotty's character? (*He is no user of people, and would always repay a debt tenfold if he possibly could.*)
8. As David wanders around Europe, what losses does he feel and grieve? (*Dora, Steerforth, Emily, and his own feelings of safety and love when he was very young and lived at Blunderstone.*)
9. The healing power of Nature is a frequent theme in literature. How is this idea brought out in Chapter 58? (*After months of despondency, David comes into a beautiful valley in the Swiss Alps. There he is finally able to weep for all he has lost.*)

-
10. A character who has been in the novel almost all along also has healing powers for David. Who is it, and how does she help? (*Agnes writes to David regularly, offering him support and encouragement.*)
 11. What are some activities that restore David and bring him out of his despondency? (*He resumes writing, makes many friends in the little Swiss village, exercises regularly, and learns about the countries he visits.*)
 12. How do David's feelings about Agnes change while he is in Europe? (*He begins to realize she was the one he relied on all along, that she would make a wonderful wife.*)
 13. How long does David stay away from England? (*three years*) Upon his return, who does he visit first, and what is the situation there? (*He goes to see Traddles, who is now married and surrounded by Sophy's five adoring sisters in a small apartment.*)
 14. Dickens was often critical of the wealthy. How does Traddles prove that "money can't buy happiness"? (*Although not well-off materially, Traddles is exceedingly happy, and so are those around him. His life is filled with warmth and love, and that is all that seems to matter.*)
 15. Why is Mr. Chillip included in Chapter 59? (*Chillip provides the information that the Murdstones have treated Murdstone's new wife the same way they treated David's mother. Chillip gives confirmation to David's belief that the evil Murdstones will pay for their greed and dishonesty someday.*)
 16. Did Janet continue to take Aunt Betsey's advice to her to renounce mankind? (*No. She married the tavern keeper.*)
 17. What is Mr. Dick doing? (*happily copying everything he can find*)
 18. Why do you think Aunt Betsey tells David that Agnes "has an attachment"? (*Answers will vary.*)
 19. Why is it so difficult for David to tell Agnes how he really feels about her? (*He doesn't want to jeopardize the brother-sister relationship by trying to change it to something she may not want.*) Have you ever been in a similar situation?
 20. What explanation does Mr. Wickfield give for his wife's death? (*She had married him against her father's wishes, and his rejection of the marriage broke her heart.*) Is it really possible to die of a broken heart, do you think?
 21. Why does Creakle contact Traddles? (*to show him the "perfect prison system"*) Who are the "two interesting penitents" in Chapter 61? (*Heep and Littimer*) What are the components of the "perfect system"? (*solitary confinement, good food, religious zeal*) Does it seem to be working for the two prisoners? (*No. Dickens pokes fun at the prison system here and shows Littimer and Heep to be even more repulsive than they were before due to their sanctimonious attitudes and their warnings to repent. David and Traddles see that they have simply become more hypocritical than ever.*)
 22. How did Littimer happen to get caught? (*Miss Mowcher tripped him and hung on to him like a bulldog until the authorities came for him.*)
-

-
23. What does Agnes tell David that changes his life from that point on? (*"I have loved you all my life."*) What last wish of Dora's makes the union even more poignant? (*Dora hoped that only Agnes would replace her as David's wife.*)
24. Events in Chapter 63 and 64 take place ten years after the last chapter. Why do you think Dickens included them? (*to let the reader know the following: David and Agnes' marriage is happy and blessed with children; the Peggottys, Micawbers, and friends—including Mr. Mell—are doing well in Australia; Peggotty is now taking care of Aunt Betsey, who is old but still quite feisty; Doctor Strong still works on his dictionary; Julia Mills has married a wealthy Scotchman and been ruined by money; Traddles is destined to be a judge; Mrs. Steerforth was driven crazy by the loss of her son.*)
25. A more modern novel would probably end with Chapter 62, and let the reader supply from his or her own imagination what happened in the coming years. Which kind of ending do you prefer, and why? (*Answers will vary.*)