



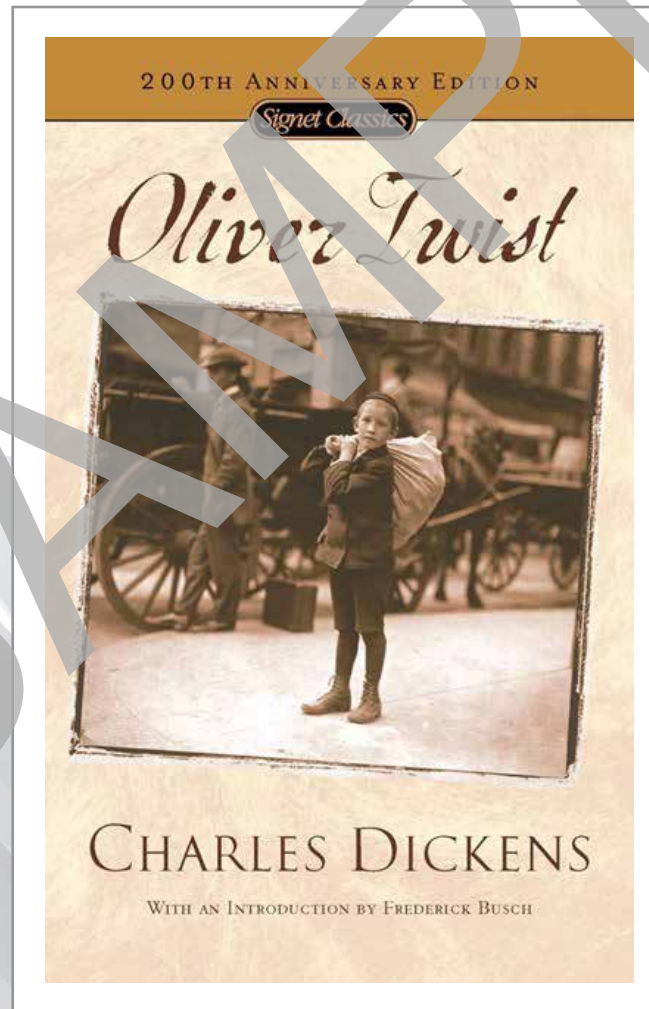
TEACHER GUIDE

GRADES 9-12

COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM BASED LESSON PLANS

Oliver Twist

Charles Dickens



READ, WRITE, THINK, DISCUSS AND CONNECT

Oliver Twist

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!

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Skills and Strategies

Thinking

Analysis, compare/contrast,
research, brainstorming,
critical thinking

Vocabulary

Target words, definitions,
applications

Writing

Poetry, eulogy, letter, essay,
metaphors, similes, TV script,
journal entry

Listening/Speaking

Discussion, oral reports

Literary Elements

Metaphor, simile, allusion,
conflict, personification,
symbolism, foreshadowing,
irony, satire, characterization,
mood, setting, theme, genre

Comprehension

Cause/effect, predicting,
inference, plot development,
thematic development

Across the Curriculum

Music—ballad, appropriate
selections; Art—mask,
collage, caricature; Current
Events—magazine and
newspaper articles

Genre: fiction

Setting: 1830s; England: London, small village, countryside

Point of View: third-person omniscient

Themes: good vs. evil; abandonment, cruelty to, or disregard for orphans; poverty; power of influence; “guilt by association”; trust or lack thereof; self-preservation; survival

Conflict: person vs. person; person vs. society; person vs. self

Style: narrative

Tone: poignant; subjective and sympathetic to plight of protagonist; confrontational; at times ironic and/or sarcastic

Date of First Publication: serial form in the periodical *Bentley's Miscellany*, February 1837–April 1839; book form, 1838

Summary

Oliver Twist is born in a workhouse to an unwed mother who dies soon after his birth. He lives in a poorly-run, squalid home for orphans until he is nine and then is transferred to a workhouse. Oliver and the other children are forced to work hard and must survive on meager rations. After the other boys bully him into asking for more food, Oliver is apprenticed to an undertaker. Oliver runs away from the lies and cruelty of another apprentice. On his way to London, starved and exhausted, he meets Jack Dawkins, a boy about his own age. Jack takes him to meet Fagin, a wicked criminal who trains young boys to pick pockets. When he realizes the nature of the “assignment” on which he has been sent with two boys, Oliver runs away. He is caught and accused of the crime but is set free when the truth is revealed. The victim of the crime, Mr. Brownlow, becomes Oliver's benefactor, but the child is captured and returned to Fagin. Oliver is shot after being forced to assist in a house burglary. The two women of the house, Mrs. Maylie and her foster daughter Rose, take care of him. Fagin's determination to recapture Oliver involves Monks, who is actually Oliver's half-brother. Through a series of events involving Monks, Fagin, the wicked Sikes, and the compassionate Nancy, Oliver's true parentage is revealed. Oliver receives a family inheritance, and Mr. Brownlow adopts him. Fagin hangs for his crimes.

About the Author

Personal: Charles John Huffam Dickens was born February 7, 1812, in Portsmouth, England. The family moved to London when Dickens was eleven. His father, who was a clerk for the navy, spent some time (1824) in a debtors' prison, where he was joined by his family except for Charles. During this time, Charles worked pasting labels on bottles of shoe polish at Warren's Blacking Warehouse. Some of his literary works feature autobiographical information from these years of poverty. After an unexpected legacy relieved the family's debts, Charles attended Wellington House Academy in London but left school when he was in his teen years. He married Catherine Hogarth in 1836, and the couple had ten children. Dickens ended his marriage in 1858 and began to pursue a young actress. He was injured in a train wreck in 1865 and suffered impaired health from that time until he suffered a stroke and died in June 1870. During the last several years of his life, he assisted various charities, including schools for poor children and societies to assist the poor.

Career: Dickens became a newspaper reporter in the late 1820s, specializing in reporting debates in Parliament and writing feature articles. His first book, *Sketches by Boz* (1836) included many of

Story Map

Directions: Complete the story map below.

Characters	Setting	Conflict(s)
	Date: _____ Place: _____ Other: _____	
main _____ main _____ main _____ minor _____ minor _____ minor _____	Novel Title	
Possible Themes (general statements the book makes about life)	Point of View _____	Author's Style and Tone
	Genre _____	

Chapters 1–4, pp. 1–33

Oliver is born in a workhouse, and his mother dies soon after his birth. He is mistreated during his early years and is transferred back to the workhouse when he is nine. He is soon apprenticed to an undertaker.

Vocabulary

parish (1)
magnanimously (4)
beadle (6)
*foundlings (9)
paupers (13)
temerity (14)
sinecure (16)
ablutions (17)
indentures (20)
malignity (30)
*spelling in text

Discussion Questions

1. Discuss circumstances surrounding Oliver Twist's birth. Note the origin of his name and his early attributes. *(His mother is brought to the workhouse after she is found lying in the street. No one knows who she is or where she came from, and she is not wearing a wedding ring. She dies soon after Oliver's birth. Parish officials cannot find information about his mother or his father. Mr. Bumble, the parish beadle, names foundlings alphabetically, and since Oliver is the "T" child, he is named "Twist." Oliver's determination is obvious from his will to survive at birth. His stereotype as an orphan of the workhouse indicates his theoretical destiny: to be half-starved, beaten, and forced to work hard. Although he is small for his age, he has a strong spirit. pp. 1–6)*
2. Discuss the rationale for Oliver's being "farmed out" to the branch-workhouse and the living conditions of the children who are sent there. Note the irony of the "humane" decision of the parish authorities. *(As an infant, Oliver is kept in the workhouse. Before he reaches his first birthday, he is sent to live with 20 or 30 other children who are under the care of Mrs. Mann, who keeps most of the money allotted for the children's care for her own use. Because of inadequate food and supervision, a large percentage of the children die soon after arriving. The children are neglected and filthy except when Mrs. Mann learns of an impending visit from the parish officials. Oliver, at the age of nine, is pale, thin, and small for his age. Irony: The decision of the parish authorities to send Oliver to the branch-workhouse is described as humane and magnanimous. Actually, they send him there because they don't know what else to do with him and want him out of their way. Mrs. Mann, denoted as a woman of wisdom and experience, is selfish and cruel. Mr. Bumble refers to her as humane, with the feelings of a mother, but she is exactly opposite. She pretends to love Oliver, hugging and kissing him when he leaves to return to the workhouse. pp. 4–10)*
3. Examine the changes in Oliver's circumstances and his reaction. Note Mr. Bumble's characteristics and his role in Oliver's life. *(When Oliver is nine years old, the parish board decides to send him back to the workhouse. Although Mrs. Mann has starved and abused him, Oliver is grief-stricken because he must leave the only friends he has ever known. Shortly after arriving at the workhouse, the board interrogates Oliver, reminding him that he is an orphan. When he does not understand the word, a member of the board refers to him as a fool. He is put to work immediately and must exist primarily on thin gruel. Mr. Bumble is fat, arrogant, and self-seeking. He is representative of all members of the parish board. Bumble names Oliver "Twist," and it is he who takes Oliver back to the workhouse. pp. 9–12)*
4. Discuss the definition of "pun" and examine the pun referring to the parish board. *(A pun is the use of a word in such a way as to suggest two or more of its meanings. "Board" refers to the group of men who govern the parish. When Mr. Bumble commands Oliver to bow to the board, the only board Oliver sees is a table, so he bows to that. p. 11)*
5. Analyze the irony of the "Christian" men who serve on the parish board. *(This well-fed group of men advocates the value of a meager diet for the paupers who live in the workhouse. Board*

members consider themselves to be good Christians, yet they treat the paupers as sub-human creatures. Because they deceive themselves into believing that the paupers like their “life of ease,” they establish “wise and humane regulations,” e.g., separation of married couples, taking children from parents, forced labor while subsisting on a starvation diet. pp. 9–13)

6. Discuss the cause/effect of Oliver’s “transgression” using the Cause/Effect chart on page 8 of this guide. (*Cause: Oliver and the boys who live and work with him are slowly starving to death, and they choose Oliver as the one to ask for more food. Effect: When he does so, he is seized, placed in confinement, and ordered to be apprenticed to anyone who will take him. He is kept in solitary confinement for a week. Every other day, he is carried into the dining hall and publicly beaten as a warning to the other boys. pp. 14–17*)
7. Analyze the bartering for Oliver’s services. Note the implication of “fate” in the outcome. (*The board offers five pounds to the person who will take Oliver as an apprentice. Mr. Gamfield, a chimney-sweep, is the first to barter for him. A board member who observes Gamfield beating his donkey decides this is just the master Oliver needs. Because Gamfield has already abused three or four boys to death, the parish board negotiates with him to accept less money. Destiny: The old man who is to sign the papers giving Oliver to Gamfield happens to look directly into Oliver’s terrified face and speaks kindly to him, eliciting an outburst of tears. In response to the man’s query, Oliver begs him to do anything, e.g., kill or starve him, rather than send him with the cruel chimney-sweep. The man orders Oliver returned to the workhouse, saving him from Gamfield’s abuse. Fate intervenes again the second time Oliver is offered as an apprentice. Following a chance meeting with Mr. Bumble, Sowerberry agrees to take Oliver as an apprentice, thus saving him from being sent to sea, which would have meant almost certain death. pp. 17–29*)
8. Discuss Oliver’s initial treatment in the Sowerberry household. (*When Oliver arrives, fearful and lonely, Mrs. Sowerberry is displeased because he is so small. She pushes him down the cellar stairs and orders her maid, Charlotte, to feed him the scraps saved for the dog. He must sleep among the coffins. pp. 31–33*)
9. **Prediction:** How will Oliver fare as Mr. Sowerberry’s apprentice?

Supplementary Activities

1. Begin a list of similes and metaphors. This is an ongoing activity, and examples are given in the Supplementary Activities of each section where applicable. **Metaphors**—Mr. Gamfield: receipt for cruelty (p. 23); Oliver: millstone (p. 27)
2. Divide into groups and have each group research and present an oral report to the class for one of the following: (a) the effects of the Industrial Revolution in England during the early 1800s (b) workhouses in England during the 1800s (c) the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834 (d) 19th-century English orphanages (e) the apprenticeship system.