

# Individual Learning Packet

## Teaching Unit

# Oliver Twist

by Charles Dickens

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## Notes

Charles Dickens was born on February 7, 1812 in Portsea, England. He was born into a lower middle class family, led by a kind father who, unfortunately, had a habit of spending more than he earned. Eventually, this habit would have great negative consequences. At age twelve, Charles Dickens was forced to take a job in a blacking warehouse for little pay, in hopes he could help his family get out of debt. Two weeks after he took the job, his father was arrested and put into debtor's prison, where Mrs. Dickens and her four youngest children joined him.

Charles Dickens would never forget this chapter in his life, when his family suffered from poverty, and few were able or willing to help them. Though he would go on to be educated, work for a lawyer, become a journalist, and finally become a published writer, his experiences as a young child with poverty would continually inspire him to write, and would repeatedly show up as subject or theme in his works.

*Oliver Twist* is no exception. In 1834, the Poor Law was enacted in England, which provided that all able-bodied paupers must live in a workhouse in order to receive assistance. Those that resided there were stereotyped by society, and life inside and outside its walls was harsh. Though this law was said to have reduced the cost of poor relief by one-third, it was also believed the law attributed to the sharp rise in crime. Readers will note that Dickens' continued sympathy with the poor, and his condemnation of those that do nothing to improve the lives of those suffering, no doubt stems from both his own experiences and the seeming injustice such a law inflicted on his country.

All references from the Dover Thrift edition of *Oliver Twist*, copyright 2002.

## Objectives

By the end of this Unit, the student will be able to:

1. define style and point out Dickens' use of parallelism in the novel.
2. discuss how setting is often symbolic.
3. identify examples of the following literary devices:
  - theme
  - narrator
  - contrast
  - personification
4. point out how Dickens uses foreshadowing to build tension and suspense.
5. define irony and recognize it in the story, including the following:
  - the fate of the Bumbles
  - the fate of Bill Sikes
6. define satire and discuss ways that satire is used to ridicule, particularly the social institutions in this novel.
7. find examples of comic relief in this story.
8. discuss the importance of the following themes in the novel:
  - the struggle of evil to overcome the good and innocent of the world
  - the ability for man to achieve happiness only by counting on kind people in the world
  - fate, and its control over people's lives
9. define the first person narrator and recognize when the narrator breaks away from the story to speak directly to the reader.
10. discuss the intricate plot and the intertwined relationship between characters.
11. identify the protagonist and antagonist of the story and the conflict that drives the plot forward.
12. identify the many coincidences in this novel that eventually result in the resolution of the conflict.
13. cite incidents from the novel to demonstrate Dickens' point of view on the treatment of the poor by society.

### Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. List four coincidences in the novel that must be accepted by the reader for the story to be believed.
2. Write a brief character sketch of Nancy. Do you think the character grows and changes by the end of the story? If so, what motivates the change? If not, what prevents it?
3. Support or refute the following statement by citing incidents from the story: Charitable institutions only reproduced the horrible circumstances in which the poor already lived.
4. In what ways can the scene in which Mr. Bumble woos Mrs. Corney be considered humorous? If it is satirical, at what group of people is Dickens poking fun?
5. Discuss the definition of irony. List and explain at least three examples of irony in this novel.
6. Dickens often selects names for his characters to contribute to a reader's understanding of the character or to foreshadow the character's future. What is significant about the following character names?
  - Oliver Twist
  - Rose Maylie
  - Mr. Bumble
  - Toby Crackit
  - Mrs. Mann
  - Mr. Grimwig
  - Bull's-eye
7. Discuss the use of London Bridge in this book. What does its use symbolize in this particular novel?
8. There are numerous examples of good and evil in this book. Select one example to support or refute the following statement: The line between who is good and who is evil is often blurred in this novel.
9. Dickens writes about orphans in many of his novels, and in this novel numerous orphans are present. What do you think he is saying about what it takes to properly raise a child?
10. Define a coming-of-age novel. In what ways does this novel fit the definition?
11. Discuss the character little Dick. What is his function in the story?
12. Discuss Gamfield, the chimney sweep. Why do you think Dickens included him in the story?

# Oliver Twist

## Chapter I

### VOCABULARY

appendage—limb  
buffeted—pummeled  
consolatory—comforting  
cuffed—hit  
drudge—labor  
indubitably—unquestionably  
interposed—inserted  
prudent—careful

1. Briefly describe the condition of the infant that is born in Chapter I. What might these conditions foreshadow of its future?

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2. What does the conversation between the nurse and the surgeon reveal?

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3. What happens to the infant after his mother dies?

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## Chapter XI

### VOCABULARY

**dispensary**—provider  
**gratuitous**—unjustified  
**impertinent**—rude  
**insolent**—disrespectful  
**peremptorily**—unconditionally  
**roused**—provoked  
**vagabond**—beggar

1. What haunts Mr. Brownlow about Oliver?  
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\_\_\_\_\_  
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2. Describe the magistrate. Why do you believe Dickens portrays him the way he does?  
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3. Why does Oliver not speak in his own defense?  
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4. How is Oliver cleared of the charges brought against him?  
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5. How do Mr. Brownlow and Oliver remain connected?  
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\_\_\_\_\_  
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**Chapter XIX**

## VOCABULARY

**evinced**—proved  
**execrations**—exclamations  
**indignation**—resentment  
**loitering**—lingering  
**ruminating**—thinking over  
**turbulent**—confused

1. How is the weather in this chapter a foreshadowing of things to come?

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2. What plan do Fagin and Sikes discuss?

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3. How does Fagin show a sign of humanity and softness?

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**Chapter XXIX**

## VOCABULARY

bestowed—granted  
commendations—praises  
gig—carriage  
propriety—politeness  
trifle—little  
undaunted—fearless  
zenith—high point

1. What information has Giles withheld from Mrs. Maylie and her niece, which would undoubtedly affect their attitude toward Oliver?

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2. How is this chapter similar to the very first of this novel?

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**Chapter XLIII**

## VOCABULARY

**copious**—abundant  
**disposition**—nature  
**endowed**—gifted  
**gait**—pace  
**meager**—scanty  
**prig**—pauper  
**saunter**—stroll  
**wily**—crafty

1. How does Noah discover Fagin has swindled him? How does Fagin explain his actions?

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2. What news does Charley Bates bring about the Artful Dodger?

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3. What becomes Noah Claypole's first job? What does he see?

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4. Why is there some irony in the Artful Dodger's fate?

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