

# **David Copperfield Study Guide**

## **David Copperfield by Charles Dickens**

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## Overview

David Copperfield is a bildungsroman, the story of the narrator's life from early childhood to maturity. In it Copperfield describes the obstacles he overcame and the unhappy events he lived through before becoming a successful novelist in later years.

The book is an expert blend of fiction and autobiography. While Dickens was not an orphan, he felt abandoned by his parents during the harsh experiences of his early years. David Copperfield's father had died before his birth and his mother dies when he is twelve years old. David had led a happy life with his mother and the housekeeper Peggotty until his mother's second marriage to Murdstone, who beats David severely and whose treatment breaks his mother's spirit and finally causes her death.

Before her death, Murdstone sends David to Salem House, a school presided over by a master as cruel as Murdstone himself. It is here, however, that David meets two lifelong friends, James Steerforth and Tommy Traddles. With his wife dead, Murdstone, who hates David, sends him to his business in London. He lodges with the amiable Micawber family. David runs away from the hated warehouse and becomes the ward of his great-aunt Betsy Trotwood, who sends him to school in Canterbury, a vast improvement over Salem House. Here he lodges with the Wickfields and is attracted to Agnes Wickfield, but dislikes Uriah Heep, her father's obsequious clerk. He studies law under Mr. Spenlow and falls in love and marries his daughter Dora. Micawber and Traddles ultimately expose Uriah Heep as a thief, and the Micawber family immigrates to Australia. David himself eventually becomes a skilled journalist, but shortly after he finds success, his wife Dora dies.

After a period of wandering, David begins his career as a popular novelist and marries Agnes.



## About the Author

The most popular Victorian author in Great Britain and the United States, Charles Dickens was both gifted humorist and critic of the social evils of his time. His characters are frequently eccentric, almost caricatures. They change very little, or not at all in the course of the narrative, but they are none-the-less memorable. For example, Mr. Micawber is one of the outstanding characters in *David Copperfield*, and remains his improvident, amiable self all through the novel until he goes to Australia. Yet he is a comic character almost in the same league as Shakespeare's Sir John Falstaff.

Dickens was born in 1812 at Landport, near Portsmouth, England, to John Dickens, a navy payclerk, and Catherine Dickens, nee Barrow. The family moved to London in 1815 and in 1817 to Chatham, where Dickens spent the happiest years of his childhood. Neither of his parents was particularly mature in financial matters, and after returning to London in 1822, the family became destitute. In 1824 John Dickens was thrown into the Marshalsea Prison for debt. During the previous year, Charles had been taken out of school and sent to work in Warren's Blacking Factory, a warehouse managed by a relative. This was said to be the most traumatic event in Dickens' young life. After his father's release from prison, Dickens returned to school briefly but his formal education ended when he was fifteen. A succession of jobs followed, including work as a solicitor's clerk, as a shorthand reporter in the law courts, and as a parliamentary reporter. In 1833 he began contributing stories to newspapers and magazines that were later collected to form his first book *Sketches by Boz*. In 1836 began the serialization of *Pickwick Papers*, which became immensely popular. While *Pickwick* was still appearing, Dickens, as editor of Bentley's *Miscellany*, was contributing installments of *Oliver Twist* to the magazine.

In April 1836, he married Catherine Hogarth, who between 1837 and 1852 bore him ten children. Serial publication suited Dickens' temperament, and *Nicholas Nickleby* (1838-39), *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1840-41), and *Barnaby Rudge* (1841) all appeared in this format. A visit to America in 1842 resulted in *American Notes* (1843), and in a lengthy episode in *Martin Chuzzlewit* (1843-44). The first of the five "Christmas Books," *A Christmas Carol*, appeared in 1843, and became the most important Christmas story in the English language. *Dombey and Son* was serialized in 1846-48, followed in 1849-50 by the semiautobiographical *David Copperfield*, Dickens' "favorite child." Then came *Bleak House* (1852-53), *Hard Times* (1854) and *Little Dorrit* (1855-57). Dickens also edited and contributed to the journals *Household Words* (1850-59) and *All the Year Round* (1859-70). He bought a country house, *Gad's Hill*, near Rochester in 1856. He was separated from his wife in 1858. In 1859 his historical novel *A Tale of Two Cities* was published. *Great Expectations* (1860-61) was his third book to use a firstperson narrator, and both it and the historical novel were serialized in *All the Year Round*. Dickens' last completed novel, *Our Mutual Friend*, was published in 1864-65.

The *Mystery of Edwin Drood* was left unfinished at Dickens' death on June 9, 1870.



# Plot Summary

David Copperfield records the life experiences of the title character as he grows from impressionable youth through adulthood. His experiences shape his character and shape the choices he is forced to make. The people involved in his life, with their positive and negative influences, play a role in determining who he will become. This classic coming-of-age tale explores nineteenth century social conditions and their affect on one person, David Copperfield.

David's early childhood is spent in pleasant isolation with his mother and their devoted servant, Peggotty. An early visit to Peggotty's family introduces David to Emily, his first crush. This pleasant isolation changes abruptly when his mother marries Mr. Murdstone. The arrival at David's home of Mr. Murdstone and his sister, Miss Murdstone, tears David apart from his naive and weak willed mother.

Sent to a boarding school called Salem House, David meets two of his lifelong friends, Tommy Traddles and James Steerforth. Tommy Traddles is good-hearted but extremely unlucky. James Steerforth is very wealthy and lives a life of privilege. David's time at boarding school is cut short by the death of his mother, and he is then forced to return home.

Mr. Murdstone, no longer interested in educating David now that David's mother is dead, sends ten-year-old David to work in London. David narrowly manages to avoid starvation due to his small wages and grueling work schedule. It is during this period of his life that he meets the Micawber family. The Micawbers are continually in debt despite their higher-class status. They are briefly held in Debtor's Prison. Shortly after the Micawbers are liberated from prison and go to look for work in another town. David decides to run away from London and find his great aunt, Miss Betsy Trotwood.

After traveling for weeks with little food and no shelter, David reaches his aunt's house. She takes him in to live with her and sends him to school in Canterbury. At Canterbury, David lives with Mr. Wickfield, his aunt's lawyer, and his daughter, Agnes. Mr. Wickfield has a drinking problem, which is made worse by the interference of a scheming clerk, Uriah Heep. David successfully graduates from school and is apprenticed as a proctor in London.

David's life in London reunites him with Steerforth. David takes his friend Steerforth to visit Peggotty's family in Yarmouth. During this visit Steerforth strikes up a relationship with Emily, who is engaged to another man. Eventually, Steerforth and Emily run off together, without getting married, which devastates all of Emily's family and friends.

During this time, David meets his boss's daughter, Dora Spenlow. He immediately falls in love with her. While he is courting Dora, his aunt goes bankrupt. David takes on extra work in order to make ends meet. Eventually, this leads him to take up writing as an additional way to make money.





After David and Dora marry, their domestic life is very problematic due to Dora's inability to manage the house or to assume any responsibility. At the same time, David's old friends, the Wickfields, are in serious trouble because of Uriah Heep's meddling and deceptions. Finally, Heep is confronted and the fortunes of both the Wickfields and David's aunt are restored. Shortly thereafter Dora dies.

In the meantime, David has become a famous author. He goes on a trip across Europe for several years to both grieve for Dora and to discover his true feelings for Agnes Wickfield. When he returns, the two marry and live happily together.



# Chapter 1

## Chapter 1 Summary

David is born six months after his father dies. His mother and their servant, Peggotty, are alone in "The Rookery," awaiting the birth. Miss Betsey Trotwood, David's great aunt, arrives unexpectedly on the day David is born. Miss Trotwood predicts that David will be born a girl and proposes to be this female infant's godmother. When David is born a boy, Miss Trotwood takes his gender as a personal insult and leaves. Several superstitious elements are introduced regarding David's birth. One is the hour of his birth, late on Friday night, which implies that he will be able to see ghosts or have some other connection to the spirit world. The other is that he is born with a caul, a good luck charm against drowning.

## Chapter 1 Analysis

In this chapter, all the factors of David's birth are explained which provides foreshadowing about his future life. The first significance is the relationship between himself, his mother, and his aunt, as is shown by the significant personality traits of both women. The superstitious element of the caul, with its particular reference to sailors and drowning, also foreshadows David's later contact with fisherman and the risks associated with their profession.



## Chapter 2

### Chapter 2 Summary

David recalls the sights of his early childhood, including the church, his childhood home, and more. David's mother, long a widow, has begun dating, which causes conflict between her and Peggotty. Mr. Murdstone is introduced as a potential suitor. His relationship with Mrs. Copperfield progresses over Peggotty's objections. At one point, David accompanies Mr. Murdstone alone on an outing. David is too young to understand the conversation of the men as they discuss Murdstone's plans to marry David's mother.

David still suspects nothing when Peggotty suggests a trip away from home. She proposes that the two of them go to Yarmouth to visit her family. David's mother agrees to this plan because she is going to go for a long visit to a friend's home at the same time. David is eager to go and does not connect the unexpected trip with his mother's relationship with Murdstone.

### Chapter 2 Analysis

The relationship between Peggotty and Mrs. Copperfield is strained by their disagreement about Mrs. Copperfield's new social life. The comments that Mrs. Copperfield makes to Peggotty illustrate that Mrs. Copperfield has a very narrow worldview. The deception involved in both David's outing with Mr. Murdstone and the visit to Peggotty's relatives foreshadows the dishonest beginnings of Mrs. Copperfield's future marriage to Mr. Murdstone. This dishonesty foreshadows problems for their future marriage, especially in how the marriage affects David.



# Chapter 3

## Chapter 3 Summary

David arrives in Yarmouth to visit Peggotty's family. Various relatives live in a boat that has been converted into a house on dry land. The relatives welcome David kindly and his first impressions of Peggotty's family are very positive. Peggotty's brother, Mr. Peggotty, is a retired sailor who has taken in two orphaned relatives, Emily and Ham, as well as the widowed wife of an old friend, Mrs. Gummidge. David strikes up a friendship with Emily. They wander the seashore together and develop a childhood crush on each other. David has a very pleasant time at the Peggotty home. He regrets having to leave, but looks forward to seeing his mother again.

On arriving home, Peggotty informs him that his mother has married Mr. Murdstone while they were away. David finds his familiar childhood home greatly changed with the addition of Mr. Murdstone.

## Chapter 3 Analysis

The trip to Yarmouth provides many clues about David's future. His crush on Emily is the first of many such attachments that David develops towards young women in his life; attachments usually based on their poetic features instead of their practical ones. His conversations with Emily foreshadow her own future, as she discusses how she would wish to be a lady rather than a fisherman's wife. Mrs. Gummidge, the sad widow, foreshadows many of the developments that will take place with David's mother, including the problems in her marriage to Mr. Murdstone.



# Chapter 4

## Chapter 4 Summary

David's return home is not a happy one. His mother is offended by his negative feelings towards Mr. Murdstone. Mr. Murdstone presents himself as a strict stepfather and makes it clear that David must obey him or risk physical punishment.

Mr. Murdstone's sister comes to stay with them and to run the house according to her own paranoid delusions. The two Murdstones set rule with an iron fist and break the spirits of the others in the house, particularly David and his mother. One instance of this is David's schooling at home. The two Murdstones watch David and his mother during his lessons in order to catch the slightest sign of affection toward one another. These lessons usually end in violence against David for some perceived transgression. David takes comfort by escaping into stories that he secretly reads.

Tensions come to a head when David bites Mr. Murdstone's hand during a beating. David is locked in his room for a week before Mr. Murdstone suggests that he be sent off to boarding school. Peggotty tries to comfort David as assures him of her devotion. His mother sadly goes along with her husband's wishes.

## Chapter 4 Analysis

David's relationship with his stepfather quickly becomes violent. David can do nothing right in Mr. Murdstone's eyes, no matter how hard he tries. David constantly sacrifices his own feelings for his mother and accepts the brutal treatment. David's mother's naivety and childlike personality lead to many of her problems. She does not have a strong enough character to defend David and is easily bent to her new husband's will. Her character is a model for many women throughout David's life. Their lack of individual strength or practical knowledge will continue to be a source of struggle for David because he is helplessly drawn to this type of women.



# Chapter 5

## Chapter 5 Summary

David begins his journey to London to attend his new boarding school, Salem House. As the carriage is about to leave, Peggotty appears to give him money and food for his journey. She rides with him for a little while in order to comfort him. When Peggotty leaves, the carriage driver, Mr. Barkis, asks David about her and hints that he would like to begin a courtship with her.

After arriving at the transfer point, David is at the mercy of those around him, who are looking to trick him out of his money or food. What follows is an uncomfortable journey to London, where David is left waiting at the station for someone to pick him up. Finally, Mr. Mell, one of the teachers at Salem House, meets him. On the way to the school, Mr. Mell and David stop at a charitable institution to get something to eat. While there, David finds out that Mr. Mell's mother lives at this charitable institution and has some mental problems.

On arriving at the school, David discovers that it is closed for a holiday period. While he explores the grounds, he examines the graffiti left by other students and wonders about how he will be accepted by them.

## Chapter 5 Analysis

The mysterious insistence of Mr. Barkis confuses David, but Mr. Barkis does continue to pursue a relationship with Peggotty. The ease with which people take advantage of David will also continue as he learns how much to trust other people, particularly strangers.

David's arrival at Salem House also presents hints at what is to come. What David knows about Mr. Mell's mother will have a negative impact at some point in the future. The names that he reads in the student graffiti, especially the names of Tommy Traddles and James Steerforth, foreshadow the relationships he will have with those two boys.



# Chapter 6

## Chapter 6 Summary

Preparations are made for the school to reopen. The headmaster, Mr. Creakle, returns to the school and meets with David. Mr. Creakle is an old friend of Mr. Murdstone's and rules the school by inspiring fear in the students. The first student to return is friendly and kindhearted Tommy Traddles. Steerforth arrives later. He is the head student and leader of the schoolboys. He tricks David out of his remaining money, which he spends on a feast of cakes and candy. The boys gossip about the school and its staff. The gossip generally involves Mr. Creakle, who recently changed occupations from beer maker to schoolmaster and who had thrown out his grown son after a disagreement about the use of physical punishment at the school. These conversations help David to establish friendships with the other boys and settle into his new home.

## Chapter 6 Analysis

This chapter introduces the reader to both Tommy Traddles and James Steerforth, two individuals who will have a lasting relationship with David. Tommy Traddles is shown to be good and kind, although unlucky most of the time. Steerforth is immediately seen as domineering and in control. His authority is unchallenged and everyone looks up to him. From the reader's perspective, however, Steerforth's individual actions are manipulative and often mean spirited. David's unquestioning admiration of him will later prove to be problematic.



# Chapter 7

## Chapter 7 Summary

The school semester begins with the headmaster, Mr. Creakle, making many threats of violence against both David and the general school population. David learns more about his new friends. Traddles, hopelessly warmhearted and yet constantly in trouble, is seen as an honest, honorable, and loyal boy. David and Steerforth begin a friendship based on their individual strengths. They establish a nightly ritual in which David tells Steerforth stories from the books that he has read. Steerforth, in turn, helps David with difficult assignments.

One day, Steerforth and Mr. Mell have an argument in which Steerforth insults the poor teacher, who resigns and immediately leaves the school. The boys cheer Steerforth for some perceived gallantry, even though he has so cruelly insulted Mr. Mell. Steerforth's insults were based on the information that David had given him about Mr. Mell's mother.

The only other memorable moment from the semester is a visit from Peggotty's relatives. They come to see David and end up meeting Steerforth. They are all impressed by Steerforth and think he is great.

## Chapter 7 Analysis

This chapter provides a strong comparison between Traddles and Steerforth. Traddles' kind feelings and loyalty to Mr. Mell contrast sharply with Steerforth's elitist and privileged attitude. David, showing his own innocence, is completely entranced with Steerforth, despite having a few lingering feelings of sorrow about Mr. Mell, who had always been kind to him. David goes along with the crowd and praises Steerforth although Steerforth has been extremely mean and insulting to someone who was not deserving of such treatment. Steerforth also makes a strong impression on Peggotty's relatives, proving that everyone he meets is overwhelmed by his strength of personality and are eager to think that he is a good person. These opinions will serve Steerforth throughout his life as he continues to take advantage of those he considers beneath him.





# Chapter 8

## Chapter 8 Summary

David arrives home for the holidays to find that his mother has given birth to a baby boy. She has also fallen into bad health and does not seem likely to recover. David, his mother, and Peggotty spend a quiet evening together until the two Murdstones return from an outing. The bad relationship between David and the Murdstones resumes, with the addition of the Murdstones banning David from touching or even being near the new baby. David tries to avoid conflict by staying out of their way but they respond by ordering him to stay in the public rooms of the house where they can monitor him. His vacation passes slowly and is very emotionally painful for David as his mother draws away from him out of fear of her husband and sister-in-law. Finally David returns to Salem House, feeling both sorry to leave his mother again and relieved to escape from the cruelty of his stepfather.

## Chapter 8 Analysis

This chapter foreshadows the death of David's mother. It is clear that this will be the last time that David will see her alive. The change in their relationship in such a short time is very painful for David. In trying to please his mother, David falls further into the pattern of submission to weak-willed women who will dominate his adult love life. He forgives his mother's abandonment of him and concentrates all his negative feelings on his stepfather.



# Chapter 9

## Chapter 9 Summary

Two months uneventfully pass at school. On his birthday, David learns that his mother has died. He returns home for the funeral, not knowing that he will not be going back to Salem House ever again. Upon arriving home, David is met by the village tailor. The tailor sews his funeral suit and tells him that his baby brother has died as well. David arrives at his house in the midst of the funeral preparations. He receives consolation for his grief from Peggotty alone. Peggotty recounts his mother's illness and her last days. David resolves to remember his mother as she had been before marrying Mr. Murdstone rather than as the scared and timid woman she had become after the marriage.

## Chapter 9 Analysis

David meets the tailor and his family. This family will continue to play a part in David's life and will generally be his first welcome whenever he returns to visit in Yarmouth. David's resolution regarding his mother will continue to influence him throughout his life, particularly when the Murdstones are paired with various other people he cares about.



# Chapter 10

## Chapter 10 Summary

After the funeral, the Murdstones fire Peggotty. Instead of trying to humiliate and punish David, they completely ignore him. When Peggotty tells David that she is returning to her family in Yarmouth, she suggests that he come with her for a visit in order to get out of the Murdstone house for a while. When the two of them go to Yarmouth, they ride with the same carriage driver, Mr. Barkis, who continues to drop hints about his willingness to marry Peggotty. When they reach Yarmouth, Peggotty asks David if he thinks it would be a good idea to marry Mr. Barkis. David is enthusiastic about the possible union.

David settles back into his routines at Yarmouth, and renews his crush on Emily. One day, David, Emily, Peggotty, and Mr. Barkis go on a picnic. One the way to the picnic, Mr. Barkis and Peggotty take a quick detour into a church and come out married.

David eventually must go home to the Murdstones after his pleasant vacation. At first the Murdstones continue to ignore him. Finally, Mr. Murdstone arranges for David to take a job at a counting house in London connected to the Murdstone family.

## Chapter 10 Analysis

This chapter provides a pleasant interlude in David's misfortunes. His bonds with Peggotty's family grow stronger and will continue to be some of the dominant bonds he will form throughout his life. As for his new job in London, it is assumed that this will have some negative outcome because the job has some connection with Mr. Murdstone. The presence of Mr. Murdstone's old friends who participated in some of the deceptions surrounding the marriage between Murdstone and David's mother also bodes ill for David's future in London.



# Chapter 11

## Chapter 11 Summary

David goes to work for the firm of Murdstone and Grinby, a company chiefly involved in shipping wine and spirits. David's job is to refill old bottles and pack them for shipment. David goes to live in the spare room of the Micawber family. The Micawber family is plagued with debt but has high-class manners. David can barely make ends meet on his small salary and often goes hungry. He is soon pawning things for the Micawbers so that they can buy food.

Mr. Micawber is eventually arrested and put in Debtor's Prison. His family joins him there and David takes a cheap room nearby. The Micawbers slowly scheme their way out of debt, mainly relying on the charity of family members. David is very affected by the time he spends visiting them in the prison. Other than those visits, his life is very lonely as he goes to and from work.

## Chapter 11 Analysis

David's new life is horrible and contributes one of the strongest images for a running theme throughout the novel: opposition to child labor. During this time, the reader is reminded that David is only ten years old. His hunger and poverty are in parallel to the Micawber family, who has sunk deep into debt despite their upper class beginnings. David and the Micawbers illustrate the hardships of life in the nineteenth century and the ways in which those more fortunate ignore the problems of the poor.



# Chapter 12

## Chapter 12 Summary

Mr. Micawber appears in court and is released from prison. The family moves to Plymouth where Mrs. Micawber's family may be able to help them. David resolves to run away and find his aunt, Miss Betsey Trotwood, to see if she might help him. He arranges secretly to go to Dover to find her, but as he tries to leave London he is robbed of all his money and possessions. He is forced to travel without food or shelter the entire way to Dover.

## Chapter 12 Analysis

Again, as a child, David is left to take care of himself and is at the mercy of those around him. Even though he tried very hard to save money for his journey and to be honorable to his dishonorable boss, he is rewarded by being robbed and left to starve on his own.



# Chapter 13

## Chapter 13 Summary

David sets out on the road to Dover. Along the way, he sells most of his clothes to buy food and sleeps outside at night. The journey frightens him and leaves a deep impression in his mind. When he finally reaches Dover, he has trouble locating his aunt's house. When he finally finds her house, he discovers that she is sharing the house with a man known only as Mr. Dick. It is a pleasant house despite being run by Miss Betsy's many eccentric habits. She takes David in, and feeds and bathes him. As David falls asleep that first night, he is unsure if she will keep him or what she might decide to do with him.

## Chapter 13 Analysis

David's journey to Dover is marked by hunger and poverty. No one helps David and most people try to cheat him in some way. Coming from such a state, David is easily overwhelmed by his aunt's energy and is merely grateful to end his wanderings for a short while. The reader and David wait to see how Miss Betsey's eccentric ways will influence her decision on whether or not she will keep David, who at this point is without other options.



# Chapter 14

## Chapter 14 Summary

At breakfast the next morning, Miss Betsy tells David that she has written to his stepfather to say that David is staying with her. She tells David that she will not be able to make any decision about him until his stepfather writes or visits.

David learns more about Mr. Dick, who has some mental problems and is writing a never-ending manuscript about his connection to the beheading of King Charles. Mr. Dick also enjoys flying kites. Miss Betsey explains that she took him in after his family planned to put him in a mental institution. She thinks that Mr. Dick is perfectly fine.

The Murdstones arrive to discuss David's future. They explain their intentions to treat David as they wish, and express their opinion that he is a horrible child. Miss Betsey accuses them of ruining the life of David's mother and decides to accept David as her ward. She tells the Murdstones to leave and never return. David is delighted to stay with his aunt and hopes the Murdstone chapter of his life is finally over. Miss Betsey nicknames him "Trotwood."

## Chapter 14 Analysis

Miss Betsey and Mr. Dick are introduced as two eccentric characters who have chosen to make an alternative life together. Each of them has their own strange habits, but both are shown to be essentially kindhearted. The confrontation between both Miss Betsey and Mr. Dick and the Murdstones is a change from previous standoffs between the Murdstones and other adults. Miss Betsy refuses to believe what they say about David and defends David. This defense is a strong contrast to the way that David's own mother acted. The difference between Miss Betsey and David's mother sets up one of the fundamental contrasts in David's views of women, in which he is emotionally drawn to women of his mother's type while being nurtured and protected by those of Miss Betsey's type.



# Chapter 15

## Chapter 15 Summary

David settles in at Miss Betsey's and established a strong friendship with Mr. Dick. It is decided to send David to school in nearby Canterbury. After arriving in town, they go to the office of Miss Betsey's lawyer, Mr. Wickfield. Mr. Wickfield and Miss Betsy agree on a school for David and decide that David will live at Mr. Wickfield's house while he goes to school. Mr. Wickfield introduces them to his daughter, Agnes, who is the same age as David and takes care of the house for her father. David is quite pleased at the pleasant domestic atmosphere of the house but is disturbed by the presence of the clerk, Uriah Heep, who makes him feel uneasy.

## Chapter 15 Analysis

This chapter introduces the Wickfields and their domestic ups and downs. The relationship between Mr. Wickfield and Uriah Heep will continue to develop throughout the novel as the two shift roles of power and independence. This chapter also introduces Agnes Wickfield, one of the dominant figures in David's life. She is presented as completely practical and warmhearted, in the same manner of David's aunt, Miss Betsy. David's relationship with Agnes will continue to develop throughout the novel, and she is established from the beginning as a trustworthy rock of loyalty to her father.





# Chapter 16

## Chapter 16 Summary

David goes to his new school for the first time and meets the headmaster, Dr. Strong. At first David is confused about Dr. Strong's relationship with Annie, a much younger woman, but soon discovers that Annie is Dr. Strong's wife. Dr. Strong and Mr. Wickfield have a long discussion about one of Mrs. Strong's relatives, Jack Maldon. David is very anxious about his return to school, feeling that his experiences working in London and being homeless will be found out and used to ridicule him.

On returning from school, David feels at home in his new lodgings. David and the Wickfields agree that he will continue to live with them for the remainder of his schooldays. David also has another uncomfortable conversation with Uriah Heep, who confesses that he wishes to partner with Mr. Wickfield some day.

A few days later, there is a going away party for Jack Maldon, who is leaving to work in India through connections of Dr. Strong and Mr. Wickfield. Mrs. Strong's mother makes a very emotional scene about Dr. Strong's generosity to her relatives, which embarrasses her daughter. Mrs. Strong is noticeably upset by Maldon's departure. Mr. Wickfield, in particular, notices her reaction, but tries to ignore Mrs. Strong's emotions.

## Chapter 16 Analysis

David is learning a lot about the people in his new life; however, because of his own innocence he does not see the whole picture. The issue of Jack Maldon and the relationship between Dr. and Mrs. Strong will continue to develop as suspicions deepen surrounding Mrs. Strong's feelings for Maldon. The emotional scenes of Mrs. Strong's mother will continue to put Mrs. Strong in a compromising situation.

The combination of Mr. Wickfield's drinking problem and Uriah Heep's ambitions also complicates David's pleasant new surroundings. Nothing is directly said, but it is clear that something bad is going to develop from this issue.



# Chapter 17

## Chapter 17 Summary

On a visit to David in Canterbury, Mr. Dick relates the appearance of a strange man at his aunt's house who had frightened her. David is not sure if he should believe Dick's story, and is worried that it might have something to do with Dick's own family trying to take him back from Miss Betsey.

David has tea with Uriah Heep and Heep's mother. Both Heeps constantly refer to their own humbleness and poverty. While they are very poor, they are also extremely interested in pumping David for information about himself and his life. David ends up sharing many experiences and feelings that he later regrets. During the meeting, by sheer coincidence, Mr. Micawber walks past the house and sees David. David uncomfortably introduces him to the Heeps and tries to get him not to reveal anything to them about his former life. However, some information slips out.

David goes to see Mrs. Micawber and learns what has brought them to Canterbury. She recounts that they had to leave Plymouth because her family had not been able to provide assistance. After looking at various industries, they stop in Canterbury to see the Cathedral and end up having to stay there until they can get money to pay their hotel bill. During their time in Canterbury, Mr. Micawber strikes up a friendship with Uriah Heep, which worries David, who does not want Heep to find out about David's past. The Micawbers, of course, do not receive any money to pay their bill and have to secretly leave, burdened with this new debt. Although David likes them very much, he is glad to see them go.

## Chapter 17 Analysis

Mr. Dick's description of the mysterious stranger that bothers Miss Betsey will come up later in the story. Similarly, Uriah Heep's tendency to collect gossip and secrets about people will serve him as he climbs the social ladder to take over Mr. Wickfield's business. Heep's constant talk of his humble existence is a cover for his ambitions.



# Chapter 18

## Chapter 18 Summary

David continues to do well in school and develops a series of romantic attachments to women of the neighborhood. David is growing up, and so is Agnes. David shares his romantic troubles with Agnes, and she teases him about the temporary nature of his affections. David recounts two crushes in particular. One is a local schoolgirl, who briefly returns his affection and then rejects him. The other is a much older woman who flirts with David and then marries another man.

## Chapter 18 Analysis

David's memories of attending school in Canterbury revolve mainly around his various romantic attachments. This is a continuing theme in his life, in which his emotional world is taken over by one girl or another. The relationship between David and Agnes develops as he turns to her with all his romantic problems.



# Chapter 19

## Chapter 19 Summary

David finishes school and is trying to find a suitable career. His aunt suggests that he visit Peggotty in Yarmouth to clear his head and do some research into various professions. Before he sets out for London, he goes to say goodbye to all his friends in Canterbury. During his visit to the Wickfields, Agnes confesses that she is worried about her father's drinking problem and the influence that Uriah Heep is starting to have over him. During his visit to Dr. Strong, the subject of Jack Maldon comes up again. The decision is made to bring Jack Maldon back from India. Mr. Wickfield shows his suspicions of Mrs. Strong by trying to keep her from touching or coming close to Agnes.

David sets out on his journey to London, and tries to act mature. He arrives in London and happens to see Steerforth at his hotel. They get reacquainted and renew their old friendship.

## Chapter 19 Analysis

Miss Betsey's suggestion that David take a vacation shows her great affection for him and her need to see that he is happy. As David leaves, there are many hints of negative things to come: first for Mr. Wickfield because of his drinking, and second for Dr. and Mrs. Strong because of the suspicions hovering over Mrs. Strong and Maldon.

David's reunion with Steerforth is one of many unlikely reunions that will take place throughout the story, fueling the plot with these coincidences. The immediate reconnection of their former friendship shows that David is still extremely vulnerable to strong personalities such as Steerforth's and foreshadows further trouble for David because of this strong attachment.



# Chapter 20

## Chapter 20 Summary

David agrees to visit Steerforth's home in Highgate and meet his widowed mother. As they make their way there, Steerforth explains that he is attending Oxford but does not plan to take a degree because it is not fashionable. When they arrive at the house, they meet Mrs. Steerforth, who thinks everything that her son does is wonderful, and Miss Rosa Dartle, her companion. Miss Rosa Dartle has a strange way of speaking and a scar on her face from a childhood accident, which involved Steerforth. Mrs. Steerforth explains that she sent her son to Salem House so that he would be the highest-ranking student and get special treatment.

Steerforth proposes that he accompany David to Yarmouth to meet the people there. He says it will be funny to see poor people in their natural environment.

## Chapter 20 Analysis

The reader begins to understand Steerforth's character. Because no one, especially his mother, ever disciplined him or set limits for him, Steerforth behaves as though he owns the world and that naturally everyone should do whatever he wants. Steerforth shows little to no understanding of the restraints that other people live with and treats life like a game that he knows he has already won. So often David's positive impressions of Steerforth are in conflict to the negative impression of Steerforth the reader comes to have.



# Chapter 21

## Chapter 21 Summary

The next morning David meets Steerforth's butler, Littimer. Littimer is very proper and makes David feel foolish and inexperienced. After a week of relaxing at Highgate, David and Steerforth set out for Yarmouth.

After arriving at Yarmouth, the two part for a few hours so that David can visit privately with Peggotty first. On his way to her house, he stops at the tailor shop to catch up on old times. He learns that Emily has been apprenticed to the tailor shop as a dressmaker. He is too shy to see her and instead goes on to Peggotty's house.

After a cheerful reunion with Peggotty and Barkis, Steerforth joins David. Then Steerforth and David go on to Peggotty's family home. Their visit interrupts an announcement that Emily and Ham are engaged. The whole group passes a pleasant evening discussing the upcoming marriage and telling stories. On the way home, Steerforth hints that he finds Emily very beautiful and that she should not marry an ordinary fisherman like Ham.

## Chapter 21 Analysis

Steerforth's butler, Littimer, is introduced here. He is shown as extremely proper and subservient to his master, Steerforth. His role in serving Steerforth will be problematic for David because David holds both Littimer and Steerforth in such high respect. Everyone in Yarmouth is immediately trusting and admiring of Steerforth, which only magnifies Steerforth's own ideas about how important he is. Steerforth's comments about Emily mirror Emily's childhood comments about wanting to be a lady rather than a fisherman's wife. Combined, both statements foreshadow that something will happen between Steerforth and Emily.



# Chapter 22

## Chapter 22 Summary

During the visit, David stays at Peggotty's house while Steerforth stays at the inn. Because of this, they spend a lot of time apart, and Steerforth often goes out on his own with the fishermen. David often goes to visit his old house, "The Rookery." One evening, he returns to find Steerforth very upset. Steerforth will not explain why.

They discuss leaving the next day. Steerforth reveals that he has bought a boat and that Littimer has come to town as well. When they arrive at the inn for dinner, Littimer brings in a hairdresser named Miss Mowcher. She is a middle-aged dwarf who caters to the rich and famous. She gives Steerforth a hair treatment and shares some gossip about other customers.

When David arrives back at Peggotty's home, he finds Ham and Emily. Emily is having a secret meeting with Martha, a former resident of the village who has fallen into disgrace because of some unexplained sexual transgression. Emily gives Martha money to go to London and escape the shame of her hometown.

## Chapter 22 Analysis

The reader begins to feel that Steerforth is up to something bad. His behavior, including his unexplained mood swings, show that he is contemplating something significant. The arrival of Littimer also arouses suspicion because Littimer's presence is also unexplained. David and the others do not feel these suspicions because they all admire Steerforth and think that he is noble because he is of a high social station.

Miss Mowcher is a strange addition. Because she does not have a normal appearance, David is not sure if he should trust her. This provides a contrast to David's automatic trust of Steerforth because Steerforth is so handsome and strong.

The scene with Emily and Martha is similar to the scene with Agnes and Mrs. Strong, in which the men in the room are uneasy about the assumed innocent girl speaking with someone who has a bad reputation.



# Chapter 23

## Chapter 23 Summary

David and Steerforth leave Yarmouth. Miss Betsey has written to suggest that David become a proctor, based on the advice of her own lawyer. Steerforth agrees that this would be a noble profession for David. They return to London where Miss Betsey has arrived to help settle David's new career. She proposes to apprentice him as a proctor to Mr. Spenlow. The cost of the apprenticeship is quite high and David worries about the financial burden on his aunt. She reassures him that it is not a problem.

On the way to the proctor's office in Doctor's Commons, a man they see on the street disturbs Miss Betsey. She goes off to privately meet with this stranger. When she returns, most of the money she had in her purse is gone and she is very agitated. David is reminded of the story that Mr. Dick told him about a mysterious stranger. Miss Betsey says nothing about the encounter. She helps David make all the arrangements to live in London, and then returns to her home in Dover.

## Chapter 23 Analysis

The incident with the mysterious stranger continues to develop. Miss Betsey, who is usually so honest and straightforward, is clearly keeping her relationship with this strange man a secret. David is intrigued, but is also caught up in the many exciting decisions to be made about his new life in London. It is quite ironic that David, who is now almost twenty years old, should be taken care of by his aunt while his ten-year-old self was thrown into the working world alone. David's current financial means contrast greatly to his financial situation when he first came to London as a child.





# Chapter 24

## Chapter 24 Summary

Steerforth comes to visit David at his new lodgings. David arranges an elaborate dinner party to welcome Steerforth and his friends from Oxford. During the party, David gets extremely drunk and is persuaded by the others to go to the theater while intoxicated. There, in his drunken state, he happens to see Agnes. She is angry to see him drunk and convinces him to go home. He does and wakes up the next day with a terrible hangover and regrets all the things he did while drunk.

## Chapter 24 Analysis

Again Steerforth leads David astray and takes advantage of his hospitality. The trouble that David goes to in order to please Steerforth is immense and Steerforth acts as though he is used to people sparing no expense to please him. Steerforth encourages David to get drunk and then takes him out to the theater because it amuses him. He does not protect David or take responsibility for anything that has happened. This shines more light on Steerforth's personality and his belief that others exist to serve him.

David's encounter with Agnes is another of the chance meetings that take place throughout the novel. Again, his immaturity is contrasted with her maturity when she serves as both friend and protector.



# Chapter 25

## Chapter 25 Summary

The day after the hangover, David receives a letter from Agnes to arrange a meeting. He is very embarrassed about his past behavior in front of her and seeks her forgiveness. She tells him that Steerforth is a bad influence on him and should be avoided. She also tells him how Heep will become her father's partner after having taken advantage of his drinking problem. While Agnes dislikes the idea, she thinks it is a necessary sacrifice.

The next day, the two of them attend a dinner party where, in another coincidence, Tommy Traddles, David's former schoolmate, is present. They do not have time to talk at the party but arrange to meet later.

The day after that, Uriah Heep visits David. During the visit he hints at the new power he has over Mr. Wickfield and is quite open about his intentions to court Agnes. This news greatly upsets David but he avoids a confrontation because he knows Agnes needs Heep for her father's sake.

## Chapter 25 Analysis

Agnes is the first character to judge Steerforth for his actions instead of his appearance. She insists that he is a bad influence on David despite his social standing. She is looking out for David just as she is trying to help her father by agreeing to his partnership with Heep. David is put in the uncomfortable position of having to tolerate Heep for her sake, especially now that he knows Heep wants to marry Agnes. The reappearance of another former character, Tommy Traddles, foreshadows another renewed schoolboy friendship, most likely to contrast his friendship with Steerforth.



# Chapter 26

## Chapter 26 Summary

David is officially apprenticed to Mr. Spewlow as a proctor. To celebrate, Mr. Spewlow invites David to spend the weekend at his house and to meet his only daughter, Dora, who has just returned from finishing school in France. David falls in love with Dora at first sight. He is concerned, however, by the appearance of Miss Murdstone as Dora's companion and guardian. At first David is worried that Miss Murdstone will try to turn Dora against him. Miss Murdstone proposes a pact that neither one of them will mention their past connection to each other. David's real focus is Dora, who he spends all his time thinking about and planning chance encounters with.

## Chapter 26 Analysis

David's pattern of developing intense romantic crushes on the women he meets continues with Dora. The reader learns very little about Dora, other than that she is beautiful. David does not learn anything about her personality and he does not try to discover her thoughts and feelings. Instead, he falls in love based on appearance only.

The coincidence that Miss Murdstone is involved with Dora does not give David any hesitation about his feelings for Dora, even though Miss Murdstone is serving in somewhat of the same role to Dora as she did to David's mother. Miss Murdstone has been brought into the house to guard and guide Dora because Dora's father does not trust Dora to be able to guide herself. This is another way in which Dora's character is defined as weak. David's infatuation with her fits into his pattern of developing strong emotional attachments to women of weak character.



# Chapter 27

## Chapter 27 Summary

David pays a visit to Tommy Traddles, who is having financial difficulties and is studying for a career in law. Tommy explains his financial problems, which mostly stem from bad relationships with his relatives and unlucky choices in life. He also discusses his plans to marry a girl named Sophie, the daughter of a country minister, when he established himself in his career.

The coincidence of meeting Traddles is increased when it becomes clear that Traddles is boarding at the home of the Micawber family. David has a reunion with the Micawbers, which reveals their continued financial problems and Mr. Micawber's hinted schemes to lift himself and Traddles out of poverty. They all agree to meet at David's home for dinner at some point in the future.

## Chapter 27 Analysis

In contrast to Steerforth, Traddles is struggling to make ends meet. He is also shown as much more warmhearted and generous than Steerforth. Traddles' relationship with Sophie shows him as having patience and dedication to those he cares about, rather than expecting the world to change for him. His position at the Micawbers highlights this, as it puts him in the same position that David once was in.



# Chapter 28

## Chapter 28 Summary

The Micawbers and Traddles come to dinner. The party begins very badly, as the meal is not well cooked, but the group makes the best of it. They are having a very good time when they are interrupted by a surprise visit from Littimer, who is looking for Steerforth. David explains that he hasn't seen Steerforth in awhile, but Littimer insists on staying and serving everyone at the party, making everyone uncomfortable. After he leaves, the group relaxes and discusses the Micawber's financial circumstances. Mrs. Micawber suggests that her husband take out an advertisement expressing his skills and asking for employment. On the way out, David warns Traddles not to lend the Micawbers any money for their various schemes. He is too late, as Traddles has already signed some loans for Mr. Micawber. A letter from Mr. Micawber reveals that property of both his family and Traddles is about to be seized to pay debts.

After they leave, Steerforth shows up. He has just returned from a visit to Yarmouth and has a letter from Peggotty for David. The letter is concerning the ill health of Mr. Barkis. David resolves to visit her but Steerforth convinces him to visit his home in Highgate for a few days first.

## Chapter 28 Analysis

The surprise visit from Littimer disrupts the enjoyment of the group. Littimer is so proper that he makes everyone uncomfortable. His appearance at David's home is also strange because it implies that he does not know where Steerforth is. Steerforth's own visit, several hours later, is also suspicious. He mentions his continued trips to Yarmouth.

The never-ending financial problems of the Micawbers and Traddles go between being comical and tragic. On the Micawber side, it is more comical, as they are continually making new debts without paying for their previous ones. On the Traddles side, it is tragic because Traddles is working so hard to establish his future life. Traddles' involvement in the Micawber debt shows his own kind nature and inability to refuse help to a friend, even at his own expense.



# Chapter 29

## Chapter 29 Summary

At Steerforth's house, Rosa Dartle is suspicious about Steerforth and attempts to get information from David, who has none to offer. During the visit, Steerforth seems to be seeking her friendship, but does not succeed. When David leaves the house he expresses the idea that he will never see Steerforth again.

## Chapter 29 Analysis

This chapter provides more mystery about Steerforth's plans. David remains caught in Steerforth's power and admires him all the more. Something is developing but David does not see what it is. The anxiety that Rosa Dartle shows adds to the feeling of mystery and secretive nature in whatever Steerforth is planning to do.



# Chapter 30

## Chapter 30 Summary

David goes to Yarmouth. He arrives late at night and goes to the tailor shop rather than disturb Peggotty at this hour. At the tailor shop, he learns that Emily is to be let out of her apprenticeship to get married. The doctor arrives with news of Mr. Barkis' failing health. David goes directly to Peggotty's after hearing this news. Emily is there and seems very upset by everything that is going on. David tries to comfort Peggotty and Barkis. Barkis dies early that morning.

## Chapter 30 Analysis

David's trip to Yarmouth to see Barkis is very different from previous visits. The whole family is under a cloud because of his illness. Something is happening with Emily although everyone is too concerned with Barkis to investigate what it is. Emily's actions, combined with Steerforth's behavior, seem to foreshadow that something bad is about to happen.



# Chapter 31

## Chapter 31 Summary

David helps to execute Barkis' will and attends the funeral. The whole family plans to gather at the Peggotty home that evening. Ham comes home without Emily and takes David outside to tell him secretly that Emily has run away. He shows him a letter that Emily wrote saying that she's left with another man. Ham reveals that he saw Steerforth and Littimer visiting the town and talking with Emily.

When it is announced to the family, Mr. Peggotty vows revenge and they all cry together over the loss of Emily and the disgrace that she has brought on herself by running away with Steerforth.

## Chapter 31 Analysis

One of the underlying plots has finally been revealed. Steerforth and Littimer's plotting has been to convince Emily to leave her family and run off with Steerforth as an unmarried woman. Steerforth has betrayed the trust of the whole family. David feels personally responsible for introducing Steerforth to Emily, but still cannot feel great anger at Steerforth.





# Chapter 32

## Chapter 32 Summary

The uproar continues over Emily's departure. All those who were her friends and family do not know what to do. Her uncle, Mr. Peggotty, is determined to find her and asks to go to London with David. While David is anxiously waiting at Peggotty's house, Miss Mowcher suddenly appears.

Miss Mowcher explains that she has thought David was the one courting Emily back when she had first met him. She had only begun to suspect something when she learned of Steerforth and Littimer's visits to Yarmouth without David. She shares the rumors that she has heard that the three of them have gone abroad. She promises to inform David if she learns anything more.

David, Peggotty, and Mr. Peggotty go to London. David and Mr. Peggotty go to visit Mrs. Steerforth, who knows what her son has done. Mrs. Steerforth feels no pity for Mr. Peggotty and declares that her son will never marry Emily. She resolves never to speak to her son again until he renounces Emily. Rosa Dartle follows them out of the house and shares similar threats of violence against Emily. Mr. Peggotty sets out the next day to find Emily, wherever she is. He has forgiven her and just wants to get her back.

## Chapter 32 Analysis

In unraveling the plot that seduced Emily, the reader learns more about the characters. Miss Mowcher, who was not trusted because of her physical appearance, is shown to be an honest and reliable friend in contrast to Steerforth, who turned out to be bad despite his handsome appearance. The reaction of Mrs. Steerforth and Rosa Dartle shows clear class-consciousness on their part. They put all the blame on Emily and say horrible things about her. They reject her because she is not high class enough for Steerforth. While they are clearly brokenhearted that Steerforth has taken such a step without caring about their feelings, they are unable to blame Steerforth for his own conduct.



# Chapter 33

## Chapter 33 Summary

David makes the legal rounds to execute Barkis' will and settle Peggotty's finances. In the course of those proceedings, they run into Mr. Murdstone, who is applying for a marriage license.

Later that day, David is invited to a birthday party for Dora. He goes through elaborate preparations for the event. The party is a picnic and there are few moments when David and Dora have a chance to be alone, or almost alone, together. They are generally accompanied by one of Dora's friends. This friend informs David that Dora is coming to visit her in London and that he would be welcome to visit them.

On his visit to the friend's house, he declares his love for Dora and is accepted by her. He buys her an engagement ring and they establish a secret courtship and hide it from her father.

## Chapter 33 Analysis

David's relationship with Dora is established, despite the fact that they are rarely alone together. Dora's personality is shown to be quite childish and immature. Her friend makes most of the decisions about Dora and David's courtship. David's infatuation with Dora blinds him from making any real evaluation of her character other than feeling that she is very beautiful.



# Chapter 34

## Chapter 34 Summary

David sees Traddles again and helps him eliminate Mr. Micawber's debts. Surprising everyone, Miss Betsey and Mr. Dick arrive. After exchanging hellos, Miss Betsey informs David that she has lost her fortune through bad investments.

## Chapter 34 Analysis

This chapter is a defining one for David. He has led a life of leisure for a long time now. Because his aunt can no longer support him, he will have to find another way to earn money.



# Chapter 35

## Chapter 35 Summary

Miss Betsey is told about David's love for Dora. However, in his new financial state, David feels he must resign from his apprenticeship and tell Dora that he is now poor. He finds out that he cannot get out of his apprenticeship without forfeiting the money that was paid for it. While he is pondering what to do, he runs into Agnes. Agnes informs him that Uriah Heep has moved into her father's house and his influence over her father worries her. The two of them go in and discuss the new financial situation with Miss Betsey. Miss Betsey explains how she has lost her fortune. Agnes suggests that David could get work as a private secretary to Dr. Strong, who has retired from the school and now lives in London. David takes this advice and writes to him.

Agnes and the group are made to feel uncomfortable when Uriah Heep arrives with Mr. Wickfield. David observes how low Mr. Wickfield has fallen now that he is in the control of Uriah Heep.

## Chapter 35 Analysis

Agnes's troubles continue alongside David's. However, as usual, she is able to offer David help. Her practical suggestions allow him to plan how to reestablish his life. At the same time, David is worried about how Dora will take the news that he has no money. This worry, in itself, foreshadows Dora's inability to cope with any practical circumstances.



# Chapter 36

## Chapter 36 Summary

David begins getting his life in order by going out to visit Dr. Strong. Here he learns that Jack Maldon has returned from India. Maldon himself arrives at the house while David is discussing the terms of his new position. Maldon invites Mrs. Strong out to the opera. She tries to refuse but her husband insists that she go.

Mr. Dick also wants to help earn money. Traddles gets him work copying documents. Mr. Micawber has also found work. He accepts a position from Uriah Heep to work as a clerk in Canterbury. While David is concerned and suspicious of Heep, he is happy for the Micawbers and wishes them well.

## Chapter 36 Analysis

The plot surrounding Mrs. Strong and Jack Maldon continues to make the characters uncomfortable and suspicious of each other. It starts to seem that Mrs. Strong is trying to resist Maldon but is having a hard time due to the good intentions of both her unsuspecting husband and mother.



# Chapter 37

## Chapter 37 Summary

David, Miss Betsey, and Mr. Dick go to live in a cottage together. Dora is visiting her friend in London and David goes to see her to tell her how his circumstances have changed. Dora is distraught and begs David never to mention poverty or hard work to her again. When he asks her about practical matters like budgeting and cooking, she faints. Slowly her friend reassures her. David realizes that she will not be able to help in any way and that she will not be able to accept any changes to her lifestyle. David leaves her with new declarations of love and is determined to work even harder to make sure that he can provide her with the life she requires.

## Chapter 37 Analysis

Dora's reaction to David's difficulties shows her own weak and spoiled character. She puts concern for the welfare of her dog ahead of her concern for David. David's suggestions of practical housekeeping cause her to faint, which shows that she is not capable of contributing anything to their future life together. David recognizes her inabilities and loves her anyway, although her weaknesses make the task he needs to do even more difficult. Dora is unable to do anything for herself and her friend must be the one to set things right between Dora and David.



# Chapter 38

## Chapter 38 Summary

Through Miss Murdstone's snooping, Dora's father has found out about the affair between David and Dora. He confronts David about the relationship. He demands that David break off the relationship immediately, which David refuses to do. He also hints that Dora will be disinherited from her substantial fortune if she continues her relationship with David. David has few options and turns to his friends for help, but they cannot do anything.

In a surprising turn of events, Dora's father dies suddenly. What is more surprising is that he left no will. Instead, he left substantial debts. Dora is left with a small income and goes to live with her aunts. David stays in touch with her friend to learn what is happening to Dora, but Dora is too grief-stricken over her father's death to communicate with him herself.

## Chapter 38 Analysis

A potential problem for David's courtship of Dora appears in Mr. Spenlow's disapproval. However, before that has a chance to sink in, Mr. Spenlow dies. Mr. Spenlow's death gives more evidence to the idea that how people appear is not truthful. Mr. Spenlow appeared to be secure and wealthy, but was actually deep in debt. His objections to David on the basis of money, therefore, seem deceitful.

Dora's reaction to her father's death leaves serious questions about her commitment to David. She never writes to him herself and leaves the relationship in her friend's hands.



# Chapter 39

## Chapter 39 Summary

David's aunt, hoping to cheer him up, asks him to attend to some business for her in Dover. David agrees to go because he has little work to do at the Commons because of his boss's death. Business at the Commons is doing well under the new manager. The staff is reduced to trying to trick people into bringing their legal business to their office.

In Dover, having settled his aunt's business, David pays a visit to Canterbury to see the Micawbers and Agnes. The Micawbers are doing well but are already deep in debt to Uriah Heep. Agnes also seems well and gives David advice about the situation with Dora. David wants to talk to Agnes alone but Mrs. Heep seems to follow them around. Uriah Heep confesses that he asked his mother to keep an eye on David, thinking that David could be a possible rival for Agnes. After being assured that David is already engaged to someone else, Heep backs off.

That evening, Uriah Heep gets Mr. Wickfield drunk and declares his intentions for Agnes. This greatly upsets Mr. Wickfield. The commotion brings Agnes, who overhears the cause of the argument. David asks her to promise that she will not marry Heep out of duty to her father. The next morning, Heep comes to see David off to London and assures him that he will continue to work toward the goal of marrying Agnes.

## Chapter 39 Analysis

The problems between Uriah Heep and the Wickfields continue to worry David and Agnes. Neither one seems to know how to fix this situation. David's conversations with Agnes reveal some of his own problems with Dora. When Agnes suggests that David write a letter to Dora's aunts to ask permission to visit her, she is surprised when David expresses doubt that Dora will tell her aunts that she wants to see him. This shows that David recognizes the weak character of his beloved but continues to make excuses for it. It also shows that Agnes' character is much stronger willed.





# Chapter 40

## Chapter 40 Summary

Arriving home, David tells his aunt about the trouble with the Wickfields. He also posts the letter to Dora's aunts. On his way home from work one night, he happens to meet Mr. Peggotty. Trailing behind them is Martha, the disgraced girl from Yarmouth who does not want them to see her. Mr. Peggotty describes his trip to France to search for Emily. He also shares a series of letters that he believes indicate that Emily has gone on to Germany. During the conversation, Martha hides outside and listens. Finally, Mr. Peggotty goes on to his hotel and David goes home. He does not see Martha again that night.

## Chapter 40 Analysis

Mr. Peggotty's search for Emily shows how much he cares for her. He finds that many people along the way sympathize with him in his search. They are probably relating to what their own daughters have done. Martha's presence foreshadows her own involvement in helping Emily and shows her own commitment to helping her friend.



# Chapter 41

## Chapter 41 Summary

David receives a reply from Dora's aunts and arranges a meeting, bringing Traddles to vouch for his character. They go to visit and, after a very long explanation, are told that David will be allowed to visit Dora under the aunts' supervision. David is able to have a brief conversation with Dora where he tries to let her understand what has happened. Dora refuses to hear about any of his friends or family members.

A schedule of visits is arranged and David's courtship becomes assured. He attempts, here and there, to introduce the subject of practical housekeeping, but can never get Dora to be serious about anything. Nonetheless, he is very happy with his relationship.

## Chapter 41 Analysis

David's conversations with Dora continue to show her selfish and weak willed character. She refuses to meet any of David's friends or family out of fear. David's continued attempts to discuss the practical responsibilities of their future life all fail. David remains blinded to this fault in Dora's character.



# Chapter 42

## Chapter 42 Summary

Agnes, her father, and the Heeps come for a visit to London. In a conversation with David, Uriah Heep drops hints about the relationship between Mrs. Strong and Jack Maldon. He also plans to stop Agnes's continued friendship with Mrs. Strong.

David takes Agnes to meet Dora. The meeting goes very well and the two women strike up a strong friendship. Coming home from the visit, David stumbles on a meeting between Dr. Strong, Mr. Wickfield, and Uriah Heep. Heep has revealed the evidence for Mrs. Strong's supposed affair. Dr. Strong is very affected by the news but he vows to stand by his wife and blames himself for marrying someone so much younger than himself.

The situation causes David to lose his temper with Uriah Heep. David hits him. Uriah Heep refuses to be angry and acts as though nothing had happened. David watches as the relationship between Dr. and Mrs. Strong slowly shifts in the following weeks as both of them try to figure out how to make the other happy again.

David receives a letter from Mrs. Micawber in which she shares suspicions about her own husband's relationship with Uriah Heep. David is unsure how to advise her and worries about what is happening to Mr. Micawber.

## Chapter 42 Analysis

All the men in the group have acknowledged the speculations about Mrs. Strong. Dr. Strong's choice to avoid confronting his wife about it, however, keeps he and his wife from resolving the issue. Instead, the atmosphere of suspicion and deception drains their relationship. Neither seems to know how to fix the problem since neither will admit that something is wrong.

The Micawbers are facing a parallel situation fueled by their inability to discuss their problems together. Uriah Heep is also responsible for the Micawbers' marital division.



## Chapter 43

### Chapter 43 Summary

Over time David has begun a literary career as a way to earn extra money. The money he earns from writing for magazines and newspapers allows him to buy a little cottage. He prepares to marry Dora. The entire group joins in on the preparations for the wedding and the newlywed home. The wedding is a blur of delightful memories for David, and the young couple leaves together for their honeymoon.

### Chapter 43 Analysis

David's literary achievements are mentioned only in passing. The reader is to assume that the fictional character of David Copperfield is a well-known writer. David's wedding to Dora is blurred and unclear, much like their relationship. He comments on her beauty as well as her inability to get through the ceremony without Agnes' help. Similarly, in planning for their new life together, Dora is unable to assist in purchasing furniture or anything else, choosing instead to buy a playhouse for her dog. She leaves all these decisions to others.



# Chapter 44

## Chapter 44 Summary

Dora and David begin their married life. The major problem is Dora's inability to do anything practical or put forth any effort to manage the household. David catalogs the many servants that they go through and how the merchants take advantage of their inexperience.

Dora and David both attempt to learn the art of housekeeping, but never get very far with it. David realizes that Dora will never be a true partner for him. He recognizes that he cannot share his thoughts and feelings with her and that he must take care of her throughout their lives. He loves her very much, so he does not mind at this point.

## Chapter 44 Analysis

The problems present during David and Dora's courtship are equally present in their married life. Dora's inability to do anything causes a lot of conflict between them. For the most part, David has to give up in trying to change her habits. He begins to reflect on his marriage and sees that Dora will never be a helpmate to him, nor will she be able to understand his work. At this point in their marriage, he thinks that her inabilities are acceptable.



# Chapter 45

## Chapter 45 Summary

Meanwhile, the relationship of Dr. and Mrs. Strong continues to go nowhere. Both try to please the other and yet both remain unhappy. Mr. Dick senses their unhappiness and wants to help. His simple action of placing their hands together sets off the emotional scene that has been storing up for many years. Mrs. Strong kneels down to her husband and asks him to tell her what has come between them. When Dr. Strong refuses to say anything, David steps in and explains the conversation involving Uriah Heep's suspicions about her and Maldon.

Mrs. Strong explains that she married out of love and that all the attempts by her mother to get help for Maldon had never been her idea. She was ashamed that others thought she had married for money. Through this explanation, the Strongs are able to renew their love for each other. David, however, is unsettled by something Mrs. Strong said. She stated that two people with different outlooks on life (meaning herself and Maldon) could never be happily married. This worries David although he cannot explain why.

## Chapter 45 Analysis

Dr. and Mrs. Strong heal their relationship by finally being open and honest with each other. While this solves their problem, it gives David serious cause for concern. David is unable to ignore Mrs. Strong's comments about her own relationship with Maldon, which sound too similar to his own relationship with Dora. He does not want to admit that there is a fundamental problem in his relationship with Dora, but the idea is beginning to occur to him more and more. This sense of doubt will begin to define his relationship with Dora, as well as his relationships with other people.



# Chapter 46

## Chapter 46 Summary

David is passing the Steerforth house on his way home when the maid comes out to ask him to come inside and speak to Miss Dartle. He meets with Miss Dartle and Littimer. Littimer relates the story of what he had been doing with Steerforth and Emily. They had gone to Europe and traveled to many countries where Emily had had easily adapted to life and had been received warmly. They had been happy for some time until Emily became depressed with regret about her family. In Italy, Steerforth left her with Littimer, telling her that he was finished with her and that she should marry Littimer. Emily refused and ran away. Steerforth and Littimer fought over what to do about it and eventually ended their relationship with each other.

David goes to find Mr. Peggotty and tell him the new information. During this conversation, he reveals that he had seen Martha in town and suggests that she might be helpful in finding Emily.

## Chapter 46 Analysis

The second confrontation at the Steerforth house reveals many of the same conflicts. First, the confrontation illustrates the inability for Miss Dartle to feel any pity for Emily and to give Steerforth any of the blame for the destruction he has caused. Second, it shows the callousness of Steerforth, who would turn over his mistress to marry his servant. Mr. Peggotty is in great contrast to these characters, even though he is the poorest and of the lowest social standing. He shows real concern and sympathy for Emily and wants to do what is best for her.



# Chapter 47

## Chapter 47 Summary

Mr. Peggotty and David go in search of Martha. Eventually they find her and share their information about Emily. Martha promises to contact them if she hears anything or sees Emily.

Coming home late at night, David sees a man outside of his aunt's house and discovers it is the same man he saw bothering her before in London. He sees his aunt give the man money and plead for him to leave her alone. David tries to stop him but his aunt tells him to come inside to talk about the situation. She explains that the man is her husband who everyone believes has been dead for many years. She briefly explains how he betrayed her and that he appears from time to time to demand money from her. She tells David that she never wants to discuss this painful subject again.

## Chapter 47 Analysis

Miss Betsey's personal struggles are revealed. Her bad relationship with her husband helps to explain many of her negative attitudes toward marriage. The fact that she has kept such a secret for many years shows the strength of her character and the importance she places on shielding such problems from those she loves.





# Chapter 48

## Chapter 48 Summary

David's first novel is published and is very successful. His home life, however, gets worse as he and Dora are unable to manage their home properly and go through more cheating servants. David tries again to improve his wife's thinking but gets nowhere with it except in making Dora mad at him. Again, David must give up trying to change Dora into becoming a competent wife. He is still happy with her but feels that there should be more to their relationship.

David also hopes that a baby would help Dora become more serious. Their attempt at this fails, however, and Dora lapses into a long-term illness, weakening to the point where David has to carry her up and down the stairs.

## Chapter 48 Analysis

David's marital bliss is quickly ending. Dora's inability to do anything practical can no longer be ignored or hoped that it will go away. Instead, David must accept that she is essentially a child. Dora herself encourages him to think of her as a child-wife. The complications from Dora's unsuccessful pregnancy begin the same way. At this point everyone is confident that she will get better.



# Chapter 49

## Chapter 49 Summary

David receives a letter from Mr. Micawber asking for a secret meeting in front of the Debtor's Prison. At the same time, Traddles receives a letter from Mrs. Micawber detailing Mr. Micawber's violent and secretive behavior and her suspicions that he has gone to London.

David and Traddles go to see Mr. Micawber, who drops many hints that Heep is the cause of many of his troubles. David brings Mr. Micawber home to calm him down, but he only gets more wild and unintelligible about Heep. He runs out of the house. Soon after, they receive a letter from him. It mentions that something will happen the following week in Canterbury, but no one knows to what the letter refers.

## Chapter 49 Analysis

Mr. Micawber's strange behavior illustrates a building toward the revelation of another secret, about Uriah Heep. The dramatic way that Mr. Micawber presents the secret is consistent with his dramatic nature, so neither David nor Traddles is sure how to react. Mr. Micawber's secret meeting in Canterbury is surrounded by mystery and everyone must wait to find out what the secret may be.



# Chapter 50

## Chapter 50 Summary

Martha arrives at David's house. She says that they must quickly go to London. She takes him to a rooming house. Before they get to her room, however, Miss Dartle enters. Miss Dartle confronts the person who is hiding in the room, who is presumed to be Emily. David overhears the entire encounter but feels that he should not enter the room before Mr. Peggotty does. Miss Dartle yells horrible things at Emily for a long time until Mr. Peggotty finally arrives and is reunited with Emily.

## Chapter 50 Analysis

Miss Dartle's surprise appearance is not explained. The reader does not know how she found out where Emily was staying. Everything that Miss Dartle says to Emily repeats what she had previously said to Mr. Peggotty and David. David shows a combination of loyalty to Mr. Peggotty and fear of confronting either Miss Dartle or Emily by waiting on the stairs instead of going into the room.



# Chapter 51

## Chapter 51 Summary

Mr. Peggotty takes Emily back to his lodgings and then comes to David's house to share her story. Emily, after running away from Littimer, was taken in by an Italian housewife. This woman hid her from Littimer and then nursed her through a fever. After Emily recovered, she went to France and then on to Dover. In England, she avoided her former home and was found by Martha in London. Mr. Peggotty makes plans to take Emily away to Australia where they can start a new life. He asks David to accompany him to Yarmouth to tell the family and pack up his belongings. David and Mr. Peggotty go to Yarmouth and share what has happened to Emily. It is a very painful goodbye for everyone.

## Chapter 51 Analysis

Mr. Peggotty's loyalty to Emily continues as he plans their new life together. Leaving the only home he has known all his life to start a new life in Australia is a great sacrifice that he is happy to make for his daughter's sake. Their trip to Yarmouth, where they see Ham, Emily's former fiancé, underscores the deep tragedy that has undercut this family. The trip also foreshadows Ham's eventual death.



# Chapter 52

## Chapter 52 Summary

David, Betsey, Mr. Dick, and Traddles go to Canterbury to keep their appointment with Mr. Micawber. Dora stays behind because she is sick. They arrange to meet Mr. Micawber at a hotel and from there they go to the Wickfield house.

When everyone is assembled, Micawber begins presenting his evidence against Uriah Heep. Heep warns them all to stop or he will ruin them all with the secrets he knows about them.

Mr. Micawber's charges against Heep begin with the fact that he forced Mr. Wickfield to sign various papers and lied about what the papers were about. This made Mr. Wickfield think that he had mismanaged the financial affairs of his friends, including Miss Betsey, and had put him under Heep's control to keep the secret from getting out.

Secondly, it is revealed that Heep forged Mr. Wickfield's signature on documents that left a significant amount of money to Heep upon Wickfield's death. Thirdly, Heep forged a set of accounting books to convince Mr. Wickfield that he was bankrupt. Heep was trying to use these fake accounting books to get Mr. Wickfield to sell his house in order to pay off his fake debts.

The group works together to sort out the financial mess from all the documents. Miss Betsey's fortunes are restored. As a reward, they all agree to pay the passage for the Micawbers to move to Australia to start a new life, debt free.

## Chapter 52 Analysis

The revelations against Uriah Heep expose him for the person that he really is. His ambition is made clear, despite his mother's attempts to use the old tactic of claiming humbleness. The more startling revelation, however, is that Miss Betsey has lost her fortune because of Heep's manipulations but had kept quiet about it out of loyalty to Mr. Wickfield. This shows the strength of her friendship and loyalty to the family because she was willing to take financial loss without blaming Mr. Wickfield. Also, Mr. Micawber has finally triumphed and made himself useful. The change in his character, when he prosecutes Heep, shows that he does have talents he could use if he was not so often idle.



# Chapter 53

## Chapter 53 Summary

Dora's illness continues with little hope of recovery. Family and friends gather to watch her die, including Agnes, who Dora had specifically sent for. Dora, in her last conversation with David, expresses her belief that it is better for her to die now, full of his love, than to live another ten years as he would grow bitter and distant because she was never going to improve or be a better wife. Finally, after insisting on a private conversation with Agnes, Dora dies.

## Chapter 53 Analysis

Dora, in death, is more serious than Dora in life. She recognizes the same things that David does; that their marriage was doomed to failure from the start. Her death is inevitable and foreshadows how David's life will develop now that he has learned the lessons of marrying someone so unsuitable to him. Dora's conversation with Agnes also hints at what Agnes' role might be in David's future.



# Chapter 54

## Chapter 54 Summary

David is deep in sorrow over Dora's death. His family urges him to travel abroad. First he pays a visit to Canterbury to see how the affairs of the Wickfield and Micawbers have improved. The Micawbers are preparing to go to Australia. Traddles has managed to sort out the Wickfield estate and recover most of Miss Betsey's fortune. On returning to London, Miss Betsey takes David aside to tell him that her husband has really died and that that part of her life is finally over.

## Chapter 54 Analysis

This chapter helps settle several plotlines, including Miss Betsey's mysterious husband, who is now finally gone. Agnes' support of her father shows her strong loyalty and character. Traddles, also, is shown to actually be quite competent and worthy of trust.



# Chapter 55

## Chapter 55 Summary

Mr. Peggotty and Emily are also making preparations to go to Australia. David takes a letter from Emily to Ham at Yarmouth, but is delayed by a terrible sea storm. Late that night, a ship from Spain is caught in the storm off the coast. During the commotion on the beach, David sees Ham and tries to keep him from going out on a rescue mission. Ham dies while attempting to rescue another man from the ship. The rescued man turns out to be Steerforth.

## Chapter 55 Analysis

The irony of Ham dying in attempting to rescue Steerforth is quite bitter. Ham is shown as good, responsible, and brave to the very end. He has been seeking his death in some way since Emily left him, and now he has found it. The fact that Steerforth also dies in the storm finishes off their conflict.





# Chapter 56

## Chapter 56 Summary

Steerforth's body is brought home to his mother. David tries to explain what happened. An emotional scene follows this explanation. Rosa Dartle declares her love for Steerforth and states her anger at Mrs. Steerforth for making him what he was. She is bitter that Mrs. Steerforth has fought with her son for so long, only to be reunited with him by death.

## Chapter 56 Analysis

Rosa Dartle's statements to Mrs. Steerforth show a very interesting perspective. She argues that his mother created Steerforth by allowing him to do whatever he wanted, and is therefore ultimately responsible for whatever Steerforth did. Her declarations of love are surprising, although they match the admiration that everyone else held for him. David's own feelings toward Steerforth remain positive despite all the pain that Steerforth has caused.



# Chapter 57

## Chapter 57 Summary

The ship for Australia sets sail, carrying both the Micawber family and Mr. Peggotty and Emily. David decides not to tell them about the deaths of Ham or Steerforth. When he goes to see their ship off, he notices that Martha is also going with them to Australia.

## Chapter 57 Analysis

The boat for Australia represents a new life for all the people on board. The Micawbers hope to finally escape their debt and establish themselves as prosperous members of society. Mr. Peggotty and Emily are leaving behind the land of Emily's disgrace. The fact that Martha has been included in this new life shows that Mr. Peggotty has learned to give everyone a second chance.



# Chapter 58

## Chapter 58 Summary

David goes abroad and roams aimlessly for many months. One day a letter arrives from Agnes. It revives him and makes him start writing again. He passes many more months this way until he begins to think of returning home. He has begun to see that he truly loves Agnes. He is afraid to find out that he has missed his chance with her by marrying Dora. He assumes that now they can only be friends. He continues wandering in Europe for several years before finally returning to England.

## Chapter 58 Analysis

David's time alone gives him the opportunity to contemplate his life. He realizes that his relationship with Dora was not a good one. He also rediscovers his childhood friend, Agnes, and grows to understand that she has always been a much more suitable partner for him. He worries that their friendship could not bear any pressure on his part, and instead of pursuing her as he has previously pursued all his romantic crushes, he makes the very mature decision to wait and see what will transpire.



# Chapter 59

## Chapter 59 Summary

David returns to London without telling anyone. He surprises Traddles first and finds out that Traddles has finally married Sophie. Traddles and Sophie have no money but seem extremely satisfied in their life together, working together to establish Traddles' career. David learns about Mr. Murdstone, who, in contrast to Traddles, has succeeded in crushing his second wife's spirit, just as he had crushed the spirit of David's mother. David goes on to Dover, where he stays with his aunt, Mr. Dick, and Peggotty.

## Chapter 59 Analysis

The contrast between the two marriages is clear. The Traddles are poor but hopeful. Unlike Dora, Sophie has been able to manage the household expertly and learns several tricks to help her husband's career. While they are taken advantage of by all of their relatives, they manage to make their situation work. Mr. Murdstone's new marriage reminds the reader of David's mother and brings the Murdstone story full circle.



# Chapter 60

## Chapter 60 Summary

David and his aunt discuss Agnes. Miss Betsey hints that Agnes may have a suitor. David goes to Canterbury to see Agnes. To support her father, Agnes now runs a girls' school. David is sure of his love for her but thinks that they can never be more than friends. They resume their brother-sister relationship and recount their pleasant childhood together. David resists the temptation to tell Agnes that he loves her. Instead, he feels that he must sacrifice his love in order to preserve their friendship.

## Chapter 60 Analysis

David's relationship with Agnes is different from his previous relationships. He is able to restrain himself from declaring his love because he respects Agnes and values their friendship. Unlike his previous relationships, David's feelings for Agnes are founded on her character, not just her appearance. He knows and understands her.



# Chapter 61

## Chapter 61 Summary

David is finishing a book at his aunt's house in Dover. He takes occasional breaks to visit Traddles in London. David has become a famous author and has a great deal of fan mail to read. One letter he receives is from Mr. Creakle, his old schoolmaster at Salem House. Mr. Creakle now runs an experimental prison and asks David to come and visit the prison.

Mr. Creakle's prison is more like a hotel than a prison. The two most penitent prisoners are Uriah Heep and Littimer. Both profess great regret for their crimes and are made much of by the prison staff. David and Traddles are not fooled.

## Chapter 61 Analysis

Mr. Creakle's change from violent schoolmaster to polite prison magistrate is very odd. Similarly the fake regret expressed by Heep and Littimer continues the theme that one can be easily deceived by appearances. Heep and Littimer have managed to convince everyone at the prison that they have changed, although David and Traddles have learned from experience that neither of those men really feel anything that they say.



## Chapter 62

### Chapter 62 Summary

David continues to see Agnes whenever he can. Again, Miss Betsey drops hints that Agnes has a suitor and plans to be married. David confronts Agnes about her possible suitor. She confesses that she has always loved him. He confesses his love for her. They are overcome with relief now that they have both revealed their secret love for each other. The next day, they announce their love to their relatives and quickly get married. After the wedding, Agnes reveals that Dora, on her deathbed, had asked Agnes to marry David.

### Chapter 62 Analysis

David and Agnes are finally united. They are well suited for each other and everyone accepts their marriage very happily.



## Chapter 63

### Chapter 63 Summary

Ten years later, after Agnes and David have had several children, Mr. Peggotty suddenly arrives one night. He tells them about what has happened in Australia.

Emily learned about Ham's death from a newspaper. She has never married and is content to take care of her uncle. They are doing very well. The Micawbers have also prospered in Australia and repaid all their debts. Mr. Micawber has been elected to local government office in Australia and regularly contributes to the newspapers there.

To complete his visit, they go to Yarmouth to see Ham's grave. Mr. Peggotty then returns to Australia.

### Chapter 63 Analysis

Mr. Peggotty's visit ties up all the loose ends about the people who went to Australia.





# Chapter 64

## Chapter 64 Summary

This chapter sums up the lives of all the characters. Everyone is happy and prospering in a domestic way, especially David and Agnes and Traddles and Sophie. The dark note is Mrs. Steerforth's situation; she has gone mad with grief over the death of her son. David attributes all of his good fortune to Agnes.

## Chapter 64 Analysis

This chapter wraps up the lives of all the characters and establishes that everyone has turned out good and been rewarded for their honesty and loyalty.



# Characters

## David Copperfield

David Copperfield recounts his life from birth. David is an impressionable boy who is easily swayed by stronger personalities. Others, who prey on his innocence, routinely take advantage of him. David's experiences include stints at two schools, one bad and the other good. He also works as a child laborer and experiences the loneliness and desolation of homelessness.

David is fortunate in the many people who grow to love and protect him, including his former nurse, Peggotty, and his aunt, Miss Betsey Trotwood. Under their love, David is able to thrive, and eventually becomes a novelist.

One of the main conflicts in David's life stems from his mother, who was weak willed and impractical. Her unfortunate marriage to Mr. Murdstone colors all of David's future relationships with women as he chases after those that are most similar to his mother, including his first wife, Dora. As David matures, however, he sees that his true love is Agnes, a woman he has known since childhood and who has always been steady and reliable.

## Clara Copperfield Murdstone

David's mother's first marriage was very pleasant but ended with the death of her husband six months before David's birth. She raises David with the help of Peggotty for the first eight or nine years of his life. At this point she is carried away by the appearance of Mr. Murdstone and chooses to marry him. He is a very strict and controlling man who, along with his sister, breaks her spirit. David's mother allows Mr. Murdstone to decide what is best for her son. Mr. Murdstone physically punishes David and sends him away to boarding school. Her death leaves David in the care of the Murdstones, who hate him.

## Clara Peggotty Barkis

The loyal servant, Peggotty, is called by her family name because her first name is the same as David's mother. Peggotty remains loyal to David and his mother throughout the Murdstone marriage. She is often the only source of comfort for David. She eventually marries the carriage driver, Mr. Barkis, and lives near her family in Yarmouth. She continues to be a significant presence in David's life and is often the person he turns to when he is in trouble.



## Mr. Murdstone

Mr. Murdstone appears in David's town one day and meets David's mother at a house party. He soon is walking them home from church. Over a short period of time, he wins over David's mother and marries her. His main purpose in marrying David's mother is to break her spirit and control her. He also shows strong hatred of David and is very cruel to him. After David's mother dies, Mr. Murdstone sends David to work, even though David is only ten years old. Later, Mr. Murdstone remarries and acts in the same manner to his second wife.

## Miss Murdstone

The sister of Mr. Murdstone, Miss Murdstone arrives in David's house shortly after her brother marries David's mother. Miss Murdstone supports her brother in controlling David's mother and in punishing David. Years later, David meets her again when she is Dora's companion and guardian. She is the one who exposes David's affair with Dora to Dora's father.

## James Steerforth

Steerforth is a rich boy who grows up believing that he can do whatever he wants. He is spoiled by his mother and sent to Salem House because he would be the highest-ranking student. David is quick to admire Steerforth and continues to do so despite the many mean spirited and cruel things that Steerforth does. Steerforth's greatest crime is seducing Emily Peggotty and running away with her to Europe without marrying her. After he abandons Emily, he is drowned in a storm, and ironically is rescued by the man from whom he stole Emily.

## Tommy Traddles

Traddles also meets David at Salem House. He is a warm and kindhearted boy who is always in trouble. Although he is often in financial trouble, he is always loyal. His long engagement to Sophie endures through many troubled times. Eventually he finds success.

## Mr. and Mrs. Micawber

The Micawber family is plagued with debt. Mrs. Micawber comes from a wealthy family and is always referring to her life before marrying Mr. Micawber as having been a very wealthy one. David lives with them while his is working in London as a child. At one point the Micawbers have to go to Debtor's Prison. At a later point, Mr. Micawber ends up working for Uriah Heep and eventually exposes all of Heep's deceptions. The



Micawbers move to Australia, where they finally escape their debts and become respected citizens.

## **Betsey Trotwood**

David's great aunt attended his birth but was very disappointed that he was born a girl. Ten years later, David arrives at her house after his homeless trek from London. She takes him in and educates him. Eventually she loses her fortune due to Uriah Heep's manipulation and is forced to rely on David for help. Her estranged husband, who everyone else thinks is dead, also upsets her. He comes to demand money from her from time to time. Her fortune is returned after Mr. Micawber exposes Uriah Heep.

## **Agnes Wickfield**

Agnes Wickfield is raised by her father, who serves as Miss Betsey's lawyer. While Agnes is dependable and responsible, her father has a drinking problem that threatens to ruin them. Agnes and David are lifelong friends who eventually marry.

## **Uriah Heep**

Uriah Heep begins his career as Mr. Wickfield's clerk. He schemes his way into a partnership and tries to marry Agnes. Mr. Micawber reveals his fake accounting and forged signatures. He is seen again years later in prison, pretending to be humble and regretful of his crimes.

## **Dora Spenlow**

David falls in love with her at first sight. Their courtship is troubled by her weakness and inability to do anything practical. This continues in their marriage. Dora becomes pregnant and loses the baby, which initiates a long illness resulting in her death. David reflects on his marriage to Dora as being unsuitable.

## **Emily Peggotty**

David first meets Emily as a child in the seaside town of Yarmouth. Emily grows up to be apprenticed to a local tailor and engaged to her cousin, Ham, a fisherman. After meeting Steerforth, she abandons her family to run off with him to Europe. Her uncle, Mr. Peggotty, tracks her down after she has been abandoned by Steerforth, and takes her to Australia to begin a new life.



# Objects/Places

## The Rookery

This is David's childhood home where he lives with his mother and Peggotty in good times and bad. It is named for bird nests on the roof, although birds do not live there.

## Yarmouth

This is the seaside town where Peggotty is from. Peggotty takes David to visit her family many times. David, in turn, brings Steerforth to meet them all. Here Steerforth meets Emily and puts together his plan to seduce her. Both Steerforth and Ham die in a storm off the coast of this town.

## Highgate

This is an area outside of London where Steerforth's mother lives. David visits the Steerforth home several times. When he works for Dr. Strong he lives in the same neighborhood and passes this house often.

## The Commons

David is apprenticed as a proctor. The proctor offices are all located in this neighborhood in London, called the Doctor's Commons, or simply, the Commons. David spends a lot of time there during his apprenticeship.

## Salem House

David's first school is very poorly managed and led by a cruel and violent schoolmaster. Here David meets Steerforth and Traddles and begins a friendship with them. Steerforth is the lead student at Salem House because of his wealthy mother.

## Dover

Miss Betsey lives in this seaside town. David makes the long trip to meet her when he runs away from his work in London. Miss Betsey has to sell her home in Dover temporarily when she has some financial problems, but is able to return there when her fortunes are restored.



## Canterbury

This town is close by Dover and is where David is sent to school. David lives with the Wickfields during his school days. The Micawbers also settle in Canterbury at various times. After Mr. Wickfield dissolves his practice, Agnes sets up a school for girls.

## Proctor

This is a type of profession in the British legal system, similar to that of a notary. David is apprenticed as a proctor. The main interests seem to be filling out the proper forms for wills and marriage licenses. It is chosen for David because it pays a lot but does not require extensive education.

## Debtor's Prison

When a person does not pay their debts, a warrant is issued for their arrest and they are forced to live in Debtor's Prison. Whole families come to live here, as do the Micawbers for a short time.

## Australia

Australia is offered as a place for British citizens to immigrate to in order to start a new life. The Micawbers are able to start again in Australia. Mr. Peggotty and Emily go there to escape Emily's disgrace in England. All the characters that go to Australia end up prosperous.

## Setting

David Copperfield begins in Blunderstone Rookery, a house in rural Suffolk. The rooks no longer nested on the property, but David's father had liked the idea of living near a rookery. This home is an ideal setting in the years before his mother's second marriage. After she marries Murdstone, it becomes a prison with Murdstone and his equally "firm" sister as keepers.

Before this second marriage David goes with his nurse, Peggotty, to her native region, the seacoast near Yarmouth. Yarmouth, Dickens told his friend, John Forster, was "the strangest place in the wide world." It has miles of flat coast, an even sea, and marshes reaching toward the sea. Peggotty's brother Dan'l lives in a small house that has a roof made from the bottom of a boat.

Dickens had a lifelong fascination for the sea which figures prominently in several of his books, including *Dombey and Son* and *Great Expectations*. David and Em'ly spend many hours collecting seashells and stones along that coast. During the days he spends in Yarmouth he falls innocently in love with her. The sea dominates the lives of Dan'l and his fellow fishermen, and they believe that many of their deaths will take place as the tide ebbs. David pays several visits to Yarmouth as the novel continues.

En route to his first school, Salem House Academy, David sees London for the first time. He is awe stricken, but his stay there is brief. Salem House is six miles outside the city at Blackheath. He becomes thoroughly acquainted with the capital less than two years later when employed at Murdstone and Grinby, where he washes and labels wine bottles. He comes to know the streets much more intimately. Later, having apprenticed himself to Mr. Spewlow in order to train as a proctor in the Commons and also as a parliamentary reporter, his knowledge of London is further increased. Dickens, thanks to similar experiences, knew London as few writers ever succeeded in doing. Even in his maturity, while working out his plots and characters, he would walk the streets late at night. The Murdstone and Grinby's warehouse is by the Thames, but the river becomes a setting of the novel only later when the prostitute Martha Endell is saved by David and Dan'l Peggotty from committing suicide in it.

Betsy Trotwood's cottage where David finally finds refuge is near the sea in Dover, and the novel briefly becomes a picaresque story as David walks from London to his aunt's home. He lives for only a short time with his aunt and her protegee Mr. Dick.

Aunt Betsy soon arranges for David to attend school in Canterbury, the ancient cathedral city that is to the Anglican Church what Rome is to the Catholic Church. The Archbishop of Canterbury is the primate of the Anglican Communion, and his seat is here. Dickens captures the atmosphere of the city with its serenity and medieval beauty. The bells of the cathedral ring constantly. Even the rooks walk about as if they are an important part of the scene, as important as the towers themselves. It is a city of gardens as well, such as the one where Dr. Strong, David's headmaster in his second school, takes daily walks while planning his dictionary.

After his education is finished, David goes back to London to establish himself in a career. Visits to Yarmouth and Canterbury occur several more times and Dickens does a masterful job of describing the great storm at Yarmouth when both Ham Peggotty and James Steerforth perish. Tolstoy believed it to be one of the finest episodes in fiction. Dickens' flair for drama is seen at its best here.

Mourning the loss of Dora and the death of his school friend, Steerforth, Copperfield wanders in Europe, finally staying for an extended period in the Lausanne region in Switzerland. Dickens had visited Lausanne with his family in 1846, and loved the quiet town and the majestic Alps that formed its background. Here Copperfield's literary alter ego comes to terms with his losses, finds peace, and returns to England to resume his life.





# Social Sensitivity

Dickens in *David Copperfield* is not as concerned as he usually is with "the condition of England question," Thomas Carlyle's term for Dickens' concern with the problems of contemporary English society. The overall tone of *David Copperfield*, and of *Great Expectations*, differs very much from *Oliver Twist*, *Nicholas Nickleby*, and *Dombey and Son*, which all preceded *David Copperfield* and from *Bleak House* and *Little Dorrit*, which came after it. The bildungsroman shows Dickens exploring his personality, tracing its origin and development. Social concerns do enter into the novel however. Salem House Academy is a school as brutal in its depiction of sadistic schoolmasters as the Yorkshire schools in *Nicholas Nickleby*. Dr.

Strong's school in Canterbury seems to have been the exception rather than the rule in England during the first half of the nineteenth century. But Dickens presents Salem House and the students' lives there without tirades against the obvious abuses of such an institution.

Dickens sees the evils of prostitution as the result of a male dominated society.

Martha Endell and Little Em'ly are victims of that society, but there is no editorializing on the evils of prostitution per se.

While reporting the activities of Parliament, Dickens developed a contemptuous attitude toward that branch of the English government and toward the legal profession generally. He satirizes Doctors' Commons, which was abolished in 1857 and its precincts torn down. It was an amalgam of many courts including those of the Admiralty and the Prerogative Office, where wills were registered and filed, Mr. Spenlow's specialty. Spenlow is so convinced of the importance of his profession that makes the Commons virtually the necessary foundation of English civilization: "Touch the Commons and down goes the nation." The satire, mostly confined to this part of the novel, is mild. *Copperfield* becomes amused with the proceeding in the Commons, but not indignant. His description of the frantic efforts of some lawyers to gain clients is hilarious. They are comparable to the worst examples of ambulance chasing by our present-day shysters.

Emigration was an important solution for many people of the period. It provided opportunities for many who could find none in England. Annie Strong's cousin, Mr. Jack Maldon, goes to make his fortune in India.

He returns and lives off the Doctor's charity instead. Australia offered a haven for those who had disgraced themselves at home, women such as Martha Endell and Little Em'ly. Wilkins Micawber, who had not succeeded in making a mark for himself, despite many attempts, goes to Australia, becomes a journalist and ultimately a magistrate.

This is rather surprising, and may be due to Dickens' desire to give happy endings to his characters in accordance to his love of fairy tales—"They lived happily ever after." Dan'l



Peggotty takes Martha and Em'ly to Australia and becomes a wealthy farmer there, a reward for his very virtuous life.

Possibly the sharpest satire is reserved for the model prison system based on Pentonville. Here the prisoners lived in isolation. Dickens had visited the Eastern Penitentiary near Philadelphia in March 1842, and the mental effects of solitary imprisonment had shocked him. The same Mr. Creakle, former headmaster of Salem House, administered this model prison. Creakle's model prisoners were the two arch hypocrites, Mr. Lattimer, that highly "respectable" valet for James Steerforth, who had helped procure Little Em'ly for his employer, and Uriah Heep. Both read prepared statements that show no evidence of reform whatever, but indicate that hypocrisy can easily deceive the none too bright Creakle.

# Literary Qualities

Dickens attempted to write his autobiography, but found that some episodes in his early life were too painful to relive in an autobiographical or confessional fashion.

David Copperfield, on one level at least, is a fictionalized account of some of these episodes. Dickens succeeded in recreating the mind of a child and young man in an unsurpassed psychological portrait. Copperfield obviously depends on the memory of others to give an account of his birth and baby years. Dickens was a close observer of the world around him from childhood and had a strong memory of events in his life. David Copperfield has this quality too. Dickens' imagination allied with the memories of that period in his own life recaptures not only the physical scene where early events took place but their emotions as well. The feel of the past lends that quality of magic so often attributed to the writing of the first part of David Copperfield.

It is unlikely that Dickens knew the term bildungsroman but he sets up his novel along the lines of the classics in that genre. The events of an individual's life from childhood to a successful maturity with special emphasis on the difficulties he faced and overcame in childhood and youth form an integral part of these works. Difficulties with parents occur in the early years of the person's story. Fatherless at birth and an orphan before his teen years, David Copperfield has a succession of father substitutes. His is the only point of view given in this novel. He suffers at the hands of the Murdstones who try to prevent him from being anything but a little wretch. Steerforth at Salem House, several years his senior, offers some protection against the terrible cruelty of Creakle. He is a boarder with the Micawber family while at Murdstone and Grimby's warehouse. This improvident family, Mr. Micawber in particular, provides some humor to brighten what would otherwise be a totally dark period. Aunt Betsy Trotwood and her protegee, Mr. Dick, finally give him the security and affection expected of true parents. Aunt Betsy is masculine enough in some ways to be a substitute father in her own right. After his adoption by her, a new life begins for David.

Life at Dr. Strong's school is essentially calm and happy. He boards with the Wickfields and is immediately highly impressed with Agnes Wickfield, whom Dickens at the very offset plans to make the heroine of the novel. Future problems are foreshadowed by Mr. Wickfield's alcoholism, and by the presence of Uriah Heep. His education completed, Copperfield must make a career for himself. He is apprenticed with the firm of Spewlow and Jorkins.

He meets what he believes to be his true love, Dora Spewlow. Dickens shows great skill in creating the mad raptures of young love, the total absorption in fantasy of early romance. Marriage with Dora proves to be a mistake/but David tries to make the best of it. He is moving toward his true profession when he learns shorthand and becomes a parliamentary reporter. He begins writing stories, and becomes a novelist.

These episodes are a brilliant blend of Dickens' experience and fiction. He, of course, did not marry Maria Beadnell, the woman on whom Dora's character was based.



The villainy of Uriah Heep is revealed and his threat to Agnes removed. Dora dies, and David's idol Steerforth, having betrayed him by eloping with little Em'ly, is drowned after he has dropped her when his passion for her ends. Copperfield is learning some painful lessons about love and the nature of his own personality. He wanders for three years in Italy and Switzerland in despair, finally coming to terms with his "undisciplined heart" in Switzerland. He returns home and finds his real love in Agnes. A happy marriage and a successful career is the situation from which he has surveyed his life. All bildungsromans do not end happily, and Dickens ten years later produces one which almost reverses the story he tells in David Copperfield.

The writing of this novel caused Dickens less difficulty than almost anything else he produced. He was at the peak of his ability as a novelist, and while some great books would come in the future, in some respects he never surpassed David Copperfield. He had developed a mature style that was a marked improvement over that of his earlier works. His contemporary, to an extent his rival, William Makepeace Thackeray, believed that Dickens had improved his style by imitating *Vanity Fair*. He was "foregoing the use of fine words," pruning some of the excesses which had characterized his early writing. This seems to be true. Dickens had mastered the art of using fewer words, especially in somber scenes in the book. The death of Dora is described without the sentimental indulgences seen in the death of Paul Dombey in *Dombey and Son* and of Little Nell in *The Old Curiosity Shop*.

That face so full of pity and of grief, that rain of tears, that awful mute appeal to me, that solemn hand upraised to heave.

"Agnes?"

It is over. Darkness comes before my eyes; and, for a time, all things are blotted out of my remembrance.

Some of this chapter is almost Hemingwayesque. Dickens has not omitted all passages of tearful sentimentality from this book. The passages dealing with the prostitute Martha Endell in which she drags herself through the streets of London and threatens suicide in the Thames seem wildly exaggerated to a modern reader.

Little Em'ly, after her affair with James Steerforth, writes tearful letters and proclaims herself beyond redemption. Both women go to Australia with Dan'l Peggotty and begin new lives.

A stylistic device in David Copperfield are the "Retrospects," four in number in which David interrupts his narrative and comments on the progress he and the other characters are making. He compares his life up until he has almost completed his school days with "flowing water" and he "hovers above those days, in a half-sleeping and half-waking dream." The past in David's memory, as he admits, sometimes has an unreal quality. Two young loves and a fight with a bully happen at that time. In "Another Retrospect" David reflects, "Once again let me pause upon a memorable period in my life." Looking back he sees himself as a "shadow." The passage of time, as



remembered, flows through the seasons running toward the sea. He was twenty-one at that point, has overcome the difficult art of shorthand and is reporting the activities of Parliament for a morning newspaper. His marriage to Dora takes place. All now seems like "phantoms." He has become a legally adult male. Chapter LIII is "Another Retrospect." His child-wife Dora dies with Agnes as a sort of mother confessor at her side.

Death brings the passage of time to a temporary standstill. In "A Last Retrospect" the shortest of the four, his autobiographical narrative has been finished and he gives a report on those people who have figured prominently in it. With his marriage to Agnes, his life was fulfilled, his personality fully realized.

Copperfield has more than mastered shorthand: he has become a master of language. Autobiography is of necessity a verbal accomplishment. David recalls certain events with extraordinary detail, and more than one critic has noted that some parts of this novel anticipate Proust. For example, certain religious prints that David had seen in Mr. Peggotty's boathouse have but to be seen again to bring back to mind the entire interior of that home. Again, the very name Yarmouth forever reminds him "of a certain Sunday morning on the beach, the bells ringing of church, little Em'ly leaning on my shoulder, Ham lazily dropping stones into the water, and the sun, away at sea, just breaking through the heavy mist...."

Peggotty is always associated with her work box with the picture of St. Paul's Cathedral on its cover. These memories are from those happy days before the Murdstones appear.

The sea is a potent symbol in all of Dickens' novels after *Dombey and Son* (1846-48).

Life is seen as a river that flows to the sea, death. Mr. Barkis, Peggotty's husband, dies when the tide ebbs, according to a local superstition. The sea is a mysterious force that is destructive at times. One of the climaxes of the novel is the great storm that smashes into Yarmouth, "Tempest." "I will try to write it down. I do not recall it, but see it done; for it happens again before me."

Both Ham and Steerforth are victims of the savage wind and water. A good young man and a wicked egoist share a common fate.

Ham was to have married Little Em'ly before Steerforth seduced and eloped with her. Ham dies trying to rescue Steerforth who was clinging desperately to the mast of a foundering ship. It becomes the subject of Copperfield's nightmares for the rest of his life, and the mention of the seashore brings the memory of the fierce gale back. The storm has destroyed much that was meaningful in his past—Ham, Steerforth, even Dan'l Peggotty's boathouse. It may be too much of a coincidence that the waves bear Steerforth ashore and that he finally lies at David's feet. In the very posture he remembers so well, his head rests on his arm as David remembers seeing him sleeping during the days at Salem House. He still loves and even admires Steerforth, although in terms of what he might have become, not the seducer that he actually is.



Dickens may have had Thomas Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus* in mind when he has David wander in Italy and Switzerland in such despair that he passes ancient monuments with scarcely a glance. This kind of dark period occurs in many Victorian writings—in Tennyson's *In Memoriam* and later in the autobiographies of John Stuart Mill and John Henry Newman. In *Sartor Resartus* Carlyle describes an emotional crisis that he calls the "Everlasting No," a mood of the darkest depression. *Copperfield* describes his Everlasting No in the chapter entitled, "Absence." David writes, "Listlessness to everything but brooding sorrow was the night that fell on my undisciplined heart."

Dora and Steerforth are gone, other friends are now in Australia, and he is alone with bitter memories and the conviction that his life and everything associated with it is a meaningless failure. His will cannot cope with this sense of utter futility. Neither Dickens nor his hero turns to conventional religion in times of crisis. In the Swiss Alps a consciousness of their beauty mark a turning point for him. In a very Wordsworthian passage, as he descends into a valley, the voices of singing shepherds seem to speak to him. The sublimity and awe of the scenery had been working on his consciousness and now he was aware that "great Nature spoke to me," opening a sense of hope for his desolate spirit. This could be called another use of the pathetic fallacy resorted to by Dickens in his other novels, for example, in *Dombey and Son*, when little Paul hears the sea calling him. But the English Romantics believed that they could commune with Nature and that she, like a kindly nurse, could heal them. The next phrase described by Carlyle as "The Everlasting Aye" has begun. David lies on the grass and weeps ". . . as I had not yet wept since Dora died!"

"Absence" is the most lyrical chapter in *David Copperfield*, and shows how versatile Dickens could be in his prose styling. Some of this is seen in the "Retrospect Chapters."

David's life is coming into focus for him again. In the village to which he descends, letters are waiting for him. The letter from Agnes reconfirming her faith in him further aids the healing process. She assures him that his great grief would become not endless sorrow, but the source of new strength.

His love for her increases.

Many critics however, see Agnes as one of the weaknesses of the novel. As the critic Robert R. Garnet recently suggested, her character functions more as a symbol in this book than as a believable flesh and blood woman. She seems to have been perfect in every way from childhood on. She resembles the image with which Goethe concluded the second half of his *Faust*: "The Eternal-Feminine/Lures us to perfection."

She is a sort of English Madonna who has such a high spiritual level that David has always stood in awe of her. In reviewing her character, author George Orwell called her "the real legless angel of Victorian romance." In fact, she is an example of Dickensian saintliness, an idealization, and a spiritual guide to *Copperfield*. An earlier image is the one presented by Steerforth; a model of all that David thought was noble.



But Steerforth is a Byronic figure who appears to have been born skeptical and cynical. To follow his example would be disastrous. Agnes, however, helps him ascend to her level of virtue, although he has to order his "undisciplined heart" before he can make Agnes his own. Her image is always pointing upward in his imagination, as she was when she silently indicated that Dora was dead. As Chapter XL concludes, the memory of her "pointing upward" is with him again, and he hopes he may one day join her in heaven and there declare his love for her. But she also loves him, has loved him all of her life. They become married and have three children. As the novel ends, the final image he presents is of her even at the end of his life "near me, pointing upward."

David Copperfield remembers frequently a phrase used by Dr. Strong's young wife, Annie, when she confessed to her husband a brief infatuation she had had for her cousin Maldon. She describes it ". . . as the first mistaken impulse of my undisciplined heart." She did not wrong her husband, and the scene has been described by some critics as typical of the distraught sentimentality too frequent in Dickens. But David realized that his own heart was as poorly disciplined. Disciplining his emotions has been an important part of his self-realization, the successful conclusion of his bildungsroman. Having come to the maturity that his life with Agnes has achieved, he can look on himself as an achiever in life and in his chosen profession as a writer.





# Themes

## Childhood Influences

David's narrative shows the many influences that shaped his childhood and made him into the man he eventually became. Much attention is paid to the way children are treated in England, particularly in regard to class status.

David's life has a series of ups and downs. At first he is a treasured son. Then he becomes a hated stepson. He has various experiences as a student, including a violent and tedious time at Salem House. David must also take on adult responsibilities as a child. At one point he is a ten-year-old child laborer trying desperately to make ends meet. He spends a period of time being homeless, trekking through the English countryside. Finally, his great aunt, Miss Betsey, helps him reestablish a carefree childhood, by taking him in to her home.

David's descriptions of the loneliness and poverty that he suffered as a child give strong condemnations of how English society at the time treated the poor, particularly poor children. At many points, the child David is robbed and cheated by adults who take advantage of his weakness and innocence.

David's hero, Steerforth, however, is also influenced by his childhood. Steerforth has been spoiled by his wealthy mother and taught that he can do whatever he wants. This leads him to seduce Emily Peggotty and essentially destroy her family and his at the same time.

## Practical and Ornamental Women

Beginning with his earliest memories, David confronts two types of women. One type is weak willed and submits easily to whoever controls her. The other type is practical and loyal, with a strong character that supports her through adversity.

David's mother is the weak willed type. Easily bullied by her second husband, Mr. Murdstone, David's mother allows her son to be punished and treated with extreme cruelty because she is too weak to defend him. In contrast, Peggotty, the servant, is strong willed and loyal to David, and always tries to help him in whatever way she can. Similarly, David's great aunt, Miss Betsey Trotwood, defends David in ways his mother could not, and shows herself to be loyal and dependable.

David's first wife follows his mother's pattern of weakness. His love for her is based on appearances more than character and he soon discovers that she is unable to contribute to their life together. His courtship of her is almost entirely one-sided, as her friends and relatives do most of the work for her. After their marriage, Dora is unable to do anything towards the management of the house and asks David to think of her as a completely helpless child-wife.





David's second wife, Agnes, is a complete contrast to Dora. She is able to be a true partner to him, where Dora was only a plaything. Her loyalty and strength of character allow her to help those around her and establish a strong base for her future life with David.

## Appearances Are Deceiving

Many of the people David meets are judged on their appearances rather than their actions. Often these people show that their true characters do not line up with their outward appearances.

Steerforth is the clearest example. He is generally beloved by all who meet him because he is such a handsome and pleasant gentleman. His appearance builds trust in those around him. Throughout the novel, Steerforth takes advantage of the trust people have in him, and succeeds in ruining many lives, particularly that of Emily Peggotty, as well as the people in his own family.

Mr. Murdstone is one of the earliest examples in which appearances are deceiving. He convinces David's mother that he is kind and generous when really he is strict and controlling. After ruining David's mother's life, he marries a second time and does the same thing again to his second wife.

On the other hand, many of the people who are assumed to have a negative character turn out to be good and honest. David's great aunt, Miss Betsey Trotwood, is initially presented as controlling and demanding. On getting to know her, however, David discovers that she is loyal and honest and tries her best to make those she loves happy, even if it means she suffers loss.

Miss Mowcher, the dwarf hairdresser, is the clearest example of how appearances are deceptive. In contrasting her with Steerforth, David initially sees a misshapen servant alongside a perfect, golden hero. Miss Mowcher, however, shows that she is honest and trustworthy in ways that her more attractive and socially superior peers are not.



## Themes/Characters

The title character in *David Copperfield* presents himself, his life, and the people and experiences who have helped shape his personality by reconstructing them from memory. Copperfield becomes a novelist, after following a career in journalism for a number of years. Henry James insisted that a novelist is someone who forgets nothing in his lifetime. From childhood onward his mind closely observes the world about him.

Every child is a close observer, Dickens also insists. Feeling that he is a mature writer, Copperfield wishes to learn how he became the unique individual he knows himself to be. David's first statement, "Whether I shall turn out to be the hero of my own life, or whether that station will be held by anybody else these pages must show," seems to indicate a certain modesty and is quite different than what one might expect for a story which contains a partial autobiography of Charles Dickens. Dickens has to be considered one of the most flamboyant of English writers, a man who loved theatrical performances which he often directed and in which he played leading roles.

Copperfield's father died before his birth.

Young David was quite content spending his early years with his mother and the family's beloved housekeeper, Peggotty. He was the center of their lives, but this situation was not to last. Edward Murdstone, a character akin to the stereotypical Victorian villain, woos his mother. Dickens combined the words "murder" and "stone" to form the name, and Murdstone is murderous in his attitude toward the small boy and his overly pliant mother, Clara. Upon returning from his first visit to Peggotty's home in Yarmouth, David learns of his mother's marriage, and Murdstone immediately takes charge of the boy. He has the firmness of stone, and firmness is the quality he expects in the people around him. The relationship between children and parents is a theme in many of Dickens' books. David and his mother are in the hands of a sadist, of two sadists because Murdstone's sister, who is cast in the same mold as her brother, soon joins the family. David is soon informed that any resistance to his stepfather will lead to a beating. The threat is carried out a few days later when David is whipped within an inch of his life for being slow to learn his lessons. In the process he enrages Murdstone further by biting his tormentor's hand.

The contrast between Peggotty's kindly family and the Murdstones is striking. Dan'l Peggotty, the housekeeper's brother, is kindness personified. He has adopted a young niece, Em'ly, who is David's age, and an older nephew, Ham, who like this uncle has become a fisherman. Dan'l is an ideal father. David loves the members of this family as he does their home, a home in the shape of a boat. Dickens had carefully studied a book on the Suffolk dialect to give the Peggotty's authentic speech. David's own home, Blunderstone Rookery, no longer has even a trace of the gaiety and laughter he finds in Yarmouth, and used to know before with his mother and Peggotty. A child is helpless when forced to deal with malignancy and evil.



Shortly after biting Murdstone's hand, David is sent to a school, Salem House Academy, whose headmaster, Creakle, is not only sadistic but stupid as well. Incapable of either learning or teaching, all Creakle knows how to do is wield a cane at the slightest provocation. Since Creakle speaks only in hoarse whispers, his assistant, the one-legged Tungay, roars out the headmaster's orders. Dickens shows his usual skill in creating a duo of grotesque monsters.

Why such a pair should be running a school, and with such unmitigated brutality, a modern reader might wonder. But sadistic schoolmasters have been all too common in the history of education. Saint Augustine in his Confessions tells us the fear of being beaten was a threat he had to live with during his early schools days. Dickens used this theme in *Nicholas Nickleby*. His own education was all too sketchy, but education was a lifelong concern for him. Salem House does not really educate David or anyone else. Cowed with fear the students profit little from their lessons. David makes two friends however: Tommy Traddles, a kindly, gentle boy who is one of Creakle's favorite victims, and James Steerforth, a young aristocrat whose presence in the school is never explained.

He befriends David, and is the only student who stands up to Creakle and Tungay. He also exploits Copperfield, spending the younger boy's money and, even when David is tired, has him read stories aloud late into the night. Only much later does David realize why Steerforth asks him if he has a sister. David sees him as a truly superior being as noble as he is handsome. But he also watches as Steerforth destroys the career of an inoffensive teacher, Mr. Mell, by an arrogant charge against him made to Creakle.

David's mother dies as a result of the tyranny of the Murdstones, and the new baby succumbs soon afterward. After the funeral, David does not return to Salem House. Murdstone sends him to London to work in his warehouse in the lowliest job available, washing and labeling bottles. He boards with the Micawber family, Wilkens and Emma Micawber, two of the novel's most memorable characters. The firm of Murdstone and Grimby, and Copperfield's work there, is based on the most humiliating experience in Dickens' life, the several months he had spent at Warren's Blacking Factory, Hungerford Stairs, London. It was menial, monotonous work Dickens neither forgot nor forgave. His parents, deep in debt, could no longer afford to keep him in school.

In *David Copperfield*, Dickens constructed the Micawbers from certain traits of his parents' characters. Mr. Micawber, although shabbily dressed, always projects an air of gentility. His speech patterns are heavily loaded with Latinate terms and are said to reflect John Dickens' manner of speech.

Grandiloquent sentences are always followed by "in short" a translation into everyday English. He is always expecting "something to turn up," but nothing does.

His wife, Emma, never doubts that her husband has many talents, and she always insists "I will never desert Mr. Micawber."



Here is a typical bit of Mr. Micawber's conversation: "It was at Canterbury where we last met. Within the shadow, I may figuratively say, of that religious edifice, immortalized by Chaucer, which was anciently the resort of pilgrims from the remotest corners of—in short," said Mr. Micawber, "in the immediate neighborhood of the cathedral." The Micawbers provide some relief from the misery the young boy is experiencing.

David remembers that his mother had talked about a great aunt who had visited Blunderstone Rookery the night he was born. Furious that he was not born a girl, she vanished like a "fairy," and the family heard nothing more from her. Dickens liked to give some of his characters certain traits of the people in fairy tales that had been among his favorite reading as a child. Aunt Betsey Trotwood is a sort of fairy godmother. She is blunt in her speech, tolerating no nonsense in anyone. The Murdstones may be seen as the cruel monsters that are also part of fairy tale tradition. David walks from London to his aunt's cottage near Dover, and he presents himself to her. She already has one protege, Mr. Richard Bably, usually called Mr. Dick. Essentially a very simple person, he has, according to Aunt Betsey, depths that only she can see. She consults Mr. Dick about what she should do about David. He provides practical advice, a bath, bed, and clean clothes. She writes to Murdstone that David is with her.

They are willing to take David back to the life he has fled. Betsey Trotwood is more than a match for them. She unmask Murdstone and shows that she instinctively knows him for the sadistic brute he is. He does not try to contradict her. Evil has met its match in this frail older woman. A bully can be faced down by simple goodness.

Aunt Betsey decides to adopt David and makes Mr. Dick his guardian as well.

Copperfield is sent by his aunt to Dr.

Strong's school in Canterbury, a sharp contrast to Salem House Academy. The Doctor is the most humane of teachers and unlike Creakle, a distinguished scholar. He boards with Mr. Wickfield, a lawyer who manages his aunt's finances. His housekeeper is also his daughter. Agnes Wickfield impresses David even at their first meeting as a saintly figure, as someone who might be represented in a radiant stained glass window.

Wickfield's clerk is Uriah Heep.

Heep writes and belittles himself constantly. He will eventually be seen as a diabolical figure with the satanic ability to insinuate himself into a position of power.

A grotesque skeleton of a man, his malignancy is not immediately apparent beneath his "umble" manner. The forms that evil can assume fascinated Dickens although he cannot equal Shakespeare or even his contemporary Robert Browning in penetrating its depths. James Steerforth is another manifestation of it. He has irresistible charm and complete assurance in his own superiority.

Beneath the charm is almost total egotism.



Nobody has ever opposed Steerforth, and everybody easily succumbs to the spell of his personality. Uriah Heep, on the other hand, is the product of a foundation school for boys, a charitable institution that placed him at the bottom of the class system and attempted to forge his will into as abject a mold as possible. This formula could only produce a hatred of all those people who assumed they were his betters.

Mr. Wickfield, an alcoholic, allows Uriah to take over his business affairs. Heep also aspires to make Agnes his own. David instinctively loathes Uriah, who, as he constantly watches Agnes, reminds him of an "ugly and rebellious genie watching a good spirit."

David receives an excellent education at Dr. Strong's school. Agnes Wickfield, who seems to have attained early in life a maturity that David achieves much later, is his confidante during these years. He admires deeply her goodness and serenity. His Aunt Betsey, watching their relationship, is more aware of Agnes' devotion to David than he is. He is too self-absorbed to notice.

Copperfield leaves Canterbury for London and decides that he wants a legal career. He is apprenticed to a Mr. Spenlow in the Commons. Spenlow has a daughter, Dora, who has been educated in France.

Copperfield meets and falls in love with this beautiful little woman. "She was a fairy, a sylph." His infatuation with her is based on Dickens' earliest great love for Maria Beadnell, a banker's daughter, who could not have taken seriously a youth under nineteen, a mere shorthand reporter in the law courts. But he was rapturously in love with her, and found her absolutely flawless, and David's feelings for Dora Spenlow mirror these emotions. Maria would later dismiss Dickens as a "boy"; her fictional counterpart, Dora, lacks Maria's malice, and she and David are finally married.

Aunt Betsey, being told of her nephew's wedding plans, comments "blind, blind, blind." She knows whom he should marry.

David continues to love Dora, but soon learns that she lacks most practical skills.

She can neither cook nor manage household finances. As his career progresses she cannot share any of his intellectual interests. She dies after they have been married for only a few years.

Meeting his old school friend Tommy Traddles, David learns that Tommy lives as a lodger with the Micawbers. Traddles is such a gentle, sweet natured person that he even looks back on Creakle with affection despite the man's brutality. Dickens uses an alliance between Mr. Micawber and Traddles as a means of exposing Uriah Heep. Heep, a full partner with Mr. Wickfield, has hired Micawber as his clerk. Micawber, however improvident he may be, is anything but stupid and he soon learns how dishonest Heep is. He tells Tommy what he has discovered and together they reveal the total scoundrel that Heep, below his hypocritical claims of humility, really is. Micawber reads the indictment that he has written up as one of the letters he habitually writes.



It is his finest hour and illustrates one of Dickens' favorite themes: the good and the brave can triumph over treachery and cruelty.

Having taken his friend Steerforth down to Yarmouth to meet his fisherman friends, David has innocently set the Peggottys up for a tragedy. Em'ly, his childhood playmate, has become a beautiful young woman.

She had said years ago that she wanted to become a lady, something that could only happen if she married someone such as Steerforth, who is in a social position much higher than hers. He plans her seduction soon after they meet. His egoism is only occasionally revealed during David's acquaintance with him. Visiting Steerforth's mother, David meets her companion, Rosa Dartle, whom Steerforth had disfigured in a childish rage throwing a hammer that left her mouth deeply scarred. Rosa gets Steerforth to admit his contempt for people of the lower classes. Despite everything, Rosa adores Steerforth. He knows himself, and wishes he had a father who might have helped him build a better character. He buys a boat that he renames "The Little Em'ly." Em'ly elopes with him only to be discarded in Italy where Steerforth gives her to his valet, Mr. Littermer, who had assisted in the elopement. She eventually makes her way back to England and is rescued by her uncle from the London slum where she is living. Steerforth drowns off the Yarmouth coast as a result of one of worst storms that people on the coast can recall. Ham, trying to rescue him, perishes as well.

Copperfield himself emerges as a fully rounded character who finally comes to terms with his "undisciplined heart." After a period during which he finds solace in the wild beauty of the Swiss Alps, he goes back to England and marries Agnes, who has loved him all of her life. Like most of the other characters in the novel, she changes little, if at all. She seems almost too good to be human. Tommy Traddles, who takes up law and finally becomes a judge, has an equally angelic personality. Most of the other characters are two-dimensional at best.

Copperfield, while sharing some of Dickens' experiences, is too mild and passive to be an exact replica of the fiery, bustling Dickens. He becomes a novelist, but the exact nature of what he writes is never given. He is writing his autobiography ten years after his marriage to Agnes, and he enjoys a serenity that Dickens himself was never to achieve.



# Style

## Points of View

The novel is told in the first person by the character of David Copperfield. Although he does relate some events that happened before he really remembers them, such as the day of his birth, for the most part he is limited to his own perspective. This allows the reader to see things from his child eyes with the understanding of an adult. It also keeps the reader in the dark about the events that go on around David without his knowledge. Many of the surprising events are announced this way, letting the reader pick up clues that David misses.

## Setting

The novel takes place primarily in England during the nineteenth century. David's life is concentrated in Yarmouth, Dover, Canterbury, and London, though he frequently travels between them. These individual settings are described in detail, down to the layout of the houses themselves. There is often contrast between David's life in towns to the life he lives in the countryside and seaside. In town, David's life is primarily driven by his various appointments. In the countryside or seaside, David is often left to his own devices and can choose how to spend his time.

Several characters leave England, all as a means to escape. Steerforth and Emily run off to France, and eventually Italy, and are pursued there by Emily's devoted uncle. David himself goes to Switzerland for an extended period of time to grieve for Dora and discover his love of Agnes. Australia, although never visited by David and therefore not described in the narrative, is also made into a point of refuge for many characters wishing to escape from bad associations in England.

## Language and Meaning

The story is written in simple language, although some of the terms reflect the time period in which it was written. Some of the legal terms are difficult for someone who is not familiar with the British legal system. The fishermen at Yarmouth speak with a local accent that is recorded in their speech, but none of it is confusing to the reader. The characters all give each other nicknames at various points, so it is essential for the reader to keep up with the various names for people, as these are often different depending on who is speaking.

## Structure

The novel is laid out in sixty-four chapters. It progresses in chronological order, beginning with the narrator's birth. Often the narrative at a certain location stops to



introduce what has been happening at another. Several of the chapters are retrospectives that cover an event in terms of blurred memory instead of factual detail. With the exception of the day of his birth, most of the character development takes place in dialogue form, in which characters tell stories or give background detail within their speech.





## Quotes

"You know you did. What else was it possible to infer from what you said, you unkind creature, when you know as well as I do, that on his account only last quarter I wouldn't buy myself a new parasol, though that old green one is frayed the whole way up and the fringe is perfectly mangy. . . Am I a naughty mamma to you, Davy? Am I a nasty, cruel, selfish, bad mamma? Say I am, my child; say 'yes,' dear boy, and Peggotty will love you; and Peggotty's love is a great deal better than mine, Davy. *I don't love you at all, do I?*" (Ch. 2, p. 28)

"I should think there never can have been a man who loved his profession more than Mr. Creakle did. He had a delight in cutting at the boys, which was like the satisfaction of a craving appetite." (Ch. 7, p. 83)

"When my thoughts go back now, to that slow agony of my youth, I wonder how much of the histories I invented for such people hangs like a mist of fancy over well-remembered facts! When I tread the old ground, I do not wonder that I seem to see and pity, going on before me, an innocent romantic boy, making his imaginative world out of such strange experiences and sordid things!" (Ch. 11, p. 148)

"Dr. Strong's was an excellent school; as different from Mr. Creakle's as good is from evil. It was very gravely and decorously ordered, and on a sound system; with an appeal, in everything, to the honor and good faith of the boys, and an avowed intention to rely on their possession of those qualities unless they proved themselves unworthy of it, which worked wonders." (Ch. 16, p. 202)

"The friendship between himself and me increased continually, and it was maintained on this odd footing: that, while Mr. Dick came professedly to look after me as my guardian, he always consulted me in any little matter of doubt that arose, and invariably guided himself by my advice; not only having a high regard for my native sagacity, but considering that I inherited a good deal from my aunt." (Ch. 17, p. 215)

"Ah, Steerforth! It's well for you to joke about the poor! You may skirmish with Miss Dartle, or try to hide your sympathies in jest from me, but I know better. When I see how perfectly you understand them, how exquisitely you can enter into happiness like this plain fisherman's, or humor a love like my old nurse's, I know that there is not a joy or sorrow, not an emotion, of such people, that can be indifferent to you. And I admire and love you for it, Steerforth, twenty times the more!" (Ch. 21, p. 266)

"I listened to all this with attention; and though, I must say, I had my doubts whether the country was quite as much obliged to the Commons as Mr. Spenlow made out, I respectfully deferred to his opinion." (Ch. 26, p. 322)

"A display of indifference to all the actions and passions of mankind was not supposed to be such a distinguished quality at that time, I think, as I have observed it to be considered since. I have known it very fashionable indeed. I have seen it displayed with



such success, that I have encountered some fine ladies and gentlemen who might as well have been born caterpillars." (Ch. 36, p. 431)

"Some happy talent, and some fortunate opportunity, may form the two sides of the ladder on which some men mount, but the rounds of that ladder must be made of stuff to stand wear and tear; and there is no substitute for thorough - going, ardent, and sincere earnestness." (Ch. 42, p. 497)

"There can be no disparity in marriage like unsuitability of mind and purpose." (Ch. 45, p. 541)

"It is you who have been, in your greed and cunning, against all the world. It may be profitable for you to reflect, in future, that there never were greed and cunning in the world yet, that did not do too much, and overreach themselves. It is as certain as death." (Ch. 52, p. 621)

"I could not help thinking, as we approached the gate, what an uproar would have been made in the country, if any deluded man had proposed to spend one half the money it had cost, on the erection of an industrial school for the young, or a house of refuge for the deserving old." (Ch. 61, p. 693)



## Adaptations

Ten years after completing *David Copperfield*, Dickens wrote his second bildungsroman, *Great Expectations* (1860-61). There is little optimism despite the title in this work, and its hero, Pip (Phillip Pirrip) has a character that is much more like Dickens than David Copperfield. Unlike David, Pip is not patient and easy-going. He also becomes a snob who is embarrassed that his benefactor, Magwitch, is an escaped criminal. Another orphan character created by Dickens is *Oliver Twist*, and his story forms Dickens' third novel about a child caught in the underworld of London. Most of the characters in the major novels are either orphans or children who grow up in a single parent home like Steerforth in *David Copperfield*.

A film version of *David Copperfield* was made by MGM in 1935 with an all-star cast including Lionel Barrymore, W. C. Fields, Edna May Oliver and Basil Rathbone. Fields is outstanding as Wilkins Micawber, a role he was born to play. A made-for-television version was shot in England in 1970, but does not match in quality the earlier film. In 1999 the BBC made another production for Masterpiece Theater.

Another more recent bildungsroman is E. L. Doctorow's *Billy Bathgate*, which portrays a street kid in New York during the 1930s. Billy becomes associated with Dutch Schultz, the prohibition-era gang leader. A film version appeared in 1991 that is excellent, with Dustin Hoffman playing Schultz.



## Topics for Discussion

1. Is David Copperfield's childhood at all like that of American children in the nineteenth century?
2. Could an Edward Murdstone exploit a young naive woman like Clara Copperfield today? How has society and the legal system in England or America changed since 1850?
3. Dan'l Peggotty and his family are lower class English people. Has Dickens presented them realistically?
4. While England, even in 1850, was a democracy to an extent, it still had (and has) a rigid class system. How has Dickens presented this in David Copperfield?
5. Dickens is noted for his ability to create character in his fiction. How typically does he present minor characters in David Copperfield?
6. The very name, Little Em'ly, is rather sentimental. She is called this all through the novel. Does the reader ever see her as a realistic human being?
7. Is Dickens more skilled in presenting men than women? How has his experience influenced his views on human personalities?
8. How is London seen in David Copperfield? It was the world's largest city in 1850.
9. Lord Byron is the model Dickens had in mind when he created James Steerforth. Is his character accurately depicted in David's friend?
10. Wilkins Micawber is usually regarded as one of the supreme comic characters in English literature. By what standards is he comic? Have our views of what constitutes humor changed since Dickens' time?
11. Except in rigidly religious circles, the term "fallen woman" seems rather absurd today. Do we actually now value the feminine personality higher than most Victorians did?
12. Some critics prefer the "child bride" Dora to Agnes Wickfield. Why?
13. Uriah Heep is an arch hypocrite. Is he also comic?
14. Comment on David's friend Tommy Traddles. What is his function in the novel?
15. Comment on Aunt Betsy Trotwood. In one sense she is as eccentric as many other of Dickens' characters, but she is also a stable person with a wisdom unmatched by other characters in the novel with the possible exception of Agnes Wickfield. Is she, despite Dickens' intentions, as much a heroine as Agnes?



## Essay Topics

Consider David's mother's relationship with Mr. Murdstone. How is she responsible for what happens to David?

Compare and contrast the two schools that David attends: Salem House and Dr. Strong's School.

How does Dora resemble David's mother?

The novel presents several examples of marriage. Choose one couple and discuss how their marriage is successful or unsuccessful and what hardships they overcome.

David is nicknamed by several characters. Choose one nickname and discuss what it says about David's relationship to the person who gave it to him.

Consider the confrontation that Steerforth has with Mr. Mell at Salem House. What does this incident show about David's character? About Steerforth? About Traddles?

Uriah Heep is able to take advantage of Mr. Wickfield. How is this accomplished?

Miss Betsey Trotwood and Mr. Dick have a very interesting relationship. How does it resemble a marriage? Why do you think they do not get married?



## Ideas for Reports and Papers

1. Freud admired Dickens both as a writer and for his insights into the mystery of the human personality. *David Copperfield* was his favorite novel by Dickens. A Freudian critic, Lawrence Frank, sees in certain passages of the novel material that matches Freud's "the Wolf Man," *From the History of an Infantile Neurosis*, and *Introductory Lectures of Psycho-Analysis*. Is he right? Compare these writings.
2. Dickens was always careful to make certain that the speech patterns of his characters were accurate, whether they were Suffolk fishermen or London Cockneys. Comment on the speech patterns in *David Copperfield*.
3. Dickens obviously had great sympathy for women who had become prostitutes. For many years he advised Lady Angela Burdett-Coutts, who had founded a Home for Homeless Women. He also helped her run this charity. How is this experience in his life reflected in *David Copperfield*?
4. Dickens' own education was meager, but education was a life-long concern for him. Compare his treatment of this theme in *Nicholas Nickleby* and *Hard Times* versus *David Copperfield*.
5. Dickens respected the working people of England and insisted that their dignity should be protected. Is this born out in his writing? Compare his portraits of Dan'l Peggotty and Steven Blackpool in *Hard Times*, and workers in other Dickens' novels.
6. It has been said that Dickens does not portray upper-class English people as well as the lower- or middle-class people among his characters. Is this true?
7. The Kings Bench Prison in *David Copperfield* is really the Marshalsea Prison where Dickens' father was sent. The Marshalsea itself figures prominently in his later novel, *Little Dorritt*, which Bernard Shaw called a more seditious book than Karl Marx's *Das Kapital*. Compare the satires on prisons in these two novels.

## Further Study

Ackroyd, Peter. *Dickens*. London, England: Sinclair-Stevenson, 1990. Ackroyd says that the first biography by John Forster is too dull in places and that Edgar Johnson in his 1952 biography is frequently wrongheaded. Accordingly, he provides all the known facts about Dickens and enlivens his account with a "Prologue," describing the reaction in England and America after the writer's death, and several chapters which include a mock interview he has with Dickens during the author's lifetime, another chapter featuring Dickens in a fictional conversation with T. S. Eliot, Oscar Wilde, and Thomas Chatterton, and another chapter in which Ackroyd himself is interviewed about how he wrote this biography. A thorough and entertaining book.

Buckley, Jerome Hamilton. *Season of Youth: The Bildungsroman from Dickens to Golding*.

Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974. A full study of the genre from its origin in Europe through the major British authors who have produced these works.

Ford, George H., and Lauriat Lane Jr. *The Dickens Critics*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1972. A reprint of a book published by Cornell University Press in 1961. Includes essays by contemporaries of Dickens such as Poe, Henry James, and John Ruskin, and continues into our century. George H. Ford's perceptive essay on *David Copperfield* is included.

Frank, Lawrence. *Charles Dickens and the Romantic Self*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984. A Freudian analysis. Dickens, for Frank, stands between the writers of Romantic autobiography such as Jean Jacques Rousseau, Thomas de Quincey, and Freud. *David Copperfield* is "poet of the memory, the heir of Rousseau and de Quincey. Freud writes with both Rousseau and Dickens in mind."

Garnett, Robert R. "Why not Sophy? Desire and Agnes in *David Copperfield*." *Dickens Quarterly*, (spring 1998): 213-231. The saintly Agnes has not been treated kindly by critics who have made such remarks about her as those by Michael Slater: "a nullity" and "lifeless." But Dickens in a memoranda for the fifth number of the book's monthly installments says "Introduction of the real heroine." In her, he created the ideal to which *Copperfield* must ascend to finally realize himself.

House, Humphrey. *The Dickens World*. London: Oxford University Press, 1941. Indispensable as a source of background material on Dickens and his era.

Johnson, Edgar. *Charles Dickens: His Tragedy and Triumph*. Two volumes. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1952. The first great modern biography of Dickens.

Good critiques of the major works. Chapter Six, Volume Two, "His Favorite Child," is an excellent commentary on *David Copperfield*.



Kaplan, Fred. *Dickens: A Biography*. New York: William Morrow & Company, 1988.

Somewhat more concise than Johnson's and Ackroyd's biographies. A penetrating analysis of *David Copperfield* in Chapter Eight.

Monod, Sylvere. *Dickens the Novelist*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1968.

Originally a doctoral thesis at the Sorbonne in Paris. A close analysis of Dickens as a writer which opposes the view that Dickens was not a skilled craftsman. *David Copperfield* is the novel which demonstrates Dickens' craft at its finest. The best analysis of Dickens' writing currently available.

Storey, Graham. *David Copperfield: Interweaving Truth and Fiction*. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1991. Storey is one of the editors of the Pilgrim Edition of Dickens' Letters. This book is one of the Twayne Masterworks Series, and it covers in its brief format the essentials of Dickens' life, accomplishment, and the historical background of his works.





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