Oliver Twist Study Guide

Oliver Twist by Charles Dickens

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Introduction

Oliver Twist, published in 1838, is one of Charles Dickens's best-known and well-loved works. It was written after he had already attained success as the author of *The Pickwick Papers*. It has been adapted as a film and a long-running Broadway musical and has been considered a classic ever since it was first published. The book originally appeared as a "serial"; that is, each chapter was published separately, in order, in a magazine called *Bentley's Miscellany*, of which Dickens was editor. Each week, readers waited avidly for the next installment in the tale; this partly accounts for the fact that each chapter ends with a "cliff-hanger" that would hold the reader's interest until the following chapter was published.

Dickens uses the characters and situations in the book to make a pointed social commentary, attacking the hypocrisy and flaws of institutions, including his society's government, its laws and criminal system, and its methods of dealing with poor people. Interestingly, he doesn't suggest any solutions; he merely points out the suffering inflicted by these systems and their deep injustice. Dickens basically believed that most people were good at heart but that their good impulses could be distorted by social ills.

After publishing *Oliver Twist*, Dickens went on to write *Nicholas Nickelby*, *The Old Curiosity Shop*, *Barnaby Rudge*, *American Notes*, *Martin Chuzzlewit*, *Dombey and Son*, *David Copperfield*, *Bleak House*, *Hard Times*, *Little Dorrit*, *A Tale of Two Cities*, *Great Expectations*, *Our Mutual Friend*, and *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*. After 1858 he often toured, reading out loud from his works to huge audiences; every new piece from his pen was eagerly awaited, and he was perhaps the most famous and best-loved author who has ever lived.

Author Biography

Charles Dickens was born on February 7, 1812, in Portsea, England. His father, John Dickens, was a navy clerk. In 1814, John Dickens was transferred to London, and in 1817, the whole family moved to Chatham, near the naval docks. Dickens's life during the next five years was stable and happy; he was tutored by his mother and later went to school in Chatham. His father had a small collection of books, and Dickens read them avidly.

In 1822, Dickens's father was transferred back to London, but he had gotten himself deeply in debt by then and was soon sent to a debtors' prison, or workhouse, along with his wife and Dickens's siblings. Dickens, who at twelve was considered old enough to work, had to work in a boot-blacking warehouse. Alone in a strange city, separated from his family, he endured harrowing experiences that marked him with a hatred for the social system and the desire to succeed so that he would never have to live this way again. After a few months, he was saved when his grandmother died and her small legacy allowed Dickens's father to get out of prison.

When he was fifteen, Dickens became a clerk in a solicitor's office, and at sixteen, he became a court reporter, a job that taught him much about London and all its people. In 1932, he became a journalist, and in 1834, he became a staff writer for the well-known *Morning Chronicle*. He was soon known as one of the best reporters in the city. He used these experiences to write anonymous pieces, titled *"*Sketches by Boz*,"* for the *Monthly Magazine*. Gradually, however, his anonymity faded, and the name "Dickens" began attracting attention. In 1836, *Sketches by Boz, Illustrative of Everyday Life* was published, followed by a second series, and the complete sketches were published in 1839.

Also in 1836, the first number of *The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club* was published. Eventually, printing of the stories rose from 400 to 40,000, a number that would be large for a new author even today. Flushed with his success, Dickens married Catherine Hogarth, the daughter of a newspaper editor, in April of 1836. They had ten children and remained married for twenty-two years but eventually would become incompatible and separate.

After publishing *Oliver Twist* (1838), Dickens went on to write *Nicholas Nickelby* (1838-1839), *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1840-1841), *Barnaby Rudge* (1841), *American Notes* (1842), *Martin Chuzzlewit* (1843-1844), *Dombey and Son* (1846-1848), *David Copperfield* (1849-1850), *Bleak House* (1852-1853), *Hard Times* (1854), *Little Dorrit* (1855-1857), *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859), *Great Expectations* (1860-1861), *Our Mutual Friend* (1864-1865), and *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* (1870, unfinished).

Dickens also wrote short stories, travel pieces, and dramas. He was the editor of *Household Words* and *All the Year Round*, well-known periodicals of his day.

After 1858, he often toured, reading out loud from his works to huge audiences; every new piece from his pen was eagerly awaited, and he was perhaps the most famous and best-loved author who has ever lived. He died on June 8, 1870, while working on his last book, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*. He is buried in Westminster Abbey, one of the highest honors in England.

Plot Summary

Chapters One through Nine

The book opens with Oliver's birth in a workhouse, as his unmarried and nameless mother dies. He is soon transferred to an "infant farm," run by Mrs. Mann, who starves the children under her care and pockets the money given to her for their food. Although many of the children die, investigations always determine that the death was "accidental." Oliver lives with her until he is nine, when the parish beadle, Mr. Bumble, arrives to tell her that Oliver is supposed to return to the workhouse. At the workhouse, he gets in trouble for asking for more food. For this audacious behavior, he is locked up, and the workhouse board decides to give five pounds to anyone who will take Oliver as an apprentice and thus relieve the parish of his care.

A chimney sweep, Gamfield, offers to take Oliver but is rejected when a kindly magistrate finds that Oliver is terrified of Gamfield. He goes back to the workhouse until an undertaker, Mr. Sowerberry, agrees to take him. At Sowerberry's house he must sleep among the half-built coffins and eat leftovers even the dog won't touch. In addition, he is bullied by Noah Claypole, another charity boy who works for Sowerberry, and by Charlotte, Sowerberry's servant.

Sowerberry decides to have Oliver work as a hired mourner at children's funerals, because he looks so unhappy all the time. This promotion makes Claypole furiously jealous, and he attacks Oliver, who violently defends himself, hitting the much bigger Claypole to the floor. Sowerberry beats Oliver and then locks him up until bedtime.

The next morning, Oliver runs away to London. On his way out of town, he stops to say goodbye to Dick, a younger, frailer child who was his best friend at Mrs. Mann's.

On the road to London, Oliver is starving and exhausted. He begs for food and sleeps outside. He meets a strange boy, dressed in a large man's coat, who seems very street-smart. This boy, Jack Dawkins, otherwise known as the Artful Dodger, offers to introduce Oliver to a man who will give him free housing.

In London, they make their way to a dirty, dangerous street and enter a run-down house, where a filthy old man greets them. This is Fagin, the leader of a group of child criminals. Oliver falls asleep but wakes to see Fagin gloating over a treasure. Fagin explains that this is his life savings, but, in fact, it's stolen goods. Later, the Dodger comes in with another boy, Charley Bates, and they practice picking Fagin's pockets.

Chapters Ten through Nineteen

Oliver sometimes takes part in this game, but he doesn't realize yet that it is practice for stealing. He thinks Fagin is respectable and is simply teaching the boys good work ethics. He begs to be allowed to go out with Charley and the Dodger and gets into

trouble when they pick a man's pocket and then run away. Oliver doesn't run, and he's immediately grabbed as the thief. He is shocked, having finally realized that his "friends" are all thieves.

He is taken to the police station, and the man who accused him, Mr. Brownlow, follows. This man has second thoughts about the accusation because Oliver doesn't look like a thief. Oliver also looks familiar to him, although he doesn't know why. In the courtroom, an evil magistrate, Mr. Fang, sentences him to three months of hard labor. Oliver faints. Another witness shoves into the courtroom and reports that he saw the whole crime and that Oliver is innocent. Oliver is released, but he is weak and disoriented. Mr. Brownlow takes Oliver home with him.

Oliver remains unconscious for several days. Mrs. Bedwin, Brownlow's housekeeper, takes care of him. At Brownlow's house, he is fascinated by a portrait of a kind-looking woman on the wall. Brownlow notices that Oliver resembles the woman.

Meanwhile, Dawkins and the Dodger have gone back to Fagin's and reported that they have lost Oliver to the police. Fagin is enraged.

More thieves show up: Bill Sikes and his dog; Nancy, Sikes's girlfriend; and Betsy. Fagin tells them that Oliver is a danger to them all because he may tell the police about them. Nancy poses as Oliver's sister and goes to the police station to find out what happened and where Oliver is.

Brownlow asks Oliver to tell him his life's story, but this is interrupted by a visit from Mr. Grimwig, an argumentative old man who often says, "I'll eat my head." He says that he will eat his head if Oliver is anything other than a common thief, and Brownlow decides to test Oliver by giving him some books to return to the bookseller's, with money to pay his bill.

Oliver heads out on the errand but is intercepted by Nancy and Sikes, who take him back to Fagin's lair. Meanwhile, Brownlow and Grimwig have come to the unsettling conclusion that the boy has taken off with the books, the money, and the new clothes Brownlow gave him and that he really is a thief.

At Fagin's, Fagin threatens Oliver, but Nancy unexpectedly defends him, saying that if Fagin hurts him, she will personally hurt Fagin. Oliver is dressed in his old rags and locked up.

Back in Oliver's birth town, Mr. Bumble visits Mrs. Mann and tells her that he is going to London to appear in court in a settlement for two paupers. She tells him all is well at her house, except for Dick, who, she says, has been making trouble. The trouble is that he wants someone to help him write a letter to Oliver Twist before he dies. Bumble is horrified by this request and urges Mrs. Mann to lock Dick in the coal cellar.

In London, Bumble sees an advertisement offering five guineas for any information about Oliver Twist. The ad was placed by Brownlow, and Bumble goes to his house and

tells Brownlow about Oliver's poor origin and supposed bad behavior. This turns Brownlow against Oliver, and he forbids Mrs. Bedlow to mention him again.

At Fagin's, Oliver is told that if he continues to resist, he will be hanged for theft. Fagin keeps him locked up, and Bates and the Dodger try to convince him to become a thief. Fagin, who comes in with another thief named Tom Chitling, who has just gotten out of jail, agrees.

On a nasty night, Fagin creeps out and heads over to Sikes's place, where he tells Sikes that he has a plan for a burglary in Chertsey. Sikes says that it can't be done; another thief, Toby Crackit, has looked the place over and found that he can't entice any of the servants to come in on the plan. Sikes finally says that they can get into the house but only if they have a boy small enough to get through a tiny window and then unlock the door. Fagin likes this plan because, even if they get caught, Oliver's prospects for a normal life will be ruined and he will have to continue his life of crime.

Chapters Twenty through Thirty-One

Nancy shows up to take Oliver to Sikes's place and confesses to him that she wants to help him but can't do anything right now. She tells him it will be good for them both if he keeps quiet about her being on his side.

Sikes and Oliver set out on the long journey to the house the gang will rob. At a deserted old house, they meet Barney, who is occasionally a waiter in a seedy bar in Saffron Hill, and Toby Crackit, the well-known burglar. In the middle of the night, they head out. Oliver is petrified and doesn't want to participate in the crime, but Sikes tells him he will kill him if he doesn't. Sikes opens a tiny window and tells Oliver to enter and open the door for the rest of the gang. Oliver goes in, planning to wake up the people inside and warn them, but they have already heard the break-in, and they shoot at Oliver and the other burglars. Toby and Sikes run off, with Oliver, who is bleeding.

Back in the workhouse, Mrs. Corney, the matron, is making tea. Mr. Bumble visits her and notices that she's doing very well from defrauding the poor; she has good food, silver teaspoons, and nice furniture. He decides it would be in his best interest to marry the widow, so he flirts with her.

They are interrupted by a pauper who says that another pauper, old Sally, is dying and wants to speak to Mrs. Corney. Sally tells Mrs. Corney that many years ago she nursed a poor unmarried woman who had a child and then died. Before she died, she gave something made of gold to Sally. Sally kept it instead of giving it to the child, who, if he had received it and had known something about his mother, could have been proud of his origins. Sally's last words are, "They called him Oliver. . . . The gold I stole was□" but she dies before she can finish the sentence.

Toby Crackit returns to Fagin's and tells Fagin that the burglary fell apart and they had to leave the wounded Oliver behind in a ditch. Fagin is enraged, even more so because Toby has no idea where Sikes is either. Fagin goes to the Three Cripples, the public

house where Barney works. The landlord says Barney hasn't been heard from either. Fagin asks for a man named Monks, and the landlord says Monks will show up soon.

Fagin goes to Sikes's, where Nancy is alone and upset. She says she would rather that Oliver be dead than that he return to Fagin's clutches. This angers Fagin, and he leaves. As he walks the dark streets, someone calls out to him. It's Monks. Fagin lets him into his house and they talk. Monks insists that Fagin could have made a thief out of the boy, and Fagin says he has done everything he could. They see a shadow and fear that a woman is eavesdropping on them, but they can't find anyone.

Back at Mrs. Corney's, Bumble proposes marriage to her, and she agrees, telling him that she will tell him the rest of Sally's story about the golden treasure after they're married.

At the scene of the robbery, Oliver wakes up in the ditch, injured and exhausted. He drags himself back to the house, where he is taken in and the servants gloat over capturing one of the burglars. The lady of the house, Mrs. Maylie, and her adopted niece Rose, are surprised to find that the dangerous burglar is only a small boy, and they feel sorry for him. The doctor, Mr. Losberne, agrees to question Oliver in the ladies' presence. The doctor also says he will get the servants, Giles and Brittles, who fired at Oliver, to cooperate. He then talks to them and confuses them about whether or not they can be sure Oliver was actually the boy who was involved in the robbery. This also confuses two London detectives, Blathers and Duff, and they return to London without arresting Oliver.

Chapters Thirty-Two through Forty-One

Oliver's broken arm heals under the care of Rose Maylie, Mrs. Maylie, and Mr. Losberne. They take a trip to London so that Oliver can see Mr. Brownlow, and Oliver points out the ruined house where the robber gang met. The doctor jumps out of the carriage and goes into the building, where he finds an ugly, deformed man who says he has lived alone there for twenty-five years.

At Brownlow's house, they find a "For Rent" sign in the window, and neighbors tell them Brownlow has gone to the West Indies with Mrs. Bedlow and Mr. Grimwig. Oliver is deeply disappointed because he knows that Brownlow must have decided that he really was a thief when he did not return when Brownlow sent him out on his errand to the bookseller's.

The group goes on to a rural cottage, where they spend the summer, and Oliver is healed and enchanted by the beautiful countryside.

During this peaceful time, Rose Maylie becomes ill with a dangerous fever. Mrs. Maylie writes to Mr. Losberne and to "Harry Maylie, Esquire." Oliver takes the letters to the nearest village to deliver them, and he runs into a tall man wearing a cloak, who swears at him and then falls down in a fit of convulsions.

Harry Maylie, who is Mrs. Maylie's son, arrives. He is deeply in love with Rose, but Mrs. Maylie tells him that Rose will probably refuse to marry him because there is some sort of scandal attached to her and that if she becomes his wife, she will ruin his future career.

One day soon after, Oliver has a nightmare about Fagin and wakes to see Fagin looking at him through the window. He tells the others, but they can't find any evidence that anyone has been outside the window.

Harry asks Rose to marry him, and, as predicted, she says that she does love him but can't marry him because it will attach scandal to his name. Disappointed, Harry leaves, but he makes Oliver promise to write him regularly and tell him what is happening in the Maylie household.

At the workhouse, Mr. Bumble and Mrs. Corney (now Mrs. Bumble) have been married for eight weeks. They fight constantly. Mr. Bumble is now subservient to her wicked temper and physical abuse. As a result, he goes to a public house to drown his sorrows. At the pub, he meets a mysterious man in a cloak, who asks Mr. Bumble for information about Oliver Twist's birth. Mr. Bumble tells the man that his wife has this information and will give it up for money. They arrange a meeting the next day at an address in a seedy part of town. The man's name, he says, is Monks.

At the meeting, Mrs. Bumble tells Monks that Sally stole a locket and a wedding ring from Oliver's mother. It is inscribed with the name "Agnes" and a date that is a year before Oliver's birth. He gives her a payment of twenty-five pounds, takes the ring and locket, and throws them into the river, where they will be lost forever.

At Sikes's house Sikes is ill and wretched, but Fagin, the Artful Dodger, and Charley Bates show up with food, drink, and a little money. They go back to Fagin's to get the money, and everyone except Nancy leaves. Monks shows up, and Nancy eavesdrops on their conversation. The reader is not told what she hears.

When Fagin returns and gives her the money for Sikes, Nancy leaves. She's very upset and distraught, and Sikes notices that she's behaving strangely. He decides she must have a fever. She puts a sleeping potion in his drink, and when he falls asleep, she leaves and goes to a hotel, where Rose Maylie is staying. She tells Rose that she is the one who grabbed Oliver to take him back to the thieves but that she regrets it. She then asks Rose if she knows Monks. Rose doesn't, but Nancy tells her, "He knows you." She tells Rose that she learned of her and found out where she was staying by eavesdropping on Monks and Fagin.

Monks, she says, offered to pay Fagin for finding Oliver and to pay him more if Fagin could turn him into a thief. She later heard him say that all evidence of Oliver's true identity is gone and that Monks has his money. Despite this, he wanted Oliver to suffer, to be imprisoned and worse, and he would devote his life to ruining Oliver's. Monks also said that Mrs. Maylie and Rose would give a fortune to know where Oliver is.

Rose offers to protect Nancy if she will turn away from the thieves, but Nancy says it's too late. She tells Rose she will walk on London Bridge every Sunday night, in case Rose wants to talk to her again. Rose writes to Harry, asking him what to do about this situation.

Oliver enters, excited because he has seen Mr. Brownlow entering a house. Rose takes Oliver to the house, and they have a joyous reunion. Rose discusses Nancy's revelations with Mr. Brownlow, and Brownlow recruits Mr. Losberne and Harry Maylie.

Chapters Forty-Two through Fifty-One

On the same night that Rose and Nancy meet, Noah Claypole and Charlotte come to London. They have stolen a twenty-pound note, and, by chance, they stop at the Three Cripples, the thieves' pub. Fagin overhears them talking about their crime and the difficulty of cashing such a big note without arousing suspicion, and he offers to take them in and teach them. He tells them that one of his best thieves, the Artful Dodger, has been arrested and could end up a "lifer."

Charley Bates arrives and explains that there are witnesses to the crime, so the Dodger's fate is sealed. Shamefully enough, the stolen item was a small snuffbox, not even anything expensive or daring. Fagin tells him that Dawkins will perform well at the trial and will uphold his dignity as a daring thief. Claypole is sent to the police station to see how the hearing goes; the Dodger mocks everyone there.

The following Sunday night, Nancy tries to leave to go to London Bridge, in case the Maylies are there to meet her. Sikes senses something amiss and refuses to let her go. Fagin assumes she has another boyfriend and plots to convince her to turn against Sikes and perhaps poison him. This will be convenient for Fagin, who thinks Sikes knows too much. He decides to have her followed so he can find out where her real affections lie. Then he can use the information against her and convince her to do Sikes in. He assigns Claypole to this job.

A week later, Nancy goes to London Bridge, followed by Claypole. Brownlow tells Nancy that he wants to get the secret of Oliver's identity out of Monks and that he also wants her to turn Fagin over to him. She refuses to betray either of them but tells him that if he goes to the Three Cripples, he can see Monks there. She describes him, and it turns out that the description is familiar to Brownlow □it matches someone he already knows.

Fagin is furious that Nancy talked to Brownlow, and in his anger he recruits Sikes by telling him that Nancy did so and that Noah can prove it. Sikes runs home and locks Nancy in and then tells her everything she said was heard by Claypole. She begs him to spare her life, but he is unmoved and kills her.

He is horrified by what he's done and runs outside with his dog, wandering aimlessly, feeling pursued and haunted. He realizes that people may be on the hunt for a murderer with a dog, so he tries to drown the dog, but the dog escapes.

Meanwhile, Brownlow has abducted Monks from the Three Cripples and brought him to his house. Brownlow tells Monks he must cooperate or Brownlow will give him to the police and charge him with fraud and robbery.

It turns out that Monks's father and Brownlow were friends for many years. When Monks's father was a boy, his sister, who was going to marry Brownlow, died. Brownlow and Monks's father were always close after that.

Monks's father was forced by his parents to marry. They chose a woman ten years older, who was greedy and evil. They had one son, Monks. The couple eventually separated, and the woman went to Europe, taking the young Monks with her. Eventually, Monks's father met a new love, a girl of nineteen, and became engaged. Monks's father then inherited money from a relative in Rome, but while there, he contracted a fatal illness. When his ex-wife heard about this, she went to see him, and when he died, she and her son, Monks, inherited all the money.

Brownlow tells Monks that before Monks's father left England, he left a portrait of his new love with Brownlow. Brownlow was unable to find the girl or her family after Monks's father's death.

Brownlow tells Monks that he was startled by Oliver's resemblance to this portrait and that he knew Monks might know who Oliver was. Monks had gone to the West Indies, so Brownlow followed him there and then followed him back to London. Brownlow tells Monks that he knows Monks's father made a will that contained the secret of Oliver's identity but that Monks's mother destroyed it so that she and Monks could keep all the money.

Monks breaks down and says he will confess all the facts in front of witnesses and in writing. Brownlow says that he must also give back Oliver's share of the inheritance. Monks agrees.

Mr. Losberne enters and says that Sikes's dog has been found and a huge manhunt is on for him. Also, he says, Fagin will soon be arrested.

Meanwhile, Toby Crackit, Chitling, and Kags, a convict, have gathered in a decrepit old house on an island in the Thames. After dark, Sikes appears. They are horrified by him because, although they're thieves, they're not murderers, at least not of women. A crowd gathers outside, yelling that Sikes is inside. He tries to escape by shinning down a rope from the chimney of the house but slips into a loop he has made and inadvertently hangs himself.

Two days later, Mrs. Maylie, Rose, Mr. Losberne, and Mrs. Bedwin travel toward Oliver's birthplace. Behind them, Mr. Brownlow and Monks follow. In a meeting, Mr. Brownlow tells Monks, "This child is your half-brother; the illegitimate son of your father, my dear friend Edwin Leeford, by poor young Agnes Fleming, who died in giving him birth."

Monks agrees. Agnes Leeford was his father's young sweetheart, and he had planned to marry her, as shown by the ring he gave her and the locket with her name on it. He

had written a will, which allotted an annual income of eight hundred pounds each to Monks and his mother and which gave the rest of the property to Agnes and her unborn child. If the child was a boy, he was to receive the money only if he had led a clean, honorable life. If he had not, his money was to go to Monks.

Monks says that his mother burned the will, and he swore to her that he would find the child, if it lived, and make its life a misery.

Mr. and Mrs. Bumble are then brought in and forced to confess that Mrs. Bumble stole the locket and ring that were once Agnes's.

Brownlow then says that Agnes had a much younger sister and that after her father died, she was adopted by some country people. Monks's mother tracked her down and told the new parents that she was illegitimate and thus tainted. This scandal marked her life, and she was treated poorly until Mrs. Maylie noticed her and took her away. Thus, Oliver is Rose's nephew. Also, Rose's previous reluctance to marry Harry, because of her belief that the scandal attached to her would taint him, is eliminated now that she has a respectable origin. They become engaged.

Chapters Fifty-Two and Fifty-Three

Fagin is in court, and the verdict is "Guilty." He is sentenced to death by hanging. He realizes that, of all the people in the courtroom, none care about him and all are glad he will die. Brownlow and Oliver visit him in his cell, and Brownlow asks about some papers that Monks gave to Fagin. Fagin tells him where the papers are. Oliver is so upset by this visit that he is unable to walk for some time afterward.

A few months later, Rose and Harry are married, and Harry gives up his plans for a political career in favor of life as a clergyman. Mrs. Maylie comes to live with them in their country parsonage. Oliver generously allows Monks to keep half of the inheritance, and Monks goes to the New World and eventually dies in prison. The rest of Fagin's gang are transported far from England and die overseas. Mr. Brownlow adopts Oliver as his son, and they live with Mrs. Bedwin, close to Rose and Harry's parsonage. Mr. Losberne and Mr. Grimwig also settle close by. Noah and Charlotte Claypole become police informers; they buy drinks on Sundays and then report on the pubs for being open, which is against the law on Sunday. The Bumbles lose their jobs and become so povertystricken that they must live in the workhouse they once ran. Charley Bates repents of his life of crime and becomes a wholesome farmer.

Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

The initial chapter describes the birth of the main character – Oliver Twist. His mother has been found lying in the street, her shoes in shreds from walking. She is brought to a workhouse in England, and the next night gives birth to Oliver, delivered by a surgeon and a drunken nurse. Oliver struggles to breathe at first, but once established, cries heartily. His mother asks to see him, and dies once she has placed a kiss on him. She is unmarried, and no one knows her identity. Oliver is left at the workhouse in the care of the nurse.

Chapter 1 Analysis

In this initial chapter, Dickens begins to observe class differences in society. As he describes the nurse dressing the infant in worn and yellowed clothing, he describes how these used, ragged clothes already denote Oliver's place in the world.

Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

The second chapter describes Oliver's upbringing to the age of nine. After his birth, he is sent to a branch workhouse that houses children. The children are half-starved and rarely bathed. Many die from malnutrition, illness and accidents. On Oliver's ninth birthday, Mr. Bumble, the beadle, comes to collect Oliver. He is taken to the regular workhouse, where he appears before the board, and is told that he will begin to earn a wage by picking oakum. Residents of the workhouse are fed a thin gruel made from ground corn and water three times a day, and are slowly starving to death. Oliver is housed with other boys his age, who decide that someone must ask for more food. The group is, of course, terrified to do so, but somehow Oliver is nominated. After eating his portion of gruel, he approaches the master and says, "Please sir, I want some more." Frenzy ensues, and Oliver is placed in solitary confinement. A sign is posted on the workhouse gate offering 5 pounds to anyone who will take Oliver off the hands of the parish.

Chapter 2 Analysis

Dickens makes two distinct points in Chapter 2. The first is the strength and constitution of his main character. Oliver is shown to be a strong person by his very survival in such an environment. He leaves his friends in the first workhouse, and, however miserable, makes a place for himself at the second house. He is the only boy brave enough to ask the master for more gruel.

Dickens second point in this chapter relates to how the rich remain in control of society.

He points out clearly, and rather melodramatically, how they expect to retain control, and are quite surprised that the subjects are disrespectful enough to want more than they have. The description of the board's plan to provide as meager an amount of food possible, coupled with their absolute horror when Oliver asks for more clearly depicts their belief that their system is somehow just. They are quick to point out that anyone is free to leave the workhouse if they choose, and they are quick to remove Oliver the minute his behavior threatens their control.

Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

In this chapter, Oliver spends most of his time in solitary confinement, except for the regular beatings he received in the mornings, courtesy of Mr. Brumble, and his occasional flogging in the dining hall in front of the other boys. The board took every opportunity to make an example of Oliver while he was still in the workhouse. Mr. Gamfield, a chimney sweep, wishes to take Oliver as his apprentice. He is a frightening looking man, and Oliver is very afraid of him. The board discusses the matter, and approves the assignment, though they negotiate down the 5 pounds that they originally promised, because the work is dirty. Mr. Brumble takes Oliver to the magistrate, who is required to sign off on the apprenticeship. Oliver is very frightened, and bursts into tears in front of the magistrate, who then refuses to sign off on the apprenticeship. Mr. Bumble is ordered to take Oliver back to the workhouse, and "treat him kindly."

Chapter 3 Analysis

In this chapter we see the first glimpse of human kindness shown toward Oliver. The magistrate's behavior is in stark contrast to that of the other characters. However, the point is still clear that, while the magistrate refuses to send Oliver to live with a man that he clearly is frightened by, Oliver's fate is still that of a workhouse orphan. He will still ultimately be indentured to someone, and will remain in solitary confinement until an apprenticeship is found. So, while the humanity of the magistrate is striking to the reader, it begs the question, "Is Oliver any better because of it?"

Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

In Chapter 4, Oliver becomes apprenticed to Mr. Sowerberry, the local undertaker. He is very frightened to leave the workhouse, and becomes even more so when he meets his new mistress and sees his new living arrangements. Mrs. Sowerberry has a complete disdain for children, claiming that they eat too much. She feeds Oliver the scraps she has out for the dog, and requires him to sleep among the coffins.

Chapter 4 Analysis

Here we are again struck by Oliver's strength and courage. He cries uncontrollably as Mr. Bumble is escorting him to Mr. Sowerberry's house, but once inside, puts on a brave face, as long as others are present. He eats the scraps provided to him ravenously. Dickens takes the opportunity in this chapter to preach a bit about poverty, hunger, and the middle class world's lack of understanding of both. Dickens states, as the narrator of the story, that he wishes a well-fed philosopher could witness the fervor with which Oliver devoured the scraps. And, moreover, he wishes that same philosopher could enjoy his own meal nearly so much.

Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

In Chapter 5, Oliver spends his first sad night among the coffins, and is awakened in the morning, by Noah Claypole, his supervisor, of sorts. Noah is a bit of a charity case himself, though he is proud of the fact that he is not an orphan. He immediately begins to derive pleasure from belittling Oliver, particularly about his mother. Mr. Sowerberry has taken somewhat of a liking to Oliver, and decides that he should pose as a mute, to be dressed up and paraded at funerals. Oliver pays his first visit to a grieving family, and to the burial where the mother has died. He is most uncomfortable, but Mr. Sowerberry assures him that he will get used to it.

Chapter 5 Analysis

This chapter gives particular note to how quickly Oliver has to grow up. He is suddenly put into the adult world, and made to observe things that are not meant for children. Again he shows his strength, and keeps his questions to himself, particularly at the end of the chapter, when Mr. Sowerberry tells him he'll get used to the undertaking business, and Oliver wonders, "How long did it take you to get used to it?"

Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary

Oliver has been with Mr. Sowerberry for several months now, and leads the procession at many infant funerals, as measles has caused a large number of children's deaths. Mr. Sowerberry is being very kind to Oliver, and he is growing more comfortable. Noah is jealous of Oliver's relationship with Oliver, and begins to taunt him even more. One particular evening, Noah relentlessly goads Oliver about his mother, calling her a bad woman. Eventually, Oliver, filled with rage, attacks Noah, grabbing him by the throat. Noah screams that Oliver is going to murder him, and Charlotte and Mrs. Sowerberry panic. Charlotte begins hitting Oliver, Mrs. Sowerberry scratching his face, and Noah pummels him. When it is all over, Oliver is locked in the cellar, and Mrs. Sowerberry collapses into tears. They leave him in the cellar, saying they fear he will kill them with Mr. Sowerberry out of the house. Mrs. Sowerberry sends Noah to tell Mr. Brumble about the incident.

Chapter 6 Analysis

Oliver shows his breaking point in this chapter. As an orphaned little boy, he has very little to cling to, making his mother's imagined memory, sacred to him. But once he reacts in an even slightly negative way toward Noah, he is immediately put out, showing that, even here, where he has lived for months, he is not cared for or valued.

Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary

Noah tells Mr. Brumble that Oliver has tried to murder him, Charlotte and Mrs. Sowerberry. He asks if Mr. Brumble has time to come and flog Oliver, since Mr. Sowerberry is out of the house. Mr. Bumble agrees, and when he reaches the Sowerberry home, he can hear Oliver still screaming and kicking the door. Mr. Brumble calls out to Oliver, and asks him if he is scared that he is here to see him. Mrs. Sowerberry says that Oliver must have gone mad, and Mr. Brumble informs her that the problem is that he has been too well fed. At this point, Mr. Sowerberry returns, and is told of the situation. He pulls Oliver out of the closet, and Oliver explains that Noah was calling his mother names. An argument between Oliver and Mrs. Sowerberry ensues, and Mrs. Sowerberry begins to cry. Though he doesn't want to, Mr. Sowerberry flogs Oliver to appease his wife. Oliver does not flinch or cry at his beating, and he is locked up for the rest of the day with a scrap of bread and some water. At bedtime, Mrs. Sowerberry sends Oliver to his room for bed. Only then does Oliver cry. He gathers his few belongings, and when morning comes, he leaves. He runs by the workhouse and sees a child he knew outside. He talks to him briefly and the child hugs him and wishes him well.

Chapter 7 Analysis

This chapter continues to drive home the fact that Oliver is never allowed to be a child, and never treated like one. His refusal to be quiet when his mother is being insulted, and his stoic attitude about his beating, once again shows the strength and courage that the young boy possesses. He also shows great courage by leaving the Sowerberry home, since he has only a penny and no idea where he is going. Dickens notes that the hug and well wishes that Oliver receives from the little boy at the workhouse as he is leaving town, is the first Oliver has ever received from anyone.

Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary

Oliver leaves town with no real plans as to where he is going. But when he is 5 miles out of town, he sees a sign saying that London is 70 miles away. So he sets his sights on walking to London, because he has heard that there are many ways to make a living there. He walks 20 miles the first day, eating only a crust of bread he has brought from the Sowerberry's and some water he begs from strangers. When night comes, he sleeps in an open field. Over the days, he looks for ways to get food or money, including trying to keep up with a stagecoach running uphill, for the promise of a half penny at the top. One kind man gives him a meal of bread and cheese, and a woman who takes care of him and treats him with more kindness and sympathy than he has ever known. On the seventh day, he reaches the village of Barnet, and meets Jack Dawkins, aka the Artful Dodger, who feeds him ham, bread and beer, and offers to take him to a place in London where he can spend the night. Oliver finds London very dirty, but he follows Jack home, where his is introduced to Fagin, the man of the house, who welcomes Oliver with food, gin and a bed.

Chapter 8 Analysis

Once again, Oliver's persistence is shown as he continues to trudge on to London. As is always the case in this story, the little bit of kindness he is shown is noticeable and touching, simply because there is so little of it. Oliver can't help but believe his luck might be changing a bit when he meets Jack. The dirtiness that Oliver notices in London strikes him, and seems to foreshadow the dirty life that Oliver is about to be dragged into.

Chapter 9

Chapter 9 Summary

When Oliver wakes up the next morning, he sees Fagin looking at watches and other jewelry that he has hidden. He pretends to be asleep, but Fagin catches him and asks what he has seen. Oliver admits to having seen the jewels, and Fagin tells him that it is for his old age. Fagin gives Oliver water to wash in, and the Dodger returns with Charley Bates. Fagin asks what their take was for the day, and is shown some purses and handkerchiefs they have brought home. Oliver is very vaguely led to believe that they have made them. Oliver participates in a game where the object is to remove things from Fagin's pocket unnoticed, and he proves to be very good at it. Fagin tells Oliver to make Jack and Charley his models. Fagin gives Oliver a shilling, and teaches him to take the monograms out of the handkerchiefs Charley has stolen.

Chapter 9 Analysis

Oliver's naiveté begins to show in this chapter. He is, of course just a child, and so starved, literally and figuratively; that he does not see the purpose behind the kindness he is being shown. He looks to his new friends for direction and is eager to please.

Chapter 10

Chapter 10 Summary

For the next several days, Oliver spends his time removing the marks from handkerchiefs and playing the pickpocket game, but he is eager to get out of the house. He has seen Fagin chastise the boys when they come home empty handed, even to the point of knocking them down the stairs, so Oliver is eager to pull his own weight. Fagin allows him to go out with Jack and Charley, who quickly spot a pickpocket target. Oliver has no idea what is about to happen. Jack and Charley steal the man's handkerchief and slip away. Oliver is horrified at what has happened, and begins to run when he realizes what they have done. The man believes Oliver has stolen the handkerchief, and a chase ensues, with everyone, including Jack and Charley, crying, "Stop, thief!" Oliver is knocked down and caught, and Jack and Charley leave him as a police officer takes him away.

Chapter 11

Chapter 10 Summary

Oliver learns a huge lesson in this chapter – his whole new world crashes down on him, as he realizes what his new occupation is to be, and as his friends desert him. This chapter begins a whole new phase of growing up for our central character.

Chapter 12

Chapter 11 Summary

Oliver is taken to jail, and subsequently brought before the magistrate, Mr. Fang, and the robbery victim, Mr. Brownlow. Mr. Fang is quite harsh with Oliver, though Mr. Brownlow is very sympathetic to Oliver, who is terrified. Mr. Brownlow fears that Oliver is ill, and before the hearing is over, Oliver has fainted. Mr. Fang is still unsympathetic, and sentences Oliver to three months hard labor. As the court is adjourned, the keeper of the bookstall comes in and testifies that he saw another boy commit the crime. Oliver's face is bathed with water and he leaves in a coach with Mr. Brownlow and the bookstall owner.

Chapter 11 Analysis

Oliver experiences the terror of jail in this chapter, but he also experiences his first glimpse of true justice, when the bookstall keeper comes forward, and when Mr. Brownlow feels sympathy for him.

Chapter 13

Chapter 12 Summary

Oliver is very ill with a fever, and is bedridden for quite some time. He is attended by Mr. Brownlow's housekeeper and is treated very kindly. Once he is up and about, he takes a liking to a painting of a woman that hangs in Mr. Brownlow's living room. Though he doesn't realize it, he bears a striking resemblance to the woman in the picture, and Mr. Brownlow has it moved out of the room. In this chapter, Dickens also takes the time to report on the Dodger and Charley's activities after the handkerchief robbery. He reports that the boys became interested only in their self- preservation, which, according to Dickens, is human nature, and as soon as they realized that Oliver had been captured, made their way out of the area as quickly as possible. Charley found great amusement in the incident, but the Dodger was quite concerned about Fagin's reaction to them coming home without Oliver.

Chapter 12 Analysis

Oliver feels like a dream has come true in this chapter. He is part of a family, treated kindly and well provided for. The housekeeper takes a particular liking to him, and becomes the closest thing to a mother Oliver has ever had. The mention of the portrait that looks like Oliver is no doubt a foreshadowing of things to come.

Chapter 14

Chapter 13 Summary

The Dodger and Charley return to Fagin, who questions them about Oliver. They tell him that the police have him, and Fagin is quite angry with them. They are visited by Fagin's cohort in crime, Bill Sikes, and his girlfriend Nancy. Bill is dirty, cantankerous and downright mean. Fagin tells Sikes about Oliver's capture, and that he fears that Oliver may say something to the police that would incriminate Fagin, Bill and the boys. They determine that they must find and capture him. They determine that Nancy should go to the police office and try to find out what has become of Oliver. She is told that the prosecutor took Oliver home, but that they are not sure where he lives. When this is reported to Fagin and Sikes, they order Charley Bates to lurk around and listen until he can determine where Oliver might be.

Chapter 13 Analysis

Fagin shows his first real fear in this chapter, and the strange relationships between Sikes and Fagin, and Sikes and Nancy begin to take shape. Fagin and Sikes have a distinct fear and dislike of each other, yet share a strange camaraderie. By contrast, Nancy is the classic female victim character. She hates her situation, but believes that she loves Bill, and believes she has no other alternatives in life. These relationships will further unfold throughout the novel, and will bring to light a bizarre sort of family unit.

Chapter 15

Chapter 14 Summary

Oliver has noticed that the portrait is missing, and has inquired about it. Mr. Brownlow tells him that he has removed it because he is afraid that it might bother Oliver, but Oliver reports that he quite liked it. He is promised that when he is well he will be able to see the portrait again. Mr. Brownlow asks to see Oliver in his study, where he inquires about Oliver's past. Oliver tells him his story, and Mr. Brownlow explains that he has been duped by others he has tried to help, and that he hopes that Oliver will remain truthful with him. He promises Oliver that he will take care of him as long as Oliver remains honest. Mr. Brownlow's friend, Mr. Grimwig visits, and informs Mr. Brownlow that he doesn't believe that Oliver is honest. He tells Mr. Brownlow that Oliver will steal from him and leave at the first opportunity. Mr. Brownlow has some books that need to be returned to the bookseller, so it is decided that Oliver will take them. He is given a 5-pound note, and says the trip should take no more than 10 minutes. Mr. Grimwig predicts that Oliver will never return, and Mr. Brownlow says he would bet his life on Oliver's honesty.

Chapter 14 Analysis

Mr. Grimwig's presence in this chapter serves as a reminder that Oliver will always be regarded in some circles as a street urchin not worthy of trust. But Oliver has won the hearts of Mr. Brownlow and Mrs. Bedwin, and he is eager to be true to his newly acquired family. Mr. Grimwig's prediction foreshadows the next chapter.

Chapter 16

Chapter 15 Summary

The chapter opens with Bill Sikes beating his dog, and the dog growling and threatening to bite him. Fagin comes in and gives Bill some money, his take from a recent robbery. Nancy comes in and Fagin inquires as to whether she has been looking for Oliver. She says she has but that he has been ill. She quickly stops, before she says too much, and remarks that it is time to leave. Bill says he will walk her part of the way. Meanwhile, Oliver has started on his trip to the bookseller's. He meets Nancy and Bill along the way, and Nancy starts screaming – "Brother, where have you been," and puts her arms around his neck. A crowd gathers, and Nancy convinces them that Oliver is her runaway brother. He tries to convince them that he is not, but eventually Nancy and Bill take him away, only after he hit by the onlookers and accused of stealing the books he is trying to return. Meanwhile, Mr. Brownlow and Mr.Grimwig await Oliver's return.

Chapter 15 Analysis

This chapter in particular tears at the reader's heartstrings, because not only do you have to see Oliver sent back to his life of misery, but you feel the pain in his heart and in Mr. Brownlow's heart when he doesn't return.

Chapter 17

Chapter 16 Summary

Bill and Nancy walk Oliver to Fagin's house, where Fagin greets Oliver sarcastically. The boys take great amusement in Oliver's nice new clothes and take his money. Oliver begs them to give the books back to the bookseller, lest everyone think he stole them. Fagin laughs, and says, yes, he is pleased that they will think the books stolen. With this, Oliver shrieks and runs crying from the room. Fagin and the boys run after him, and Bill threatens to send the dog after him. Nancy blocks him and forbids Bill to harm him. Fagin comes back into the room with Oliver, and takes a club and strikes him on the shoulders for trying to leave. Nancy takes the club and throws it into the fire, threatening to kill Fagin if he hurts Oliver. Nancy goes on in a rage for quite a while; enough to make Bill and Fagin take care not to incite her further. Eventually, Charley takes Oliver's good clothes, finds him some old ones, and sends him to bed.

Chapter 16 Analysis

Nancy becomes more of a central character in this chapter. We see her passion and grief for the way Oliver is treated, and we learn that she too, was made to steal for Bill when she was a child. She has taken a great liking to Oliver, and his plight makes her relive her own childhood. Nancy's character is in great contrast to Fagin and Sikes, because she shows conscience.

Chapter 18

Chapter 17 Summary

Mr. Brumble pays a visit to Mrs. Mann and explains to her that he is going to London to go to court concerning trying to transfer two sickly paupers to another parish. He pays Mrs. Mann her monthly stipend, and asks to see Dick. Dick tells Mr. Brumble to give his love to Oliver Twist. And to tell Oliver that Dick is glad that he will die young, because then he sister won't have forgotten him. Mr. Brumble and Mrs. Mann are quite offended, and believe this to be yet another case of Oliver having poisoned children of the parish. Mr. Brumble travels to London, where he sees a sign posting a reward of 5 guineas for anyone with information regarding Oliver Twist's whereabouts or history. Mr. Brumble goes to visit Mr. Brownlow, and tells Mr. Brownlow what a terrible child Oliver was when he was taken care of by the parish. When Mr. Bumble leaves, Mr. Brownlow tells Mrs. Bedwin that Oliver's name is never to be mentioned again.

Chapter 17 Analysis

Oliver has long been a thorn in Mr. Brumble's side, and he relishes the opportunity to speak ill of him. This chapter shows what an impression Oliver makes on everyone he meets. To only be a poor orphan, shuttled from place to place, he has made a significant impression on everyone he has come in contact with. For Mr. Brumble the impression is one of disdain, because Oliver had the nerve to ask for more gruel, and because he ran away from an apprenticeship. But Oliver has made a place in Mr. Brownlow's heart, and he is saddened at the news that Mr. Brumble brings him.

Chapter 19

Chapter 18 Summary

Fagin gives Oliver a long lecture on the evil of disobeying, and makes thinly veiled threats to Oliver's life if he tries to leave again. For several days, Oliver is left in the house all day, first locked in one room, and then locked in the house. He explores the house, finding rats and dirt in every room. Charley and the Dodger take their chances to make fun of him, and Oliver, eager for some activity, shines Charley's boots. Charley and Dodger tell Oliver that he should willingly work for Fagin, and they allude to the fact that they skim off the top before handing over their take to Fagin. Charley talks about being able to retire one day on what he is keeping. Oliver says he would just rather leave, but Dodger and Charley remind him that Fagin will never let that happen. Fagin and the boys spend lots of time telling Oliver stories about their robberies, and playing the pickpocket game. In short, they are working to make Oliver one of them, so that he will not think of leaving again.

Chapter 18 Analysis

Fagin does his utmost to brainwash Oliver, as he is aware that he cannot physically keep Oliver from escaping forever. He limits his outside activity and tells him stories about being a criminal, many of which make Oliver laugh. All of the people in Fagin's clan behave the way they do because they have known no other life. Fagin works to make Oliver know no other life as well.

Chapter 20

Chapter 19 Summary

Fagin visits Bill Sikes, where they discuss an upcoming robbery they have planned. They have tried to get an insider in the house to help them, but have been unable to find one. They have scoped out the house, and determined that they need a small boy in order to get into the small window of the house. They decide that Oliver is whom they need to take, and Fagin is to frighten him into cooperation. Nancy is to come to Fagin's house the next evening to take Oliver, as they feel that he will be more cooperative with her.

Chapter 19 Analysis

This chapter lays out the plan for an important event in the story. The robbery that is about to take place will change life significantly for Oliver and the other major characters. This will be the test as to whether Fagin's brainwashing has been effective.

Chapter 21

Chapter 20 Summary

The next morning Oliver is given new shoes, and told that he will be taken to Bill Sikes house that evening. He is quite afraid, and worried that he is being sent there to live. Fagin assures him that he will not send him away, but carefully warns him that his very life is in danger if he is not cooperative. He is left with a candle and a novel to wait. He reads the book – a history of criminals and their crimes. Oliver prays that he be spared from a life of crime and that he be rescued. Nancy comes to collect Oliver. She tells him that she is doing her best to keep him safe, and will continue to do so, but that Oliver must be quiet and cooperative, or neither of them will be safe. When they arrive at Bill Sikes' house, he warns Oliver that he carries a gun, and that he will not hesitate to kill Oliver if he crosses him. Oliver is put to bed, and awakened early in the morning to leave with Bill. He again threatens Oliver with the gun, and they set off. Nancy sits by the fire and does not look at them as they leave.

Chapter 20 Analysis

Oliver's new brainwashing, as well as his faith, is about to be put to the test, though he has not been told was his assignment will be. Nancy, once again, does the best she can by Oliver, but is shackled by her circumstances.

Chapter 22

Chapter 21 Summary

Oliver and Sikes begin traveling, first walking and then catching a ride in a cart. They travel all day, and stop at a pub for dinner. Sikes strikes up a conversation with a man, who agrees to give them a ride. They ride in the man's cart for a while, and then walk a bit farther to a house, and go in.

Chapter 21 Analysis

Oliver is completely in the dark about what he and Bill are about to do, and simply remains quiet and cooperative in order to not raise Bill's ire, but he is quite afraid. Once, when they cross over a river, Oliver believes that Sikes has brought him here to murder him.

Chapter 23

Chapter 22 Summary

They have arrived at Toby Crackit's house, and are greeted by Toby and Barney, his helper. They drink some wine – forcing Oliver to have some too. Oliver chokes on it, causing much amusement among the thieves. The men eat, but Oliver eats only a small crust of bread, because of his fear. They sleep for a while, and then awaken to Barney packing bags. The four of them leave together, and walk to a house surrounded by a wall. Toby climbs the wall and then Sikes hoists up Oliver to put him over the wall, as well. Oliver then realizes what they are about to do, and begins to cry, and sinks to his knees. He begs the men to let him go, to run away and die in the fields. He promises he will never come near them. Bill cocks the pistol, but Toby knocks it out of his hand, and puts his hand over Oliver's mouth, to silence him. He hoists Oliver up to the house, telling him to be quiet. They open the shutters to the window, and explain to Oliver that he must climb through the window, take the light up the stairs and down the hall, and unlock the outside door for the men. Oliver is let into the house, and decides that, even if he dies in the attempt, he will try to alarm the family. Suddenly, Sikes cries out for Oliver to come back, and Oliver drops the lantern. Two men appear at the top of the stairs, and a shot is fired. Oliver falls back. Sikes fires at the men and then drags Oliver out. Oliver has been hit by the first shot, and he faints as he is being dragged out of the house.

Chapter 22 Analysis

Here, we are assured that our hero has not changed his ways. He is terrified, but willing to die in order to warn the family of the robbery that is about to take place. He still is shown to be a brave and honest child, even after Fagin's brainwashing and his terrible circumstances. The chapter ends with Oliver's fainting, leaving the reader to wonder about Oliver's fate.

Chapter 24

Chapter 23 Summary

Mrs. Corney is about to have a cup of tea, when Mr. Bumble comes to visit. They discuss the ingratitude of the paupers, and have tea. Mr. Bumble sits closer and closer to Mrs. Corney and flirts with her. After some time, he kisses her, and Mrs. Corney threatens to scream. Before he can kiss her again, there is a knock at the door. A woman tells Mrs. Corney that Old Sally is dying and needs to speak with her before she goes. Mrs. Corney follows the woman, leaving Mr. Bumble alone at her house.

Chapter 23 Analysis

Mrs. Corney is summoned to attend the deathbed of Old Sally, one of the workhouse paupers, for what reason, we are not sure. In addition, Mr. Bumble seems intent upon advancing his relationship with Mrs. Bumble.

Chapter 25

Chapter 24 Summary

Old Sally is very ill, and not expected to live more than a few hours. She has been in a fit, but is quiet now. Mrs. Corney is about to leave, saying that the women have dragged her here for no reason, when the woman sits upright. Old Sally tells Mrs. Corney to come near and let her whisper in her ear. She tells the other women to leave. She tells Mrs. Corney that years ago she nursed a woman who gave birth to a boy and that she stole gold from her after she died. Old Sally says that it must have been very precious to the woman, since she could have sold it for food and clothing, but had held onto it. Old Sally tells Mrs. Corney that she feels guilty that she took the gold, and did not see that the woman's child got the gold. She says that the woman told her that she hoped that one day the child would not feel disgraced to hear his mother's name. She tells Mrs. Corney that the boy was called Oliver. Old Sally dies before she tells Mrs. Corney exactly what the piece of gold is.

Chapter 24 Analysis

Mrs. Corney learns a great secret about Oliver here, but Old Sally dies before the full tale is told. The reader is left to wonder what significance the gold might have to Oliver's life, and how it might have changed it had Old Sally been honest in the first place.

Chapter 26

Chapter 25 Summary

Fagin, Charley, Dodger and a character named Tom Chitling are playing cards, and discussing Tom's love life, when Toby Crackit comes to visit. Toby asks Fagin about Bill- and Fagin starts, as he thinks that Toby knows about them. Fagin has no idea what has happened to Sikes and Oliver, and Toby tells him that Oliver was shot, and left lying in a ditch, for dead, after the failed robbery attempt. Fagin runs out of the house.

Chapter 25 Analysis

Fagin is startled to learn that Toby has no knowledge of the whereabouts of Sikes or Oliver, and he is immediately concerned about Oliver's condition.

Chapter 27

Chapter 26 Summary

Fagin runs out, looking for Sikes or a man named Monks at the local bars. He finds Nancy in a back room at one of the bars, and asks her about Sikes. She says she does not know where he is, and that she hopes that Oliver is dead, so that he is out of his misery and her head. Fagin tells her she's just drunk, and she says maybe she is, but she believes that if Toby got out alive, so did Bill. Fagin leaves her, content that Sikes has not returned. Fagin returns home to find Mr. Monks waiting for him. Fagin explains to Monks what has happened to Oliver, and Monks tells him he should have kept the boy with him, rather than sending him with Sikes. He asks Fagin why he couldn't have seen that Oliver got caught stealing and sent out of the kingdom. Fagin tells Monks that Oliver was not easy to train into the business, and that he never had anything to frighten him with. He tells Monks that he got Oliver back for him once, using Nancy, but that then Nancy took a liking to Oliver. Monks reminds Fagin that he never ordered anything violent to happen to Oliver, and if he is dead, it is not his fault. Fagin assures Monks that if Oliver is still alive; he can still make a thief of him. Monks then believes he sees the shadow of a woman briefly pass by.

Chapter 26 Analysis

Here we are introduced to the character of Monks. He has a great interest in Oliver's fate, though we don't know why. We also learn that Monks has had a hand in Fagin's keeping of Oliver, apparently from the start. We also learn that Sikes' whereabouts are not known to anyone.

Chapter 28

Chapter 27 Summary

This chapter takes us back to Mrs. Corney's house, where Mr. Bumble has been waiting for her. While she has been gone, he has helped himself to taking inventory of everything in her possession, including her small stash of money. Mrs. Corney returns, and Mr. Bumble talks to her about marriage. He tells her that the master of the workhouse is about to die, and that when he does, his job will need to be filled, leaving open the opportunity for Mr. Bumble to become the master of the workhouse, and marry Mrs. Corney and live with her. Mrs. Corney agrees and the matter is settled. But Mrs. Corney seems agitated, and Mr. Bumble inquires as to why, and she says she will tell him after they are married. On his way home, Mr. Bumble stops by Mr. Sowerberry's to make arrangements for Old Sally's funeral. Mr. Sowerberry is out, and he finds Noah and Charlotte there, drunk, eating oysters, kissing and flirting.

Chapter 27 Analysis

This chapter lays out Mr. Bumble's plans for his new life. He has determined that Mrs. Corney will be his wife, and he will live with her as the master of the workhouse. It is worth noting that Mrs. Corney does not share Old Sally's story with Mr. Bumble.

Chapter 29

Chapter 28 Summary

This chapter goes back to finish the account of the night of the robbery. Sikes and Toby are running away, with Sikes carrying Oliver, who is slowing them down. Sikes calls for Toby to come and help. Toby hesitates and Sikes draws his gun, but Toby keeps going. Sikes lays Oliver in a ditch, when the followers get closer, and he starts to run, leaving Oliver behind. There are three men chasing them. Mr. Giles, the butler and steward of the house, is in charge. The three men stop and discuss whether to keep going after the robbers, or go home. They all agree that they are afraid, and decide to go home. The night gets cold, and Oliver still lies in the spot where Sikes left him. When morning comes, Oliver wakes feeling very weak, and in a great deal of pain. He sees a house, and starts to stagger toward it. When he gets closer, he realizes that this is the house they were trying to rob, and he is very afraid. He thinks of running away, but realizes he has nowhere to go, so he knocks on the door. Mr. Giles and the servants are recounting last night's events to the female servants, when they hear the knock on the door. The men go to the door to find Oliver, and declare him one of the robbers from the night before. Mr. Giles says that Oliver is wounded and admits that he shot him. A woman's voice is heard, asking how he is. Mr. Giles, proud that he has shot a robber, says he is wounded. The lady says to treat Oliver kindly, and let her ask her aunt what they are to do. Mr. Giles is told to take Oliver carefully up to Mr. Giles room and to send someone for a constable and doctor.

Chapter 28 Analysis

Oliver's luck is about to change, though he doesn't know it yet. He has taken a great risk by knocking on the door of the house he has robbed, but he realizes that he will die if he doesn't and that he has nowhere else to go. Mr. Giles is a good man, but, at this point in the story, sees Oliver as only a thief. He is proud that he has been able to shoot a would-be robber, and also is covering up a bit for the fact that he and the other servants gave up the chase early out of fear the night before.

Chapter 30

Chapter 29 Summary

Mr. Giles, Mrs. Maylie, who is the lady of the house, and Rose, her niece, discuss the thief upstairs. Mr. Giles, embarrassed, fails to tell them that the thief is a child. The doctor visits Oliver and asks Rose if she wishes to see him.

Chapter 29 Analysis

Mr. Giles is not sure what to do. He has seen that the ladies of the house wish to treat the thief with compassion even if he is an adult, so he wonders what they will say to him when they realize he has shot a child. The doctor is quite amused, and wants Rose to see the thief.

Chapter 31

Chapter 30 Summary

Rose visits with Oliver, and, when she sees that he is just a child, begs Mrs. Maylie not to prosecute him. Oliver tells Mrs. Maylie and Rose his entire life story, and they, and the doctor are very moved, and wish to protect him. The doctor asks Mr. Giles if he can be 100 percent sure that Oliver is the robber from the night before. He also tells Mr. Giles that he may be in trouble with the law for shooting a child.

Chapter 30 Analysis

Rose, Mrs. Maylie and the doctor need a way to keep from prosecuting Oliver. Their plan is to convince Giles that he is not sure that Oliver was really the robber. This will mean that Giles doesn't admit that Oliver is the person he shot, either. The doctor plans to try and convince Mr. Giles that this is the best approach for both Oliver and himself.

Chapter 32

Chapter 31 Summary

The police arrive to question about the robbery. After investigating, they say that it was definitely a professional job. They meet Oliver, who has grown quite ill, and ask Giles if he is the boy who was with the robbers. Giles says he can't be sure that Oliver was the boy with the robbers, and, in fact, he thinks that it was not Oliver, after all. The police leave, and Oliver is left in the care of Mrs. Maylie

Chapter 31 Analysis

Mr. Giles attempt at self-preservation serves to be a great thing for Oliver. Without identification to connect him to the robbery, the police cannot prosecute, and Oliver can stay with the kind woman and her niece.

Chapter 33

Chapter 32 Summary

Oliver grows strong and well being attended by Rose and Mrs. Maylie. He explains to them that he would like to go see Mr. Brownlow, to thank him for his kindness. Mrs. Maylie has him driven to Mr. Brownlow's house, only to find that Mr. Brownlow has gone to the West Indies. Oliver, Mrs. Maylie and Rose go to the country for the spring, where Oliver thrives. He gets tutoring, learns to garden, helps out around the house, and plays in the fresh air.

Chapter 32 Analysis

This chapter is significant because it shows that Oliver has not changed. All of Fagin's attempts to brainwash Oliver have failed. He is still a sweet and honest child, who remembers those who have been kind to him, and wishes to thank them and let them know that he is ok.

Chapter 34

Chapter 33 Summary

Rose becomes very ill, with a very high fever. For weeks they fear that she will die, and Oliver and Mrs. Maylie attend her bedside. Oliver is sent on an errand to send a letter for Mrs. Maylie, and happens upon a man who acts to be in a fit of madness. He is quite rude to Oliver, and frightens him. After many weeks of illness, Rose recovers.

Chapter 33 Analysis

Oliver has become a member of Mrs. Maylie's family, and is very saddened by Rose's illness. The madman in this chapter frightens Oliver, but he soon forgets it. But we will see this character again.

Chapter 35

Chapter 34 Summary

Mrs. Maylie's son, Harry, comes to visit. He has been worried about Rose. He is in love with Rose, and wishes to see her. He asks Mrs. Maylie if Rose is in love with anyone else, and Mrs. Maylie assures him that she is not. She tells Harry that there may be some problems with he and Rose being together because of the stain on Rose's name. Meanwhile, Oliver picks flowers for Rose, as does Harry, and everyone generally celebrates her recovery. Oliver is doing very well with his studies. He takes a nap after studying one day, and dreams that he is with Fagin again. The nightmare wakes him, and finds Fagin and the crazy man he saw when he went into town, looking in his window. They disappear quickly, and Oliver calls for help.

Chapter 34 Analysis

We find out in this chapter that Rose is not really Mrs. Maylie's niece, though we don't really know who she is, or what is meant by the stain on her name. Harry, having been worried by her illness, has come to declare his love for her, but there seem to be many unanswered questions about he and Rose. The crazy man reappears, this time with Fagin, and the reader now knows that Fagin knows Oliver's whereabouts.

Chapter 36

Chapter 35 Summary

All the men in the house search diligently for Fagin and the other man, but they seem to have disappeared into thin air. There are no footprints or telltale signs that they have been there, leaving the men to wonder if Oliver dreamed it. But Oliver insists that it really happened, and the men continue to look even the next day. Harry professes his love to Rose. She says she cannot be with him because of the stain on her name. She cannot bear the thought of the stain affecting him and his career. Harry asks her if she might feel differently if he was not wealthy and successful, and she says yes. They agree to discuss it once more in a year. Harry decides to leave that day.

Chapter 35 Analysis

We still do not know the extent of the so-called "stain" on Rose's name, but we know that there must be something very significant from her past that would make it difficult for her to be the wife of a politician. Harry's heartbreak at Rose's answer causes him to decide to leave rather abruptly.

Chapter 37

Chapter 36 Summary

Harry asks Oliver to write to him once every two weeks to let him know how he, Mrs. Maylie and Rose are doing. Oliver agrees and is pleased to be assigned such an important task. Harry asks Oliver not to let Rose or Mrs. Maylie know that he is writing to him. Harry leaves in a coach with the doctor, who has been to check on Rose.

Chapter 36 Analysis

Harry wishes to keep tabs on Rose, and asks Oliver to help him with this. Oliver, always eager to help out, is pleased with his new responsibility.

Chapter 38

Chapter 37 Summary

Mr. Bumble has married Mrs. Corney, and has left his job as the beadle to become the master of the workhouse. He is quite unhappy with his new position and his new wife. Mrs. Bumble ridicules him in front of the workhouse paupers. He goes for a walk, and ends up in a bar, where a man questions if he used to be the beadle. Mr. Bumble answers yes, and the man offers to pay him for some information. He asks him to think back to Oliver's birth. The man is anxious to find the nurse that attended the birth. Mr. Bumble tells him that she has died, but that he knows the woman she spoke to in secret about Oliver, just before her death. The man wants to see this woman, and gives Mr. Bumble an address to bring her to the next night. Mr. Bumble inquires the man's name, and is told only "Monks."

Chapter 37 Analysis

Monks is again looking into Oliver's history and birth, though we don't yet know why. Mr. Bumble, of course, is eager to do anything for money, and is pleased that he might house some important information.

Chapter 39

Chapter 38 Summary

Mr. and Mrs. Bumble go to visit Monks to tell him the story of Oliver's birth. Mrs. Bumble demands twenty-five pounds from Monks, and tells him the story. She says that on her deathbed, Old Sally admits that she stole gold off the woman's corpse. She pawned it, and when she died, she gave the pawn ticket to Mrs. Bumble. Mrs. Bumble retrieved the item. It was a gold locket containing two locks of hair and a plain gold wedding band. She gives the locket to Monks, who throws it into the river.

Chapter 38 Analysis

The reader finally finds out what was stolen from Oliver's mother, but we still don't know the significance of the locket with the locks of hair and wedding ring. What we do know, however is that Monks is very anxious to destroy any evidence of Oliver's mother.

Chapter 40

Chapter 39 Summary

Sikes has been ill with a fever. Nancy has tended him. Fagin, Charley and Dodger come to visit and bring some dinner. Sikes demands money, and Nancy follows Fagin home to get it. Monks visits while she is there, and she overhears Fagin tell Monks where Oliver is located. As Nancy leaves, she is tempted to run, but eventually goes home to Bill. But the next night, when Bill goes to sleep, she leaves and goes to a hotel where Rose, Mrs. Maylie and Oliver are staying. She asks to see Rose.

Chapter 39 Analysis

Nancy is once again looking out for Oliver's best interests. She literally risks her life to go and warn Rose of Oliver's danger.

Chapter 41

Chapter 40 Summary

Nancy, after much difficulty with the hotel staff, meets with Rose. She tells Rose that it was difficult to get in to see her, and Rose apologizes if Nancy was given any trouble. Nancy tells Rose that she is about to put her life and the lives of others into Rose's hands. She tells Rose that she is the woman who dragged Oliver back to Fagin's from Mr. Brownlow's house. She tells Rose that she has had a hard life, and has had to do many dishonest things to survive. Rose is very sympathetic to Nancy. Nancy asks Rose if she knows a man named Monks. Rose assures her that she does not, and Nancy says that he knows Rose and her whereabouts, and that Oliver is with her. She tells Rose that she overheard Monks tell Fagin of their location. She tells Nancy that she had overheard Fagin and Monks talking once before, and that during the first conversation she learned that Monks had been watching Oliver for some time, and had found him with Fagin's boys. He then struck a deal with Fagin, that he should watch over Oliver and turn him into a thief. Fagin was to be paid money for getting Oliver back from Brownlow, and even more money if he could make a thief of Oliver.

Nancy is not sure, however, why Monks is watching Oliver. Nancy tells Rose that Monks has said that all traces of the boy's heritage are in the river and he has the money safely now. But he says he would still have preferred to be able to see Oliver in jail, to "bring down the boast of the father's will." Monks has said that what he wanted was to see Oliver hanged, but only if it could be done so without Monks being found out. He says that if Oliver tries to make use of his name, Monks will harm him yet. He reveals that Oliver is his brother. He tells Fagin that he wonders how much money Mrs. Maylie would pay to know whom her Oliver really is. Nancy tells Rose that Monks is a very dangerous man. Nancy tells Rose that she must get back to Bill before he wakes up. Rose pleads with Nancy to let her help her to get out of her present situation. She says she will help Nancy so that she doesn't have to go back to her life on the streets. But Nancy says that she must go back to Bill, for she knows no other life, and she does not want Bill to be arrested, for he surely will die. She asks Rose to promise her that she will not betray her in her attempt to take care of Oliver. Rose assures Nancy that her secret is safe. Nancy advises Rose to tell the story to some man that she trusts, so that they can figure out what to do. Nancy tells Rose that every Sunday night, she will be on the London Bridge from 11pm until midnight, in case Rose needs to get in touch with her. Rose again tries to appeal to Nancy to leave Bill, but Nancy cannot be persuaded. Rose also offers Nancy money so that she can live without stealing, but Nancy refuses this as well.

Chapter 40 Analysis

Nancy, once again, comes to Oliver's rescue, and the mystery of the story is unfolded. Monks is actually Oliver's brother, and there must be some family money that he is

unwilling to share with Oliver, to the point that he is willing to do almost anything to keep Oliver from finding out the truth about his heritage. Rose is very sympathetic to Nancy, and truly wishes to remove her from her horrible life. But, Nancy's tragedy is that, even with an offer of help, she cannot remove herself from the life she knows. Though she knows that her life is wrong, she is loyal to Bill, and the life which he, and poverty, has forced her into. Dickens makes very strong statements in this chapter. He points out the greed and hatred that money can bring. Monks feels such hatred for a brother he has never even met, that he goes to great lengths to ruin the child's life. He has driven himself nearly mad with this hatred, ruining his own happiness even as he tries to ruin Oliver's. Dickens also makes a clear statement about the life of crime, and how difficult it is to leave. Nancy is, indeed, a good and honest person, who has been driven to a dishonest life that she cannot give up, even when offered assistance. We can see here that poverty and hunger can make even the best of hearts turn to dishonesty, and that this life, once begun, is difficult to recover from.

Chapter 42

Chapter 41 Summary

Rose must decide what to do with the information she has received. They are only planning to be in London for two days, before they take a journey to the coast, and Rose wonders how she can take care of the problem in such a short time. After much thought, she decides to consult Harry, but can never bring herself to write the letter. Just then, Oliver come in, breathless and reports that he has seen Mr. Brownlow in the streets, and wishes to be taken to his house. He has written down the address, and asks to go and see him. Rose agrees to take him. They only tell Mrs. Maylie that they are going out for an hour. They ride to Mr. Brownlow's and Rose leaves Oliver in the coach. She visits Mr. Brownlow and Mr. Grimwig, and tells him Oliver's story. Mr. Brownlow is pleased to hear that Oliver is well, and that he is honest, but Mr. Grimwig is skeptical.

Oliver is brought into the house, and reunites with Mr. Brownlow and Mrs. Bedwin. Rose asks to speak to Mr. Brownlow alone while Oliver visits with Mrs. Bedwin. She tells Mr. Brownlow the story of Monks, and seeks his advice. Mr. Brownlow advises that she should tell Mrs. Maylie and the Doctor about the events, and that Mr. Brownlow will call upon them at the hotel that evening, to decide what to do. The four of them discuss it that evening. Their first inclination is to have Nancy, Fagin and Sikes arrested, but later decide that this is not in Oliver's best interest. Since they have no proof against Monks, they believe they must use strategy to catch him, and they must catch him away from Fagin and Sikes. They decide that they need Nancy to identify Monks, and since they cannot see her until Sunday night, they will keep quiet about the matter until then. They will stay in London until the matter is resolved. They also decide to add Harry Maylie and Mr. Grimwig into their group for helping with the problem. Mr. Brownlow also requests that he not be questioned just yet about why he has been out of the kingdom, that he will reveal his reasons in due time if necessary.

Chapter 41 Analysis

All of Oliver's friends are coming to his aid, to finish solving the mystery, and to gain his inheritance for him. Oliver, of course, knows nothing of what is going on. Rose has done her share to make sure that Nancy is protected. Another mystery begins, however, as we wonder why Mr. Brownlow has been in the West Indies, and why he doesn't want to talk about it.

Chapter 43

Chapter 42 Summary

Noah Claypole and Charlotte have come to London. They have stolen money from Mr. Sowerberry's till, and run away together. It is actually Charlotte who has done the stealing, as Noah has convinced her to do it, so that if they get caught, he is not implicated. They walk for quite a while, and end up in the Three Cripples bar. They ask for dinner, and are led to a back room where they are fed and told that they can lodge there for the night if they choose. Fagin is in the bar, and overhears Noah and Charlotte discussing how they will be able to make a living in London as thieves. He goes in to see them, and tells them that he overheard their conversation, and that, he, too is in that business. They send Charlotte up to the room with the bags so that they can talk alone. Fagin offers Noah and Charlotte employment, saying that he will get room and board and half of all that he and Charlotte steal. Noah is clearly lazy and cowardly. He wants Charlotte to do most of the work, and he wants easy and safe assignments. Fagin tells Noah that in order to get this work, he must turn over the 20 pounds he has taken from Mr. Sowerberry. They decide that Noah's job will be stealing lunch money from children, and Noah is quite pleased. They agree to meet at 10:00 the next morning for Noah and Charlotte, now called Mr. and Mrs. Bolter to meet Fagin's friend.

Chapter 42 Analysis

Fagin has once again found a would-be thief to take under his wing. This one is quite willing, however, as long as he is given easy work. It will be interesting to see, however, what Fagin really has in store for Noah and Charlotte.

Chapter 44

Chapter 43 Summary

Noah is taken to Fagin's house where Fagin explains to Noah the rules. He makes sure that Noah is aware that he must be loyal and true to Fagin, or they will both be the worse for it. He implores Noah, who isn't so inclined to agree, to understand that Fagin is to be as important to Noah as himself, otherwise the arrangement won't work. Fagin is in need of a new apprentice because the Artful Dodger has been arrested. The Dodger was caught trying to pickpocket a gentleman, and then found with an engraved snuffbox. The owner of the snuffbox was found and has agreed to testify. Charley comes in, very upset at what has happened to the Dodger, and very afraid that when the Dodger is sent out of the kingdom, he will never be known for the skilled criminal that he really is. Fagin assures Charley that the Dodger will go down in history, partly for being caught and sent away at such a young age. It is decided that someone should go see how the Dodger is doing, and Noah seems to be the one for the job, since he is new in town and cannot be recognized. Noah is hesitant, but Fagin convinces him. He is disguised and given directions to the magistrate's office, where he observes the Dodger's trial. The Dodger is loud and boisterous, but is convicted and sent off to jail.

Chapter 43 Analysis

Fagin has lost his greatest thief, and needs to replace him. But so far, Noah has proven to be obstinate, and may not be so easy to train. He does, however, handle his first assignment well, and returns with Charley Bates to tell Fagin the details.

Chapter 45

Chapter 44 Summary

Nancy's conscience has been bothering her since she visited with Rose. She has stopped eating and has been behaving oddly. When Sunday night at 11 comes, Fagin and Sikes are talking and Sikes refuses to let Nancy go out. She protests that she only wants a breath of fresh air, and that she will be back in an hour, but Bill will not allow it. She goes into a fit, and Bill puts her in another room and restrains her. After an hour or so, she comes out and Fagin leaves. As he is leaving he tells Nancy that if Bill is too hard on her, that she can count on him. He tells Nancy that he is her true friend, and that they can talk of it again. As Fagin goes home, he devises a plan. He is convinced that Nancy is in love with someone else. So, he wonders if he can get her to agree to poison Bill and come to be with him. But, he thinks that Nancy might not be willing to poison Bill, so he thinks that bribery might be the best option. So, he decides to find out whom Nancy is seeing, so that he has something to hold over her head.

Chapter 44 Analysis

Fagin is up to his old tricks and sees an opportunity with Nancy. Both Fagin and Skies know that something is wrong with Nancy, and Fagin thinks he can use it to his advantage, to get rid of Sikes, and have Nancy to himself.

Chapter 46

Chapter 45 Summary

Fagin tells Noah he has a job for him. He plans to assign Noah to watch Nancy when the time is right. He tells Noah that Nancy has made some new friends, and he needs to know whom they are. On the next Sunday, he tells Noah that it is finally time, and takes him to Nancy's house. Bill Sikes is away, so he is sure that Nancy will be able to leave. He sneaks him into an area where he can see what Nancy looks like, and they wait for her to leave. As soon as she leaves the house for her appointment at the bridge, Noah follows her.

Chapter 45 Analysis

Noah will finally get his chance to prove himself to Fagin, and Nancy will likely suffer the consequences. Fagin has no idea what is in store, but he knows that Noah is eager to please him.

Chapter 47

Chapter 46 Summary

Nancy is very nervous and filled with a sense of dread, but she goes to the bridge, closely followed by Noah. Mr. Brownlow and Rose approach her, and she asks them to go down the stairs, so that they can speak in secret. Noah follows them, hides nearby. Mr. Brownlow tells Nancy that she must either give up Fagin or give up Monks. Nancy says she can never give up Fagin, because even though he is evil, he is part of her group. Mr. Brownlow tells Nancy that if she describes Monks to them, they will try to find him, but that if they cannot, they will need to locate Fagin, but they will keep her name out of it. She describes Monks to them, and Mr. Brownlow says he thinks he knows him. They once again try to get Nancy to come away with them, but she refuses. They also offer her money, which she refuses as well. The parties leave, and Noah runs to Fagin's house as fast as he can.

Chapter 46 Analysis

Nancy is filled with a sense of dread in this chapter, which is well deserved, as Noah hears every word she shares with Mr. Brownlow and Rose. Nancy's fatal mistake may be her refusal to run away, but she has always had the feeling that her the life that she leads will end in her death. She is in grave danger now, as Noah flees to tell Fagin what he has heard.

Chapter 48

Chapter 47 Summary

Fagin is filled with hatred and with dread at the news that Noah has brought him, and he lies awake all night in thought. At daybreak, Sikes come to visit him. He asks Sikes what he would do if one of the boys, or even he, betrayed him. Sikes says he would surely kill anyone who betrayed him. With that, Fagin has Noah recount the story he has told about Nancy. Sikes, overcome with anger, runs to the door. But Fagin stops him long enough to ask Sikes not to be too violent with Nancy. Sikes goes home and calls for Nancy to come here. He is obviously very angry and Nancy asks what she has done. He tells her that she knows well what she has done, and she begs for her life. She tells Bill that she has not betrayed him, that she has tried to protect him, and that she knows of a place where they can go and live out the rest of their lives. But Bill will not take pity on her. He raises his gun to fire, but fears he will be caught if someone hears the shot. So he hits her on the head with the pistol instead, and she falls to the ground, but is still alive, and rises back up holding a handkerchief, and prays for mercy. Bill takes a club and strikes her down, killing her.

Chapter 47 Analysis

Sikes lowers himself even further in this chapter, to murder. He is filled with rage, and acts upon it, without real worry of consequence. Nancy's last breath is spent uttering a prayer to heaven for mercy for her soul. We see clearly how Nancy has caused her own death by trying to be honest, yet still protecting the thieves she ahs made her life with.

Chapter 49

Chapter 48 Summary

Sikes takes care to clean up and burn the club that he used to kill Nancy. He covers her body with a rug, and refuses to look at her. When he has disposed of all the evidence, he locks the house and leaves with the dog. He wanders aimlessly; unable to decide which way to go for a long time, fearing everyone he sees looks at him with suspicion. Later at night he finally forces himself to go into a pub for a meal, but runs out quickly after a soap salesman tries to get a bloodstain out of his hat as proof that his wares really work. He travels on, nearly mad with the guilt he feels. He hears two men discussing the murder and saying that the murderer has not yet been found. He finds a shed to sleep in, but everywhere he looks he sees Nancy's eyes. He hears screaming, and looks out to see a fire in the distance, and runs toward it. He takes up with the people attempting to put out the fire, and after working all night, takes breakfast with the firefighters. Nancy's murder is again discussed; the rumor being that the murderer has fled to Birmingham. After wandering some more, he decides that it is best to go back to London, and stay with Fagin for a few days, get some money, and then maybe escape to France. But he is worried that the dog will be recognized, so he decides to drown him. But the dog growls and threatens to bite when Sikes approaches him, and eventually the dog gets away. Sikes continues his journey back to London, using back roads so as not to be noticed.

Chapter 48 Analysis

Sikes is nearly mad with guilt and confusion over his crime. He tries to elude the memory of Nancy and his crime, even by fighting a fire to take his mind off it. But, he cannot escape the feeling, and decides to retreat and be among friends to ease his mind.

Chapter 50

Chapter 49 Summary

Mr. Brownlow brings Monks to his house. Monks wants to leave, and Mr. Brownlow tells him he is free to leave, but, if he does, that he will summon the police as soon as Monks hits the streets. If Monks chooses to stay, he acknowledges that he is doing so of his own free will. Monks says he can't believe that he is being treated so by his father's oldest friend. Mr. Brownlow begins to tell Monks the story – that he has a brother. Monks says that he knows very well that he was an only child. Mr. Brownlow agrees that it is so that he was the only child of his father and mother, but that after several years, his parents separated, and his father fell in love with another woman, to whom Oliver was born. One of his father's relatives left him money, and he traveled to Rome to retrieve it, but became gravely ill. He died in Rome, with no will, all of the money passed to Monks mother. But, before leaving for Rome, Monks' father stopped to see his friend Mr. Brownlow, and left a portrait of his new love. He told Mr. Brownlow that he planned to travel to Rome and obtain his fortune, leave a portion for Monks and his mother, and then flee the country.

Mr. Brownlow suspected that he meant to flee with Oliver's mother, though he never said so out right. But Mr. Brownlow never saw Monks father again. When Oliver came to live with Mr. Brownlow, quite by chance, he knew that he was his old friend's son, by his striking resemblance to the woman in the portrait. After Oliver left, Mr. Brownlow traveled to the West Indies to find Monks, to straighten out the situation, but was unable to find Monks there. When he returned to London, he was told that Monks came and went erratically from his apartment, and was difficult to find. It was after this that Mr. Brownlow obtained the information from Nancy that put all the pieces together, including that fact that there was, indeed, a will, but Monks mother destroyed it. Mr. Brownlow tells Monks that he knows every word that has passed between he and Fagin, and that Monks is a party to Nancy's murder, because it was over his secrets that she was killed. Mr. Brownlow asks Monks if he is ready to disclose everything, before witnesses so that it can be set right. Monks, grudgingly says he will do so. He must also disclose the provisions of his father's will, and give Oliver his part. Once that is done, Mr. Brownlow says he will not see Monks prosecuted, and he will be free to go as he pleases. Just then, the doctor enters and says that Sikes is about to be apprehended. The dog has been found wandering near the home, and they suspect Sikes to come when dark arrives. A reward has been offered, and Mr. Brownlow agrees to add more money to see Sikes and Fagin apprehended. They leave with an agreement to meet the next day to solve the whole issue. Mr. Brownlow leaves Monks in his home, for his own safety.

Chapter 49 Analysis

The story is finally unfolded in its entirety and there are many surprises. We see now how Mr. Brownlow, and the portrait fit into the whole story, and we understand why Mr.

Brownlow traveled to the West Indies. We see here how Dickens so poignantly shows how money can corrupt and ruin lives. Oliver's life has been ruined by money he deserved, but never had, but just as surely, Monks life was ruined by trying to keep the secret of the money that his mother laid on his head.

Chapter 51

Chapter 50 Summary

Toby Crackit and two other robbers are holed up in a deserted house on Jacob's island, hiding from the police. They discuss that Fagin has been arrested, and that Noah was taken with him. Charley Bates got away, and they expect him to arrive momentarily. They believe that Noah will be a witness for the state, which will make the police able to prosecute Fagin as an accessory to Nancy's murder, and he will be hung within six days. Charley arrives, and they hear another noise. Next in is Sikes' dog, and Sikes follows him. Charley calls Sikes a murderer, and swears that if the police come, he will tell them that Sikes is there. He then attacks Sikes and wrestles with him on the floor. Sikes has Charley pinned down when they hear the noise of the police descending on the house. Sikes tries to escape by going out through the roof, and crossing over the chimneys. He uses a rope around his neck to lower himself, with a knife to cut it when he gets low enough, but he slips and hangs himself. His dog tries to jump up to him, but falls and kills himself by hitting himself on a rock.

Chapter 50 Analysis

Finally, all of the robbers are accounted for. Sikes does not give up until the end, and meets a death fitting for such a creature. Charley's reaction is interesting; he seems to blame Sikes' murder of Nancy for bringing down his whole world.

Chapter 52

Chapter 51 Summary

Oliver travels to finish the paperwork surrounding his inheritance. They travel to the town where Oliver was born, and Oliver points out sights along the way. He also tells Rose that he wishes to see Dick, the little boy who wished him well as he ran away, and that they should take him from the workhouse and give him a good life. They arrive at the hotel and wait until the papers are signed. Then Mr. Brownlow introduces Oliver to his brother, Monks, and they recount the story. Monks admits that Oliver is the son of his father, Edward Leeward, and Agnes Fleming, Mr. Leeward's love, and the woman he intended to marry. Monks mother and Monks had traveled to Rome when Mr. Leeward fell ill, and had removed the will and a letter that Mr. Leeward had written to Agnes. In the letter, Mr. Leeward had told Agnes to remember the time he gave her the ring and the locket with her first name engraved on it and a place for her to add her married name as soon as he was able to marry her. He promised to marry her and move away with her to hide the shame. In the will, he has left the bulk of the fortune in two sums, one for Agnes and one for her child. The child's money was to be given unconditionally to the child once it reached age if it was a girl, but to a boy only if he had never been caught in dishonest deed. If the boy was not found to be honest, the money was to go to Monks. In addition, he had left a sum for Monks and his mother. However, Monks mother had destroyed the will and taken the money for herself and her son.

Mr. Leeward's mother had later visited Monks and told him that she believed that a boy child had been born to Agnes, and that Monks was to seek out and destroy the child if he could find it. When Oliver came to London, Monks spotted him, and knew from his resemblance to his father that he was his brother. It was then that he struck the deal to make Oliver a thief, so that even if he found out about the money, would never be able to inherit it. It is also learned that Agnes had a younger sister, who was left with a poor family after the death of their father. The poor family had been unable to take care of her, and in time a widow woman – Mrs. Maylie, had taken her in. This child was Rose, making Rose Oliver's aunt. Harry then asks Rose if they may again discuss their relationship. Rose tells him that she is still of the same station. But Harry tells her that he has changed his station in life, so as to make the barriers between them disappear. He has left his life in the city and become a minister. They will live in a rustic house in the country by the church. She agrees to marry him. Oliver is sad because he has found out that Dick has died.

Chapter 51 Analysis

All the secrets are finally revealed. We find that Monks' mother took the will and letter meant for Agnes, and that his grandmother is the one who has placed the revulsion in his heart for Oliver. Rose is found to be Oliver's aunt, and Harry and Rose finally end up

together. Finally, after all the pain and misery the characters have suffered, there seem to be happy endings for our hero and his friends.

Chapter 53

Chapter 52 Summary

Fagin goes to court and is sentenced to die on Sunday by hanging. He lives out his last few days in a cell, where he contemplates his death and the deaths of other men that he had sent to the gallows. Others come to visit him to talk to him about repenting of his sins, but Fagin sends them away with curses. On the day he is to die, Oliver and Mr. Brownlow visit him, but he is delirious. Mr. Brownlow asks Fagin where the papers that Monks entrusted him with are located. Fagin wants to speak to Oliver. He tells Oliver where the papers are located, and tries to get Oliver to help him escape. The guards come and take Fagin to the gallows. Oliver is very weak from what he has witnessed. He and Mr. Brownlow spend the night at the prison and leave in the morning.

Chapter 52 Analysis

Fagin's fate is finally fulfilled. He lives out his last days in a cell where he has sent many others before him, but still he does not repent. Oliver is allowed to see Fagin one last time before he dies, perhaps as much to give Oliver closure to his vile past as to find out the location of some papers.

Chapter 54

Chapter 53 Summary

Harry and Rose are married, and Mrs. Maylie goes to live with them in the country. The sum of Mr. Leeward's money that is left totals about 6000 pounds, which, by order of the will, should all go to Oliver. But Mr. Brownlow decides to divide it equally between the two boys, so that Monks is not left penniless to pursue a life of crime. Monks takes his half and moves to the new world, where he squanders it, and reverts to a life of crime again. He finally ends up dying in a prison. Mr. Brownlow adopts Oliver, and they move to the country near Harry and Rose, where Oliver thrives. The doctor moves there as well, and Mr. Grimwig visits them regularly. Mr. and Mrs. Bumble end up as paupers in the workhouse they once ran. All that he has witnessed makes Charley Bates turn from his life of crime and become a farmer. The author says that were his hand not faltering, he would love to write more about Rose and Oliver and how they thrived in their new lives. He notes that a white marble headstone that reads "Agnes" has been erected, though no grave is beneath it, but he believes that it is regularly visited by Agnes' spirit.

Chapter 53 Analysis

Dickens reports a happy ending for all who deserve it, and a bitter ending for those who deserve that. This ending shows a true belief in the theory that good will win over evil in the end. Though throughout much of the novel he shows people with money as being greedy and vile, he also introduces characters that do not want for money, but are kind as well, such as Mr. Brownlow and Mrs. Maylie. These characters show that while Dickens is very passionate about social injustice and the oppression of the poor, he does not suggest that all rich people are evil, just as his characters like Fagin show that not all poor people are kind. His one note of optimism for those given to a life of crime is Charley Bates, who sees the error of his ways after witnessing the horror that crime can bring. This seems to be Dickens way of saying that people can change, after all.

Characters

Artful Dodger

See Jack Dawkins.

Barney

Barney is a waiter at the Three Cripples, a pub where the thieves hang out. He has a nasal condition, so everything he says sounds like he has a cold.

Charley Bates

Charley Bates is a member of Fagin's gang and is most notable for his habit of laughing all the time, even when it's inappropriate.

Mrs. Bedwin

Mrs. Bedwin is a comforting, motherly old woman, very clean and neat. She is Mr. Brownlow's housekeeper and takes care of Oliver when Mr. Brownlow takes him in. Even when Mr. Brownlow becomes disillusioned about Oliver's true nature, her faith in Oliver never wavers.

Betsy

Betsy is a member of Fagin's gang; she is not really pretty but is healthy looking and loyal to the gang.

The Bookseller

The bookseller runs the book stall where Mr. Brownlow stands reading when the Artful Dodger and Charley Bates pick his pockets. They run away, and Oliver is accused of the crime, but the bookseller follows him to court and insists on testifying that he is innocent. He is "an elderly man with decent but poor appearance."

Brittles

Brittles is a servant of Mrs. Maylie's. Although he is over thirty years old, he is considered a "boy" by the others in the household, indicating that he may be a little slow.

Mr. Brownlow

Mr. Brownlow is a wealthy, respectable gentleman, well educated, moderate, and kind. At first he believes that Oliver has stolen from him but soon realizes this is wrong and takes Oliver in and has his housekeeper, Mrs. Bedwin, nurse him back to health. When Oliver disappears again, he believes Oliver truly was a thief, but he is ready to renounce this view when Oliver comes back into his life. He does all he can to help Oliver and to restore him to his relatives and a respectable life. Dickens describes him as having "a heart large enough for any six ordinary old gentlemen of humane disposition."

Mr. Bumble

Mr. Bumble is the parish beadle, a position of petty and pompous authority that fills him with a sense of his own importance. He is a bully and loves to abuse people whom he knows can't fight back, but when he is faced with anyone stronger, he's a coward. He's also greedy: he marries Mrs. Corney simply because she seems rich and receives his just reward of a bitterly unhappy marriage.

Charlotte

Charlotte is the Sowerberrys's maid; she is strong but slovenly and lazy. She later joins Noah Claypole in a life of crime.

Tom Chitling

Tom Chitling is one of Fagin's gang. He is about eighteen, not very bright, and has small eyes and a pock-marked face.

Noah Claypole

Noah is a charity boy who works for Mr. Sowerberry and who abuses Oliver simply because he can: Oliver is smaller than Noah, and lower in the social order. Noah is big, clumsy, greedy, cowardly, and lazy. He later joins Fagin's gang, using the alias "Morris Bolter," and asks Fagin for easy, safe jobs; he first specializes in taking money from children sent on errands and later becomes an informer, telling the police about pubs that are illegally open on Sunday.

Mrs. Corney

Mrs. Corney oversees the workhouse where Oliver was born. She is a widow but later marries Mr. Bumble, whom she terrorizes with her temper and her physical and verbal abuse. She hates the paupers and considers them an annoyance; she doesn't even see

them as human and has no sympathy for them even when they are dying of starvation and disease.

Toby Crackit

Toby Crackit is a well-known burglar who works with Fagin and Sikes; unlike them, he is flamboyant.

Jack Dawkins

Also called the Artful Dodger, Dawkins is the best thief in Fagin's gang. He wears a man's coat with the sleeves turned up and is street-smart beyond his years. He is eventually caught for pickpocketing, but he swaggers and brags and is disrespectful to everyone in court.

Dick

Dick is Oliver's best friend at Mrs. Mann's "infant farm." The two of them have stuck together through their shared experiences of beatings, starvation, and neglect. Like Oliver, Dick has a pure soul and remains kind, sweet, and trusting until his early death from illness.

Fagin

Fagin is a master criminal, the head of a gang of child thieves, whom he trains and uses, taking half of their income. He is ugly and filthy, with red hair and a matted red beard, and he has no loyalty to anyone or anything but himself; he easily turns against Bill Sikes, for example, and tries to get Nancy, Sikes's girlfriend, to kill him. He is eventually caught and sentenced to death. He goes mad when he realizes that no one in the world cares about him and that the spectators are all happy that he will be hanged.

Mr. Fang

Mr. Fang is the magistrate who deals with Oliver when he is accused of stealing. He is notorious for his strictness and inflexibility, and he is completely uninterested in the facts of the matter, until a witness whose testimony can't be denied steps in and speaks in Oliver's favor.

Agnes Fleming

Agnes Fleming is the daughter of a retired naval officer. She appears at the workhouse to give birth to Oliver, but no one knows her name, where she came from, or who her relatives are until the end of the book. Her sister is Rose Maylie's mother, so Oliver and Rose are cousins.

Gamfield

Gamfield is a chimney sweep who sees an advertisement offering five pounds to anyone who will take Oliver off the parish's hands. He is eager to get the money and applies to be Oliver's master, but at the last minute he is refused when a kindly magistrate sees that Oliver is deeply afraid of him.

Mr. Giles

Mr. Giles is Mrs. Maylie's butler. When the gang of thieves puts Oliver through the window of Mrs. Maylie's house, Giles shoots at Oliver, unaware that he is just a boy. Even after he finds out, however, he enjoys the sense that he is a hero and doesn't tell those who are praising him that he has defended the house from a child. Despite his exalted sense of his own importance, he is basically good at heart, loyal, and agreeable.

Mr. Grimwig

Mr. Grimwig is a friend of Mr. Brownlow's. He is a retired lawyer and has a habitually argumentative personality, perhaps as a remnant of his law days. He is heavy, old, lame in one leg, and he carries a heavy stick, which he likes to pound on the ground to make his point. His favorite expression is "I'll eat my head," which he says when he doesn't believe something is true.

Kags

Kags is a robber who was transported overseas as punishment for his crime□presumably to Australia, although Dickens doesn't make this clear. He has returned to London, and his past has marked his face: he is "a robber of fifty years, whose nose had been almost beaten in."

Edward Leeford

See Monks.

Mr. Limbkins

Mr. Limbkins is the head of the parish board, which oversees the welfare of the poor. He is very fat and has a very red face; like many of the other functionaries in the book, he actually does little to help anyone other than himself.

Mr. Losberne

Mr. Losberne is a surgeon who is called when Oliver is found injured after the attempted burglary of Mrs. Maylie's house. He is good-humored and quick-witted, as is shown by the way he confuses Giles, Brittles, and the London detectives assigned to the burglary case. Like Mr. Brownlow, he believes in Oliver's essential goodness and is devoted to helping him.

Mrs. Mann

Mrs. Mann is a harsh old woman who runs a foster home; she takes in pauper children and raises them, and the parish gives her an allowance for the upkeep of each child. She pockets this money, starves the children, and otherwise abuses them. The corrupt system is revealed by the fact that whenever she is investigated after a child's death from starvation, illness, or neglect, the investigators blithely state that the death was "accidental" and continue sending children, and money, to her.

Harry Maylie

Harry is Mrs. Maylie's son. He is about twenty-five, good-looking, with an easy, pleasant demeanor. He is deeply in love with Rose and wants to marry her even if she has some scandal in her background.

Mrs. Maylie

Mrs. Maylie is Rose's adoptive aunt. She is a well-mannered, genteel, elderly woman. She is generous and loving, as shown by her adoption of Rose and her equal kindness to Oliver.

Rose Maylie

Rose, like Oliver, is a sweet, generous, loyal, and optimistic person. She is Agnes Fleming's younger sister and Oliver's aunt, although she doesn't know this until the end of the book. For most of the book, she and the others believe there is some sort of scandal attached to her origins; for this reason, she refuses to marry Harry Maylie, although she deeply loves him, because she doesn't want his career marred by her low origins. Later, when her name is cleared, they enjoy a happy marriage.

Monks

Toward the end of the book, the reader learns that Monks's true name is Edward Leeford. He is Oliver's half-brother and has sworn to spend his life ruining Oliver's, because if he does so, he can keep the money he illegally inherited from their father. He has spent his life in crime, and even when Oliver splits the inheritance with him to allow him the resources to lead an honest life, he continues as a criminal and eventually dies overseas.

Nancy

Nancy, like Betsy, might have been pretty once, but her rough life has made her untidy and ill mannered. However, she still has some nobility of soul left, as shown by the fact that she regrets bringing Oliver back to the gang and later tries to help him get free of them, despite the fact that she knows the gang will kill her if they find out.

Bill Sikes

Bill Sikes is the most notorious and ruthless member of Fagin's gang; he is strong, impulsive, and dangerous. Dickens remarks that he has the sort of legs that "always look in an unfinished and incomplete state without a set of fetters to garnish them." He later murders Nancy, his girlfriend, when he hears that she has turned against the gang, and he is pursued throughout London until he accidentally hangs himself while trying to escape. Dickens accentuates his inhumane personality when he has Sikes try to kill his own dog, lest the dog lead pursuers to him.

Mr. Sowerberry

Mr. Sowerberry is a tall, gaunt, mournful-looking man, befitting his profession as undertaker. He takes on Oliver as an apprentice and teaches him the trade.

Mrs. Sowerberry

Meaner than her husband, Mrs. Sowerberry is short and thin, with a sharp face and a nasty disposition. She becomes jealous of Oliver when she sees that her husband favors him and so treats Oliver badly.

Sally Thingummy

Sally is a withered old pauper who serves as a midwife at Oliver's birth, despite the fact that she is somewhat drunk. She later dies in the workhouse, but not before she reveals some secrets about Oliver's mother.

Oliver Twist

Oliver is born in a workhouse to an unknown woman whose name, the reader learns much later, is Agnes Fleming. He is sensitive, compassionate, kind, loyal, and gentle, and no matter how much he is abused and mistreated, he retains these qualities as well as his deep faith in the innate goodness of people. At times he seems rather naïve; for example, when he sees the members of Fagin's gang practicing picking Fagin's pockets and when he goes out with them to steal but has no idea they are thieves until they run off and he is apprehended for the deed. An example of his loyalty is his love for his childhood friend Dick; when he goes back to the workhouse, his first thought is to find Dick, and he is crushed to learn that Dick has since died. Although he is badly treated by many people in the book and comes to fear them, he never hates them. Similarly, although Monks has spent most of his life trying to ruin Oliver's, Oliver has no hard feelings against him and divides his own inheritance with Monks, although Monks is legally entitled to nothing.

Themes

Good and Evil

According to George Gissing in *Critical Study of the Works of Charles Dickens*, Dickens once wrote, "I wished to show, in little Oliver, the principle of good surviving through every adverse circumstance, and triumphing at last." The novel does this but perhaps at the cost of depicting Oliver as a realistic character. Although he runs away from Mr. and Mrs. Sowerberry, in the remainder of the novel Oliver has little initiative or drive. He is the tool of thieves or the protégé of kind Samaritans, but he never purposefully seeks his own life or decides, on his own, what he must do.

Nevertheless, the pattern of good versus evil runs throughout the book; generally, the good people, like Oliver, Mr. Brownlow, and the Maylies, are very good, and the bad people, such as Fagin, Monks, and Sikes, are thoroughly bad.

A rare exception is Nancy, who has led a corrupt life but who nevertheless yearns to protect Oliver and do some good. Despite these desires, however, she is so sunk in her own miserable life that she doesn't believe she can ever change; she feels she is doomed to die at the hands of the criminals, and she turns out to be right.

Other characters, such as Mr. Bumble and Mr. Fang, are presented as holders of positions of public trust who are nevertheless evil and untrustworthy. These characters, and the corrupt-but-good ones like Nancy, were intended to shock readers of Dickens's time out of their traditional class-based views, which held that the poor were often corrupt and criminal, whereas those who were wealthy or in high positions were automatically moral. One of the most corrupt and scheming people in the book is Monks's mother, a high-born and wealthy woman who proves to be an evil and selfish manipulator.

Satire of the Poor Laws

Throughout the book, Dickens shows, and comments on, the effects of the laws on the poor. Confined to workhouses, starved, and mistreated, the poor have no way of redeeming themselves from unending misery and death except by running away or turning criminal. Statistics show that crime soared after the Poor Laws of 1834, despite the government's exultation that much money would be saved on feeding, housing, and clothing them.

Dickens shows the effects of the Poor Laws in his depiction of the criminal underworld of London as well as through dark, mocking humor, as when Mr. Bumble and Mr. Sowerberry are discussing the low price the parish board will pay for coffins. When Sowerberry complains about the small prices, Mr. Bumble remarks with a laugh that the coffins are correspondingly small, so Sowerberry is not losing much. The coffins are small because they're made for children who died of neglect or starvation; the men's

laughter only serves to show their callousness and the callousness of the public in allowing such things to happen. Dickens also mocks authority figures' fear of the poor, as when Oliver is locked up for the "crime" of asking for more food. In addition, he enlists the reader on his side by saying that unsympathetic people, who are not upset by the fact that Oliver had to eat food even the dog wouldn't touch, should be as hungry as Oliver was and have to eat such food themselves.

Alienation

Many, if not most, of the characters in the book are alienated from their society and each other. Oliver is an orphan, the quintessential outcast, and with the exception of Dick, the people with whom he associates throughout his childhood are deeply selfish and mistrustful, interested in their own welfare and no one else's. Among the thieves, there is no camaraderie; they often spy on each other and are ready to turn on each other at a moment's notice if it will gain them more money or freedom from jail. The "good" characters in the book present a rare little community of trust and goodwill, but they are so good that at times they seem unrealistic: no quarrel or misunderstanding ever mars their pleasant society. In addition, they are a small minority compared to the vast number of other characters in the book, most of whom are solitary and cut off from their origins and families, or associate in rough, shifting, untrustworthy, and temporary alliances.

Style

Shifting Narrative Voice

Throughout the novel, Dickens employs a shifting narrative voice; as James R. Kincaid noted in *Dickens and the Rhetoric of Laughter*, "It is impossible to define the characteristics or moral position of the narrators in this novel, for they are continually shifting." At times the narrator is detached and wordy, as in the opening paragraph in which he says abstractly that he will not name the town or workhouse where a certain "item of mortality" was born. At the same time, he is mocking the conventions of many novels of his time, which open with a lengthy and often smug description of the main character's birthplace and family.

The narrator doesn't consistently stay in this remote but sarcastic voice but sometimes shifts to remarking ironically on the supposedly wonderful way in which the poor are treated and on how kind it is; or sometimes the narrator appeals to the friendly feeling of the reader: "We all know how chilled and desolate the best of us will sometimes feel." As Kincaid noted, "We can never count on being in any single relationship with the narrative voice for long. Just as we relax. . . . We are pushed away."

Dark Humor

The novel is filled with dark humor, from Mr. Bumble and Mr. Sowerberry laughing about the abundance of small children's coffins to Dickens's mocking the seriousness and puffery of the members of the parish board, to his exposure of the cowardice and avarice of Noah and Charlotte, to the caperings of the Artful Dodger when he is put on trial. This humor only serves to sharpen the desperate sufferings of Oliver and the other characters, however, so that although readers may laugh while they are reading the book, when they're done, they tend to remember the sadness in it.

Characterization

Dickens uses "flat" characters; his people don't tend to grow or change over the course of the book. Oliver, who begins good, stays good, and he never wises up; never once does he show any awareness that the thieves are truly evil or any real disgust at Fagin's life. He is afraid of the thieves, but he is afraid because they may hurt him, not because he is aware that they're twisted and corrupted souls. Fagin, who begins evil, stays that way. Many of the characters are easily marked by certain "tags" of behavior or voice: Mr. Grimwig habitually thumps his cane on the ground and asserts, "I'll eat my head!"; Fagin is always out for money; Mr. Brownlow is steadfastly good; Monks is obsessively evil. Mr. Bumble is consistently pompous and shallow, and Noah Claypole remains a coward and a bully throughout the book.

In modern fiction, characters like these are considered a mark of poor writing, but in Dickens's time, readers were not bothered by such flat depictions. In addition, because the novel was written as a serial that required readers to remember all the characters for a long period of time, it was necessary for writers to make their characters easy to remember and categorize.

Historical Context

In the mid-nineteenth century, England was suffering from economic instability and widespread unemployment. The economic instability was a legacy of the Napoleonic era, which lasted until 1815. During this time, England was at war with France. The English government had imposed heavy taxes to pay for the war, and although these did not really affect the wealthy classes, they were a crushing burden on the poor. Prices rose, food became scarce, and inflation rose. Also because of the war, French and European markets for English goods were closed, leading to unemployment among workers.

Workers were also unemployed because the increasing use of machinery in manufacturing had made many of their jobs obsolete; for example, instead of employing many individual weavers, textile manufacturers began using mechanized looms, with only a few people needed to run them. The angry workers, known as Luddites, led movements to smash industrial machinery, a crime that was made punishable by death in 1811.

The Napoleonic War ended in 1815, but the misery did not. With the war over, England entered the worst depression it had ever seen. The number of poor people, never low, increased to crisis levels. Historically, each parish had been responsible for taking care of its poor by handing out money and food, and more and more people now chose to take these handouts. Others worked but took the assistance anyway, and when employers found out about this, they lowered their wages, making it impossible even for honest workers to survive on their wages. In addition, several thousand war veterans had returned to England, swelling the ranks of the jobless.

During this time, children often worked long hours, every day of the week, in dangerous factories. In 1833, child labor and working conditions began to be regulated and controlled.

In 1834, the "Poor Laws" were passed. They required that people needing public assistance live in workhouses, where they were poorly fed and badly treated. The object of this plan was to make public assistance unattractive to the poor and thus to decrease the number of people on assistance, as well as the associated costs. The plan did save money, but at a great cost in human suffering, as Dickens makes plain in *Oliver Twist*.

In 1837, Queen Victoria ascended the English throne and began her long rule and a relatively stable period in English history. This stability, and the increasing numbers of people in the middle classes who were educated enough to read books for leisure and had the money to buy them and the time to read them, would help the young Dickens to an illustrious future.

Critical Overview

In *Dickens and His Readers: Aspects of Novel Criticism Since 1836*, George H. Ford quoted George Borrow, who wrote in 1838 that "Everybody was in raptures over a certain *Oliver Twist* that had just come out." Readers of the time, far from being dismayed by the dark quality of the book, loved it. An exception was Thackeray, who mocked Dickens's portrayal of Nancy, saying she was sentimentally and unrealistically presented. Dickens was so upset by this comment that he wrote an angry reply to Thackeray in the preface to the book, according to Ford. Ford also noted that although most readers loved the book, some were indeed alienated: "the kind of reader who cannot bear to be ruffled by violent emotions."

Some of these readers were critics who were dismayed by its presentation of criminals, workhouse inmates, and illegitimacy. According to Ford, Henry Fox wrote that the book was "painful and revolting"; Fox quoted Lady Carlyle, who commented, "I know that there are such unfortunate beings as pick-pockets and street walkers . . . but I own I do not wish to hear what they say to one another." Fox also wrote that although the book seemed to be such a fad that few dared to speak against it, "I suspect, when the novelty and the fashion of admiring [it and other books] wear off, they will sink to their proper level."

For these readers, Dickens's attacks on the social institutions responsible for crime and poverty were not considered enough to make up for the fact that he was presenting indecent, wretched characters to his supposedly sheltered readers. However, in *Critical Studies of the Works of Charles Dickens*, George Gissing noted that these views were not shared by most readers and wrote, "When criticism had said its say, the world did homage to a genial moralist, a keen satirist, and a leader in literature."

Gissing did remark on what he saw as the book's flaws: "Attempting a continued story, the author shows at once his weakest side, the defect which he will never outgrow. There is no coherency in the structure of the thing; the plotting is utterly without ingenuity; the mysteries are so artificial as to be altogether uninteresting." However, he did note that at the time Dickens wrote the book, fiction was in its infancy, and readers were not nearly as demanding as they are now. Tight, complex, and realistic plotting had yet to be developed, so modern readers cannot fault Dickens for not using it. If modern readers overlook the creaky plot mechanisms, what remains is "a very impressive picture of the wretched and the horrible," with realistic descriptions of the London streets and people, their daily habits, voices, food, and clothing.

Joseph Gold, in *Charles Dickens: Radical Moralist*, wrote that it was not surprising that critics in Dickens's day were upset by the book, because what Dickens did was to "humanize the criminal. This was not readily forgiven, for to humanize the criminal is to show his relationship to the reader, who would prefer to regard him as another species." This was very different from previous novels, which either romanticized criminals as gallant outcasts or as complete monsters, utterly inhuman.

In *Modern Critical Views: Dickens*, J. Hillis Miller commented that the book was flawed mainly because of its depiction of Oliver, who from beginning to end is a tool of others. He does rebel against the thieves who try to mold him into one of them, but in the end he succumbs to the molding of Mr. Brownlow and friends; Mr. Brownlow adopts him, and he becomes what Brownlow wants him to be. He has not solved the dilemmas of his parentage and of determining on his own what he wants to be and to do. He lives happily ever after, but "only by living in a perpetual childhood of submission to protection and direction from without."

Geoffrey Thurley, in *The Dickens Myth*, remarked that of course the book's plot is absurd but that the book's enduring value stems from its "moral vision" and its depiction of the confrontation between good and evil. In *Dickens: A Collection of Critical Essays*, John Bayley wrote that the book, unlike its predecessor, *The Pickwick Papers*, was "a modern novel," as shown by the fact that despite its flaws it can still touch the modern reader.

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3
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Critical Essay #1

Winters is a freelance writer and has written for a wide variety of educational publishers. In this essay, she considers themes of survival, the portrayal of criminals, and attitudes toward money and power in Dickens's Oliver Twist*.*

Oliver Twist is notable for its emphasis on the struggle to survive, its presentation of the poor and criminals as real people with their own stories and sufferings, and its emphasis on money and the hypocrisy it frequently breeds.

Both Oliver and the thieves are victims of the Poor Laws and other social institutions that prevent or discourage them from productive work. They all battle hunger, cold, and lack of decent living conditions, and society seems bent on rubbing them out—even Oliver's harmless and sweet friend Dick is viewed as a nuisance and a danger by the authorities. As Dickens wrote, children in the "infant farm" are often killed when they are "overlooked in turning up a bedstead, or inadvertently scalded to death" during clothes washing. When the workhouse board decides to get rid of Oliver so they won't have to pay for his food and lodging anymore, they consider sending him to sea, "the probability being, that the skipper would flog him to death, in a playful mood, some day after dinner, or would knock his brains out with an iron bar." This they regard as his rightful due, as if, being a pauper, he is therefore a criminal in need of punishment. He is almost apprenticed to Gamfield, a cruel chimney sweep who takes pleasure in torturing small boys, with the board's approval, until at the last minute he is saved from this horrible fate by a kind magistrate.

In addition, one of the board members, "the gentleman in the white waistcoat," repeatedly remarks, "I know that boy will be hung," as if he is already a criminal and the death penalty is his due. This comment is particularly chilling because Oliver is depicted as a kind, loving child who has done nothing wrong during his short life. However, because of social attitudes toward the poor, he is considered doomed or inherently evil, a born criminal.

Like a prisoner, Oliver is given very little food, is frequently beaten, and is often confined in a small, dark room. Throughout the novel, this imprisonment is repeated whenever Oliver offends someone who has more power than he does. He is variously imprisoned in a "coal cellar," a "dark and solitary room," "a little room by himself," a "cell," "a stone cell . . . the ante-room to the coal cellar," and the claustrophobic coffin workshop, as well as the dark, filthy, and labyrinthine rooms of Fagin's criminal gang.

The criminals themselves are shown as living in "dens" like those of animals: dirty "holes," houses boarded up and entered through tiny openings, with dark passages; at times Dickens uses the word "kennel" to describe these places and writes of the criminals as if they are predatory animals who must hunt to survive.

Before Dickens's novels, few writers had presented criminal life as physically, morally, and psychologically repellent, preferring instead to glorify criminal characters as

fascinating, glamorous, or romantic outlaws, similar to Robin Hood; this tendency continues in modern fiction, with murder mysteries, gangster movies, Mafia mini-series, and prison escape tales in which the criminals are heroes. In *Oliver Twist*, Dickens shows the filth and degradation the thieves live in and their utter lack of faithfulness to each other; with rare exceptions, they are all ready to spy on each other and turn each other in if they can save themselves, make money, or gain new alliances by doing so. As Fagin says, they are all "looking out for Number One." This nerve-wracking, unstable, and dangerous world was new to readers and accounted for both the negative remarks of some critics as well as the fascination of many readers, who were able to see into a world of which they had no direct experience.

Dickens also showed the unglamorous end of some of the thieves' careers: Fagin is hanged; Monks dies in prison overseas, unmourned after a life of crime; and the Artful Dodger is arrested and jailed for life. None of the thieves, in fact, remains active in crime, as if Dickens did not want to show any of them achieving "success" as criminals. Dickens's motive in portraying the criminals as ordinary and even pathetic people was to establish a sympathy between the reader and these degraded specimens of humanity. He links the poverty and suffering created by the Poor Laws with the growth of crime, saying through the story that the rich, wealthy, and complacent people who don't care about the sufferings of the poor are in fact creating a huge underclass of criminals, who in turn prey on both rich and poor. By seeing the criminals as human, readers will be awakened to their sufferings and to the sufferings of the poor, instead of simply thinking (as many people did, and still do) that what happens to the poor is not their problem.

For example, until Rose Maylie meets and talks to Nancy, she has no idea that women like Nancy exist. Perhaps she knows of the existence of "bad women," but Nancy makes her see that some "bad women" may actually be "good," or, more realistically, a mix of the two—simply human, like herself. Once she realizes this, she is eager to help Nancy, although Nancy insists it's too late. This lesson of human kindness and compassion is not learned by the servants of the hotel where Rose is staying; they are bitterly rude to Nancy, seeing her only as an instrument of evil because she is not a respectable or wealthy woman.

Dickens frequently attacks the smugness and complacency of people whose place in society is secure and who have no sympathy for those who suffer. He mocks the parish board, Mr. Fang the magistrate, Mr. Bumble, Mrs. Corney, and others, and in the case of Mr. Bumble and Mrs. Corney, some of the worst offenders, he makes sure to put them in the very position of the people they previously abused and despised, as they end up in the very workhouse where they once tormented others.

Dickens vigorously attacks the Poor Laws of 1834, showing the resulting brutal treatment of the poor. The workhouse system was designed to save money; by making the workhouses repellent places of starvation and hard labor, the authorities intended to make hard work outside the workhouse seem like a better choice and thus prevent ablebodied people from becoming what in modern times are called "welfare abusers." By lessening the number of people who took public assistance, the authorities could save a great deal of money. However, they went too far in their emphasis on money

over humaneness, as Dickens shows. He also has venomous words for those in the system who see it as a form of "Christian charity," for as he shows, it is not spiritually or religiously based at all. Those who claim it is real "charity," as opposed to torment, are exposed as the most wicked of hypocrites. As Dickens ironically writes:

> [The system of starving the poor] was rather expensive at first, in consequence of the increase in the undertaker's bill, and the necessity of taking in the clothes of all the paupers, which fluttered loosely on their wasted, shrunken forms, after a week or two's gruel. But the number of workhouse inmates got thin as well as the paupers; and the board were in ecstasies.

When Oliver is born in the workhouse, he is regarded as yet another mouth to feed on a sort of assembly line of poor children. This dehumanization is shown by the way Mr. Bumble makes up names for the children, in alphabetical order, so that Oliver is randomly named "Twist" because he comes after a child whom Bumble named "Swubble" and before one whom Bumble will name "Unwin." Bumble has devised a whole list of these alphabetic names, which he will apply to orphans in logical order. The babies are never seen as human but as a procession of burdens, and they are discussed as economic factors□how much money Mrs. Mann will get for him or other orphans and how much she can keep for herself by not feeding them. In addition, Oliver is considered to be such a financial liability on the parish that they are willing to pay five pounds to anyone who will take him away and teach him a trade□a job skill that will prevent him from returning to the parish as a pauper in adult life.

The thieves, of course, are obsessed with getting money, although bad at saving it. Later in the book, Oliver's entry into a loving surrogate family is made even more idyllic by the fact that he inherits a great deal of money. Dickens does not take the story far enough to tell us what becomes of Oliver as an adult and if he spends any of his considerable fortune to help the poor, but given his character as presented in the novel, it would be safe to assume that he would.

Source: Kelly Winters, Critical Essay on *Oliver Twist*, in *Novels for Students*, The Gale Group, 2002.

Critical Essay #2

In the following essay, Paroissien examines Oliver Twist *as a reflection of English society and its changing environment during Dickens's formative years.*

Readers familiar with literature about Britain written during the interval between Napoleon's defeat at Waterloo in 1815 and the coronation of Queen Victoria twenty-two years later know how rich it is in studies that map the distinctive features of the post-war period. Some writers, like Bulwer Lytton in his *England and the English* (1833), mixed sociology and history in order to analyze society in the manner of De Toqueville and Montesquieu. Others□David Ricardo, Sismondi, the Swiss economist and historian, and Patrick Colquhoun, are examples□focussed more specifically on the best ways to exploit the source of England's wealth. Some took the position that a free economy would promote social harmony and growth. Dissenters, like Sismondi, advocated government controls as the best way to ensure stability by regulating the production of goods and slowing the economy in order to counter the increasing gap between the rich and the poor. Other barometers of the period include its fiction, which provided commentary of a different sort, as readers discovered in their vicarious participation in the imagined settings of novels truths about the real world they inhabited. It is my contention that *Oliver Twist* (published serially from February 1837 to April 1839) can be read as a literary work that reveals a good deal about the period which shaped Dickens's early life, those years in which people faced, for the first time, some of the public and private challenges posed by the Industrial Revolution.

The distinctive features which characterize *Oliver Twist* as an imaginative instrument for the empirical exploration of early Victorian England require enumeration. Dickens uses the novel to explore two major concerns: first, the plight of children born into the early phase of the Industrial Revolution, and, second, the difficulty of reading "correctly" the external signs of the new urban culture, whose impact on the class system, to take one important instance, rendered unreliable previous assumptions about both the means by which one social group was distinguished from another and the underlying presumption of separateness. These two social realities form the novel's moral agenda and account for a determined effort by Dickens to create a new literary form in which to convey his vision. Prototypical features of *Oliver Twist* include the use of a child hero to convey the specific threats the young faced in their painful initiation into life, the suspenseful revelation of unsuspected connections between different social groups, and the employment of several characters and a narrator to assemble clues and solve mysteries in the manner of a detective.

I shall begin with the foundling hero, whose illegitimate birth in a workhouse many Victorians evidently read as a prelude to the boy's almost certain misfortune and descent into crime. Dickens plays on this likely response to Oliver's fate in several scenes early in the novel. Members of the managerial class who administered the New Poor Law of 1834, for example, are portrayed as taking pleasure in humiliating Oliver, and they aggressively predict his demise. "'I know that boy will be hung,'" warns one

member of the Board of Guardians, a prophecy he and his companions do their best to assist by handing over Oliver to anyone willing to take him on as an apprentice.

Once parish overseers resigned juvenile paupers in their care to an employer, children were generally subject to further degradation, a point made clear by Oliver's apprenticeship to an undertaker. In the hands of cruel employers, typified in the novel by Gamfield and Sowerberry, children often ran away and drifted into crime. And when apprentices fled from the harsh conditions and brutal treatment commonly associated with menial jobs, adolescents often took to stealing, parliamentary investigators discovered, because they had no other way to survive. This development, in turn, had further destructive consequences. If they were caught, boys and girls were taken before police magistrates, who sentenced them to several months in jail. If they remained free, they might fall prey to villains like Fagin, who specialized in training boys to pick pockets. In return for the stolen goods, which the adults fenced for a profit, Fagin and his kind provided food and shelter for their young associates.

The sequence of events showing Oliver's journey from the workhouse in Mudfog to Fagin's den in London shapes the novel's narrative structure and gives it an almost epic scope. In Dickens's own words, the tale portrays a classic struggle of "little Oliver . . . surviving through every adverse circumstance" (1841 Preface). Because Oliver is "so jolly green," he is quickly spotted as a potential recruit by the alert young thief who finds him starving in Barnet High Street. And he is easily ensnared with the promise of help, the first kind word or gesture Oliver has ever received in his life. "'Don't fret your eyelids on that score,'" says the Artful Dodger, sympathetically, when Oliver confesses that he has no money and nowhere to stay. "'I've got to be in London to-night; and I know a 'spectable old genelman as lives there, wot'll give you lodgings for nothink, and never ask for the change'."

Fagin's warm welcome and invitation to eat pointedly contrast with Oliver's earlier experiences concerning food and accommodation. In the workhouse he had been reviled for asking for more, a direct attack on the dietaries introduced by the government in 1836, which ignored the needs of growing children and simply stipulated that the young should be fed "at discretion." Later, on the evening of his arrival at the undertaker's, after he had been sold by the parish officials, Mrs. Sowerberry's preparations for the apprentice's first meal go no further than ordering her servant to "'give this boy some of the cold bits that were put by for Tip,'" the family dog. "'We are very glad to see you, Oliver□very,'" said Fagin, commanding the Dodger to remove some sausages from a skillet and draw up a tub "'near the fire for Oliver,' " making an offer no hungry boy could refuse.

The guiding principle of parsimony written into the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834□I refer to the euphemistic notion of "less eligibility"□ also meant that Union authorities were not encouraged to spend money educating children or providing vocational or industrial training for their charges. Instead, they were urged to reduce administrative expenses for the young as quickly as possible, a justification for the practice of offering a nominal premium to masters as an inducement to take on apprentices as a cheap supply of labor.

Children thus forced into the labor market were so commonly abused that the young "slaves" often ran away from their employers, preferring to fend for themselves in the streets and survive by stealing. And once on a course that doomed them to an outlaw existence, one of two possibilities usually prevailed. They might live relatively well while their luck held, like the boys in Fagin's gang, who drank heavily, gambled and enjoyed the sexual favors of their female companions. Or, if they were caught, they faced prosecution and certain imprisonment, thus completing a downward spiral from which there was almost no chance of escape.

Dickens drives this point home through the juxtaposition of the parallel court appearances of Oliver and the Artful Dodger in chapters 11 and 43. For the hero to escape, "a stronger hand than chance" must intervene to rescue Oliver from the Hatton Garden magistrate, Mr. Fang, and effect his miraculous delivery into middle class respectability and ease. Lacking Oliver's good fortune and help from wealthy friends, Fagin's "best hand" has no one to come to his aid when, later in the novel, he is arrested and tried at Bow Street police court. Instead, the Artful Dodger is convicted and sent abroad to a penal colony in Australia, lagged as a lifer for stealing a twopenny sneeze-box, in the "flash" idiom of the thieves.

Modern readers sometimes object that Oliver's final removal from London and adoption by Mr. Brownlow "as his own son" conflict with Dickens's realistic treatment of poverty and its inevitable link with crime. On the contrary, I suggest that the novel's emphasis on Oliver's happy survival calls attention to the failure of government officials to offer a constructive response to the problem of juvenile delinquency. Orphans and abandoned children in early Victorian England, Dickens realized, constituted an entire class at risk, feral children of the slums destined either for the hangman's noose or transportation to a penal colony.

Finding a solution to the problem of juvenile crime assumed particular urgency in the 1830s when the commitment and conviction of those under sixteen rose more rapidly than ever before in English history. Public officials and members of Poor Law boards who sat "in solemn conclave," like the sadistic "white-waistcoated gentleman" and his fellows, often viewed young offenders as incorrigibles, "A distinct body of thieves whose life and business it is to follow up a determined warfare against the constituted authorities by living in idleness and on plunder." Sentiments life this pervaded government reports and oral testimony from prison governors, policemen and magistrates, witnesses united in a belief that the maintenance of law and order required tough penal measures.

Indifference to children's needs, the most pressing of which were voluminously documented in parliamentary papers published by the government from 1800 onwards, clearly angered Dickens. In novel after novel he aimed a series of sledgehammer blows at some of the instances of misery he saw around him. The defacto infanticide practiced in the country's baby farms, the sexual exploitation of girls on a scale surpassing any previously known and the absence of government regulations for promoting public health all receive careful attention in *Oliver Twist*. In Dickens's view, England's conduct deserved the severest censure. The country seemed willing to pay for its post-war

prosperity by using its young as carelessly as we dispose of plastic cups and paper plates today.

Dickens's choice of a child hero to call attention to the plight of the nation's youth is closely related to the second part of his agenda. This aspect of *Oliver Twist* was equally unique, especially in the novel's emphasis on the care middle-class readers needed to take when they attempted to interpret the external signs of England's new urban culture. If urban reality made it easy to overlook the needs of infants and juveniles, as they were being generated in record numbers for almost certain destruction during the first three decades of the nineteenth century, that same new world also created, through the anonymity and multiplicity of city life, interpretative challenges unknown to earlier generations.

Reference to the novel's treatment of class and the apparent separateness of traditional social groups suggests that Dickens saw this phenomenon very clearly. In a society whose social structure remained relatively stable, customary markers of difference such as dress, vocabulary, accent and occupation served two general functions. They tended to limit opportunities for social mobility by confining individuals to the circumstances into which they were born. They also provided an aid to recognition most people were quick to assimilate. The way one spoke and dressed, together with one's occupation and source of income, offered reliable clues to status and position.

The four apparently distinct groups of characters in *Oliver Twist* illustrate how these notions of class and separateness were challenged by an urban culture, whose contours Dickens read and mastered perhaps more quickly than most of his contemporaries. One at first assumes that the novel's different groups have nothing in common, that beadles, criminals, businessmen and genteel members of the middle class are set apart on the opposite side of gulfs, destined never to meet. Only in fiction, runs one likely objection, do thieves rub shoulders with innocents and respectable upholders of the law, in turn, commit actions that, on a moral plane, reduce them to the level of criminals.

On the other side of this formulation are deserving individuals whose goodness and virtue are assessed negatively on the basis of misleading external appearances. Oliver's own birth in the workhouse furnishes the most obvious example of an infant who, initially, defied attempts by even "the haughtiest stranger" to assign him to "his proper station in society," until he was "badged and ticketed" as a parish child the minute he was wrapped up in old calico robes "which had grown yellow in the same service." The dilemmas of Rose Maylie and Nancy carry this theme even further. Nancy, thief and prostitute, can only be placed outside the law, despite her goodness and courage, while her respectable "sister" Rose, the embodiment of every domestic virtue Dickens can summon from the culture, nevertheless remains under a "stain," forbidden to marry the man who loves her because she is thought to be illegitimate. Revelations at the end of the novel clear up the ambiguities surrounding Rose's birth, and Oliver's ancestry proves sufficiently worthy to justify his assumed middle-class status. But for Nancy heroic death and implied forgiveness in heaven must suffice.

The novel's mystification and literary devices drive home Dickens's point about class interconnectedness in other ways. Punctuating the narrative, for example, are a series of journeys, each presented with scrupulous care for accuracy and topographical detail. The expedition of Oliver and Sikes is perhaps the most dramatic instance, a twenty-five mile trip from Bethnal Green to Chertsey, a remote Thames-side village in Surrey, where Mrs. Maylie and Rose reside. Dickens devotes two chapters to their foray and the attempted robbery in order to warn readers about dangers many overlooked. Sitting in her "detached house surrounded by a wall," Mrs. Maylie has no idea that her home has been under surveillance by a member of Fagin's gang for two weeks, or that Sikes so covets her silver plate that he submits to Fagin's proposal to use Oliver as the means of breaking in through a small, unsecured lattice-window at the back of the house.

The linking of inhabitants from widely disparate locales is further reinforced by the sudden and mysterious appearance of Fagin and Monks outside Oliver's study one midsummer evening later in the story. Safe though Oliver is at Mrs. Maylie's summer cottage, goodness, Dickens appears to suggest, never remains completely invulnerable. In the new urban world of the 1830s, criminals and law-abiding citizens seemed to share the same ground, or to have access to it on nearly equal terms. Similar instances of this theme appear elsewhere in the novel. On one occasion Oliver runs into Monks as he leaves a country inn while on an errand for Mrs. Maylie; on another, Nancy, whose life had been squandered in the streets, makes her way to "a family hotel in a quiet but handsome street near Hyde Park," to meet Rose Maylie and provide information that Mr. Brownlow uses to solve the mystery of Oliver's identity.

Brownlow's role as a prototypical detective is reinforced by the narrator and by Rose and Nancy, all of whom patiently assemble clues and demonstrate a keen intelligence. This very quality, privileged by its prominent role, seems to be one Dickens wants to propose for adoption by his readers. Extend your sympathies to those whose suffering deserves support. And sharpen your ability to decode the complicated social messages embedded in city life.

This summary makes mine a reductive reading on *Oliver Twist*, one that deliberately links the novel with its formative social and historical contexts. A more expansive inquiry would admit as evidence the literary features of the novel Dickens inherited from his predecessors. It would also take into account the compelling biographical aspects of Oliver's story, into which Dickens confessed to his publisher that he had thrown his "whole heart and soul." My account, nevertheless, accords with Dickens's deepest conviction that fiction always tells us something about the way readers thought and lived and how he, like his contemporaries, tried to make sense of the bafflement of existence. To this end, I have focussed on the experience of reading *Oliver Twist* as a novel dedicated to reading experience as it was shaped, for many readers, by the urban conditions of the 1830s.

Source: David Paroissien, "*Oliver Twist* and the Contours of Early Victorian England," in *Victorian Newsletter*, Vol. 83, Spring 1993, pp. 14-17.

Critical Essay #3

In the following essay, Gissing discusses Dickens's motives for writing Oliver Twist*, as well as the political, social and economic climate in which it was written.*

Critical Essay #4

It was a proof of Dickens's force and originality that, whilst still engaged upon *Pickwick*, with the laughter of a multitude flattering his joyous and eager temper, he chose for his new book such a subject as that of *Oliver Twist*. The profound seriousness of his genius, already suggesting itself in the course of Mr. Pickwick's adventures, was fully declared in "The Parish Boy's Progress." Doubts might well have been entertained as to the reception by the public of this squalid chronicle, this story of the workhouse, the thieves' den, and the condemned cell; as a matter of fact, voices were soon raised in protest, and many of *Pickwick's* admirers turned away in disgust. When the complete novel appeared, a *Quarterly* reviewer attacked it vigorously, declaring the picture injurious to public morals, and the author's satire upon public institutions mere splenetic extravagance. For all this Dickens was prepared. Consciously, deliberately, he had begun the great work of his life, and he had strength to carry with him the vast majority of English readers. His mistakes were those of a generous purpose. When criticism had said its say, the world did homage to a genial moralist, a keen satirist, and a leader in literature.

In January, 1837, appeared the first number of a magazine called *Bentley's Miscellany*, with Dickens for editor, and in its second number began *Oliver Twist*, which ran from month to month until March of 1839. Long before the conclusion of the story as a serial, it appeared (October, 1838) in three volumes, illustrated by Cruikshank. Some of these illustrations were admirable, some very poor, and one was so bad that Dickens caused it to be removed before many copies of the book had been issued. Years after, Cruikshank seems to have hinted that his etchings were the origin of *Oliver Twist*, Dickens having previously seen them and founded his story upon them. The claim was baseless, and it is not worth while discussing how Cruikshank came to imagine such a thing.

There had fallen upon Dickens the first penalty of success; he was tempted to undertake more work than he could possibly do, and at the same time was worried by discontent with the pecuniary results of his hasty agreements. During the composition of *Oliver* he wrote the latter portion of *Pickwick* and the early chapters of *Nickleby*; moreover, he compiled an anonymous life of the clown Grimaldi, and did other things which can only be considered hackwork. That he had not also to work at *Barnaby Rudge*, and thus be carrying on three novels at the same time, was only due to his resolve to repudiate an impossible engagement. Complications such as these were inevitable at the opening of the most brilliant literary career in the Victorian time.

How keenly Dickens felt the hardship of his position, toiling for the benefit of a publisher, is shown in Chapter XIV, where Oliver is summoned to Mr. Brownlow's study, and, gazing about him in wonder at the laden shelves, is asked by his benefactor whether he would like to be a writer of books. "Oliver considered a little while and at last said he should think it would be a much better thing to be a bookseller; upon which the old gentleman laughed heartily and declared he had said a very good thing."□"Don't be afraid," added Mr. Brownlow, "we won't make an author of you whilst there's an honest

trade to be learnt, or brick-making to turn to." An amusing passage, in the light of Dickens's position only a year or two after it was written.

Critical Essay #5

Oliver Twist had a twofold moral purpose: to exhibit the evil working of the Poor Law Act, and to give a faithful picture of the life of thieves in London. The motives hung well together, for in Dickens's view the pauper system was directly responsible for a great deal of crime. It must be remembered that, by the new Act of 1834, outdoor sustenance was as much as possible done away with, paupers being henceforth relieved only on condition of their entering a workhouse, while the workhouse life was made thoroughly uninviting, among other things by the separation of husbands and wives, and parents and children. Against this seemingly harsh treatment of a helpless class Dickens is very bitter; he regards such legislation as the outcome of coldblooded theory, evolved by well-to-do persons of the privileged caste, who neither perceive nor care about the result of their system in individual suffering. "I wish some well-fed philosopher, whose meat and drink turn to gall within him; whose blood is ice, whose heart is iron, could have seen Oliver Twist clutching at the dainty viands that the dog had neglected. . . . There is only one thing I should like better, and that would be to see the philosopher making the same sort of meal himself, with the same relish." (Chapter IV.) By "philosopher" Dickens meant a political-economist; he uses the word frequently in this book, and always in the spirit which moved Carlyle when speaking of "the dismal science." He is the thorough-going advocate of the poor, the uncompromising Radical. Speaking with irony of the vices nourished in Noah Claypole by vicious training, he bids us note "how impartially the same amiable qualities are developed in the finest lord and the dirtiest charity boy." This partisanship lay in his genius; it was one of the sources of his strength; its entire sincerity enabled him to carry out the great task set before him, that of sweetening in some measure the Augean stable of English social life in the early half of our century.

That he was in error on the point immediately at issue mattered little. The horrible condition of the poor which so exasperated him resulted (in so far as it was due to any particular legislation) from the old Poor Law, which, by its system of granting relief in aid of insufficient wages had gone far towards pauperizing the whole of agricultural England. Not in a year or two could this evil be remedied. Dickens, seeing only the hardship of the inevitable reform, visited upon the authors of that reform indignation merited by the sluggishness and selfishness which had made it necessary. In good time the new Act justified itself; it helped to bring about increase of wages and to awaken self-respect, so far as self-respect is possible in the toilers perforce living from hand to mouth. But Dickens's quarrel with the "guardians of the poor" lay far too deep to be affected by such small changes; his demand was for justice and for mercy, in the largest sense, for a new spirit in social life. Now that his work is done, with that of Carlyle and Ruskin to aid its purpose, a later generation applauds him for throwing scorn upon mechanical "philosophy." Constitutional persons, such as Macaulay, might declare his views on social government beneath contempt; but those views have largely prevailed, and we see their influence ever extending. Readers of *Oliver Twist*, nowadays, do not concern themselves with the technical question; Oliver "asks for more," and has all our

sympathies; be the law old or new, we are made to perceive that, more often than not, "the law is an ass," and its proceedings invalid in the court of conscience.

Critical Essay #6

In a preface to *Oliver* (written in 1841) Dickens spoke at length of its second purpose, and defended himself against critics who had objected to his dealing with the lives of pickpockets and burglars. His aim, he tells us, was to discredit a school of fiction then popular, which glorified the thief in the guise of a gallant highwayman; the real thief, he declared, he had nowhere found portrayed, save in Hogarth, and his own intention was to show the real creature, vile and miserable, "for ever skulking uneasily through the dirtiest paths of life." From the category of evil examples in fiction of the day, he excepts "Sir Edward Bulwer's admirable and powerful novel of Paul Clifford," having for that author a singular weakness not easily explained. His own scenes lie in "the cold, wet, shelterless midnight streets of London," in "foul and frowsy dens," in "haunts of hunger and disease"; and "where"□he asks□"are the attractions of these things?"

This defence, no doubt, had in view (amongst other things) the censure upon *Oliver Twist* contained in Thackeray's story of *Catherine*, which was published in *Fraser's Magazine*, 1839-40, under the signature of "Ikey Solomons jun." Thackeray at this time was not the great novelist whom we know; seven years had still to elapse before the publication of *Vanity Fair*. His *Catherine* is a stinging satire upon the same popular fiction that Dickens had in view, but he throws a wider net, attacking with scornful vigour *Paul Clifford* and *Ernest Maltravers*, together with the Jack Sheppards and Dick Turpins and Duvals, and, in two instances, speaking contemptuously of *Oliver* itself. "To tread in the footsteps of the immortal Fagin requires a genius of inordinate stride," and he cannot present his readers with any "white-washed saints," like poor "Biss Dadsy" in *Oliver Twist*. Still, says the author, he has taken pains to choose a subject "agreeably low, delightfully disgusting, and at the same time eminently pleasing and pathetic." His heroine is a real person, one Catherine Hayes, whose history can be read in the Newgate Calendar; she was brought up in the workhouses, apprenticed to the landlady of a village inn, and, in the year 1726, was burned at Tyburn for the murder of her husband. Thackeray uses his lash on all novelists who show themselves indulgent to evildoers. "Let your rogues act like rogues, and your honest men like honest men; don't let us have any juggling and thimblerigging with virtue and vice." In short, he writes very angrily, having, it is plain, Dickens often in mind. Nor is it hard to see the cause of this feeling. Thackeray was impatient with the current pictures of rascaldom simply because he was aware of his own supreme power to depict the rascal world; what thoughts may we surmise in the creator of Barry Lyndon when he read the novels of Bulwer and of Ainsworth, or the new production of the author of *Pickwick*? Only three years more, and we find him writing a heartfelt eulogy of the *Christmas Carol*, praise which proves him thoroughly to have appreciated the best of Dickens. But it must be avowed that very much of *Oliver* is far from Dickens's best, and Thackeray, with his native scorn of the untrue and the feeble, would often enough have his teeth set on edge as he perused those pages. *Catherine* itself, flung off in disdainful haste, is evidence of its author's peculiar power; it has dialogues, scenes, glimpses of character beyond the reach of any other English novelist. In certain directions Thackeray may be held the greatest "realist"

who ever penned fiction. There is nothing to wonder at in his scoff at Fagin and Nancy; but we are glad of the speedy change to a friendlier point of view.

It was undoubtedly Dickens's conviction that, within limits imposed by decency, he had told the truth, and nothing but the truth, about his sordid and criminal characters. Imagine his preface to have been written fifty years later, and it would be all but appropriate to some representative of a daring school of "naturalism," asserting his right to deal with the most painful facts of life. "I will not abate one hole in the Dodger's coat, or one scrap of curl-paper in the girl's dishevelled hair." True, he feels obliged so to manipulate the speech of these persons that it shall not "offend the ear," but that seemed to him a matter of course. He appeals to the example of the eighteenth-century novelists, who were unembarrassed in their choice of subjects. He will stand or fall by his claim to have made a true picture. The little hero of the book is as real to him as Bill Sikes. "I wished to show, in little Oliver, the principle of good surviving through every adverse circumstance, and triumphing at last." Think what we may of his perfectly sincere claim, the important thing, in our retrospect, is the spirit in which he made it. After a long interval during which English fiction was represented by the tawdry unreal or the high imaginative (I do not forget the homely side of Scott, but herein Scott stood alone), a new writer demands attention for stories of obscure lives, and tells his tale so attractively that high and low give ear. It is a step in social and political history; it declares the democratic tendency of the new age. Here is the significance of Dickens's early success, and we do not at all understand his place in English literature if we lose sight of this historic point of view.

Critical Essay #7

By comparison with the book which preceded it, *Oliver Twist* seems immature. Putting aside the first chapter or two, *Pickwick* is an astonishingly ripe production, marvellous as the work of a man of five and twenty, who had previously published only a few haphazard sketches of contemporary life. *Oliver*, on the other hand, might well pass for a first effort. Attempting a continued story, the author shows at once his weakest side, the defect which he will never outgrow. There is no coherency in the structure of the thing; the plotting is utterly without ingenuity, the mysteries are so artificial as to be altogether uninteresting. Again, we must remember the time at which Dickens was writing. Our modern laws of fiction did not exist; a story was a story, not to be judged by the standard of actual experience. Moreover, it had always to be borne in mind how greatly Dickens was under the influence of the stage, which at one time he had seriously studied with a view to becoming an actor; all through his books the theatrical tendency is manifest, not a little to their detriment. Obviously he saw a good deal of *Oliver Twist* as if from before the footlights, and even in the language of his characters the traditional note of melodrama is occasionally sounded. When, long years after, he horrified a public audience by his "reading" of the murder of Nancy, it was a singular realization of hopes cherished in his early manhood. Not content with his fame as an author, he delighted in giving proof that he possessed in a high degree the actor's talent. In our own day the popularity of the stage is again exerting an influence on the methods of fiction; such intermingling of two very different arts must always be detrimental to both.

Put aside the two blemishes of the book□on the one hand, Monks with his insufferable (often ludicrous) rant, and his absurd machinations; on the other, the feeble idyllicism of the Maylie group□ and there remains a very impressive picture of the wretched and the horrible. Oliver's childish miseries show well against a background of hopeless pauperdom; having regard to his origin, we grant the "gentle, attached, affectionate creature," who is so unlike a typical workhouse child, and are made to feel his sufferings among people who may be called inhuman, but who in truth are human enough, the circumstances considered. Be it noted that, whereas even Mr. Bumble is at moments touched by natural sympathy, and Mr. Sowerberry would be not unkind if he had his way, the women of this world□Mrs. Corney, Mrs. Sowerberry, and the workhouse hags□are fiercely cruel; in them, as in many future instances, Dickens draws strictly from his observation, giving us the very truth in despite of sentiment. Passing from the shadow of the workhouse to that of criminal London, we submit to the effect which Dickens alone can produce; London as a place of squalid mystery and terror, of the grimly grotesque, of labyrinthine obscurity and lurid fascination, is Dickens's own; he taught people a certain way of regarding the huge city, and to this day how common it is to see London with Dickens's eyes. The vile streets, accurately described and named; the bare, filthy rooms inhabited by Fagin and Sikes and the rest of them; the hideous public-house to which thieves resort are before us with a haunting reality. Innumerable scarcely noticed touches heighten the impression; we know, for instance, exactly what these people eat and drink, and can smell the dish of sheep's head, flanked with porter,

which Nancy sets before her brutal companion. Fagin is as visible as Shylock; we hear the very voices of the Artful Dodger and of Charley Bates, whose characters are so admirably unlike in similarity; Nancy herself becomes credible by force of her surroundings and in certain scenes (for instance, that of her hysterical fury in Chapter XVI) is life itself. The culminating horrors have a wild picturesqueness unlike anything achieved by other novelists; one never forgets Sikes's wanderings after the murder (with that scene in the inn with the pedlar), nor his death in Jacob's Island, nor Fagin in the condemned cell. These things could not be more vividly presented. The novelist's first duty is to make us see what he has seen himself, whether with the actual eye or with that of imagination, and no one ever did this more successfully than Dickens in his best moments.

His allusion (in the Preface) to Hogarth suggests a comparison of these two great artists, each of whom did such noteworthy work in the same field. On the whole, one observes more of contrast than of likeness in the impressions they severally leave upon us; the men differed widely in their ways of regarding life and were subjected to very different influences. But the life of the English poor as seen by Dickens in his youth had undergone little outward change from that which was familiar to Hogarth, and it is *Oliver Twist* especially that reminds us of the other's stern moralities in blackand- white. Not improbably they influenced the young writer's treatment of his subject. He never again deals in such unsoftened horrors as those death-scenes in the workhouse, or draws a figure so peculiarly base as that of Noah Claypole; his humour at moments is grim, harsh, unlike the ordinary Dickens note, and sometimes seems resolved to show human nature at its worst, as in the passage when Oliver runs after the coach, induced by promise of a half penny, only to be scoffed at when he falls back in weariness and pain (Chapter VIII). Dickens is, as a rule, on better terms with his rascals and villains; they generally furnish matter for a laugh; but half-a-dozen faces in *Oliver* have the very Hogarth stamp, the lines of bestial ugliness which disgust and repel.

Critical Essay #8

One is often inclined to marvel that, with such a world to draw upon for his material, the world of the lower classes in the England of sixty years ago, he was able to tone his work with so genial a humanity. The features of that time, as they impress our imagination, are for the most part either ignoble or hideous, and a Hogarth in literature would seem a more natural outcome of such conditions than the author of *Pickwick* and the *Christmas Carol*. Dickens's service to civilization by the liberality of his thought cannot be too much insisted upon. The atmosphere of that age was a stifling Puritanism. "I have been very happy for some years," says Mrs. Maylie; "too happy, perhaps. It may be time that I should meet with some misfortune." (Chapter XXXIII.) Against the state of mind declared in this amazing utterance, Dickens instinctively rebelled; he believed in happiness, in its moral effect, and in the right of all to have their share in it. Forced into contemplation of the gloomiest aspects of human existence, his buoyant spirit would not be held in darkness; as his art progressed, it dealt more gently with oppressive themes. Take, for instance, the mortuary topic, which has so large a place in the life of the poor, and compare Mr. Sowerberry's business, squalid and ghastly, with that of Mr. Mould in *Chuzzlewit*, where humour prevails over the repulsive, and that again with the picture of Messrs. Omer and Joram in *Copperfield*, which touches mortality with the homeliest kindness. The circumstances, to be sure, are very different, but their choice indicates the movement of the author's mind. It was by virtue of his ever-hopeful outlook that Dickens became such a force for good.

Disposing of those of his characters who remain alive at the end, he assures us, as in a fairy tale, that the good people lived happily ever after, and we are quite ready to believe it. Among the evildoers he distinguishes, Mr. Bumble falls to his appropriate doom; Noah Claypole disappears in the grime which is his native element□severity, in his case unmitigated by the reflection that he, too, was a parish-boy and a creature of circumstances. Charley Bates it is impossible to condemn; his jollity is after Dickens's own heart, and, as there is always hope for the boy who can laugh, one feels it natural enough that he is last heard of as "the merriest young grazier in all Northamptonshire." But what of his companion, Mr. Dawkins, the Dodger? Voices pleaded for him; the author was besought to give him a chance; but of the Dodger we have no word. His last appearance is in Chapter XLIII, perhaps the best in the book. We know how Dickens must have enjoyed the writing of that chapter; Mr. Dawkins before the Bench is a triumph of his most characteristic humour. What more is to be told of the Dodger after that?

We take philosophic leave of him, assured that he is "doing full justice to his bringing-up, and establishing for himself a glorious reputation."

Source: George Gissing, "Chapter IV: *Oliver Twist*," in *The Immortal Dickens*, Kraus Reprint Co., 1969, pp. 63-87.

Adaptations

Oliver Twist was adapted as a silent film in 1909, directed by J. Stuart Blackton and starring William Humphrey and Elita Proctor Otis; in 1912, directed by Thomas Bentley; and in 1916, directed by James Young and starring Marie Doro and Tully Marshal.

The book was adapted as a film in 1922, directed by Frank Lloyd and starring Jackie Coogan and Lon Chaney; in 1933, directed by William J. Cowen and starring Dicke Moore and Irving Pichel; and in 1948, directed by David Leon and starring John Howard Davies and Alec Guinness.

Television versions were released in 1959, directed by Daniel Petrie and starring Richard Thomas and Eric Portman; in 1982, directed by Clive Donner and starring Richard Charles and George C. Scott; in 1985, directed by Gareth Davies and starring Ben Rodska and Eric Porter; in 1997, directed by Tony Bill and starring Alex Trench and Richard Dreyfuss; and in 1999 starring Sam Smith and Robert Lindsay, directed by Renny Rye.

A long-running Broadway musical based on *Oliver Twist*, entitled *Oliver!*, was adapted as a feature film in 1968, directed by Carol Reed.

Topics for Further Study

Oliver Twist attacks the nineteenth-century treatment of orphans by showing how they were abused. How are orphans treated in our society? Investigate and write about what happens to children whose parents are dead or unknown, and who don't have family members willing to take them.

Fagin is sentenced to death for his crimes. Do you think this is justified? Why or why not?

Oliver is remarkably "good," despite the starvation and abuse he receives during his childhood. Do you think this is realistic? Why or why not?

Investigate what it was like to live in London during the middle of the nineteenth century. If you lived there, what job would you have done? What would your life have been like?

Fagin is evil and cunning, and Dickens also frequently mentions that he is Jewish, leading critics to remark that Dickens was anti-Semitic, though this may not have been the case. How common was anti-Semitism in Dickens's time? Research and write about how Jewish people were viewed and treated in England during the nineteenth century.

Compare and Contrast

1838: It is not yet known that every person in the world has different fingerprints, so the criminal justice system relies on eyewitness reports, confessions, and rough clues to determine who has committed crimes.

Today: Fingerprinting, DNA analysis, and sophisticated analysis of microscopic clues left at crime scenes have made the criminal justice system much more precise than it was in Dickens's day.

1838: Throughout the 1800s, a variety of crimes in England are punishable by death. In 1800, 200 types of crimes merited the death penalty. By 1837, reforms have diminished this number to 15 types of crimes.

Today: In England, there is no death penalty for any crime.

1838: Laws control the movement and daily lives of poor people who are confined to "workhouses" or "debtor's prisons" where they are starved and mistreated.

Today: England has an extensive social welfare system, which provides aid to unemployed, ill, and elderly people.

What Do I Read Next?

Dickens's *The Pickwick Papers* (1836-1837) is a humorous satire on pre-Victorian London.

Dickens's *David Copperfield* (1849-1850), drawn from Dickens's own early experiences, tells the story of a young orphan.

Bleak House, by Dickens (1852-1853), is a satirical tale set in the labyrinth of the English legal system.

Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859) is a dramatic narrative of the French Revolution.

Charlotte Brönte's *Jane Eyre* (1847) tells another story about an orphan in nineteenthcentury England.

Further Study

Fido, Martin, *The World of Charles Dickens: The Life, Times and Work of the Great Victorian Novelist*, Carlton, 1999.

This book provides background information on Dickens's time, life, and work.

Hobsbaum, Philip, *A Reader's Guide to Charles Dickens*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1972.

This work examines all of Dickens's work and provides a guide to readers.

Kaplan, Fred, *Dickens: A Biography*, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998.

This biography of Dickens is written for high school students.

Pool, Daniel, *What Jane Austen Ate and Charles Dickens Knew: From Fox Hunting to Whist The Facts of Daily Life in Nineteenth-Century England*, Touchstone Books, 1994.

This fascinating volume explains all the customs of daily life in Dickens's time.

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Bayley, John, "Things As They Really Are," in *Dickens: A Collection of Critical Essays*, edited by Martin Price, Prentice- Hall, 1967, pp. 83-96.

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Gissing, George, *Critical Studies of the Works of Charles Dickens*, Haskell House, 1965, pp. 43-57.

Gold, Joseph, *Charles Dickens: Radical Moralist*, University of Minnesota Press, 1972, pp. 25-65.

Kincaid, James R., *Dickens and the Rhetoric of Laughter*, Oxford University Press, 1971, pp. 50-75.

Miller, J. Hillis, "The Dark World of Oliver Twist," in *Charles Dickens*, edited by Harold Bloom, Modern Critical Views series, Chelsea House, 1987, pp. 29-69.

Thurley, Geoffrey, *The Dickens Myth: Its Genesis and Structure*, St. Martin's Press, 1976, pp. 43-50.

BOOKRAGS

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Novels for Students (NfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, NfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of NfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of NfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in NfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by NfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

NfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Novels for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Novels for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Novels for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from NfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Novels for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from NfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Novels for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of NfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of NfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Novels for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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