

# Oliver Twist

Charles Dickens



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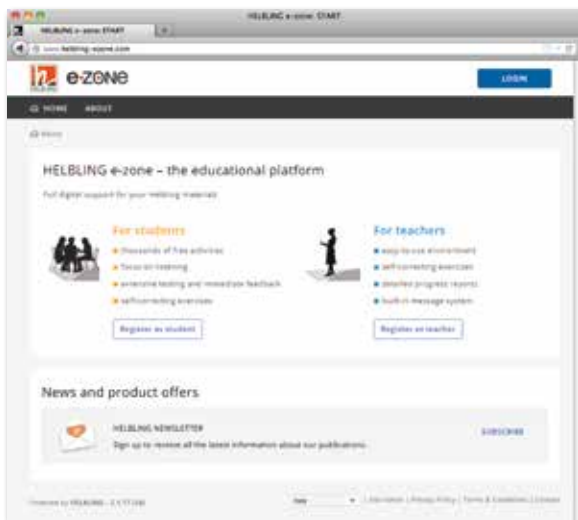


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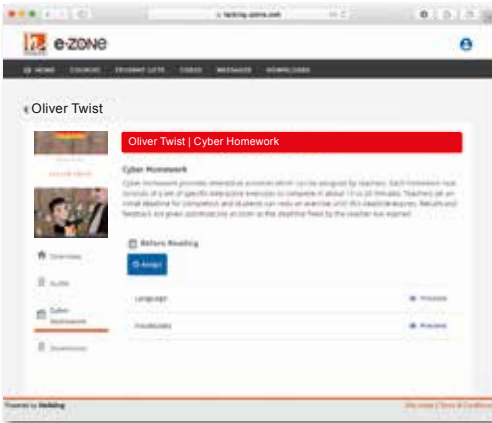
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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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**Charles Dickens** was one of Britain's most popular writers. He was born in Portsea, in the south of England, in 1812, but Dickens spent most of his life in London. He had a difficult childhood. He grew up in a family that never had enough money. His father could not earn enough to support his ten children and he lived in a debtors' prison•. At the early age of 12, Dickens

had to start working in a factory.

As a young man Dickens found work first in an office and then as a journalist. His newspaper work brought him into contact with many different people. He enjoyed writing detailed descriptions of the people he met, their clothing, their habits, and their way of talking. He witnessed• the hardship• and tragedy of life, as well as its humorous• side.

Soon Dickens started writing stories that he published in monthly instalments•. His first novel *The Pickwick Papers* had only a small following• at first, but then it started selling 40,000 copies per instalment. After this he wrote many more novels and travelled throughout Britain and America doing dramatic readings of his most loved books. Among the most famous were *David Copperfield*, *Great Expectations*, *Bleak House*, *A Christmas Carol*, *A Tale of Two Cities*, and *Oliver Twist*. Dickens's work presented to readers a new type of novel which used fiction to talk about the most important social problems of the period. Charles Dickens died in 1870.

### GLOSSARY

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- **debtors' prison:** prison for people who owed money/were in debt
- **following:** people who read it
- **hardship:** difficult side (of life)
- **humorous:** funny
- **instalments:** parts
- **witnessed:** saw

## ABOUT THE BOOK

*Oliver Twist* (written in 1837) brings to life the character of a poor lonely orphan. Oliver suffers all types of problems, evil influences and cruel treatment from adults but he remains innocent and pure at heart.

Like Oliver, Dickens himself experienced the horrors of the workhouse<sup>•</sup>, where people who were very poor were sent to work. Like Oliver, too, Dickens had to go to work at a very young age. Dickens worked in a factory while Oliver becomes an apprentice<sup>•</sup>.

Through *Oliver Twist*, Dickens illustrates the social injustices<sup>•</sup> of his time. Extreme poverty<sup>•</sup> led to crime<sup>•</sup>, but also to people being severely punished for minor<sup>•</sup> crimes.

The London of Dickens is a dark and evil place. Dickens shows us the squalor<sup>•</sup> of the streets and the buildings that are inhabited by Fagin and his boys. This contrasts with the calm, beautiful countryside where Mrs Maylie and Rose live in peace and comfort. There are also contrasts between the characters who want to help Oliver and protect him, and those characters who want to exploit<sup>•</sup> Oliver and each other.

Oliver is innocent and trusting, but throughout the novel he falls into the hands of dishonest people. They sell him, they rob him, they kidnap him, they make him ill, but Dickens shows that in the end good can be stronger than evil.



- 
- **apprentice:** person who is learning a job
  - **crime:** illegal actions
  - **exploit:** use
  - **injustices:** things that are not fair
  - **minor:** not important
  - **poverty:** the state of being poor
  - **squalor:** dirty, bad conditions
  - **workhouse:** place where poor people worked in exchange for food and a place to sleep



# HARD TIMES IN WORKHOUSES

During Charles Dickens's lifetime (1812-1870), England enjoyed the prosperity that the **Industrial Revolution** was bringing. Even a very short list of the major inventions during Dickens's lifetime is impressive. These inventions certainly made life easier for upper-class Victorian society. The inventions meant factories and factories meant workers and a new social class of industrial workers was born. Life was difficult for these people. They were poor and lived in terrible conditions and often children and women worked too. Dickens was aware of the price man was paying in the name of progress. In *Oliver Twist* and in many other novels, he describes with sharp realism the gloomy and polluted industrial areas of his time. What is more important, he condemns the terrible working and living conditions of the working classes. In Dickens's eyes, this was not progress, it was decline.



Dickens was particularly sensitive to the problem of child labour. When he was a child his father went to a debtors' prison and the young Dickens had to work in a factory. Oliver's words:

**“Please, sir, I want some more”**

on page 20 of this book and the punishment he gets for his request have become a universal symbol of social injustice. Dickens often visited factories and wrote newspaper articles in which he expressed his disgust at what he saw there. In *Oliver Twist* he strongly attacks the **New Poor Law** of 1834, which established the workhouse system and encouraged unmarried mothers to place their children in baby-farms in return for a regular, small sum of money. The **workhouse** orphan Oliver therefore symbolizes the effects of this act, and Dickens shows how the law was hardest on children.



## WORKHOUSES

Workhouses were places where very poor people could stay in exchange for work. Find out more about workhouses during Dickens's time in the book and online.

## THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION

What was the Industrial Revolution? Write words you know, then find out more online.

## GLOSSARY

- **condemns:** says it is bad
- **decline:** the process of becoming worse
- **disgust:** strong physical dislike
- **established:** (here) created
- **gloomy:** dark and sad
- **impressive:** (here) amazing
- **meant:** (here) brought; resulted in
- **polluted:** dirty; unsafe (because it is dirty)
- **prosperity:** period of success and richness
- **was aware of:** knew about

# Oliver Twist



Agnes



Mrs Bedwin



Dr Losberne



Oliver



Mr Brownlow



Rose



Monks



Old Sally



Mr Bumble



Sikes



Nancy



Fagin



The Dodger

## BEFORE READING

**1 Look at the pictures in the book and read the descriptions. Which one describes Oliver Twist? Tick (✓).**

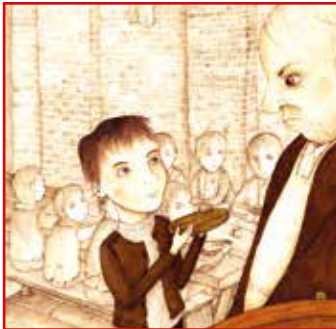
- a  He is eleven years old but is small and fat for his age. He has short dark hair and brown eyes.
- b  She has long dark brown hair and her eyes are blue. She is tall and thin but we do not know how old she is.
- c  He has short brown hair and blue eyes. He's thin and he isn't very tall. He's about nine years old.

**2 Read these sentences about Oliver and choose a word from the box to describe him.**

clever      tired      hungry      innocent

- a Every day in the workhouse, Oliver only got soup to eat. Oliver was very .....
- b Oliver walked and walked for twenty miles to get to London. Oliver was .....
- c Oliver quickly learned everything that Fagin taught him. Oliver was .....
- d Oliver didn't rob anyone, but the police officer thought he was a thief. Oliver was .....

**3 What do you think Oliver is doing in this picture? Tick (✓).**



- a  Asking for more food.
- b  Walking to London.
- c  Talking to a police officer.



4 Listen and match the characters to the descriptions.

a



Mr Brownlow

b



Fagin

c



Nancy

d



Oliver

5 Listen to these extracts from the story. Do the characters in the pictures like or dislike Oliver? Tick (✓).

A Mr Bumble



Like

Dislike

B Mrs Bedwin



Like

Dislike

C Monks



Like

Dislike

D Sikes

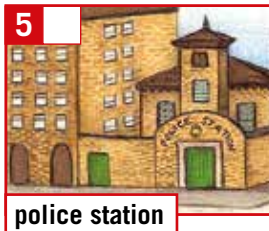
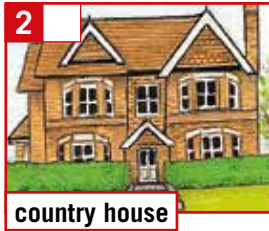
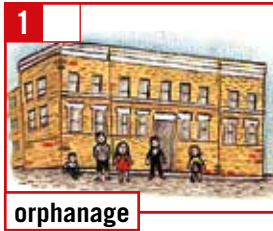


Like

Dislike

# BEFORE READING

1 Look at the pictures of these places from *Oliver Twist*. Then match them with the descriptions below.



- a The police investigate crimes in this building.
- b People who enjoy reading can choose and buy books here.
- c Children who have no mother or father live in this place.
- d Rich people can live and enjoy the beauty of the countryside here.
- e This is a small house in the country, close to a village.
- f This is a large building where very poor people live and work.

2 Who says the following? Match the word to the sentence.

orphan    servant    thief

- a I steal things from other people. ....
- b I have no mother or father. ....
- c I work in someone's house, cooking and cleaning. ....



**3 Here are some words from the story. Match them with the pictures.**

**a** wedding ring

**b** handkerchief

**c** pocket

**d** soup

**e** cloak

**f** portrait

**g** knife

**h** watch

**1**



**2**



**3**



**4**



**5**



**6**



**7**



**8**




**4 Use the words from Exercise 3 to complete these sentences.**

- a** Oliver's mother was not wearing a ..... so probably she was not married.
- b** Nancy wore a ..... to keep her warm when she went outside.
- c** There was a ..... of a beautiful lady on the wall of Oliver's room.
- d** The children at the workhouse ate ..... every day.
- e** In Fagin's room there was a ..... for cutting bread.
- f** Fagin put a ..... and a ..... in the ..... of his jacket and the boys tried to steal them from him.





# 1 Oliver enters the world

 Oliver Twist was born in a workhouse•. When Oliver was born, there was no one to look after him except for an old nurse and a doctor. They didn't care about him.

Oliver's mother arrived at the workhouse the night before she gave birth to her son. She asked to see her baby and then died. No one knew where she came from or who she was. But the doctor noticed• that she had no wedding ring on her finger.

When the doctor left and the old nurse dressed him, Oliver cried loudly. He was an orphan and he was all alone. There was no one to look after baby Oliver at the workhouse so he was sent to an orphanage•. Life was hard here, with little food or love.

By the age of nine, Oliver was a small pale thin child, but he had a strong spirit. The housekeeper• of the orphanage was cruel• and hard. She often beat• Oliver and locked him up. This was usually for saying he was hungry.

One day the housekeeper was surprised by a visit from Mr Bumble, the head of the workhouse.

'Oliver Twist is nine years old now. He's too old to stay here at the orphanage with you,' Mr Bumble said. 'So, we have decided to move him to the workhouse. I have come here myself to collect him and take him there.'

## GLOSSARY

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- **beat:** hit
- **cruel:** unkind
- **housekeeper:** person employed to look after a house
- **noticed:** saw
- **orphanage:** home for children with no mother or father
- **workhouse:** place where poor people worked in exchange for food and a place to sleep

As soon as they arrived at the workhouse, Mr Bumble took Oliver to meet the Board•. The Board consisted of nine or ten fat gentlemen sitting around a table.

‘Boy,’ said one of the fat gentlemen to Oliver, ‘you are an orphan and you must be grateful• for the charity• of the town. Pray hard for the people who feed• you. You are here to learn a trade•, and you will begin your work tomorrow morning. Goodnight.’

And poor little Oliver was sent to sleep on a hard cold bed in a room full of other boys, to be ready for work the next morning.

There was even less food at the workhouse than at the orphanage. The boys got three meals of thin soup a day, with an onion in it twice a week, and half a piece of bread on Sundays. The boys got hungrier and hungrier until one day they decided to do something. One boy had to ask for more food at supper that evening. They drew lots•: Oliver Twist was that boy.

## Drawing lots

Work in groups of six.

Put together a collection of ‘lots.’ They can be pencils with one shorter than all the others or pieces of paper, one marked with a sign.

Then draw lots.

Decide on a question to ask the teacher. The student with the shortest pencil or with the paper with a mark must ask the teacher the question.

### GLOSSARY

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- **Board:** group of people who manage an institution
- **charity:** help given to poor people
- **drew lots:** played a game of chance to choose someone
- **feed:** give someone food
- **grateful:** thankful
- **trade:** job



The evening arrived and the boys took their places in the dining hall. The master of the workhouse stood by the cooking pot and served out the soup. Soon there was no more soup and the boys were desperate with hunger.

Oliver rose from the table and walked up to the master. He held up his bowl and said, 'Please, sir, I want some more.'

The master turned very pale when he heard Oliver's request. The boys froze with fear as they waited for his answer.

'What?' said the master.

'Please, sir,' repeated Oliver. 'I want some more.'

The master hit Oliver on the head with his serving spoon, and called Mr Bumble.

The Board was in a meeting when Mr Bumble rushed in and interrupted them.

'Excuse me, sir!' said Mr Bumble to the gentleman in the high chair. 'Oliver Twist has asked for more!'

'For more?' said the gentleman. 'The boy is an ungrateful criminal and he must leave the workhouse!'

They locked Oliver up. For a whole week, he was locked in a dark, solitary room, crying all day and having nightmares all night.

## Hunger


When you are hungry how do you feel?



Tell a friend.

### GLOSSARY

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- **bowl:** 
- **criminal:** person who has committed crimes

- **nightmares:** bad dreams
- **rose:** stood up
- **rushed in:** entered in a great hurry

