



Dickens and his public

When Charles Dickens was born in 1812 only rich people could read. During his life, more people were able to go to school and learn to read. Charles Dickens wrote articles and short stories for magazines. These magazines were cheap enough for most people to buy and read. Everyone liked the articles and stories by Charles Dickens. His stories were not about historical characters but about contemporary characters. The stories were not about rich and powerful people. His stories were about ordinary people. Lots of people could understand and enjoy the stories. Charles Dickens became very popular.

Charles Dickens' longer books, like *Oliver Twist*, were also published in magazines. Chapter 1 was in one magazine. People hurried to buy the magazine and read the chapter. Chapter 2 was in the next magazine. People talked about the story. They thought, "What will happen in the next chapter?"

When people read the last chapters of *The Old Curiosity Shop*, they did not know if their favourite character 'Little Nell' would die at the end of the story. Many people wrote letters to Charles Dickens. "Don't let Little Nell die!" they said. Does she die? – You'll have to read the story!

The magazines were sent to North America. North Americans read and enjoyed the stories. American's also liked Little Nell. Many people went to the port in New York harbour where the ships with the latest magazines landed. "Does Little Nell die at the end of the story?" they asked the sailors. When Charles Dickens and his wife visited the USA in 1842, Charles was already famous. In America, he read parts of his stories aloud. Lots of people came to listen. His public readings became very popular.

Rich people also read and enjoyed his stories. They did not know about the terrible lives of poor people. Charles Dickens' stories helped them to understand that life was not good for everyone. Charles Dickens was not a powerful politician, but he helped to change the lives of poor people.



Powerful politicians began to understand the lives of poor people because they read the stories by Charles Dickens.

Why did everyone enjoy the stories? The stories are sometimes funny and sometimes exciting. They are sometimes happy and sometimes sad. The stories are full of interesting people. Some of the people are good and some are bad, but they are all memorable characters.

Who can forget Miss Haversham in *Great Expectations*? She is a rich woman and she lives in a big house. When she was young, she loved a man called Mr Compeyson. On the day they were going to marry, Miss Haversham discovered that Mr Compeyson did not love her. He only wanted her money. Since that day, Miss Haversham has sat in her big house, wearing her wedding dress. All the clocks in the house are stopped at 9.20 because this was the time she heard the bad news.

Who can forget the description of young *Oliver Twist* in the work house? Oliver is eating some soup from a bowl. When Oliver finishes, he is still hungry. He gets up from his seat and goes to Mr Bumble, a frightening man who controls the work house. "Please, sir. I want some more" he tells Mr Bumble.

A Christmas Carol is one of the most popular Charles Dickens stories. It tells the story of Ebenezer Scrooge. He is a very mean man. He never gives much money to the people who work in his office. It is Christmas time, but Scrooge hates Christmas. "Bah, humbug!" he says. In the story, three ghosts visit Scrooge. Scrooge begins to understand that he is a bad man. He learns to enjoy Christmas and gives money to all the people who work for him.

Charles Dickens loved Christmas time. Every year, he wrote a new story for the Christmas magazine. Everyone bought the magazine and enjoyed the new story. At the traditional English Christmas meal, we eat turkey or goose and later a steam pudding made with dried fruits. It is just like the Christmas which Dickens describes. Many of the English Christmas traditions were invented by Charles Dickens.