



## Charles Dickens

Charles Dickens is one of the most important novelists in English. He wrote at a time when education became possible for more people in Britain and the USA. The new 'reading public' loved the exciting stories and amazing characters in Dickens' books.

People read the stories in monthly instalments in popular magazines, so Dickens learnt to end each chapter with a 'cliff-hanger' which would make the readers want to buy and read the next instalment.

Dickens created the narrative style which we can see today in TV soap operas and serialised stories.

Although Dickens was primarily concerned with entertaining his readers, his works had important political influences. 19<sup>th</sup> century society was very stratified. The rich knew nothing about the living conditions of the poor and working classes. Dickens was like an investigative journalist today. He revealed the terrible conditions of children working in factories. He revealed the horrors of bad schools. He exposed corruption in politics and amongst lawyers. Dickens was, by our standards, a very 'modern' writer.

Dickens wrote about his own century. The situations which he describes may appear to be very distant from the experiences of your students' lives. It is important to remind students that the conditions of the 19<sup>th</sup> century continue to exist in some parts of the world. Even if our lives today are very different, we can find many parallels between the situations he describes and our current conditions.





# PENGUIN DOSSIERS

You can read more about Charles Dickens and his books in *The Penguin Guide to Literature in English* by Ronald Carter and John McRae.

## Activities

A) Choose the best answers to these questions about the dossier.

- 0) Charles Dickens was born \_\_\_\_\_.  
a) in 1870                      b) in 1812                      c) when he was 58 years old
- 1) Charles Dickens was a \_\_\_\_\_.  
a) criminal                      b) politician                      c) writer
- 2) He wrote \_\_\_\_\_ like *David Copperfield* and *Oliver Twist*.  
a) labels                      b) novels                      c) magazines
- 3) Portsmouth is on the \_\_\_\_\_ England.  
a) south coast of              b) Kent                      c) Royal Navy
- 4) The Dickens family were \_\_\_\_\_ rich.  
a) not very                      b) very                      c) never
- 5) The Dickens family moved to Chatham \_\_\_\_\_.  
a) by ship                      b) in 1822                      c) in Portsmouth
- 6) John Dickens and his family went to prison because \_\_\_\_\_.  
a) he was stupid              b) he stole some money      c) he owed some money
- 7) Charles Dickens worked in a \_\_\_\_\_ making shoe polish.  
a) prison                      b) office                      c) factory
- 8) Charles had to put \_\_\_\_\_ on to jars of shoe polish.  
a) hours                      b) shillings                      c) labels
- 9) The work was very \_\_\_\_\_ and boring.  
a) angry                      b) dirty                      c) hungry
- 10) When Charles was 15 years old, started work in a \_\_\_\_\_.  
a) newspaper                      b) lawyer's office              c) factory
- 11) Charles worked for a newspaper \_\_\_\_\_.  
a) as a reporter              b) as a politician              c) called the Pickwick Papers
- 12) Many people did not buy books because \_\_\_\_\_.  
a) they were expensive      b) they could read              c) they read chapters
- 13) The stories about Mr Pickwick were \_\_\_\_\_.  
a) every week                      b) funny                      c) angry





# PENGUIN DOSSIERS

- 14] Charles Dickens wrote *Oliver Twist* \_\_\_\_\_.  
 a] in the workhouse    b] in his next novel    c] after *The Pickwick Papers*
- 15] Charles Dickens died \_\_\_\_\_.  
 a] in the United States    b] in 1870    c] at a public reading

B) Complete the sentences below using the words and expressions in the box below.

lawyer	prison	clerk	soap opera	hungry
journey	navy	funeral	shoe polish	angry
shop	chapter	label	author	magazine
jars	celebrity	criminal	journalist	politicians

- 0] The old man was angry and shouted at the noisy children.  
 1] Agatha Christie is a famous \_\_\_\_\_ of detective stories.  
 2] Can you read the \_\_\_\_\_ on the bottle of wine?  
 3] John's dad is a sailor on a ship in the \_\_\_\_\_.  
 4] The thief who took my mother's diamonds is in \_\_\_\_\_ now.  
 5] The teacher read the first \_\_\_\_\_ in the book.  
 6] Every five years people vote in elections to choose the \_\_\_\_\_ they like.  
 7] My elder brother is a \_\_\_\_\_ for the local newspaper. He writes about sport.  
 8] Every evening I watch *Neighbours* on TV. It is a \_\_\_\_\_ from Australia.  
 9] *Sweet Sixteen* is a weekly \_\_\_\_\_ for teenage girls.  
 10] Martin didn't eat his lunch and now he feels \_\_\_\_\_.  
 11] The children went to the \_\_\_\_\_ and bought some sweets.  
 12] Martha's Mum is wearing a black dress because she is going to a \_\_\_\_\_.  
 13] David was a \_\_\_\_\_ after he kicked the winning goal for England.  
 14] Did the police catch the \_\_\_\_\_ who took your Dad's car?  
 15] My sister works as a \_\_\_\_\_ in the National Bank.  
 16] My dad bought some \_\_\_\_\_ to clean my shoes.  
 17] My sister is studying law at university because she wants to be a \_\_\_\_\_.  
 18] Paul collects old \_\_\_\_\_ so he can recycle the glass.  
 19] My parents picked up their luggage and started their \_\_\_\_\_ to Germany.

C) Choose a writer from your own language who wrote stories about social conditions. Find out about the writer's life. Write a short biography about the writer and her / his work.

