



Bio4Kids: Charles Dickens (1812–1870)

Brief Outline

Back in the 1830s, people in England would wait eagerly for the latest chapter from Charles Dickens. They loved his stories and wanted to learn what happened next. Dickens was a celebrity in his time. Many of his most popular novels first appeared in newspapers and magazines over many months. Books like *The Pickwick Papers*, *Oliver Twist*, and *Nicholas Nickleby* were all published one chapter at a time. He even had his own publication called *All the Year Round* in which he serialized some of his novels.

Like many of his characters, Dickens knew how hard life could be. He was born on February 7, 1812, in Portsmouth, England. When his father went to prison for owing money, Dickens had to leave school. He went to work in a factory to help support his mother and his seven brothers and sisters. Later he went back to school and then got a job at a solicitor's office. A solicitor is a type of lawyer. After that he worked several different jobs as a reporter. In 1833, he got some of his stories and essays published. His career as a writer was beginning to take off.

Dickens was very successful with his first novel, *The Pickwick Papers* (1837). This work was followed by *Oliver Twist* (1838) and *Nicholas Nickleby* (1839). Along with these early successes, he wrote *David Copperfield* (1850), *Bleak House* (1853), *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859), and *Great Expectations* (1861) later in his career. People loved the interesting characters he created. He favored a form of the novel called the 'bildungsroman', a novel which depicts the growth and personal development of the main character, normally from boyhood to

manhood. Pip in *Great Expectations*, Nicholas Nickleby and David Copperfield are all examples of this. *David Copperfield* is said to be semi-autobiographical in that it reflects many elements of Dickens's own life and childhood.

In April 1836 Dickens married Catherine Thompson Hogarth, with whom he had ten children. They set up home in Bloomsbury, North London. They separated in 1858 but continued to live together until she died twenty years later. Divorce was unthinkable in Victorian times, particularly for someone as famous as Dickens.

In his many works, Dickens wrote about both funny and difficult situations. Dickens saw both the moral and social purpose of art. By focusing attention on the poor, he used his stories to point out social problems and awaken the reader's conscience. Several stories covered how badly the poor were treated at the time. Dickens lived in Victorian England, at the height of the Industrial Revolution. Many people moved to the city in search of opportunity. But the reality was in fact quite different: poverty, disease, and cramped working conditions. There was an enormous gap between rich and poor. Because of his own experiences of poverty Dickens empathized with the Poor's cause, and as well as focusing attention on them in his novels, he became actively involved in various organizations to help them.

Dickens died on June 9, 1870, after suffering from a stroke. At the time he was working on *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*. His stories remain popular with readers today and many have been dramatized into films, musicals and television shows. None of his novels or short stories have ever gone out of print.

Related Websites

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