Baker Street Readers

Great reads for all ages

With a hungry, timid request of 'Please, sir. I want some more', orphan Oliver Twist takes his first step on a terrifying journey...

In the dark, dangerous streets of Victorian London, Oliver enters the world of people so poor and desperate that they will take any risk and know no mercy.

Relentlessly pursued by the menacing criminal world, who should Oliver trust? Are his true friends strong enough to resist the determined plotting of desperate villains?

In this gripping tale of kidnapping, shooting and murder, Charles Dickens shows the threats to a vulnerable boy's existence and asks the eternal question: which is more powerful, good or evil?

Lexile® level: 850L
Word count: 3,829

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- BBC R4, Open Book

OLIVER TWIST
CHARLES DICKENS

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www.bakerstreetreaders.co.uk

Retold by Gill Tavner
Illustrated by Karen Donnelly

TEACHER'S EDITION ONLY

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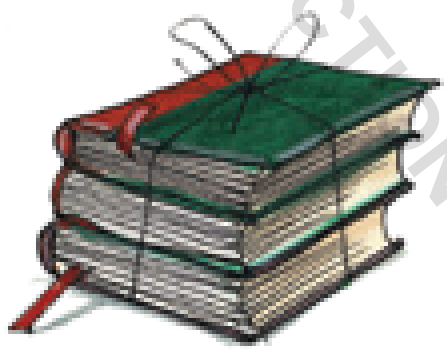
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THE CHARACTERS



Oliver Twist

Oliver is an orphan. Is he strong enough to resist Fagin's attempts to make him a thief?



The Artful Dodger

Dodger is Fagin's favourite and very good at his job. Can Oliver trust this new friend?



Fagin

Fagin looks after orphaned boys, as long as they earn him money. Can he make himself rich by turning Oliver into a thief?

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Mr Brownlow

Mr Brownlow is a respectable and warm-hearted old gentleman. Can his fondness for Oliver overcome distrust and doubt?



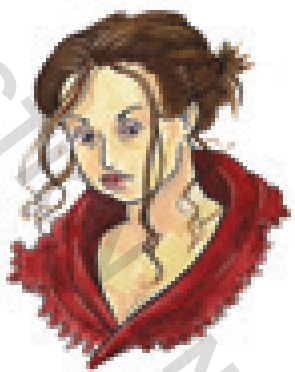


Bill Sikes

Sikes is a hardened criminal who works with Fagin. Can he control Nancy and still keep her love? Will he ruin Oliver?

Nancy

Nancy works for Fagin and loves Bill Sikes; she has a warm heart. Can she save Oliver?





Mrs Maylie

Mrs Maylie shows Oliver love and compassion. Is she strong enough to keep him safe from Fagin?



OLIVER TWIST

Oliver Twist didn't know who had named him. It wasn't his father, who had never seen him, and it certainly wasn't his mother, who died giving birth to him. It was probably someone in the cold, grey workhouse in which he lived with hundreds of other orphaned boys.

Life in the workhouse was cruel and hard, but the worst thing of all was the lack of food. At meal times, in the cavernous grey stone hall, the boys queued before the fat Master for their one ladleful of grey, watery gruel. Having returned to their hard benches, they would devour their gruel in seconds, licking their bowls and spoons so clean that washing up was never necessary. Still their stomachs rumbled.

They were terribly thin and always hungry. Not just peckish, really hungry. When they felt that they could bear it no longer, the orphans decided to take action. One of them must be

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brave enough to ask for more. The boy they chose was Oliver Twist.

The evening arrived. As the boys finished licking their spoons, the room became quiet but for the soft sound of two timid, terrified feet tapping to the front. Oliver looked up at the Master and held out his bowl.





'Please, sir. I want some more.'

Silence.

The Master turned grey and whispered 'More?'

Then he turned from pale grey to crimson.

'MORE?' he bellowed, grabbing Oliver roughly. 'Mr Bumble, come quickly. This boy has asked for MORE!'

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Back in time

Victorian England was a period of great transition. Having been an agricultural, rural economy, it was moving swiftly towards industrial nationhood. A 'middle class' was emerging, with considerable economic and political influence.

This swift change left many deprived of their traditional means of living, and dependent upon the state. People left their livelihoods in the countryside to seek their fortune in London, increasing the density of poverty there.

Mistakenly, Victorian culture considered poverty a sign of weakness or laziness. The Poor Laws of 1834 stated that people could only receive assistance from the state if they lived and worked in workhouses. Life in workhouses was deliberately made miserable in an attempt to discourage laziness. Workhouse owners often grew rich by depriving their inmates of any comfort.

Charles Dickens experienced poverty at first hand – his father was imprisoned for debt and the young Charles made to work in a warehouse. These experiences affected him deeply.

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In *Oliver Twist*, Dickens exposes the nature and consequences of the poverty of his times and the ineffective, often hypocritical, ways in which society dealt with it.

Finding out more

We recommend the following books and websites to gain a greater understanding of Charles Dickens' and Oliver Twist's England:

Books

- Terry Deary, *Loathsome London* (Horrible Histories), Scholastic, 2005.
- Terry Deary, *Vile Victorians* (Horrible Histories), Scholastic, 1994.
- *Victorian London,* Watling Street Publishing, 2004.
- Ann Kramer, *Victorians* (Eyewitness Guides), Dorling Kindersley, 1998.
- Berlie Doherty, *Street Child,* Collins, 1995.
- Peter Ackroyd, *Dickens*, BBC, 2003.

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