Baker Street Readers

Great reads for all ages

Lexile® Level	AR Level	Word Count
820L	5.2	6,617

'Why bless you, Little Nell! What if I had lost you?'

Little Nell Trent's childhood is over. Her grandfather's mind is failing, his dark secret makes him sad and distracted, and he has nobody to care for him but Nell.

The grotesque Daniel Quilp is out to cause trouble. What plans does he hatch with the dreadful Sampson and Sally Brass? What use can he hope to make of the foolish Dick Swiveller? Is Nell's one true friend, Kit, a match for Quilp's villainous mind?

Nell and her grandfather must disappear or be separated forever, and so they begin their lives as beggars. When a mysterious gentleman arrives in London, determined to track them down, it becomes a race against time and against the evil of Quilp.

Can Little Nell keep her grandfather safe? Who will protect Nell? Will the mysterious gentleman find them before it is too late?

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"Miniature masterpieces"

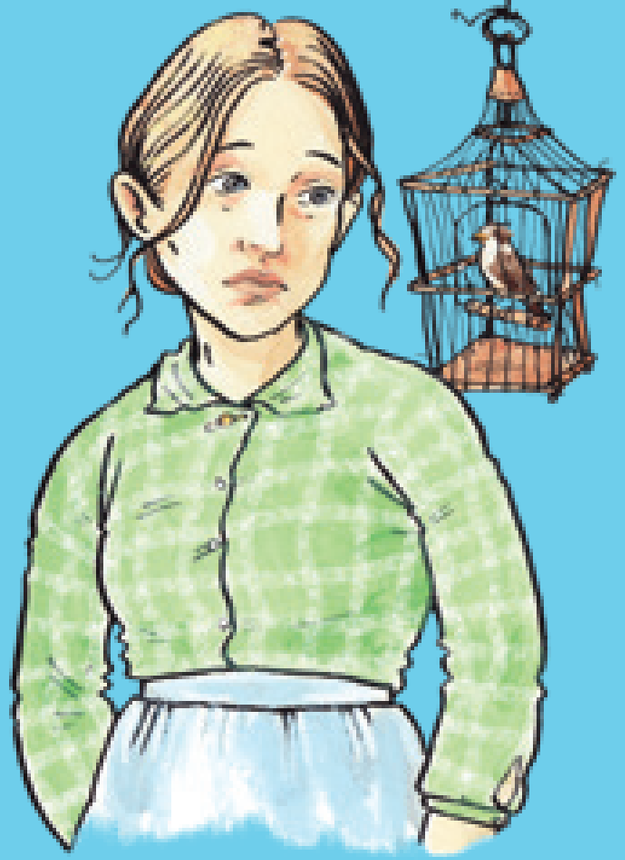
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THE OLD CURIOSITY SHOP

CHARLES DICKENS

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TEACHER'S EDITION ONLY

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Accelerated Reader

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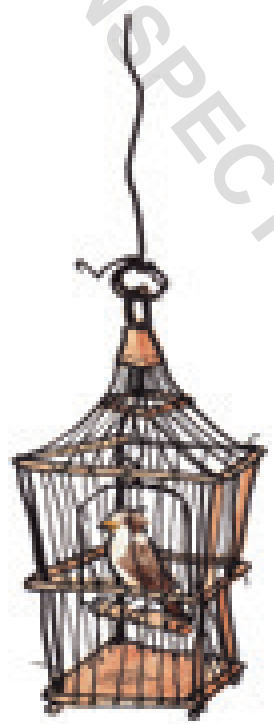
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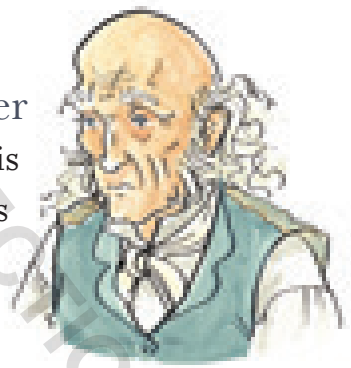
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THE CHARACTERS



Nell Trent

Though only thirteen years old, Nell must take on adult responsibilities. Can she keep her grandfather safe from his own weaknesses?



Nell's grandfather

Nell's grandfather's mind is weakening with age. Will his efforts to help her lead to happiness or ruin for them both?



Kit Nubbles

Kit provides the comedy in Nell's sad life. Can he keep her songbird alive, and bring music into Nell's heart?

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Daniel Quilp

Quilp's ugly exterior reflects the evil within. Why does he give money to Nell's grandfather? Why does he hate Kit? To what lengths is he prepared to go to ruin them both?





Sally and Sampson Brass

Brother and sister, partners in law, and partners in crime. How much harm can they do?



Dick Swiveller

Dick is a fool with a good heart. What happens when his foolish goodness confronts Quilp's cunning evil?



The Single Gentleman

Who is the mysterious gentleman who seems to arrive from nowhere? Why does he want to find Nell and her grandfather?



THE OLD CURIOSITY SHOP

The first time the girl knocked on the shadowed door nobody answered. She knocked again. The old shop seemed to squat in the street, jealous and distrustful, hiding its musty secrets. She knocked a third time. At the familiar sound of shuffling feet she clapped her hands with relief. Slowly the door opened, revealing in the evening light the stooped figure of an old man. 'Why bless you, Little Nell,' he smiled as he kissed her. 'What if I had lost you?'

Closing the door behind her, Nell followed her grandfather through the darkness of their home, past all the abandoned suits of armour, weird carvings, rusty weapons and faded tapestries. Once in the sitting room, the old man lowered himself into his chair, looking older and more worn than anything in his strange collection.

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Nell began to prepare supper, returning sometimes to sit beside her grandfather, to comfort him and rest her head on his chest. Her voice was soft and sweet, her clear blue eyes a mirror to the faded blue of her grandfather's.

'Little Nelly,' he sighed, 'whoever loved a child as I love you?' His face was lined with deep and anxious thought. 'Everything I do is for your sake, to spare you the poverty and the misery that killed your dear mother.'

Their silence was broken by a cheerful knocking at the door. Nell's face became that of a child again as she burst into a laugh. 'Why, it's dear old Kit,' she exclaimed, rushing to open the door. She returned quickly, their visitor at her heels. Kit was a shambling, awkward boy, with an unusually good-humoured face and a turned-up nose. From his head he removed a perfectly round old hat which had long since lost its brim.



'Did you deliver the letter, Kit?' asked the old man, leaving his

chair and shuffling towards the table where Nell was laying out three plates of food.

Kit nodded absentmindedly. 'Yes, master.' He was hungry, and his mind was on other matters. Even before he had sat down he had picked up his knife and started to eat his bread and meat – with considerable danger to his tongue.

The old man's eyes fell lovingly upon Nell. 'I thought Nell was lost this evening, Kit.'

Kit stopped chewing and swallowed. 'I'd have found her,' he said. 'I'd have found her wherever she was.' Unable to stay serious for long, Kit burst into a loud roar of laughter, his mouth wide open and his eyes nearly shut. Nell's eyes lit up with merriment.

The old man didn't share the laughter. 'Little Nell is poor like you, Kit,' he said, 'but the time is coming when she shall be rich.'

Kit nodded seriously as the old man continued. 'Good fortune for Nell must come soon. It is the one care of my life. It must come soon.' He lapsed again into a thoughtful silence rising to the crescendo of a sigh. 'It's a weary, weary life for an old man.'

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newspaper. Readers awaited each new instalment of Nell's story with great eagerness.

At that time many children died before the age of ten, and this is the story's main theme. Many died of illnesses which are now curable, often in poverty and hunger. Nell's death appears to be the result of illness brought on by exhaustion. Her death has caused a variety of reactions over the years – some readers have grieved for her, while others have found it far too sentimental to be taken seriously. However, readers in Dickens's time would not have been surprised by the ending.

By the time *The Old Curiosity Shop* was published, it was no longer a common practice to take old people into madhouses when they suffered from dementia. However, this was a very recent change, and Nell's fear for her grandfather's future is very real. Madhouses were terrible places where 'patients' were treated with great cruelty.

Many studies have tried to trace the journey made by Nell and her grandfather. It is now commonly accepted that Dickens based the towns and villages they visit upon towns in Buckinghamshire, Warwickshire and Shropshire.

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Dickens seems to contrast an idealised pastoral world with the grime and squalor of cities and industrial towns, although he shows that evil and goodness can be found in both environments. His depiction of the industrial town, probably Wolverhampton, reflects his concern about living conditions during the industrial revolution.

Finding out more

We recommend the following books and websites to gain a greater understanding of Little Nell's England:

Books

- Terry Deary, *Loathsome London* (Horrible Histories), Scholastic, 2005.
- Terry Deary, *Vile Victorians* (Horrible Histories), Scholastic, 1994.
- *Victorian London*, Watling Street Publishing, 2005.
- Ann Kramer, *Victorians* (Eyewitness Guides), Dorling Kindersley, 1998.
- Peter Hepplewhite and Mairi Campbell, *All About The Industrial Revolution*, Hodder Wayland, 2002.

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