

Introductory Lesson

Before Reading

1 In pairs, answer the following questions:

- Look at the front cover of the book. What can you see in the picture?
- In which period of time do you think the story is set?
- Read the blurb on the back cover. Why do you think children became thieves in the past?
- Look at the chapter titles. In which chapter do you think Oliver had the most difficult time? Why?

2 Look at the following pictures. How do you think they are connected to the story?



3 Read the information about Charles Dickens and answer the questions that follow.

Charles Dickens



Charles Dickens was born in Portsmouth, England, on February 7th 1812 and spent his childhood in London and Kent. He started school when he was nine years old, but had to stop soon afterwards because his father owed money and was sent to prison. This meant that Dickens had to go to work to support himself. His first job was in a shoe polish factory and he used this experience when he wrote his novels. In 1827, he started to work as a legal clerk. He learned shorthand*, which he later used when he became a reporter. He married Catherine Hogarth in 1836. "The Pickwick Papers" was published a year later and "Oliver Twist" was published in 1838.

Throughout his adult life, Dickens was concerned for the poor people in England and in his later life, he gave a number of talks and lectures on social conditions in an effort to improve their lives. He died on June 9th 1870, and is buried in Westminster Abbey, London.

* Shorthand: a quick way of writing using signs instead of words or syllables.

- a Where was Charles Dickens born?
- b How old was he when he started school?
- c Why did he have to start work when he was still a child?
- d What jobs did Dickens have before he started writing novels?
- e When was 'Oliver Twist' published?
- f What interested Dickens all his life?
- g Where is Charles Dickens buried?

A collage of five characters from the movie 'Oliver Twist'. At the top left is a young boy with a blonde bowl-cut and blue eyes, wearing a tan coat and a white scarf. To his right is a woman with blonde hair in a bun, blue eyes, and a black high-collared dress. In the center is an older man with white hair and a mustache, wearing a dark coat. At the bottom left is a young boy with dark hair and blue eyes, wearing a black hat and a white scarf, with a small number '6' in the bottom left corner. At the bottom right is a young boy with reddish-brown hair, wearing a brown cap and a dark coat. Each character's name is written in a white, serif font next to a dashed line.


*Oliver
Twist*

*Rose
Maylie*

Mr Brownlow

*Charley
Bates*

*Jack
Dawkins*



*Edward
Leeford
(Monks)*

*Bill
Sikes*

Nancy

At the Workhouse

Many years ago in England, there were special places called workhouses, where poor people went to live when they had no money or work, no family or friends to help them and when they had nowhere else to go. Life in the workhouse was hard for the poor people and they went there only if they had no hope of a better life.

One cold, dark night a young woman arrived in a strange town. She was pregnant and very tired and she fell down in the street. No one knew who she was or where she came from so the people who found her took her to the workhouse.

An old woman called Sally put the girl to bed, and then sat down by the fire to wait for the doctor. Suddenly the girl cried out and looked at Sally with eyes full of pain and fear.

"Don't be afraid, dear," said the old woman. "I've had thirteen children and I've often helped the doctor when a child was born in the workhouse. Your child will be born soon, but don't worry! The doctor's on his way!"

Something was troubling the young woman. She tried to take off the gold chain she was wearing around her neck. Sally helped her and then the girl put the chain, which had a locket with the name 'Agnes' on it, into Sally's hand.

"Take these things... Please, keep them safe for my child... I'm very sick! I don't think I'll live to see the baby."

"Don't talk like that!" said Sally. "Close your eyes now and try to rest. You'll need all your strength for the birth."

Sally put the things into her pocket and just at that moment the doctor arrived. Soon a baby boy was born. The young mother



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lay in bed, very tired and very sick. When the baby began to cry the girl opened her eyes and tried to sit up.

"Let me see my baby before I die."

"Come," said the doctor kindly, "you must not talk of dying."

He put the baby in the mother's arms.

"His name is Oliver," she said, then kissed the child and fell back on the pillow.

The doctor and Sally did everything they could, but it was too late. The girl was dead.

"Well, Sally, I'm afraid there's nothing more I can do here," said the doctor sadly to the old woman. "Where did she come from?"

"I don't know, but she walked a long way to get here. Her shoes were worn out."

"And the baby's father?"

"We don't know anything about him. Maybe he's dead. She arrived here alone."

"Poor girl," said the doctor and he sighed as he put on his hat and gloves. Then he said goodnight to Sally and went home.

When Sally was alone again she sat by the fire with the baby in a cradle at her feet. She took the locket out of her pocket and for a long time she looked at it and at the sleeping baby. There were two small locks of hair in the locket, one fair, like the girl's and one dark. There was also a gold wedding ring inside it. At last, she put them back into her pocket and shook her head sadly.

"Poor baby ... I'm sorry, but I'm going to keep these things and sell them myself. Then I can have a bit of money now that I'm old. I've lived in the workhouse for fifty years and life here is very hard."

Children didn't go to the workhouse until they were nine years old. Before that they lived in another house, where somebody

looked after them and received money to pay for their food. Oliver went to live in such a house with Mrs Mann, an old woman who kept most of the money for herself and didn't take good care of the babies and children. For the first nine years of his life Oliver lived there and during that time he never heard a kind word and he never had enough to eat.

On Oliver's ninth birthday Mr Bumble, a big fat man who wore a uniform and carried a big stick, came to take him to the men's workhouse. Mr Bumble helped to manage the workhouse. He had a bad temper and he was very strict. If anyone in the workhouse did anything wrong, Mr Bumble hit them with his stick, so everybody was afraid of him, especially the children.

One of his jobs was to give surnames to the babies who had no father. No one knew the name of Oliver's father so Mr Bumble gave him the surname 'Twist'.

Life in the workhouse was very hard and the boys were always hungry. The food was always the same – a bowl of soup, which was mostly water, and on Sundays a small piece of bread. The master of the workhouse served the soup from a big pot, and he gave just one bowl to each boy. The boys became so hungry that one day they decided that someone must ask for more. They thought that if one boy got more soup, they could all get more. They chose Oliver.

The master served the soup as usual and the boys ate it quickly. They licked their fingers and then looked at Oliver and the big pot of soup.

"Go on then! Go on!" they whispered and pushed Oliver with their elbows.

