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Opening extract from

Great Expectations

Written by

Charles Dickens

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THE CHARACTERS



Pip

As Pip grows from a young boy into a young man, he wants answers to many questions. Will the answers surprise him? Can he soften Estella's heart?

Magwitch

A dangerous, desperate villain. Will he harm Pip, or help him?





Joe Gargery

Pip's uncle is a simple, honest blacksmith. Will Pip ever return Joe's love and respect?

Mrs Gargery

Pip's angry, frightening sister. Will she ever discover the truth about her pork pie?





Estella

Cold, cruel and beautiful. Why does she want to break Pip's heart? Will she succeed?

Miss Havisham

A heart-broken and bitter old lady. Despite her strangeness, does she want to help Pip?





Biddy

An adorable village girl. Whose heart will she win?



GREAT EXPECTATIONS

A little bundle of shivers called Pip stood in front of his parents' gravestones, afraid and crying. The savage wind howling across the unfriendly marshes threw the dark mist at him, making him cry even louder.

'Hold yer noise!' roared a terrible voice. A man appeared between the graves and put his hand roughly over Pip's mouth. 'Keep still, you little devil, or I'll cut yer throat.'

He was a large man in rough grey clothes. On one leg was a prisoner's heavy leg iron, which made him limp. He wore an old rag around his head, and his shoes were broken. He was soaked, smothered in mud, stung, torn and cut. He shivered and glared at Pip, then growled, 'Tell us yer name. Quick! Show us where you live, you young dog.'

He tipped the terrified Pip upside down to empty his pockets, making it impossible for

Pip to work out where he did live. ‘What fat cheeks you ha’ got,’ he told Pip’s upside-down face. ‘Darn me if I couldn’t eat ’em.’

He turned Pip back onto his feet. ‘Tomorrow you get me a file to cut off this leg iron, and some food, or I’ll ’ave yer ’eart and liver fer me breakfast. And you do it secretly, or I’ll creep into yer home when you’re all comfy and safe and warm in bed, and I’ll tear you open.’

His great hands at last released Pip. Not once looking back, Pip ran all the way home.

For the rest of that evening Pip felt terrified. At suppertime he managed to sneak some bread and cheese into his lap without anyone noticing. After supper he crept into the kitchen and gathered together half a jar of mincemeat, an old bone with a little meat still on it, and some brandy. Then he noticed a whole perfect pork pie on the shelf, and took that too. Finally, still unnoticed, he crept into the workshop and found a file.

Very early the next damp, dreary, misty morning, Pip once more set off into the marshes. The wind lashed at him and the mist made it hard to see. As he ran, stumbling, he imagined that he was being chased by a horde of people shouting ‘Stop thief! Stop that boy! He’s stolen a perfect pork pie!’



Little Pip was panting and trembling when the shape of the man loomed out of the mist ahead. Though he was still a frightening sight, the man now looked very weak from hunger and cold. Pip half expected him to drop down dead, but he grabbed the bag of food and started tearing it apart in desperation and gratitude. He ate the whole pork pie greedily, washing it down with a great gulp of brandy.

'I'm Magwitch,' he belched as he began to file through his leg iron.

'I'm Pip,' replied Pip. 'I'm glad you enjoyed the food.'

'Thank'ee, my boy. I did. Happy Christmas.'



When he was very young, Philip Pirrip hadn't been able to get his mouth round his real name. The best he could manage was 'Pip', and ever since then everyone had just called him Pip. After his parents died, Pip had lived



with his good-natured, sweet-tempered uncle, Joe Gargery, who was the village blacksmith. Joe had the misfortune of being married to Pip's older sister, the ill-natured, bad-tempered Mrs Joe.

'Ever the best of friends, ain't we Pip old chap?' smiled Joe as Pip warmed himself by the fire. 'Where 'ave you been so early in the morning? You'll do yourself a mischief.'



Like Pip, this was the first time Estella had visited the house for many years. Since they had last met, life had greatly changed for them both. Estella accepted Pip's invitation to visit him at Joe and Biddy's home.

The next day, Estella sat smiling with warmth and mature beauty before Joe's roaring fire. The warm glow reflected in her bright eyes as she allowed Pip to hold her smooth hand in his. When Biddy and Joe went into the kitchen, Estella leaned over and said quietly to Pip, 'I do believe the ice around my heart is beginning to thaw.'



TAKING THINGS FURTHER

The real read

This *Real Read* version of *Great Expectations* is a retelling of Charles Dickens' magnificent work. If you would like to read the full novel in all its original splendour, many complete editions are available, from bargain paperbacks to beautifully bound hardbacks. You may well find a copy in your local charity shop.

Filling in the spaces

The loss of so many of Charles Dickens' original words is a sad but necessary part of the shortening process. We have had to make some difficult decisions, omitting subplots and details, some important, some less so, but all interesting. We have also, at times, taken the liberty of combining two events into one, or of giving a character words or actions that originally belong to another. The points below will fill in some of the gaps, but nothing can beat the original.

- There is another convict on the marshes on Christmas Day. His name is Compeyson. He and Magwitch were once associates in crime, Magwitch being subservient to Compeyson.

- At the end of the novel, Compeyson is responsible for reporting Magwitch's whereabouts to the police. Magwitch and Compeyson fight in the Thames. Compeyson drowns and Magwitch sustains injuries which lead to his own illness and eventual death in prison.

- Compeyson is also the man who broke Miss Havisham's heart as part of a confidence trick to gain money from her.

- Estella is not related to Miss Havisham, but is adopted. Years ago, Jaggers, the lawyer, helped to defend a woman called Molly who was accused of murder. At the time, Molly had an illegitimate baby, Estella. When Miss Havisham's heart was broken by Compeyson, she asked Jaggers to find a child for her to

adopt. Jaggers brought her Estella. Estella's mother Molly is now Jaggers' housekeeper.

- Pip discovers that Magwitch is Estella's father. Magwitch had loved the baby, but didn't know what had happened to her after Molly's trial. As Magwitch dies, Pip says to him, 'You had a child once whom you loved and lost. She lived and found powerful friends. She is living now. She is a lady and is very beautiful. And I love her.' This revelation, and Magwitch's response, makes his death very moving.

- Herbert Pocket is a relative of Miss Havisham. Pip had already met him once, when they were boys, on a visit to Miss Havisham's.

- Herbert's fortune is not as great as Pip's. Their extravagant living in London leads Herbert into debt. Pip realises that he must bear some responsibility, and decides to make amends. He visits Jaggers and arranges to make regular payments to Herbert from his own wealth, but anonymously. Pip also persuades

Miss Havisham of Herbert's good character, and she leaves him money in her will.

- When Pip's fortune disappears with Magwitch's death, he goes abroad to work for Herbert for eleven years. His meeting with Estella in the grounds of Miss Havisham's ruined house takes place after this period of time.

- Between Miss Havisham's fire and the end of the novel, Estella marries an unpleasant man called Drummle. Their marriage is very unhappy. When she finally meets Pip, she is a widow.

- Mrs Joe's illness and death are actually due to her having been attacked by Joe's bitter, jealous employee Orlick. Orlick also attacks and almost kills Pip, who is saved by Herbert.

Back in time

Victorian England was experiencing a period of great transition. Having been an agricultural, rural economy, it was moving swiftly towards

industrial nationhood. The old rural life, represented in *Great Expectations* by Joe, was being lost as people aspired to greater wealth. Like Pip, many left traditional rural life in favour of cities like London.

A new 'middle class' was emerging. These people were below the aristocracy, their wealth usually created through trade and industry. This gave rise to a lively debate about the nature of a true gentleman. To be considered a gentleman required a combination of wealth, education and manners. Pip spends much of his time in London studying to acquire the education to be considered a gentleman.

The Victorians believed that they could overcome crime. Great numbers of prisoners were transported to colonies in Australia. This practice peaked between 1820 and 1850.

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.

Finding out more

We recommend the following books and websites to gain a greater understanding of Charles Dickens' and Pip'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 Ackroyd, *Dickens*, BBC, 2003.



Websites

- www.victorianweb.org

Scholarly information on all aspects of Victorian life, including literature, history and culture.

- www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/victorians

The BBC's interactive site about Victorian Britain, with a wide range of information and activities for all ages.

- www.dickensmuseum.com

Home of the Dickens Museum in London, with details about exhibits, events and lots of helpful links.

- www.dickensworld.co.uk

Dickens World, based in Chatham in Kent, is a themed visitor complex featuring the life, books and times of Charles Dickens.

- www.charlesdickenspage.com

A labour of love dedicated to Dickens, with information about his life and his novels. Many useful links.

Food for thought

Here are some things to think about if you are reading *Great Expectations* alone, or ideas for discussion if you are reading it with friends.

In retelling *Great Expectations* we have tried to recreate, as accurately as possible, Dickens' original plot and characters. We have also tried to imitate aspects of his style. Remember, however, that this is not the original work; thinking about the points below, therefore, can help you begin to understand Charles Dickens' craft. To move forward from here, turn to the full-length version of *Great Expectations* and lose yourself in his wonderful storytelling.

Starting points

- Which character interests you the most? Why?
- How do you feel about Pip's treatment of Joe?
- What do you think about Miss Havisham's and Estella's behaviour towards Pip?

- How surprised were you to discover the truth about Pip's benefactor? Had there been any clues in the story?
- Which aspects of Pip's character do you like or dislike?

Themes

What do you think Charles Dickens is saying about the following themes in *Great Expectations*?

- loyalty
- pride
- gratitude
- love
- what it means to be a gentleman

Style

Can you find paragraphs containing examples of the following?

- descriptions of setting and atmosphere
- the use of repetition to enhance description
- different characters speaking in different ways
- the use of imagery to enhance description

Look closely at how these paragraphs are written. What do you notice? Can you write a paragraph in the same style?

Symbols

Writers frequently use symbols in their work to deepen the reader's emotions and understanding. Charles Dickens is no exception. Think about how the symbols in this list match the action in *Great Expectations*.

- the pork pie
- hands
- fire
- ice