

**CHARLES DICKENS
PORTRAIT**



1. Charles Dickens was born in 1812 and died in 1870. Who occupied the British throne during that time? For how long? Name at least three U.S. Presidents that were in office during Dickens lifetime and the years they served.
2. What year did Charles Dickens write *A Christmas Carol*? How long did it take him to complete it?
3. What was Dickens' first published work? He used a specific pen name at the time - what is a pen name and what was the one Dickens chose?
4. What novel was Dickens writing when he died that later became the basis for an award winning Broadway musical?
5. Charles Dickens made two tours to America in his life. The first visit was in 1842. When did the second one occur? What was the furthest point west in the United States that he visited?

6. How many children did Charles Dickens have?
7. Dickens published numerous stories, novels, and articles (even stage plays), and many are quite famous. Name at least four of his novels. Now read a chapter from one of them.
8. In the Dickens novel, *A Tale of Two Cities*, what two major European cities are intended in the title?

WEB SITES

The World of Charles Dickens -
[www.geocities.com/pdubeldeis/](http://geocities.com/pdubeldeis/)

David Perdue's Charles Dickens Page
www.fidnet.com/~dap1955/dickens

The Dickens Project -
<http://humwww.ucsc.edu/dickens/index.html>

A Christmas Carol and its Adaptations -
www.dickensachristmascarol.com

The Dickens Fellowship - Phila. Branch -
<http://www2.ucsc.edu/~varese/dickens.htm>

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What effect did Charles Dickens' childhood have on his writings later in life?
2. Why have many of the works of Charles Dickens remained popular over time?

3. What were celebrations of Christmas like before Charles Dickens became famous for his work *A Christmas Carol*?

4. Are Dickens' perceptions of America accurate in your opinion? How did his thoughts about the country and its people change from his first visit to his second one?

PUBLICATIONS ABOUT DICKENS

The Friendly Dickens, by Norrie Epstein, Penguin Putnam, Inc. New York, (under Viking/Penguin Books, 1998).

The World of Charles Dickens, Angus Wilson, New York (Viking Press, 1970).

A Christmas Carol, by Charles Dickens

The Lives and Times of Ebenezer Scrooge. Paul Davis. New Haven, CT, Yale University Press, 1990.

Dickens on America and the Americans. Michael Slater. London, 1978.

VOCABULARY WORDS

Victorian, Debtors' Prison, Orphanage, Mince-Meat Pie, Yorkshire Pudding, Cold-Boiled, Pickwickian, Gruel, Omnibus, Shilling, Serial Novel, Melodramatic, Squib, French Revolution, Quill.

STUDY GUIDE ANSWERS FOR TEACHERS...

Questions about Charles Dickens and his world...

1. During Dickens' lifetime -

The British monarchs -

George III (1760-1820)

George IV (1820-1830)

1829) William IV (1830-1837)

Queen Victoria (1837-1901)

The U.S. Presidents -

James Madison (1809-1817)

James Monroe (1817-1825)

John Quincy Adams (1825-

Andrew Jackson (1829-1837)

Martin Van Buren (1837-1841)

William Henry Harrison (1841)

John Tyler (1841-1845)

James K. Polk (1845-1849)

Zachary Taylor (1849-1850)

Millard Fillmore (1850-1853)

Franklin Pierce (1853-1857)

James Buchanan (1857-1861)

Abraham Lincoln (1861-1865)

Andrew Johnson (1865-1869)

Ulysses S. Grant (1869-1877)

2. Dickens completed *A Christmas Carol* in 1843. It took him about six weeks to write it, starting in October, and then getting it published December 19, 1843.

3. Dickens actually had several articles published as a reporter (and stories he did in his brief and early career in journalism), but his first wide-spread recognition came for *Sketches by Boz* - 'Boz' being the pen name he chose at the time (a pen name = used to disguise an authors real name).

4. *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* was the novel Dickens was working on when he died. The musical, *Drood*, debuted in 1985, winning five Tony Awards (one for Best Musical).

5. Charles Dickens returned to America in November of 1867. He traveled as Far West as St. Louis, Missouri.

6. Dickens fathered ten children with his wife, but not all lived to adulthood.

7. Among his many novels - *Barnaby Rudge*, *Bleak House*, *A Christmas Carol*, *David Copperfield*, *Dombey and Son*,

Great Expectations, Hard Times, Little Dorrit, Martin Chuzzlewit, The Mystery of Edwin Drood, Nicholas Nickleby, The Old Curiosity Shop, Oliver Twist, Our Mutual Friend, The Pickwick Papers, Sketches by Boz, A Tale of Two Cities.

8. Paris and London are the major European cities where *A Tale of Two Cities* is set.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

9. Due to Charles Dickens' father becoming financially adrift, Dickens' family was forced to live in a debtors' prison at one time. Charles was also forced into child labor, spent time at a strict and oppressive boarding school and endured numerous other hardships. There is also worthy speculation that at one time, Dickens had a nurse (or nanny as we would know it) who told him graphic and violent bedtime stories that he remembered throughout his life. As a writer, Dickens wrote the first novel where an orphaned child was the hero of the piece, *Oliver Twist*. Poverty-stricken families and other situations of economic and moral strife occur throughout much of Dickens' work.

10. Though there is much merit to the life and work of Charles Dickens, much of his popularity can be linked to a few primary points. One of which is that he wrote in the English language, the primary language of the western world during part of his lifetime and certainly a century afterward. Also, Dickens is perhaps the most closely identified author with the holiday of Christmas, for not only is he known for the work, *A Christmas Carol*, but interest has also followed to his other writings due to that association.

11. When *A Christmas Carol* was published, the trends of the holiday were very much influenced by the Calvinistic faith. While Christmas was indeed a celebration, there was attention to a more subdued observation than what Dickens presents in his legendary work. When Dickens died, many children of England were asking their parents if the celebration of Christmas would indeed go away, evidence of the deep and popular connection between Dickens and the holiday. Also worthy of note is Dickens' emphasis in his writings on the celebration of Christmas, and of joyous sharing and reflection, with less attention to the giving of gifts.

12. When Dickens first came to America, he saw his optimistic expectations of the American people fall drastically short in his visit. And he wrote about it in his *American Notes*, where he sharply criticized Americans for their corrupt politics, slavery, a slanderous press, and suspiciousness, among many other problems he felt existed. In his second visit, from late 1867 to early 1868, an older Dickens came to an America that had just endured a Civil War. In his expansive tour of public readings, he found a much improved America, and noted such beliefs in his public speaking engagements as well as his later journals.

VOCABULARY WORDS

Victorian - Having to do with the Victorian period, where Queen Victoria reigned as monarch of the British Empire, from the late 1830's until her death in 1901. A cultural focus of the period was the emphasis on virtue as a part of daily life.

Debtors' Prison - where those who were in debt, owing money or materials, were housed until they could pay off their creditors. Often considered a dead-end for many individuals or families, one was lucky indeed to escape the financial constraints that forced one to live in such poverty laden circumstances.

Orphanage - institution or home dedicated to the care or management of children without parents.

Mince-Meat Pie - With roast beef and various liquors (brandy, and whisky primarily) as the main ingredients (as well raisins, dates, apples, and various spices), this type of pie was often served at holidays after taking several days to prepare it.

Yorkshire Pudding - a light bread-type food comprised of eggs, butter and flour often served with Victorian meals. It still shows up occasionally on British supper tables.

Cold-Boiled - boiled beef frequently served cold; often served at large gatherings and celebrations, such as the Fezziwig party in *A Christmas Carol*.

Pickwickian - anything that is related to, or considered in relation to, Dickens' novel, *The Pickwick Papers*.

Gruel - an unappealing mixture of corn and water blended together to form a mushy substance that didn't take much work or money to make. Often the meal of choice in orphanages, debtors' prisons, prisons, or like institutions.

Omnibus - form of public transportation long in existence in England (like a bus).

Shilling - form of British currency. At one time, one British pound (similar to our U.S. dollar, though it takes more than one dollar to make up a British pound) consisted of 20 shillings, and one shilling equaled 12 pence (meaning 240 pence = one British pound).

Serial Novel - Many of Dickens novels first came out as serial novels, where chapters would be released in installments - perhaps one week, or one month, at a time (or some other periodic time-table). Quite common during Dickens lifetime.

Melodramatic - adjective used to describe plays or novels where emotion is emphasized (sometimes exaggerated) to convey the plot or action (thus placing more emphasis on moving the plot or action forward).

Squib - a short, or witty saying; often looked upon by Victorian readers as something to praise and admire in writing.

French Revolution - (1789-1799) violent revolution in France where King Louis XVI and the royal family were removed from power (and where the King and his Queen, Marie Antoinette were executed via the guillotine). Various forms of revolutionary governments took hold through these years, during which the 'Reign of Terror' took place (where eventually well over 1400 people were executed using the guillotine). Taking place after the American Revolution, this revolution changed the European landscape and political thought forever (particularly between England and France) and greatly influenced the continent's culture and writing for years to come. The revolution is the setting for Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities*.

Quill - writing instrument most often comprised of a goose feather or some such bird. The large hard tip of the feather would be dipped into an ink well and then placed on the paper - or more likely, a form of parchment, during Dickens life - to write.

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