

Great novels

1 Reading

Read the text about Charles Dickens. Have you read any of the books that are mentioned in the text?

Charles Dickens was born on February 7, 1812 in Portsmouth, England. When he was twelve years old, his father was sent to prison and the young Dickens went to work in a factory in London. This experience was very important when he started writing his stories and sometimes his books are almost autobiographical*.

Two of his most famous novels are *Oliver Twist* (1837) and *A Christmas Carol* (1843). In *Oliver Twist*, the main character – Oliver – is born in a workhouse. Workhouses were places where very poor people lived and were made to work. Children were often beaten and didn't have enough food to eat. In *Oliver Twist* there is a very famous part where the young Oliver asks for more food.

'Please, sir, I want some more,' he whispered.

'What did you say?' the master said in surprise.

'Please, sir, I want some more,' Oliver repeated.

When the novel was published many people started to think about the conditions in the workhouses and tried to make things better. Many of Dickens' novels looked closely at the lives of poor people and Dickens was very good at making his characters seem like real people.

A Christmas Carol is also about how badly poor people were treated. The central character is Ebenezer Scrooge, an old man who hates spending money. He also hates it when people are happy.

'I am sure you want people to have a merry Christmas. How much money will you give me?'

'None. None at all,' said Scrooge. 'I don't have a merry Christmas. I don't believe in Christmas. I'm not giving money to anyone else so they can have a merry Christmas.'

The character is so famous that the word *Scrooge* is used to describe someone who doesn't like spending money.

Many other Dickens' characters are memorable and often these characters were based on people that he knew. For example, his father was the inspiration for Mr Micawber in *David Copperfield* and Mrs Nickleby in *Nicholas Nickleby* was based on his mother.

Charles Dickens died at the age of 58 on June 9, 1870. During his life he wrote nineteen novels and many short stories and articles. He is one of the greatest English writers ever.

Glossary

* autobiographical (*adj*) – relating to the author's own life.



2 Comprehension

Write *Dickens*, *Oliver Twist* or *Scrooge* at the beginning of each sentence.

- 1 Oliver Twist asked for more food.
- 2 _____ didn't like happy people.
- 3 _____ hated spending money.
- 4 _____ made his characters realistic.
- 5 _____ was born in a workhouse.
- 6 _____ is now a word used to describe someone who hates spending money.
- 7 _____ was influenced by his childhood experiences.
- 8 _____ worked in a factory.

3 Vocabulary

Match the words 1–8 with the definitions a–h.

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|--------------|---|
| 1 factory | a to use as a model to develop ideas from |
| 2 publish | b the situation or environment in which people live or work |
| 3 conditions | c a building where people make things using machines |
| 4 central | d to produce many copies of a book for people to buy |
| 5 character | e to use money to buy things |
| 6 spend | f easy to remember |
| 7 memorable | g main or most important |
| 8 based | h a person in a book or film |

4 Writing/Speaking

Work in pairs. Choose one of the quotations from the text. Write a dialogue to show what you think happens next. Then practise your dialogue and act it out in front of the class.

5 Speaking

- 1 Have you read any novels by Charles Dickens? If yes, which ones?
- 2 Would you like to read *Oliver Twist* or *A Christmas Carol*? Why?/Why not?
- 3 Who is your favourite author and what is your favourite book? Why?