

Charles Dickens

Life

- Charles Dickens was born in Hampshire in 1812 but when he was young he moved to London. There, at the age of 12, he was sent to work 12 hours a day in a factory.
- His education up to that moment was scarce, but the factory owner, who was his father's friend, gave him free lessons.
- Later, the family had to go to debtors' prison, but when his grandmother died, their situation got better.
- Dickens obtained a formal education and in 1827 he started to work, first as a solicitor and then as freelance journalist. He started writing papers anonymously.
- The success of his first works led him to write novels, that he wrote until his death.
- He died during after a tour in America in 1870.

Dickens's novels

- Dickens's **poverty** during his childhood influenced his works and his writing. In fact, he had a strong sensitivity for the **environment** and for the people who lived there. He described the streets and the slums of London in detail.
- He created unforgettable **characters** and **situations** that exposed the **inhumanities** and the terrible conditions of the Victorian age.
- However, he only criticised society but didn't propose any revolutionary changes. In general, in his works good overcomes evil.

- His novels were full of sentimentality and melodrama.
- However, their most important features are: their **humour**, their brilliant **dialogues**, the vast array of **characters**. His characters can be compared to Shakespeare's.
- However, his characters are **caricatures** and focus on some features: avidity (for ex. Scrooge in *A Christmas carol*), pride (Mr. Bounderby in *Hard Times*), evil (Bill Sikes in *Oliver Twist*) or good. Consequently, they are **flat** characters, either all good or all bad.

Novels in instalments

- Dickens became very popular because he exploited the system of novels in instalments.
- Families could buy an instalment (a Chapter) of the book each week. They read it together in the evenings, discussed it and imagined the next week's instalment, similarly to soap operas today.
- This was also a means of social and political propaganda, because it arrived to all social classes.

Oliver Twist

- O. Twist is the first English novel focusing on a child. It is set in the backstreets and slums of London and describes the terrible conditions of workhouses, the exploitation of children and criminality.
- Its major elements are: poverty, hunger, murder and blackmail, but they are alternated with moments of comic relief.

Oliver Twist: The plot

- Oliver Twist is a foundling. He lives in an orphanage until the age of 9. Then he is sent into a workhouse to work for his food.
- One day, he shocks everybody by asking for more food. As a consequence, he is sold for 5 pounds to work as an apprentice for an undertaker.
- This decision is not better and he decides to go to London.
- In London, he makes friends with the Artful Dodger, a pick-pocket, who takes him to his home, Fagin's den.
- Fagin is the head of a homeless gang and trains boys to steal for him. He is helped by the brutal burglar Bill Sikes and his girlfriend, the prostitute Nancy.

The plot, part II

- Oliver is forced to work for Fagin as a thief and one night, he is shot while trying to steal from a rich family.
- The lady of the house, Mrs. Maylie, sees that he's just a boy and decides to take care of him.
- Nancy visits Mrs. Maylie to help Oliver. With the help of Mr. Brownlow, who had become Oliver's friend, they find out Oliver's true identity and he is adopted by Brownlow.
- Nancy is killed by Bill Sikes for helping Oliver, but he also dies, while Fagin is captured by the police and hanged. → Oliver is saved and the villains are punished.

A Christmas Carol

Part one

A Christmas Carol opens on a cold Christmas Eve in London. **Ebenezer Scrooge** is an ageing miser, he dislikes Christmas and refuses a dinner invitation. He refuses two men who seek a donation. He has an underpaid clerk, **Bob**, and didn't want to give him the day off for Christmas.

- That night Scrooge is visited at home by the ghost of Marley, his ex clerk, who has chains and money boxes forged during a lifetime of greed and selfishness. Marley tells Scrooge that he has a single chance to avoid the same fate: he will be visited by three spirits.

Part two

The first spirit, the **Ghost of Christmas Past**, reminds Scrooge of a time when he was an innocent boy. Then, a dinner with his employer. Scrooge's fiancée Belle ends their relationship, because she realises that he will never love her as much as he loves money. Finally, they visit Belle with her large, happy family.

Part three

The second spirit, the **Ghost of Christmas Present**, takes Scrooge to a joyous market with people buying the food for Christmas dinner. Scrooge and the ghost also visit Bob's family feast and introduces his youngest son, Tiny Tim, a happy boy who is seriously ill.

The spirit informs Scrooge that Tiny Tim will die unless the course of events changes. Before disappearing, the spirit shows Scrooge two children named **Ignorance** and **Want**. He tells Scrooge to beware them.

- **Part four**

The third spirit, the **Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come**, shows Scrooge a Christmas Day in the future. The silent ghost shows the death of a disliked man whose funeral is attended by local businessmen only on condition that lunch is provided. When he asks the spirit to show a single person who feels emotion over his death, he shows a poor couple who finally have time to put their finances in order.

When Scrooge asks to see tenderness connected with any death, the ghost shows him Bob Cratchit and his family crying the death of Tiny Tim.

The ghost shows Scrooge to see a neglected grave, with a tombstone bearing Scrooge's name.

- **Part five**

Scrooge wakes up on Christmas morning and is a changed man. He spends the afternoon with Fred's family and anonymously sends a large turkey to the Cratchit home for Christmas dinner. The following day he gives Cratchit an increase in pay and becomes a father figure to Tiny Tim. From then on Scrooge begins to treat everyone with kindness, generosity and compassion, representing the spirit of Christmas.