

## **Oliver Twist – Charles Dickens**

### **Chapter 1**

- How does Dickens immediately present himself as a writer of great wit? Consider his satire on the workhouse institution in the opening pages.
- The novel starts with the tragic death of Oliver's mother. Why does Dickens begin the novel in such a way?
- What is the significance of the surgeon's knowing line 'The old story, no wedding ring, I see'?

### **Chapter 2**

- How does Dickens present the treatment of infant orphans by the parish? Consider the corruption of Mrs Mann's systematic mistreatment of the children in her care.
- What are our first impressions of Mr Bumble the beadle? Consider the behaviour of Mrs Mann towards him.
- Consider the language used by the gentleman of the board at the workhouse, how does Dickens present the abuse of power here?
- The presentation of the physical states of the boys in the workhouse shocks the reader. Why does Dickens create sympathy for their plight?
- How does the reaction to Oliver's request for more gruel show Dickens to be a master of writing farce?

### **Chapter 3**

- How is Oliver's suffering a shocking consequence of his request? Why does the workhouse advertise him as an apprentice?
- The prospect of Mr Gamfield strikes horror into Oliver, despite his mistreatment at the workhouse. Why?
- What saves Oliver?

### **Chapter 4**

- How does Dickens create black humour in the exchange between Sowerberry and Bumble at the start of the chapter – why is Victorian society good for business?
- When Oliver is taken to Sowerberry's, even his weak state ('he's very small') is turned into a point of attack by Mrs Sowerberry – how does she lament this (and the solution)?

## A Level Literature – Crime Writing

- How does Dickens' (non-diagetic) narration at the end of the chapter ('I wish some well-fed philosopher...') spotlight the desperation of Oliver's situation as he devours the food left over by the dog?

### Chapter 5

- The opening of chapter 5 describes Oliver's new accommodation – he sleeps in a coffin and longs for the peace of death. Select and analyse 3 quotations that display Dickens' gothic setting and consider the effect on the reader.
- Why does Noah Claypole treat Oliver so harshly? What is Dickens saying about society and status?
- Oliver is subjected to the horror of the errand to locate the dead woman – how does the raving of the woman's husband and mother expose the desperate plight of the poor and destitute?
- How does Dickens present death as a constant factor in the lives of those weakest in society?
- Consider the way Dickens presents the idea of a funeral here – how is this different today? Why is Sowerberry's assertion that Oliver will 'get used to it in time' and ominous one?

### Chapter 6

- How does the measles epidemic prove lucrative for the undertaking business?
- How does Noah react to Oliver's speedy advancement? Describe how he taunts Oliver mercilessly.
- Oliver's punishment parallels that at the workhouse after asking for more gruel - how does Dickens create Pathos here?

### **Chapter 7**

- How did the parish board at the workhouse support the brutal mistreatment of children (“they’ll never do anything with him, without stripes and bruises”)
- Consider Dickens presentation of Bumble (again presented and mocked as utterly foolish) Why does he suggest Oliver is behaving in this way?
- Oliver determines to run away as a means of escaping such a terrible life - describe Dickens’ sentimental writing as he goes to visit Dick one last time.

### **Chapter 8**

- By running away, Oliver commits a crime (the 1824 child vagrancy act made it illegal to run away from home without money) - how is this episode deeply upsetting for the reader?
- Consider the attitudes towards beggars in this episode - is this different today?
- As Oliver enters London he meets Jack Dawkins - how does the Artful Dodger ensnare Oliver?
- Despite the filthy, squalid setting of Fagin's den, when we first meet Fagin he seems welcoming and kind. Why does Dickens contrast this with Oliver's previous treatment?

### **Chapter 9**

- How does Dickens create an atmosphere of peace as Oliver wakes up at the start of the Chapter?
- Dickens uses this moment to introduce the real Fagin - describe how? Consider how he talks of capital punishment (foreshadowing).
- How does Dickens show Fagin’s criminal set up? What is he?
- Describe the game that Fagin plays with Dodger and Charlie Bates? Why does Bates laugh at Oliver?

### **Chapter 10**

- How does Fagin treat Dodger and Bates if they return empty handed? How does Dickens here subvert family discipline?
- Why is Oliver so shocked when he first accompanies Dodger and Bates on a mission? How does this show his inexperience?
- Oliver's innocence and youth are presented as he is pursued by the Mob – how?
- Consider Dodger and Bates' reaction. How does this show them to be shrewd career criminals?
- How can the Mob be described as heavy handed as Oliver is captured?

### **Chapter 11**

- How does Dickens make a mockery of the law through his presentation of the magistrate Mr Fang?
- Describe your reaction to Oliver's initial punishment meted out by Mr Fang. What does this say about attitudes towards children in 1830s England?
- Once again Dickens shows Oliver's angelic countenance as Brownlow thinks he recognises him. How does this ironically change Oliver's situation for the better?

### **Chapter 12**

- Dickens' sentimentality is clear and he describes Oliver discussing his mother with Mrs Bedwin - describe how.
- How is Oliver affected by the portrait of the young lady?
- Brownlow recognises honesty in Oliver's face. Select specific quotes which demonstrate this.
- As Brownlow places Oliver's resemblance to the picture he suddenly exclaims loudly which causes Oliver to faint - how does this present the reader with intrigue, foreshadowing a major plot detail?

### Chapter 13

- What is Fagin's reaction when the boys return without Oliver? How does his paranoia display his criminality?
- We are first introduced to Sikes as a brutal villain - how does Dickens describe him physically?
- Consider the dialogue between Fagin and Bill Sykes - how is it laced with threats and aggression? Which character holds the power and why?
- Why does Fagin need Oliver back? What is the plan they propose? Note the power Sikes has over Nancy.
- Why does Fagin move the goods to a different location? What does this show us about his criminal operation?
- The chapter ends with a familiar threat ("If he means to blab us among his new friends we may stop his windpipe yet.") How does Dickens create tension? (how does this tie in with the novels serialisation?)

### Chapter 14

- How does Dickens present Oliver's recovery in blissful surroundings? Consider the contrast to the criminal den.
- Dickens gives us the first insight into Brownlow's character - how does he present him as the benevolent figure who wants to trust Oliver? We get hints that Brownlow has suffered in the past. What are these?
- Brownlow's friend Mr Grimwig is presented comically but his cynical position regarding children echoes some of the treatment already seen in the novel – describe how.

### Chapter 15

- How does Sikes' treatment of his dog reflect his character? Why is this shocking to the reader?
- How does the exchange between Fagin and Sikes show them to be career criminals? Consider some of the criminal vernacular they use - give examples of this.

## A Level Literature – Crime Writing

- Oliver's recapturing is heart-breaking for the reader. How is this a brilliant criminal set piece? Consider the way the other civilians treat Oliver – how does this reinforce societal views towards children?
- Chapter 15 finishes in the same way chapter 14 finishes with Brownlow and Grimwig sitting waiting for Oliver's return. Consider the impact of the serialised publication here.

### Chapter 16

- Why does Dickens include the detail about the public hangings as Bill and Nancy take Oliver back to Fagin? What are the differences in Bill and Nancy's attitudes?
- How does Charlie Bates react when Oliver is brought into the den?
- Describe how everyone crowds around Oliver. Why is he so horrified when he thinks Mr Brownlow will think he has stolen the books?
- How does Nancy show her feelings towards Oliver and how does she reveal her pitiful circumstances as she details how she was forced into crime as a child?

### Chapter 17

- Why does Dickens reintroduce Mr Bumble at this point? How does this show the abuses of the parish when he and Mrs Mann discuss the treatment of the boys?
- Why is Dick's awareness of his illness so sentimental? How do the two figures of parochial authority (Mr Bumble and Mrs Mann) treat him?
- How does Mr Bumble's reaction to the reward advertisement display his greedy, craven character?
- What does Bumble disclose to Mr Brownlow about Oliver? Notice how he revels in Brownlow's reluctant conclusion.
- Why does Mr Brownlow order Mrs Bedwin never to mention Oliver's name again at the end of the chapter?

### **Chapter 18**

- What does Fagin lecture Oliver about at the start of the Chapter? Why does he do this?
- Why does Dickens make the gallows constant backdrop to the criminals talk?
- How do the two boys (the Dodger and Bates) try to persuade Oliver to join them in a life of crime?
- At the end of the chapter Fagin is described as “the wily Old Jew”. How does he hope to blacken Oliver's soul and change its ‘hue forever’?

### **Chapter 19**

- Fagin and Sikes discuss a lucrative robbery they intend to make. How does Dickens again show them to be hardened criminals in the way they discuss the set-up?
- How is Oliver brought into the plan? Why does Fagin suggest Oliver will be well-suited to the task?
- How does Oliver's peaceful rest contrast his new circumstances at the end of the chapter?

### **Chapter 20**

- Oliver is warned twice about his conduct with Sikes. How does Fagin sound an ominous warning? What is the significance of the book Fagin makes Oliver read?
- How does Nancy behave towards Oliver? How does Dickens present her as his only hope in the darkness?
- How does Sikes seek to frighten Oliver with the pistol? What is his aim?

### Chapter 21

- Comment on Dickens' ability to present the itinerary of Sikes and Oliver as they cross the city of London – How does this mark him as a master of urban representation?

### Chapter 22

- How does Dickens present the criminal brotherhood through Toby Crackit? How does he treat Oliver?
- When Oliver realizes what Sikes has plotted, Dickens describes him as 'well nigh mad with grief and terror'. Why does the author present Oliver with such opposition to the criminals here?
- At the end of the chapter Oliver is wounded and his life (and fate) hang in the balance – consider how this cliff-hanger works as a piece of serialized novel form.

### Chapter 23

- 'Bleak, dark, and piercing cold, it was a night for the well-housed and fed to draw round the bright fire and thank God they were at home; and for the homeless, starving wretch to lay him down and die.' How does this quote create the distinction between life and death, rich and poor etc?
- How do Bumble and Mrs Corney show such callous indifference to the paupers in this chapter?
- How does Dickens capture the ridiculous scene of tenderness in the exchange between Mrs Corney and Bumble?
- What does Bumble do at the end of the chapter when left alone? Why?

### Chapter 24

- How does Dickens present a scene of near gothic horror in this chapter?
- What, crucially, do we learn from old Sally? Why does she tell Mrs Corney this before dying?

### Chapter 25

- How does Dickens show the Dodger to be a master of trickery and deceit at the start of the chapter? What does Fagin mean in the lines "you must get up very early in the morning, to win against the Dodger"?
- Consider the mood shift in Fagin's den before and after Toby Crackit enters – describe the suspicion and paranoia of the scene.
- Why does Fagin react with such emotional fervor to the news about Oliver? How does Dickens again display the constant fear the criminals lived with?



## Chapter 26

- Describe (using at least 3 quotes) the scene Dickens paints in the three cripples – think about the way Fagin speaks covertly to the landlord.
- Why does Nancy say of Oliver “I hope he lies dead in the ditch and that his young bones may rot there”?
- What secret does Fagin blurt out in a fit of anger about Oliver’s value to him?
- Why does Fagin tell Monks that Oliver could not be turned into a pickpocket like Bates and Dodger?
- How does the introduction of Monks add intrigue to the plot?

## Chapter 27

- What convinces Bumble to propose to Mrs Corney? How does Dickens create a ridiculous scene of the proposal when Bumble declares ‘Coals, candles, and house-rent free...Oh Mrs Corney, what a Angel you are’?
- How does Dickens mock the utter hypocrisy of Mr Bumble when he reproaches Noah and Charlotte for their flirtatious behavior?

## Chapter 28

- Why does Dickens choose to pick up the story at the moment of the chase? How is this another hallmark of the serialized sequencing?
- Dickens presents Giles and the group as somewhat ridiculous in this chapter. How?
- How does this chapter mark a movement in fortune for Oliver?

## Chapter 29

- How does Dickens describe Rose Maylie ‘the younger lady’? Compare this description with some of the descriptions of Oliver Twist earlier in the novel.
- Why does Mr Giles hide the fact that the victim of his bullet was only a boy?

### Chapter 30

- How does the sight of Oliver contrast the expectations of Mrs Maylie and Rose? How is this another moment where Oliver's appearance is emphatic and significant?

### Chapter 31

- How does Dickens present the detectives Blathers and Duff in their investigation? What is the doctor's fear about Oliver?
- How is Oliver protected by Mr Losberne and Rose?
- How does Dickens satirise law/law enforcement in this chapter?

### Chapter 32

- Why does Oliver react so badly at the sight of the house from Chertsey Bridge? When Losberne investigates, he finds nothing – why is this?
- Describe Oliver's recovery in the country – why does Dickens use this model for his novel (Recover-relapse-recover-relapse)?
- How is the narrative progression of the text an effective one for the crime genre?

### Chapter 33

- How can Dickens be said to present Oliver's fluctuating fortunes in this chapter?
- Why does Oliver's meeting with the tall stranger in the village stand out from the rest of the chapter?
- Consider the language Dickens uses in the paragraph below:

Oliver turned homeward, thinking on the many kindnesses he had received from the young lady, and wishing that the time could come again, that he might never cease showing her how grateful and attached he was. He had no cause for self-reproach on the score of neglect, or want of thought, for he had been devoted to her service; and yet a hundred little occasions rose up before him, on which he fancied he might have been more zealous, and more earnest, and wished he had been. We need be careful how we deal with those about us, when every death carries to some small circle of survivors, thoughts of so much omitted, and so little done--of so many things forgotten, and so many more which might have been repaired! There is no remorse so deep as that which is unavailing; if we would be spared its tortures, let us remember this, in time.

- How does Dickens capture the emotions surrounding death and Oliver's innocence in this passage?

### Chapter 34

- Rose's survival brings great joy to all in the household – describe how Dickens brings Oliver fully into his new 'family'?
- How does Dickens description of sleep unsettle the reader towards the end of the chapter (comment on his use of language)?
- The final scene of the chapter (where Oliver has a nightmare about being back at Fagin's den then wakes to see Fagin peering through his window) is one we associate with horror – how is it truly terrifying?

### Chapter 35

- What is the response to Oliver's sighting of Fagin at his window? How does this display the care Oliver now finds himself in?
- The rest of the chapter concerns Harry and Rose. How does Dickens write with heightened sentimentality in the exchange between the two characters?
- Why can't Rose accept Harry's proposal? How does this allow the reader an insight into the social context of 1830s regarding class structures.
- What is Harry's final request as he leaves Rose?
- How does this sentimental subplot add an extra level of intrigue for the reader? Why does Dickens include it?

### Chapter 36

- Why does Harry ask Oliver to write to him in secret about Rose Maylie while he is in London?
- How does Dickens create a sentimental effect at the end of the chapter as the carriage pulls away? Analyse Dickens use of language in the final 3 paragraphs and evaluate the effect on the reader here.

### Chapter 37

- How does Dickens create great humour in describing Bumble's fate (being married to Mrs Corney)? Consider how Dickens depicts the relationship (stereotypes?)
- Why does Bumble feel like he has lost power, despite being promoted to Master of the work house? Think about how he is shamed in front of the paupers.
- Why does Monks want to see Bumble? How does Bumble try to work the meeting to his advantage?
- How does the extended passage of humour add relief to the overall story (which then returns with Monks)? Justify its inclusion here.

### Chapter 38

- How does Dickens present the power dynamic between Mr and Mrs Bumble at the meeting with Monks?
- Consider the effects of the surroundings (the crumbling building, the thunder) – how are these important?
- How does Mrs Bumble strike a deal with Monks? Why does she seem glad to be unburdened?
- Why does Monks throw the bag containing the ring in the river?

Consider Dickens' use of coincidence in presenting the links to Oliver's history. Why is it such a powerful subplot to the whole novel?

### Chapter 39

- How does Sikes' violent treatment of Nancy foreshadow her fate? Consider the dialogue between them – how can Nancy be said to be fatalistic here?
- How does Sikes threaten Fagin over the money and his neglect? Why is seemingly all their crime carried out in the shadow of the gallows?
- Consider Nancy's behavior at Fagin's den and upon leaving – How is she presented as a sympathetic figure?
- After drugging Sikes, Nancy risks everything by seeking out Rose Maylie – how does she use her know-how to gain access to Rose?

### Chapter 40

- How does Nancy react when treated kindly by Rose?
- Describe what Nancy tells Rose using your own words – what are the key things Dickens tells the reader?
- Nancy describes her irresistible loyalty to Sikes – how does Dickens make this such sad attachment? Is it credible? Why?
- Why does Nancy refuse any help or money?

**Extension idea – what parallels can be drawn between Nancy and Rose? (refer to Dickens' language in the opening paragraph.)**

### Chapter 41

- Why does Rose conclude she must seek Harry in the matter of Oliver and Monks? Why does she find it hard to write to him?
- Why does Dickens use coincidence to bring Brownlow back in at this point? How does he use Grimwig to create humour amongst the sentimentality?

## A Level Literature – Crime Writing

- What role does Mr Brownlow adopt in the plan to help protect Oliver and find out about his parentage? Who else is involved in this?
- How do the good camp (Brownlow etc.) contrast the evil gang (Fagin etc.)?

### Chapter 42

- Why does Noah make Charlotte carry the stolen money from Sowerberry?
- How does Fagin immediately gain power over Noah and bring him into his criminal gang? Consider how he manipulates the £20 from Noah.
- What kind of criminal does Noah want to be? How does Fagin set him up for this?

### Chapter 43

- What does Fagin mean when he states 'I'm of the same importance to you, as you are yourself'?
- What, do we learn, has happened to the Dodger? How does Fagin seek to console Charley about the loss of Dodger?
- How does Dodger act in the court setting? Despite his attempt to mock his hearing, a witness is brought and the Dodger is formally charged. Why does Dickens, after stressing the skill of the Artful Dodger, bring him down for stealing a snuff-box?

### Chapter 44

- How does the burden of Nancy's betrayal weigh heavily on her? Why is it ominous that Sikes and Fagin both remark upon her strange behavior? Consider Sikes' language in the way he addresses Nancy.
- Why does Fagin try to reach out to Nancy as he leaves?
- Here, for the first time, we see Fagin's growing hatred of Sikes. How has Sikes become too much of a danger to Fagin's safety?
- What does Fagin believe is the reason for Nancy's behaviour? How does he plan to use this to threaten and subdue her to his will?

### Chapter 45

- What job does Fagin task Noah with? How is this well suited to his character?
- How does Fagin's direction of Barney show his ability to orchestrate the whole plan?

### Chapter 46

- How does Dickens show the disparate worlds of respectability and crime in the meeting between Browlow, Rose and Nancy? How does Dickens create great melodrama in the setting (time/place)?
- Dickens describes Nancy's dark foreboding feelings – how?
- How does Nancy utterly condemn herself by colluding with Brownlow?
- Why will she not permit the capture of Fagin? What does this say about her?

### Chapter 47 – Fatal consequences

- How does Dickens create a hideous presentation of Fagin as he stewes over the intelligence about Nancy in the 'dead of night'?
- Describe the way Dickens build tension between Fagin and Sikes after Sikes enters.
- Why does Fagin use a hypothetical scenario of Noah 'preaching' on them? What does this add to the chapter?
- After enhancing his rage, Fagin recognizes the violence in Bill – why does he warn him to be 'not too violent for safety'?
- Look at the paragraph 'without one pause...curtain of the bed.' – how does Dickens capture Bill's obsession?
- The brutality of the murder is powerful. What is the effect of Nancy holding up Rose's handkerchief 'as high towards heaven as her feeble strength would allow'?

### Chapter 48 – The Flight of Sikes

- How does Dickens create anti pathetic fallacy through his description of the sun at the start of the chapter?
- The grotesque description of the corpse shocks the reader and presents the crime as truly horrific – how does this elevate the crime?
- How do the pedlar's remarks about the stain remover cause Sikes to react in such a violent manner?
- How does Sikes hear that his crime has been discovered? What does this say about the severity of the crime?
- Why is the haunting of Sikes so powerful? How is he affected? How does this show the author to be a master of this genre?
- Why is the heroism of Sikes responding to the fire included in this chapter?
- Why does Sikes return to London?
- Why does Sikes attempt to destroy his dog before returning to London? Why is his failure somewhat ironic?

Extension task – how does Dickens plot Sikes' psychological reaction to committing murder? What stages does he go through?

### Chapter 49

- How does Dickens brilliantly tie up the connection between Monks and Brownlow at the start of the chapter?
- Who is Monks?
- Dickens uses Chapter 49 to reveal some key connections that underpin the whole novel – what are these?
- Brownlow's language is fierce in its condemnation of Monks – find examples of his rising anger through his language.
- Why does Monks finally persuaded to sign a statement of truth and restore Oliver's money to him?
- How can Brownlow be said to take the law into his own hands in this chapter? Is this alarming?

### Chapter 50

- Consider the way Dickens presents the criminal den in the description in the first two pages – how does the state of decay reflect the moral decay of the criminals hiding there?
- Describe how Dickens builds tension in the exchanges between Crackit, Chitling and Kags discussing the 'smash' (The police raid). Why are they so fearful of Sikes appearing?
- When Sikes appears how do the three men react? How does Charley's reaction differ? Why is he so fearless of Sikes?
- How is the mob described in its pursuit of Sikes when they find him? Compare this to modern society.
- How is Sikes' death brilliantly staged? If Dickens here creates 'poetic justice', what does he achieve with the death of the dog?

### Chapter 51

- How does Oliver recollect his birthplace as he returns? Whom does he think of?
- How does Monks treat Oliver in the way he speaks? What does Monks tell about Oliver's father and the letters?
- How is Bumble shamed and removed from his parochial station?
- How is the chapter sequenced as a climax to a crime thriller?
- What has Harry done to be able to finally marry Rose?
- Despite the wonderful cause for joy at the end of the chapter, the mood is soured as Oliver has learnt of Dick's death. Why does Dickens include this?

### **Chapter 52**

- How does Dickens present the swiftness of trial and sentence in this chapter?
- Consider Fagins' plight – how does the finality of his situation lead him to first think of past criminals and then into a state of terrified agitation?
- When Oliver sees Fagin he tries to pray for him but encounters the raving of a mind that has lost its sanity, believing Oliver to be able to allow him to escape. Why does Dickens take Oliver back to see Fagin?
- Dickens presents public executions with an expectant crowd, there to revel in ultimate justice. How do we as modern readers view this?

### **Chapter 53**

- How does the final chapter work as a distribution of happiness and woe for all the major characters? – List what happened to each character.
- What is significant about what happens to Monks?
- Dickens reaffirms his conviction at the end of the novel that without displaying benevolence and mercy one cannot achieve happiness. How does this moral pervade some of Dickens' other work?