



CHARLES DICKENS'

# GREAT EXPECTATIONS

By Neil Bartlett | Directed by Julia Rodriguez-Elliott

March 21-April 18, 2027



**Dear School Partner,**

Welcome to A Noise Within Theatre! We are thrilled to welcome you to the 35<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Season—a season in which we look to **Those Better Angels**—a theme inspired by Lincoln's call to our best selves. In *Great Expectations*, poor orphaned Pip receives a mysterious financial gift that elevates him to high society, asking the essential question: *can money and social status truly make someone happy?*

In this study guide, you will find articles, classroom activities, behind-the-scenes interviews, and other exciting materials, all crafted to align with the Common Core and the California VAPA Standards. This study guide can be enjoyed by teachers and students alike, our hope being that teachers and students enjoy it together!

We offer this study guide as a free resource for contextualizing the show and drawing parallels with our modern world, and you can find guides from our past seasons available for download on our website.

We hope this study guide will prepare you to enjoy the show to its fullest potential and to create a lasting memory of a fantastic day at the theatre. We are happy to have you!

Warmly,

A Noise Within Education



Top image: cast of *Death of a Salesman*.

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Credits

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# Character Map

## Characters in the Kent Marshlands

**PIP,**  
**short for Mr. Phillip Pirrip**

The narrator and lead character of the play. We follow his life from childhood through adulthood.

**JOE GARGERY**

A kind and gentle father figure to Pip. He is the village blacksmith.

**MRS. JOE**

Pip's older sister and Joe's wife. A harsh, unloving woman, she is raising the orphaned Pip.

**BIDDY**

A young woman who is a friend and helper to Pip and his family.

**MISS HAVISHAM**

An eccentric, reclusive, and extremely wealthy woman who lives in Pip's village.

**ABEL MAGWITCH**

A convict whom Pip encounters as a child.

**COMPEYSON**

Another convict.

**ESTELLA**

An orphaned girl, adopted and raised by Miss Havisham.

# Character Map *continued*

## Characters in London

### MR. JAGGERS

A lawyer who manages Pip's finances.

### WEMMICK

A clerk who works for Mr. Jaggers.

### BENTLEY DRUMMLE

A suitor of Estella's.

### HERBERT POCKET

Pip's roommate and closest friend in London.

**MR. PUMBLECHOOK,  
MR. WOPSLE, SARAH POCKET,  
A SERGEANT, AND OTHERS.**

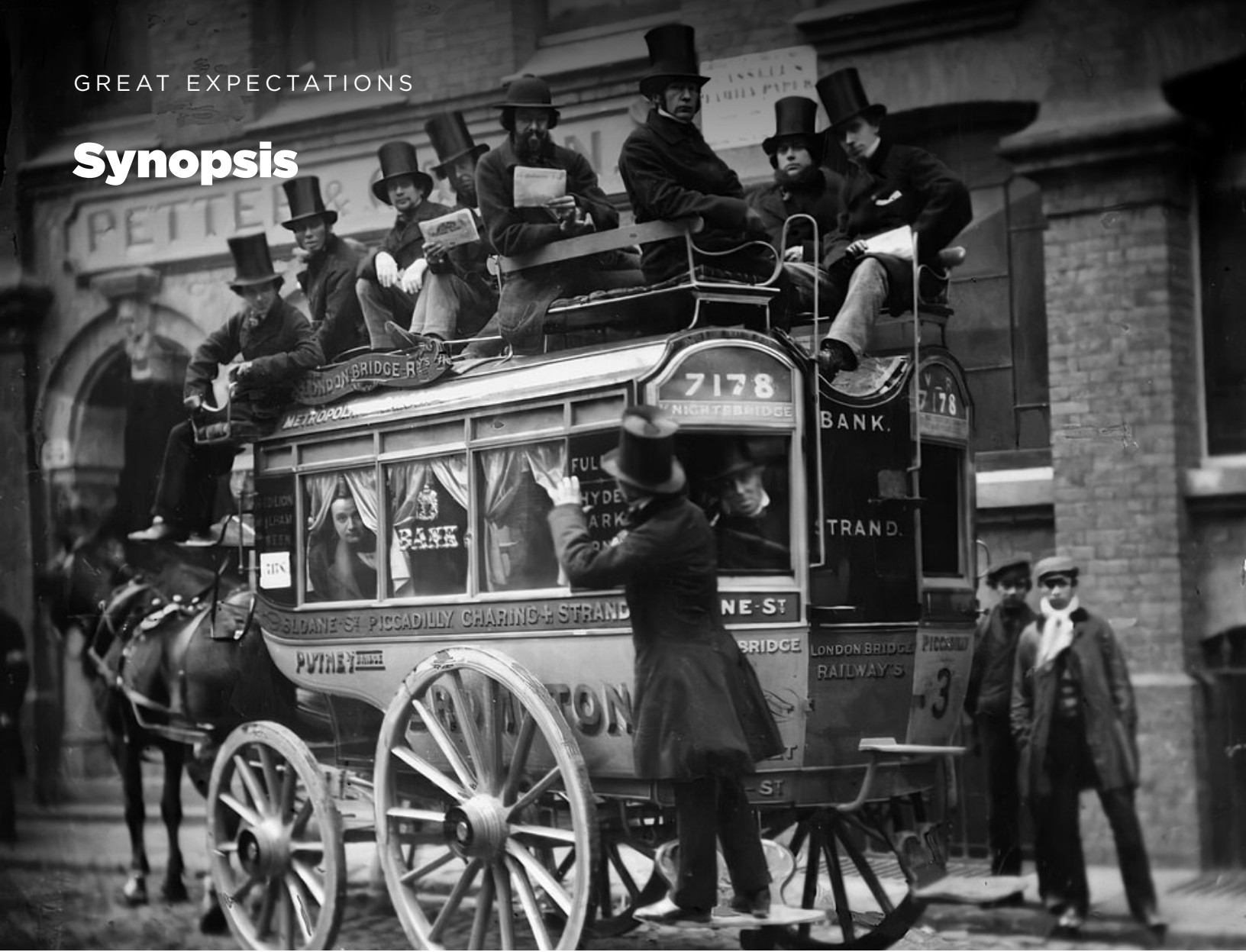
### Interesting Facts About Charles Dickens

Dickens loved gifting his characters with quirky names: Mr. Pumblechook, Mr. Wopsle, Ebenezer Scrooge, Betsey Trotwood, Mr. Bumble, Wackford Squeers, the list goes on...

Illustration by Javier Jaén;  
Source photographs Getty; Wellcome Collection



## Synopsis



A London omnibus in 1865.

**Setting:** The action cycles between the marsh country in Kent, England and London, between the 1810's and the 1830's.

### Act 1:

As the play opens, **a man in his thirties is remembering his past**, and he decides to tell his story to us, the audience. Throughout the play, the other characters often function as a **Chorus**, speaking together as they repeat or respond to the young man's words. The narrator, **Pip**, begins by recalling a childhood incident when **he encounters an escaped convict named Magwitch** in the churchyard. Pip tells the convict that he is an orphan, being raised by his sister and her husband, the local blacksmith. **Pip's sister, Mrs. Joe**, is harsh and abusive, but **her husband, Joe Gargery**, is gentle and loving towards Pip.

Pip agrees to bring the convict food and an iron file. The next day, as he is bringing these items to the convict, he encounters **a second escaped convict**; as Pip soon learns, the two convicts are bitter enemies. Later, a festive Christmas dinner at Pip's home is interrupted

## Synopsis *continued*

by the arrival of a company of soldiers who are searching for the two convicts. Pip and Joe join the soldiers in their search, and both convicts are captured. As he is being shackled, Pip's convict makes a statement designed to conceal that Pip has helped him.

Joe's uncle, **Mr. Pumblechook**, arranges for Pip to visit the wealthy and reclusive Miss Havisham in her decaying mansion. There, Pip also meets **Miss Havisham's ward, Estella**, and he is captivated by her beauty, although she is snobbish and insulting towards him. Over the course of many visits, **Pip grows more fascinated with Estella and more ashamed by his low social status.**

At age fourteen, Pip is apprenticed to Joe to learn the blacksmith's trade. Mrs. Joe takes a fall and dies, and **Biddy, a kind young woman**, arrives to take care of the household. Four years later, **a mysterious London lawyer, Mr. Jaggers**, arrives to tell Pip that he has been adopted by a generous benefactor who wishes to remain anonymous. **Jaggers tells Pip that because of this benefactor, he is now a young man of "great expectations."** Pip leaves his home for London, where he is to be made into a gentleman.

### Act 2:

Pip arrives in London, and Mr. Jaggers's clerk, Wemmick, takes him to his lodgings. There Pip meets his housemate, **Herbert Pocket**, who tells Pip the backstory of Miss Havisham and Estella. Pip learns his way around London and is instructed in how to



GREAT EXPECTATIONS.



Top: Drawing of Young Pip and Magwitch, the first convict, by F.A. Fraser. 1876.

Bottom: Miss Havisham, by Charles Green. 1898.

## Synopsis *continued*

become a gentleman. After some months, Biddy writes Pip to tell him that Miss Havisham wishes to see him. Pip returns to Miss Havisham's, **where he again encounters Estella**, now a beautiful young woman. Pip is as fascinated by her as ever, despite her warning that she has no heart. **Pip becomes convinced that Miss Havisham is his anonymous benefactor, and that his "great expectations" include her intention that he should marry Estella.** Estella comes to London, where she is admired by many men, including **Bentley Drummle, a drunken scoundrel whom Pip detests.**

Soon after his 21<sup>st</sup> birthday, Pip is shocked and disappointed when an old acquaintance shows up at his door and reveals themselves as Pip's anonymous benefactor. Despite his initial dismay and disgust, Pip comes to appreciate all that this individual has done for him. Pip returns home and confronts Miss Havisham and Estella, **who tells Pip that she is going to marry Bentley Drummle.** Devastated, Pip returns to London and decides to leave the country with his benefactor, who is in danger while remaining in England. **Pip visits Miss Havisham one last time and finds her full of remorse for what she has done.** Back in London, Pip and Herbert make careful plans for Pip and his benefactor to leave the country, but they are thwarted at the last minute by unforeseen circumstances. Overwhelmed by the loss of his "great expectations," **Pip makes his way in the world alone, until finally his path leads him back to Miss Havisham's house, now up for sale.** There in the ruined garden, the past and the present come together at last, and Pip is finally able to make his peace with both.

### Interesting Facts About Charles Dickens

Charles Dickens and his wife, Catherine Hogarth, were the parents of ten children! Dickens himself was one of eight children.

Photograph of Charles Dickens and two of his three daughters (and seven sons). 1880. Historic New England.



# Charles Dickens

**CHARLES DICKENS (1812-1870)** was an English author who overcame a difficult and impoverished childhood to become the most famous writer of the Victorian Era. Charles was the second of eight children born to John and Elizabeth Dickens in Portsmouth, England. The young Charles Dickens spent much of his time reading; he was also fond of theatricals, including puppet shows, and he had a natural singing voice.



Charles Dickens. Flickr.com

Dickens's father struggled to provide for his family. They relocated several times before settling in Camden Town, a poor neighborhood in London, where Bob Cratchit and his family live in *A Christmas Carol*. When Charles was twelve, his father was sentenced to a debtor's prison known as the Marshalsea. Charles had to leave school, and he went to live with a family friend and work in a shoe-blackening factory; the work involved pasting fraudulent labels on the bottles of an inferior product to pass them off as a more famous brand, work that Charles despised and was ashamed of. Except for Charles and his sister Fanny, the rest of the family all lived together at the prison, as was common practice. Each Sunday, Charles visited the prison and witnessed firsthand the appalling conditions in which many of London's working poor were forced to live.

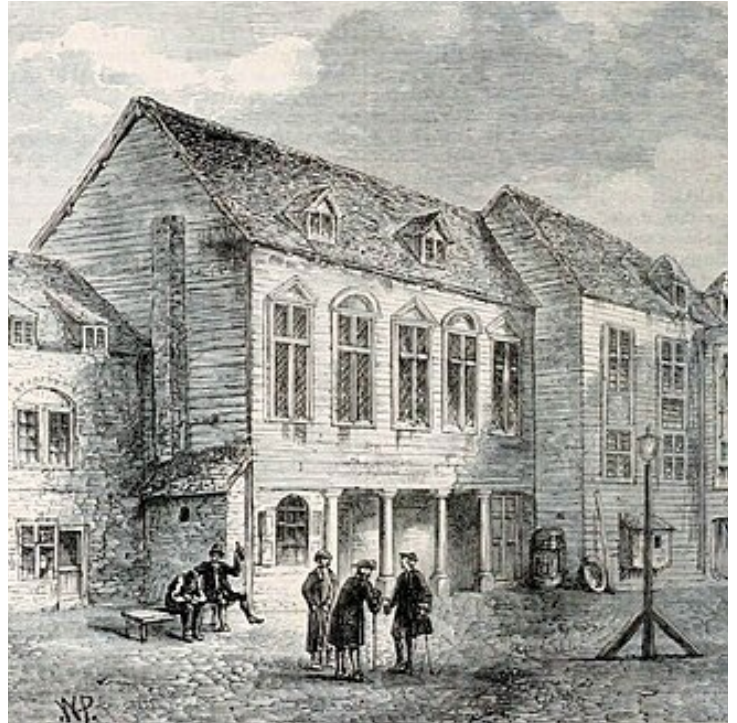
After several months, an unexpected inheritance relieved Dickens's father from debt, and Charles left the factory and returned to school. Nevertheless, Charles's time in the factory left him deeply traumatized in ways that would haunt him for the rest of his life. Many of Dickens's novels address such social evils as child labor, domestic conflict, and the hopeless cycle of poverty – all themes that reflected his own unhappy experiences.

In 1834, Dickens began to write his novel *The Pickwick Papers* in several monthly installments. This form of writing in episodes became standard for fiction in the Victorian Era. Many of Dickens's most successful novels, including *Oliver Twist*, *David Copperfield*, *A Tale of Two Cities*, and *Great Expectations*, were first published in magazine installments. *The Pickwick Papers* was an instant success that immediately earned Dickens the reputation of being a gifted author. It is arguably Dickens's most humorous work, in which nothing very bad occurs, despite some temporarily distressing situations for the four members of the Pickwick Club. Nevertheless, there is a moving episode that takes place

## Charles Dickens *continued*

in a debtors' prison that foreshadows Dickens's portrayal of various social evils in his later novels.

In 1836, Dickens married Catherine Hogarth, the daughter of the editor of a London newspaper. Together they had ten children. *A Christmas Carol*, published in 1843, was instantly popular and has remained so ever since. In 1844, Dickens's live reading of *The Chimes*, also centered around Christmas, was so well received that it launched his extensive career as an amateur actor. Dickens continued performing, for charity and for pleasure, for the remainder of his life, and he even formed an amateur theatre company in 1848, where he served as manager, producer, and actor.

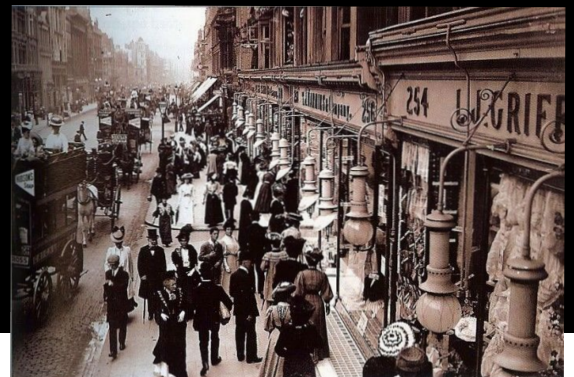


First Marshalsea Prison, 18th Century.

During the 1860s, Dickens devoted much of his time and energy to public readings from his novels. But travel began to tire him, and a train wreck in 1865 left him with dizzy spells and arthritis. On June 8, 1870, Dickens spent all day working on *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, which was unusual for him; normally he wrote for only two or three hours each day. That night, Dickens complained of a toothache and lost consciousness. Charles Dickens died from complications of a stroke on June 9, 1870, at the age of 58. He is buried in Westminster Abbey, in London.

### Interesting Facts About Charles Dickens

As both a wildly successful writer and moderately successful actor, Charles Dickens was a Victorian celebrity, and Londoners would regularly recognize him on the street.



Oxford Street, London. 1800s.

## Neil Bartlett

**Neil Bartlett** is a leading British author, adaptor and theatre director.

His plays, translations and adaptations have been and are performed widely across the English-speaking world and include Camus, Dickens, Dumas, Genet, Kleist, Labiche, Marivaux, Moliere, Racine and Wilde and have been performed by leading cultural producers such as the Royal Shakespeare Company, The Abbey in Dublin, the Aldeburgh Festival, The Brighton Festival, the Manchester International Festival, the Edinburgh International Festival, the Holland Festival, LIFT, the National Theatre, the Bristol Old Vic, the Arcola and the Royal Vauxhall Tavern.

As a director and playwright, his recent works have been an acclaimed staging of Albert Camus' *The Plague*, a roof-raising contribution to the celebration of queer Georgian London entitled *Princess* that was staged by Duckie in Vauxhall Pleasure Gardens in 2021, *Blue Now* a live version of Derek Jarman's seminal film with Russell Tovey and Joelle Taylor, and an acclaimed adaptation of Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* starring Emma Corrin & directed by Michael Grandage.

His most recent published works are *Address Book*, a collection of short fictions, and a paperback reissue of his novel *The Disappearance Boy*, both published by Inkandescent.



Neil Bartlett

HISTORICAL TIMELINE OF

# Dickensian England

Interesting Fact  
Dickens's favorite among his own novels was *David Copperfield* (1850). Like *Great Expectations* (1861), it is often described as a "coming-of-age" novel.

| Dickens's Life                                                                                             | Dickens's Books & Novellas                                 |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|
| Dickens is born in Porstmouth, Hampshire.                                                                  | 1812                                                       |
| Dickens's father is arrested for debt and sent to debtor's prison.                                         | 1824                                                       |
| The Poor Law Amendment Act is passed, forcing poor families to move into horribly maintained workhouses.   | 1834                                                       |
| Dickens marries Catherine Hogarth.                                                                         | 1834                                                       |
|                                                                                                            | 1836 <i>The Pickwick Papers</i>                            |
|                                                                                                            | 1837 <i>Oliver Twist</i>                                   |
|                                                                                                            | 1838 <i>Nicholas Nickleby</i>                              |
| Great Britian establishes the Penny Post, allowing Brits more affordable access to Dickens's works.        | 1840 <i>The Old Curiosity Shop</i>                         |
|                                                                                                            | 1841 <i>Barnaby Rudge</i>                                  |
|                                                                                                            | 1843 <i>A Christmas Carol</i> and <i>Martin Chuzzlewit</i> |
|                                                                                                            | 1844 <i>The Chimes</i>                                     |
|                                                                                                            | 1845 <i>The Cricket on the Hearth</i>                      |
|                                                                                                            | 1846 <i>Dombey and Son</i>                                 |
| Charlotte Brontë publishes <i>Jane Eyre</i> under a pseudonym.                                             | 1847                                                       |
|                                                                                                            | 1848 <i>The Haunted Man</i> and <i>The Ghost's Bargain</i> |
|                                                                                                            | 1849 <i>David Copperfield</i>                              |
|                                                                                                            | 1852 <i>Bleak House</i>                                    |
| The Crimean War breaks out between Russia and the allied forces of Britian, France, and the Ottoman Empire | 1853                                                       |
|                                                                                                            | 1854 <i>Hard Times</i>                                     |
|                                                                                                            | 1855 <i>Little Dorrit</i>                                  |
|                                                                                                            | 1859 <i>A Tale of Two Cities</i>                           |
|                                                                                                            | 1860 <i>Great Expectations</i>                             |
|                                                                                                            | 1864 <i>Our Mutual Friend</i>                              |
| Dickens suffers injuries in a train wreck.                                                                 | 1865                                                       |
| Fyodor Dostoevsky publishes <i>Crime and Punishment</i> , serialized in 12 installments.                   | 1866                                                       |
| Dickens dies suddenly of a stroke.                                                                         | 1870                                                       |
|                                                                                                            | 1870 <i>The Mystery of Edwin Drood</i> (Unfinished)        |

# Themes, Motifs & Symbols

**A Coming-of-Age Novel versus a Memory Play:** Dickens's novel and Bartlett's play trace the experiences of Pip from childhood through adulthood. Both works focus on Pip's youthful mistakes and prejudices, and on the people he loves who eventually help him to grow into a kinder, stronger, and more compassionate person. This type of novel is often referred to as a "coming-of-age" novel, because it describes the experiences that shape a young person and affect their personality as they grow into adulthood. Bartlett's play, however, functions more like a "memory play." A memory play depicts events from the central character's past, and it is often framed by commentary spoken by the central character. American Playwright Tennessee Williams coined the term to describe his play *The Glass Menagerie* (1944). Another example of a memory play is Aaron Sorkin's 2018 adaptation of Harper Lee's novel *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960).

**Childhood Trauma:** Both Pip and Estella experience significant childhood trauma. Pip's sister, Mrs. Joe, is both emotionally and physically abusive, and there are several other unpleasant individuals who make Pip's life an unhappy one. Nevertheless, Pip is fortunate to have a loving adult in his life—Mrs. Joe's husband, Joe Gargery—who takes care of him and protects him. Estella does not suffer physical abuse, but Miss Havisham raises her according to her own twisted obsessions, and unlike Pip, there is no loving adult to protect Estella during her bizarre childhood. How we interpret the story's ending depends to a considerable extent upon how resilient we believe Pip and Estella are able to be in adulthood.

**Class Prejudice:** All of Dickens's novels address the idea of class prejudice in various ways, and *Great Expectations* is no exception. In the novel and in Bartlett's play, we meet a wide variety of characters



*Over Indulgence - A Spoiled Thanksgiving.*  
By Alice Barber Stephens. 1896.

## Themes & Motifs & Symbols *continued*

from all walks of life, and both Pip and Estella are forced to confront their own class prejudices as they grow into adulthood. Often the characters who are most admirable, such as Joe and Biddy, are the characters who come from the most humble backgrounds, while others, such as Bentley Drummle, are wealthy upper-class aristocrats who are selfish and brutal.

**Poverty:** One aspect of class prejudice as depicted in both the novel and the play versions of *Great Expectations* is poverty, and particularly the wealth

gap that today we describe as income inequality. One of the most painful lessons that Pip learns about himself is the realization that in becoming a wealthy gentleman, he has developed a disdainful attitude towards those who are less affluent, even though many of them are the kindest, most generous, and most ethical characters in the play. Although Dickens never makes the mistake of romanticizing poverty, he directs much of the satirical energy in his novels towards those who are snobbish and look down on others simply because they have more money than others do. Pip comes to be heartily ashamed of himself for having fallen into this trap, and especially for his selfish presumption that he is better than Joe and Biddy (who love Pip unconditionally, despite his flaws, and whose patience is ultimately rewarded when Pip comes to appreciate them and others as a result of his own emotional growth).

**The Criminal Justice System:** Dickens was a strong critic of the British prison system, as well as of the British justice system in which the poor were targeted simply for the “crime” of being poor. Mr. Jaggers, the tight-lipped but influential lawyer who manages Pip’s finances, appears to be a rather cold and calculating man, until we learn of his efforts to save one young person from a terrible life, even though the solution he comes up with is far from perfect. In Victorian England, where orphaned street children could be hanged or transported to Australia for stealing a loaf of bread, Dickens used his writing to shed light upon and to condemn this unjust system, and Bartlett’s adaptation also keeps Dickens’s



1800s

## Themes & Motifs & Symbols *continued*

outrage clearly in the foreground.

**Penal Servitude in Australia:** By the late 1700's, British prisons had become so crowded that some prisoners needed to be confined on large ships, known as "hulks," anchored just offshore where the River Thames flowed into the sea - including in the marsh country of Kent, where *Great Expectations* takes place. Beginning in 1786, the convicts on these ships were sentenced to be "transported" to the British colony of Australia, also called New South Wales. Despite the harsh conditions, many prisoners did well there, especially once their term of servitude was ended; many even became prosperous landowners, like Magwitch, and very few chose to return to England, even if they were permitted to do so under their sentencing terms.



Prison hulk 'Success' at Hobart, Tasmania, Australia. 1840.

**The Phrase "Great Expectations":** When Jaggers tells Pip that he is now a young man of "great expectations," thanks to his anonymous benefactor, the phrase soon takes on a life of its own in Pip's mind. Jaggers seems to refer only to Pip's financial expectations and the success in life that his increased fortune and status will bring him, but Pip begins to make assumptions about other expectations that are intended for him, but for which there is no proof. Dickens's title for his novel is deceptively simple, for as we continue to learn about Pip's life and his choices, we come to realize that the title is in fact a very complex one that allows for many possible meanings, both for Pip and for the reader (or audience member).

# Who is Pip?

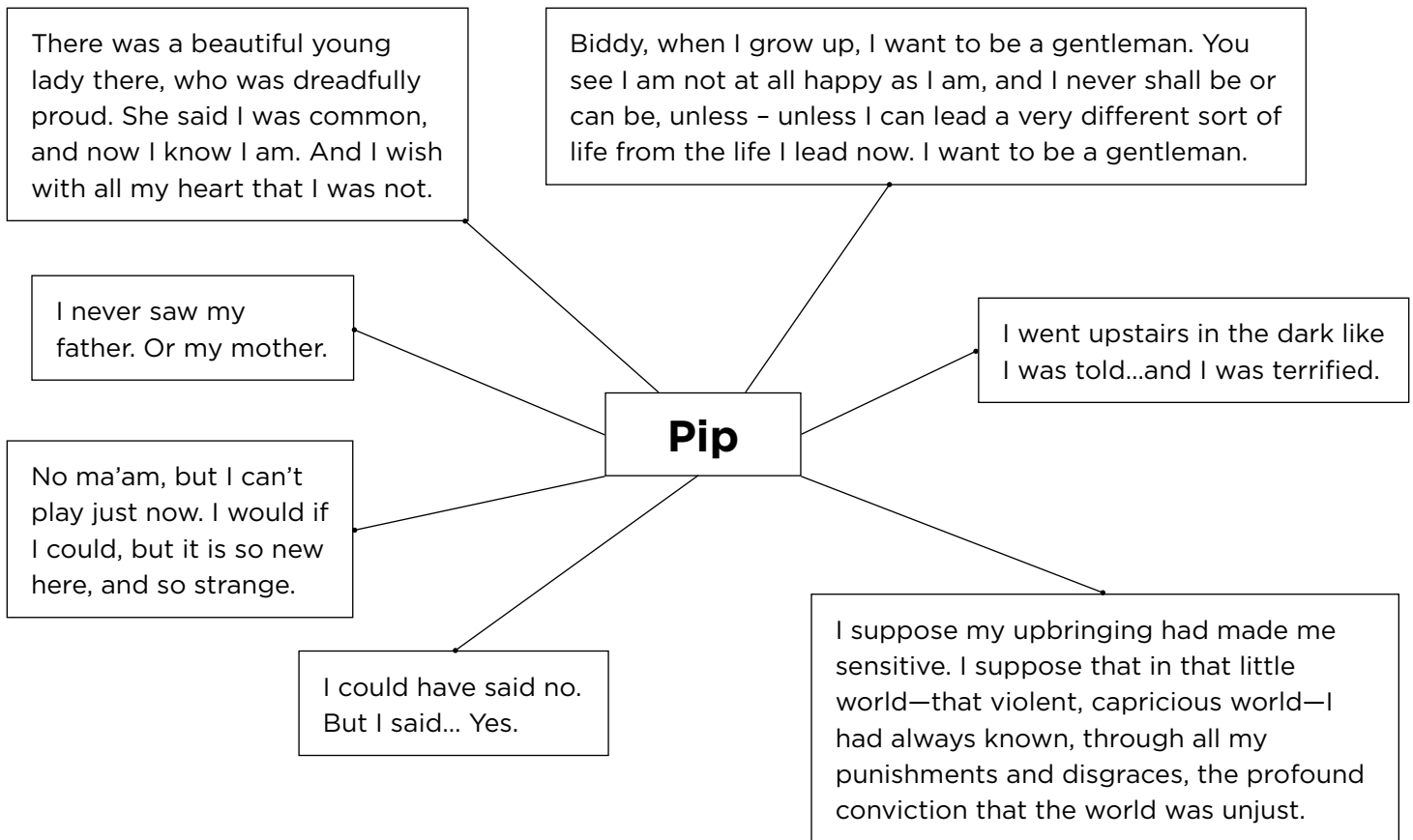
## ACTIVITY

## Objective

Explore protagonist Mr. Phillip Pirrip, aka 'Pip,' using script excerpts and writing prompts.

### Step 1: Who is Pip?

The year is approximately 1815. Eight-year-old orphaned Pip spends his days living among the Kent marshlands, an area east of London, with his cruel and abusive sister, Mrs. Joe, and her kind-hearted husband, Joe Gargery, a blacksmith. What can you learn about young Pip from some of his lines below?



### Step 2: What about Pip?

- Describe Pip's personality—what kind of kid is he?
- What does Pip want most? What does Pip value?
- What does Pip fear?
- What does Pip mean when he says he wants to be 'a gentleman'? What does he not currently have that he would need to become a gentleman?

## Who is Pip? *continued*

### Step 3: Write to Pip

Imagine you are Joe Gargery, Pip's kind working-class father figure. Young Pip shares with you that he detests his status in life and that he wishes he were rich and important. As Joe Gargery—a man who works hard every day as a blacksmith—what would you say to Pip? Write Pip a letter offering him advice for his future and explaining what you think is most important in life.

[illegible]

# Childhood Trauma and Resilience in *Great Expectations*

In Dickens's *Great Expectations*, the protagonist, Pip, and the object of his romantic fascination, Estella, are both the victims of considerable childhood trauma. As we follow each of them on their journeys to adulthood, we come to understand the ways in which both are affected by those traumatic experiences, and the choices that each must make to protect themselves from pain. While each learns valuable lessons about the ways in which those choices have served them—or not—their insight comes at considerable cost.

In his 2007 adaptation of the novel for the stage, playwright Neil Bartlett acknowledges the terrible childhoods that Pip and Estella endure. In his prologue to the play, "Staging Dickens," Bartlett notes that "Pip, the archetypal orphan, is surrounded by surrogate family," both good and bad. Bartlett continues, saying that when Pip finds "forgiveness in his heart for both Miss Havisham and Magwitch, he has finally to come to terms with perhaps the most memorably terrifying Bad Mother and Bad Father in all of English prose fiction."

As for Estella, we do not get to hear in Bartlett's play what we read in Dickens's novel: Estella's lengthy description to Pip of what her childhood was like. But we do see and hear in the play what has resulted from that warped childhood, in Estella's cool professions that she has no heart and is unable to love anyone, not even Pip, and certainly not Miss Havisham, whose indignation Estella meets with a calm reminder to both of them that "I must be taken as I am made."

Bartlett acknowledges the challenge inherent in adapting Dickens's novel for the stage. He writes candidly that "[In order to] infuse the lines with their proper weight, I think the actors are going to have to be well acquainted with the novel." The play is so full, and at the same time so condensed—and consequently so powerful—that the actors, and especially the actors playing Pip and Estella, are called upon to convey worlds of pain and confusion in a few lines (often taken from Dickens's own words in the novel). As Bartlett



Pip and Estella Walking in the Garden.  
Illustration by Charles Green. 1898.

# Childhood Trauma and Resilience in *Great Expectations* continued

advises, the actors can achieve this task only by living with their characters as they are written by Dickens.

Charles Dickens wrote several endings to *Great Expectations*, all of which focus on what becomes of Pip and Estella as adults, and particularly what becomes of their relationship with each other. Dickens seemingly could not come to rest with where he wanted to take his two protagonists. Neil Bartlett, however, writes a highly original ending to his play that differs significantly from any of Dickens's endings. Bartlett's ending appears to acknowledge the childhood trauma experienced by both Pip and Estella, and to reframe it as something they have overcome. More than that, their trauma—much of it shared in various ways and reflected in their interactions with each other—appears to be something that has created an unshakeable bond between them. The literal echoes of the past that we hear at the play's conclusion are fully present, just as childhood trauma cannot be undone; but the resilience that individuals can show in the face of a difficult past, and the ways that they can, sooner or later, lead each other to a better future, may offer a happier ending than the individuals themselves, and those who made them what they are, could ever have imagined.

# A Tale of Many Endings: the Author Who Changed His Mind

Charles Dickens struggled with how to end his novel *Great Expectations*, writing two very different endings. Yet he couldn't come to rest even on the "final" ending, eventually writing three versions of the last sentence.

The novel was originally published serially, in *All the Year Round*, a weekly magazine, as was common at the time. Dickens's original ending in *All the Year Round* read as follows:

It was two years more before I saw [Estella]. I had heard of her as leading a most unhappy life, and as being separated from her husband [Bentley Drummle] who had used her with great cruelty, and who had become quite renowned as a compound of pride, brutality, and meanness. I had heard of the death of her husband... and of her being married again to a Shropshire doctor, who... had once very manfully interposed, on an occasion when he was in professional attendance on Mr. Drummle, and had witnessed some outrageous treatment of her. [...]

I was in England again – in London, and walking along Piccadilly with little Pip [Joe and Biddy's son] – when a servant came running after me to ask would I step back to a lady in a carriage who wished to speak to me. It was a little pony carriage...and the lady and I looked sadly enough on one another.

"I am greatly changed, I know; but I thought you would like to shake hands with

# A Tale of Many Endings: the Author Who Changed His Mind *continued*

Estella too, Pip. Lift up that pretty child and let me kiss it!" (She supposed the child, I think, to be my child.)

I was very glad afterwards to have had the interview; for, in her face and in her voice, and in her touch, she gave the assurance, that suffering had been stronger than Miss Havisham's teaching, and had given her a heart to understand what my heart used to be.

Dickens's friend and fellow author Edward Bulwer-Lytton persuaded Dickens to rewrite the ending for the subsequent book edition, saying that the original ending was too sad. In the revised ending, Pip and Estella meet unexpectedly at Satis House, and after speaking together for some time they walk away hand-in-hand, though Estella says they "will continue friends apart." The final sentence reads:

"I took her hand in mine, and we went out of the ruined place... the evening mists were rising now, and in all the broad expanse of tranquil light they showed to me...":

(1) Dickens's handwritten manuscript: "... I saw the shadow of no parting from her, but one." (2) 1861 book edition: "... I saw the shadow of no parting from her." (3) 1862 edition: "... I saw no shadow of another parting from her."

Dickens himself made the change from the manuscript for the first book edition in 1861, crossing out the words "but one," which clearly indicates the final, unavoidable parting of death. But the resulting phrase is confusing, and Dickens revised it again for the final 1862 book edition, possibly to clear up the ambiguity.

Why did Dickens struggle so with the ending of this novel? Many editors and critics—and also many readers—have preferred the original ending, in which Pip and Estella do not end up together. Did Dickens truly agree with Bulwer-Lytton that this ending was too sad? Or do his struggles to rewrite the ending reflect his (possibly unconscious) belief that Pip and Estella do not, in fact, belong together? The original ending makes it clear that both have learned life lessons the hard way, but they have unquestionably learned them. Moreover, Pip's use of the past tense to describe the state of his feelings for Estella—"what my heart used to be"—seems significant. He no longer yearns for her, but he is grateful for both their sakes that Estella has risen above Miss Havisham's terrible influence to become a kinder, more empathic person.

Many adaptations of the novel have also changed the ending, especially the countless movie and TV versions made over the years. These alternate endings often reflect the cultural attitudes of their time, but the sheer number of them also demonstrates that the story of Pip and Estella defies easy categorization. Playwright Neil Bartlett, in his 2007

# A Tale of Many Endings: the Author Who Changed His Mind *continued*

adaptation for the stage, offers a highly original ending that seems to unite the past and the present at last, while also allowing for varying interpretations. Audience members may find themselves torn between completely opposite yet equally persuasive views of the play's conclusion.

The creative challenge presented by Dickens's novel – a challenge that he himself both created and grappled with -- has much to teach us, about literature, about literary adaptations, and even about ourselves. *Great Expectations* remains one of Dickens's best known and most often read novels, and playwrights and filmmakers continue to adapt it in ways that reflect the cultural attitudes and preoccupations of their era. In the case of this novel, how we answer the question of what becomes of Pip and Estella tells us a great deal about ourselves, our hopes and concerns, and the time we live in as well.

## Interesting Facts About Charles Dickens

Dickens cared deeply about the plight of the poor and about the harsh criminal justice system that characterized Victorian England. Many of his novels address these social issues.



London orphans. Photo by Horace Warner. Late 1800s.

# Discussion Questions

## Before the Show:

1. When you think of **Victorian London**, what images come to mind? Have you ever read a Charles Dickens novel or seen a famous film adaptation of his work, such as *A Christmas Carol* or *Oliver Twist*?
2. What **circumstances of life** most determine who we become in adulthood? Family, wealth (or lack thereof), education, friendships, opportunities, or other factors?
3. Imagine you unexpectedly receive ten million dollars. What would you do with that **money**?

## After the Show:

1. What does *Great Expectations* teach us about **poverty, wealth, and social status**? Was Pip happier after he became wealthy?
2. Why was **Magwitch** introduced as a **frightening character**? What did that make you assume about him? How did your assumptions change later in the play?
3. Is **Miss Havisham a villain, a victim, or something in between**? Why do you think she does and says things that hurt other characters, including Estella and Pip?
4. Do you think **Estella is happy**? What factors might cause her to be unhappy? Do these factors help us better understand why she is so cruel to Pip as a child?
5. Which characters **hid their true identities or feelings**? Why do you think Dickens included secrecy as such a recurring theme in the story?
6. Did you interpret the **end of the play** as happy or sad? If Dickens had written a sequel, what do you think would have happened next for Pip and Estella?

## Bonus Material

**Want to go deeper? ANW's Resident Dramaturg, Miranda Johnson-Haddad, has some suggestions:**

### Film and TV Adaptations:

- My favorite film adaptation (and the most faithful to Dickens's novel) is the 1946 version directed by David Lean and starring a young John Mills and a young Alec Guinness, better known to young people as old Obi-Wan "Ben" Kenobi in the original *Star Wars* trilogy.
- There is also a 1999 made-for-TV film starring Ioan Gruffudd as Pip and Bernard Hill as a wonderful Magwitch (young people may recognize Hill from the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy, and both Hill and Gruffudd from *Titanic*).
- There are numerous other film adaptations, including very recent ones:
  - the 2012 version in which Helena Bonham Carter plays Miss Havisham
  - the 2023 film in which Olivia Colman plays Miss Havisham

### More on Charles Dickens

- Good biographies include:
  - *Charles Dickens: A Life* (2011), by Claire Tomalin.
  - *Dickens* (1991), by Peter Ackroyd.
    - Ackroyd's biography inspired a 2002 BBC documentary; he also wrote a drama entitled *The Mystery of Charles Dickens* featuring the actor Simon Callow (2000).
- Good biographies for young people include:
  - *Charles Dickens: England's Most Captivating Storyteller (Historical Notebooks Series)* (2011), by Catherine Wells-Cole (recommended for ages 8-12).
  - *Charles Dickens and the Street Children of London* (2011), by Andrea Warren (ages 12 and up).

## Bonus Material *continued*

### Penal Servitude in Australia during the 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> centuries:

Beginning in 1786, the convicts confined to prison ships, or “hulks,” were sentenced to be “transported” to the British colony of Australia, then called New South Wales. Transportation helped relieve some of the pressure on England’s overcrowded prisons, but the voyage took months, and Australia was inhospitable territory. Despite the harsh conditions, however, many prisoners did well there, especially once their term of servitude was ended; many even became prosperous landowners like Magwitch, and very few chose to return to England, even if they were permitted to do so under their sentencing terms. To learn more, see these links:

- This page on the website for the State Library of New South Wales, which contains good information about “The Convict Experience.”
  - <https://www.sl.nsw.gov.au/stories/convict-experience>
- Here’s an accurate historical account of the history of transportation of convicts to Australia and of their experience there, including historical drawings:
  - <https://www.historic-uk.com/HistoryUK/HistoryofBritain/British-Convicts-to-Australia/>
- The information at the link below is fascinating, because it provides a detailed history of “transportation” as a punishment (as well as information about the “discovery” of Australia):
  - <https://www.crf-usa.org/bill-of-rights-in-action/bria-11-2-a-beyond-the-seas-the-transportation-of-criminals-to-australia#:~:text=To%20hold%20on%20to%20such,sentences%2C%20to%20settle%20the%20land>

## ABOUT

# A Noise Within

A Noise Within produces classic theatre as an essential means to enrich our community by embracing universal human experiences, expanding personal awareness, and challenging individual perspectives. Our company of resident and guest artists immerses student and general audiences in timeless, epic stories in an intimate setting.

Our most successful art asks our community to question beliefs, focus on relationships, and develop self-awareness. Southern California audiences of all ages and backgrounds build community together while engaging with this most visceral and primal of storytelling techniques. ANW's production of classic theatre includes all plays we believe will be part of our cultural legacy. We interpret these stories through the work of a professional resident company—a group of artists whose work is critical to their community—based on the belief that trust among artists and between artists and audience can only be built through an honest and continuing dialogue.

In its 35-year history, A Noise Within has garnered over 500 awards and commendations, including the Los Angeles Drama Critics Circle revered Polly Warfield Award for Excellence and the coveted Margaret Hartford Award for Sustained Excellence.

More than 45,000 individuals attend productions at A Noise Within annually. In addition, the theatre draws over 18,000 student participants to its Education Program. Students benefit from in-classroom workshops, conservatory training, subsidized tickets to matinee and evening performances, post-performance discussions with artists, and free standards-based study guides.



**aNoiseWithin**  
Classic Theatre, Modern Magic

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