## Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Character map</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Overview</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>About the author</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Synopsis</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Character summaries</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Note on page references</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Background &amp; context</strong></td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genre, structure &amp; language</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter-by-chapter analysis</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Characters &amp; relationships</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Themes, ideas &amp; values</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Different interpretations</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questions &amp; answers</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sample answer</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References &amp; reading</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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CHARACTER MAP

**Magwitch**
Convict; transported to Australia, then escapes to London.

**Mrs Joe**
Pip’s abusive sister.

**Estella**
Cold, beautiful girl.

**Compeyson**
Ruthless criminal.

**Miss Havisham**
Rich eccentric woman, whom Pip falsely believes to be his benefactor.

**Biddy**
Caring girl; teaches Pip to read.

**Joe**
Kindly blacksmith; takes care of Pip.

**Pip**
Poor yet snobbish protagonist who unexpectedly inherits a fortune.

**Drummle**
Sullen aristocrat who marries and abuses Estella.

**Herbert**
Pip’s best friend.

**Orlick**
Unpleasant journeyman hired by Joe.

**Wemmick**
Jaggers’ kindly clerk.

**Jaggers**
Successful London lawyer.

**Jaggers’ maid.**
Molly

**Guardian of**
Estella

**Patron of**
Miss Havisham

**Father of**
Miss Havisham

**Mother of**
Estella

**Tather of**
Mrs Joe

**Ex-lover of**
Miss Havisham

**Ex-lover & betrayer of**
Miss Havisham

**Ex-lover & betrayer of**
Estella

**Ex-lover of**
Molly

**Beats**
Estella

**Loves**
Estella

**Loves & respects**
Pip

**Cares for**
Pip

**Marries**
Pip

**Works for**
Jaggers

**Torments**
Estella

**Regularly visits**
Miss Havisham

**Beats**
Estella

**Friends with**
Pip

**Lawyer of**
Jaggers

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OVERVIEW

About the author

Charles Dickens was the best-known author of the 19th century. Born into a wealthy family in Portsmouth, England, in 1812, Dickens’ early childhood was relatively comfortable. This was not to last, as his father was incarcerated in a prison for bankrupts when Charles was eight. To earn enough for the family to live on, eight-year-old Charles was pulled out of school and sent to work in a shoe polish factory for several months, often working shifts of more than 10 hours. This demeaning work scarred the young Dickens so deeply that he was later unable to complete his autobiography due to the pain of recalling these early memories. However, he included many autobiographical elements in his fiction, especially *David Copperfield* and *Great Expectations*.

Dickens’ first adult job was as a court stenographer, after which he became a political correspondent with the *Morning Chronicle* newspaper. While there, he began to publish short, witty sketches under the pseudonym ‘Boz’. These immensely popular pieces led to the serial publication of Dickens’ first novel, *The Pickwick Papers*, a madcap chronicle of English life which made him an instant celebrity and attracted thousands of new readers to the paper. Dickens was just 22 years old.

By the time of his second novel, *Oliver Twist*, Dickens had become ‘the closest the 19th century had to a pop star’ (Swift 2007). Vast crowds of people would stand on the docks in Europe and America, waiting for the latest instalment of his works to arrive by boat. He had a powerful emotional hold over his readers; for example, his decision to kill off the child protagonist of his novel *The Old Curiosity Shop* plunged many of his dedicated readers into grief.

Dickens was extremely prolific, publishing 14 complete novels during his long and successful career, including such classics as *Nicholas Nickleby* (1838–39), *David Copperfield* (1849–50) and *Bleak House* (1852–53). He also published numerous essays and short stories, two travel books and several works of nonfiction, amounting to millions of published words in total.
The ageing Dickens became increasingly sombre as his domestic life began to disintegrate. After the failure of his marriage in 1858, he began an affair with the young stage actress Ellen Tiernan which scandalised many. His professional life, meanwhile, remained as busy as ever. Beginning in 1866, Dickens began his famous ‘reading tours’, in which he would act out well-known scenes from his works for adoring crowds. These tremendously popular tours were so gruelling that they are said to have contributed to his premature death at the age of 57. Dickens was buried, against his wishes, in Poet’s Corner at Westminster Abbey.

**Synopsis**

**Volume 1**

Pip, a poor orphan, lives in desolate marsh country with his abusive elder sister and her kindly blacksmith husband, Joe. One day he is accosted by an escaped convict demanding food and a file. Pip steals these items from his house to placate the convict, who briefly escapes before being recaptured. For the rest of his life, Pip is haunted by guilt for helping the convict escape.

One day, Pip, who is being apprenticed to Joe, is summoned to the mansion of Miss Havisham, a wealthy and eccentric woman. While there, Pip falls in love with Miss Havisham’s foster-daughter, a beautiful yet cruel girl named Estella, who chides him about his working-class coarseness. Pip becomes dissatisfied with his humble life and yearns to become wealthy in order to be worthy of her love. Tragedy strikes the household when Pip’s sister is violently assaulted and left insensible. After this traumatic event, she does not bother Pip or Joe anymore.

On the verge of completing his apprenticeship, Pip discovers that he has anonymously been left a fortune. He soon becomes disdainful towards Joe, as well as towards the kindly and caring Biddy, who has come to care for his sister. Pip incorrectly guesses that his benefactor is Miss Havisham, concluding that she intends him to become Estella’s husband. Dreaming of a future with Estella, the newly wealthy Pip terminates his apprenticeship and eagerly leaves for London to start his new life as a gentleman.

**Volume 2**

In London, Pip begins to cultivate the bad habits of a wealthy and idle young man. As he slowly learns that Estella does not return his feelings,
Pip’s love for her develops into an unhealthy obsession. Soon Pip’s sister dies and he is called back for her funeral. He briefly stays at the forge, but quickly leaves again after insulting Joe and Biddy.

Pip has an unwelcome visit from Magwitch, the convict he assisted on the marshes. He is in danger from the authorities for illegally returning to England, after having been transported to Australia following the encounter with Pip in the marshes years ago. Magwitch reveals to Pip that he, not Miss Havisham, is the true source of Pip’s fortune.

**Volume 3**

Although initially shocked by this news, Pip gradually begins to feel affection for Magwitch and tries unsuccessfully to help him escape from the police. On Magwitch’s arrest, Pip loses his fortune. Realising the folly of his obsession with Estella, he confronts Miss Havisham about her savage treatment of the girl. Miss Havisham admits that she has used Estella as a tool to wreak revenge on men for being jilted at the altar years before. Soon after, Pip discovers that Estella is Magwitch’s illegitimate daughter.

At the novel’s conclusion, a chastened Pip returns to the blacksmith’s forge to apologise to Biddy and Joe, who are now about to be married, and returns some years later to visit their children. On leaving the forge a final time, he meets Estella – who has just been freed from a violent marriage – and tentatively reconciles with her. At the conclusion, their future together remains uncertain.

**Character summaries**

**Pip**

‘I want to be a gentleman … I am not at all happy as I am. I am disgusted with my calling and with my life’ (p.127B; p.145R). The narrative begins when the protagonist Pip is six years old and ends when he is around 34. Pip is a self-centred character who betrays his true friends after being blinded by the lure of money. After a series of painful events, he eventually comes to understand the value of friendship.

**Joe**

‘Pip, dear old chap, life is made of ever so many partings welded together’ (p.224B; p.258R). The compassionate blacksmith Joe protects
his nephew Pip from his violent sister. Although Pip callously rejects Joe after becoming wealthy, Joe never loses his faith in Pip. The two eventually reconcile at the conclusion.

**Mrs Joe**

‘Who brought you up by hand?’ (p.9B; p.10R). Mrs Joe, Pip’s violent elder sister, torments Pip throughout his childhood. Chastened after her assault, she signals for Pip’s forgiveness before she dies.

**Magwitch**

‘If I ain’t a gentleman, nor yet ain’t got no learning, I’m the owner of such’ (p.321B; p.369R). The convict Magwitch is saved by Pip at the beginning of the novel and anonymously donates the fortune that he makes in Australia to Pip in return. When Magwitch returns to London and reveals that he is Pip’s benefactor, Pip is horrified; however, the two men soon reconcile and Pip helps orchestrate Magwitch’s escape attempt. Magwitch is eventually captured by police, and dies in prison.

**Mr Wopsle**

‘The gluttony of Swine is put before us, as an example to the young’ (p.27B; p.30R). The vain Wopsle, a friend of Pip’s sister, is a frustrated preacher who becomes an inept and unsuccessful stage actor.

**Biddy**

‘I only want you to do well, and to be comfortable’ (p.128B; p.145R). The kind Biddy teaches Pip to read and cares deeply for him; before Pip meets Estella, there is a subtle suggestion that they will fall in love. Although she is shy, Biddy criticises Pip for abandoning Joe, whom she eventually decides to marry.

**Pumblechook**

‘This boy must be bound, out of hand. That’s my way. Bound out of hand’ (p.104B; p.118R). The fawning Pumblechook falsely claims to be Pip’s ‘benefactor’, usurping the place of Pip’s real carer, Joe, in the hope of profiting from Pip’s fortune. Pip eventually learns to stand up to his vain and greedy uncle.
Jaggers
“Now, I have nothing to say to you,” said Mr Jaggers, throwing his finger at them’ (p.167B; p.191R). Jaggers is a ferocious lawyer who, coincidentally, administers both Pip’s inheritance and Miss Havisham’s estate. He made his name by successfully defending Estella’s mother against a murder charge. Jaggers is an extremely remote and patrician figure, his human warmth having been destroyed by the pressures of his job. However, he is highly trustworthy.

Wemmick
‘... the office is one thing, and private life is another’ (p.208B; p.239R). Jaggers’ buttoned-down clerk, who betrays little emotion inside work hours, Wemmick is actually a caring individual who looks after his aged father and protects Pip when he is in danger. He conceals his caring private life from public view in order to come across as more ruthless than he really is.

Compeyson
‘He’d no more heart than a iron file, he was as cold as death, and he had the head of the Devil ...’ (p.348B; p.399R). Compeyson, the other convict Pip meets on the marshes after encountering Magwitch, is a master criminal who manipulates others and evades justice through his amorality. Before Pip’s life story begins, Compeyson jilts Miss Havisham at the altar and introduces the vulnerable Magwitch to a life of criminality.

Orlick
‘You was always in Old Orlick’s way since ever you was a child’ (p.425B; p.487R). Joe’s unrefined and violent assistant, Orlick represents everything that Pip despises. Intensely jealous of Pip, Orlick fatally assaults Pip’s sister, pursues and intimidates Biddy, and unsuccessfully tries to murder Pip.

Bentley Drummle
‘I wouldn’t lend one of you a sixpence. I wouldn’t lend anybody a sixpence’ (p.215B; p.248R). The thuggish Drummle is another of Pip’s enemies. He too torments Pip, infuriating him by marrying and then physically abusing Estella.
Estella
‘I have no heart …’ (p.237B; p.273R). Estella, Pip’s romantic interest throughout his life, is abandoned by her parents as a baby and placed in the care of Miss Havisham. Miss Havisham destroys Estella’s childhood; she starves Estella of affection and moulds her personality as a way of wreaking revenge on the male sex. Trained to be an uncaring sadist all her life, Estella is consequently unable to feel genuine affection for others.

Miss Havisham
‘I stole her heart away and put pure ice in its place’ (p.399B; p.458R). A bitter and eccentric woman who dedicates her later life to brainwashing her foster-daughter, Estella, Miss Havisham becomes a recluse after being jilted at the altar in her youth. For many years, Pip mistakenly thinks that she is his benefactor. Although she wrongs Pip by turning Estella against him, she gains Pip’s forgiveness before her death.

Herbert Pocket
“‘But the thing is,” said Herbert Pocket, “that you look about you. That’s the grand thing’” (p.184B; p.212R). Herbert, Pip’s best friend and roommate, is a trusting and rather passive young man who supports Pip throughout the story. Pip’s high regard for Herbert is shown when he uses some of the money received from his inheritance to help Herbert enter a career.

Startop
‘Startop had been spoilt by a weak mother and kept at home when he ought to have been at school …’ (p.203B; p.233R). Startop is a reserved person who attends the ‘Finches of the Grove’ club with Pip, Drummle and Herbert. He is a dependable but rather nondescript friend, whose most important role is helping Magwitch escape by boat.

Note on page references
Throughout this text guide, page numbers are provided to the two editions of *Great Expectations* published by Penguin: the ‘Black Classics’ edition (with the black strip across the bottom of the front cover, 2003), and the ‘Red Classics’ edition (2006). Page numbers are given as B and R respectively.