

Name _____ Date _____

Charles Dickens

Learn more about this topic! Each section gives more detail on one of the lyrics from the song. Read each section, and then respond by answering the question or taking notes on key ideas.

1. b'

Charles Dickens was born on February 7, 1812, as the second of eight siblings. When he was 12, his father was arrested for debt and thrown into Marshalsea, a notoriously grim debtors' prison in London. Dickens had to leave school and start working 10-hour days at a boot-blackening factory to support his family. His mother and siblings were imprisoned along with his father, and he visited his family every Sunday. This bleak childhood experience would later influence Dickens's writing.

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Notes

2. b'

In 1827, Dickens began work as a solicitor's clerk (a legal administrator). There, he observed the characteristics and quirks of the people who came in and out of the office, forming the seeds of some of the memorable characters he would later create. Four years later, he became a journalist. Writing became his passion. He worked at a newspaper during the day and on his own stories at night. Dickens published his first story, "A Dinner at Poplar Walk," in the Monthly Magazine in 1833. Three years later, he began publishing monthly installments of his first novel, The Pickwick Papers. The novel became incredibly popular; its final installment sold over 40,000 copies.

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Notes

Dickens wrote 15 major novels in his lifetime. Inspired by his childhood hardships, his writing addressed serious social issues like urban poverty, child labor, the criminal justice system, and British class structure, often with a keen satirical edge. In *Oliver Twist*, an orphan meets a gang of child pickpockets led by the greedy criminal Fagin. In *Great Expectations*, the orphan Pip unexpectedly receives money from an anonymous benefactor and moves to London, which is much dirtier and more dangerous than he expected. And in *David Copperfield*, Dickens's most autobiographical novel, the titular protagonist undergoes many trials and tribulations in his growth from youth to adulthood. He generally wrote about the struggles of common people rather than the luxuries of aristocrats. On one trip to New York, he said, "Virtue shows quite as well in rags and patches as she does in purple and fine linen."

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Dickens was known for creating vivid characters with memorable names, like Miss Havisham, the wealthy spinster who insists on wearing her wedding dress for the rest of her life, and the grotesquely hideous, scheming Uriah Heep. These and other characters have entered the English language as shorthand for a certain type of person, cementing Dickens as one of the greatest storytellers in history.

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