

Student's name

Professor's name

Course title

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*Oliver Twist* by Charles Dickens

Typical of many tales of the time, *Oliver Twist* by Charles Dickens was first released as a serial, appearing in *Bentley's Miscellany* from 1837 to 1839. Partway through the release schedule Dickens re-edited the manuscript and the story was published as a novel in 1838, several months before readers of the serial discovered its conclusion.

The plot revolves around the titular character, Oliver, an orphan whose father is an unknown figure (Dickens). He is portrayed as an unwitting thief drawn helplessly into a world of vice by Fagin, a criminal with a coterie of juvenile companions, when all he really wants is a fair share in life.

In brief, the events of the novel are such that Oliver is expelled from the orphanage where he grew up and is forced to side with Fagin in order to avoid starvation. After a botched burglary, Oliver is caught, abandoned by his companions, and brought to trial for their crimes. This allows him to temporarily escape Fagin's clutches and affords Oliver a measure of comfort and happiness for the first time in his life – until Fagin dispatches Bill and Nancy Sikes to retrieve him.

Injured after the second burglary, Oliver meets Rose, adopted niece of the wealthy Mrs. Maylie. Over the rest of the novel the question of his parentage is resolved so that Rose is found to be his aunt, and Oliver is left to inherit riches from his father. In this way, honest Oliver is rewarded, while the wicked ones are punished for their sinful ways.

There are several important themes and motives present in *Oliver Twist* (Dickens) – Dickens skillfully contrasted the plight of the poor against the waste of the rich. It is Oliver’s daring to ask for more that ignites the plot – he is a starving boy asking well-fed men to feed him, yet, he is the one accused of greed. Therein lies an important critique of the age – Dickens exposed how those with power exploited those without it and expected them to be pleased with what they have. The theme of good winning out evil is also heavily played upon throughout the novel. Bill Sikes and Fagin both die as a result of their crimes, while Oliver, the pure character, avoids punishment because he is truthful.

The novel has served as more than just a literary text – it has on several occasions prompted historical and medical study (Smith et al. 337) due to the level of details, with which Dickens described Victorian society, culture and diet.

Named as one of Children’s Laureate Michael Morpurgo’s favorite books of all time in 2009 (Cornwell), the book has remained one of Britain’s bestsellers for over a hundred and fifty years. Part of the reason for its continued popularity can be attributed to the fact that Dickens’ writing is accessible to everyone, and a large number of translations, reimaginings and varied ways in which the book has been reproduced since its first publication serves as a testimony to this. George Orwell surmised the book’s appeal in 1939 by saying that Dickens “could be both read by working people (a thing that has happened to no other novelist of his stature) and buried in Westminster Abbey” (Bloom 56). It is this accessibility that has made *Oliver Twist* a world renowned piece of classic literature, the title it fully deserves.

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