

Advanced Placement in  
English Literature and Composition

Individual Learning Packet

Teaching Unit

**Oliver Twist**

by Charles Dickens

Written by Douglas Grudzina

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## Objectives

By the end of the Unit, the student will be able to:

1. analyze the characters of Oliver, Monks, Rose Maylie, and Mr. Brownlow and the techniques Dickens uses to create and depict them;
2. discuss Dickens's use of humor, pathos, and occasional bathos;
3. analyze the importance of literary elements like irony and foreshadowing on the development of the plot;
4. examine the impact of serialization on the narrative structure of the novel;
5. investigate Victorian social class structure and ideas about morality and justice;
6. identify and explain Dickens's social themes as expressed in this book;
7. respond to multiple-choice questions similar to those that will appear on the Advanced Placement in English Literature and Composition exam;
8. respond to writing prompts similar to those that will appear on the Advanced Placement in English Literature and Composition exam;
9. offer a close reading of *Oliver Twist* and support all assertions and interpretations with direct evidence from the text, from authoritative critical knowledge of the genre, or from authoritative criticism of the novel.

### **QUESTIONS FOR ESSAY AND DISCUSSION**

1. Some critics believe that the women featured in Dickens's works are either evil, comical, or the epitome of his ideal of romantic love. Into which of these categories do you think the following characters might fall: Nancy, Mrs. Corney/Bumble, Rose?
2. Considering that the book was originally written and published in monthly installments, discuss how Dickens used chapter breaks, foreshadowing, and cliff-hanger endings to maintain reader suspense and interest.
3. To what extent is *Oliver Twist* a social commentary? Are there times when the commentary slips into propaganda? Explain.

# Oliver Twist

## CHAPTER I

1. What is the narrator implying about his society when, in the first paragraph, he refuses to provide specific details of the town in which the child is born or the date on which the birth occurred?

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2. Summarize the key facts of the infant and his birth.

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3. What narrative tone does Dickens strive for in the opening chapter? What techniques does he use to achieve this tone? Provide some textual examples.

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4. What do the circumstances surrounding Oliver's birth portend for his life? What was Dickens most likely foreshadowing by describing Oliver's initial trouble with breathing?

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4. What is the most likely explanation for Dickens's describing Noah's attempts to make Oliver cry in this segment?

[Noah] entered upon various other topics of petty annoyance, like a malicious and ill-conditioned charity-boy as he was...and in this attempt, did what many small wits, with far greater reputations than Noah, sometimes do to this day, when they want to be funny.

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5. In what way is Oliver's response to Noah's taunting a turning point in his life? How does it invite the reader to reassess one of the novel's primary themes?

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6. What significant fact is Dickens revealing when he says that Noah's "top waistcoat-button might have been somewhere on a level with the crown of Oliver's head"? Why is this fact significant at this point in the story?

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**CHAPTER XV**

1. What narrative purpose does the opening episode of Sikes and his dog serve?

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2. How does Nancy clarify the chronology of this plotline?

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3. What do Fagin's and the waiter's secretive actions in the public house in Little Saffron Hill suggest? How does Dickens establish that Fagin and the waiter are communicating secretly?

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4. When Fagin and Sikes are first talking, Dickens notes that Fagin was "obviously very ill at ease." Although the reason for Fagin's discomfort is never explicitly revealed, what clues does Dickens provide throughout the chapter that might point to an explanation of Fagin's mood?

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5. How do the events of this chapter reinforce the theme that the nature and circumstances of one's life are determined by fate?

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**CHAPTER XXII**

1. Who is “the same individual who has been heretofore described as labouring under the infirmity of speaking through his nose, and officiating as waiter at the public-house on Saffron Hill”? What might his presence here suggest?

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2. What effect does Dickens create in the paragraph in which he toys with sentence structure and mechanics? How does Dickens’s word choice contribute to this effect?

The cry was repeated—a light appeared—a vision of two terrified half-dressed men at the top of the stairs swam before his eyes—a flash—a loud noise—a smoke—a crash somewhere, but where he knew not,—and he staggered back.

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3. What fact is Dickens revealing when Sikes tells Crackit, “They’ve hit him. Quick! How the boy bleeds!”?

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4. This chapter is the end of another monthly installment. How has Dickens managed to produce a sense of rising action and increase the reader’s suspense?

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