

CHARLES DICKENS

OLIVER TWIST



AUDIO ON APP



ONLINE ACTIVITIES ON eZONE

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HARD TIMES IN WORKHOUSES

During Charles Dickens's lifetime (1812-1870), England enjoyed the prosperity that the **Industrial Revolution** was bringing. Even a very short list of the major inventions during Dickens's lifetime is impressive. These inventions certainly made life easier for upper-class Victorian society. The inventions meant factories and factories meant workers and a new social class of industrial workers was born. Life was difficult for these people. They were poor and lived in terrible conditions and often children and women worked too. Dickens was aware of the price man was paying in the name of progress. In *Oliver Twist* and in many other novels, he describes with sharp realism the gloomy and polluted industrial areas of his time. What is more important, he condemns the terrible working and living conditions of the working classes. In Dickens's eyes, this was not progress, it was decline.

Dickens was particularly sensitive to the problem of child labour. When he was a child his father went to a debtors' prison and the young Dickens had to work in a factory. Oliver's words:

“Please, sir, I want some more”

on page 20 of this book and the punishment he gets for his request have become a universal symbol of social injustice. Dickens often visited factories and wrote newspaper articles in which he expressed his disgust at what he saw there. In *Oliver Twist* he strongly attacks the **New Poor Law** of 1834, which established the workhouse system and encouraged unmarried mothers to place their children in baby-farms in return for a regular, small sum of money. The **workhouse** orphan Oliver therefore symbolizes the effects of this act, and Dickens shows how the law was hardest on children.



WORKHOUSES

Workhouses were places where very poor people could stay in exchange for work. Find out more about workhouses during Dickens's time in the book and online.

THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION

What was the Industrial Revolution? Write words you know, then find out more online.

GLOSSARY

- **condemns:** says it is bad
- **decline:** the process of becoming worse
- **disgust:** strong physical dislike
- **established:** (here) created
- **gloomy:** dark and sad
- **impressive:** (here) amazing
- **meant:** (here) brought; resulted in
- **polluted:** dirty; unsafe (because it is dirty)
- **prosperity:** period of success and richness
- **was aware of:** knew about

Oliver Twist



Agnes



Mrs Bedwin



Dr Losberne



Oliver



Mr Brownlow



Rose



Monks



Old Sally



Mr Bumble



Sikes



Nancy



Fagin



The Dodger



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1 Oliver enters the world

 Oliver Twist was born in a workhouse•. When Oliver was born, there was no one to look after him except for an old nurse and a doctor. They didn't care about him.

Oliver's mother arrived at the workhouse the night before she gave birth to her son. She asked to see her baby and then died. No one knew where she came from or who she was. But the doctor noticed• that she had no wedding ring on her finger.

When the doctor left and the old nurse dressed him, Oliver cried loudly. He was an orphan and he was all alone. There was no one to look after baby Oliver at the workhouse so he was sent to an orphanage•. Life was hard here, with little food or love.

By the age of nine, Oliver was a small pale thin child, but he had a strong spirit. The housekeeper• of the orphanage was cruel• and hard. She often beat• Oliver and locked him up. This was usually for saying he was hungry.

One day the housekeeper was surprised by a visit from Mr Bumble, the head of the workhouse.

'Oliver Twist is nine years old now. He's too old to stay here at the orphanage with you,' Mr Bumble said. 'So, we have decided to move him to the workhouse. I have come here myself to collect him and take him there.'

GLOSSARY

- **beat:** hit
- **cruel:** unkind
- **housekeeper:** person employed to look after a house
- **noticed:** saw
- **orphanage:** home for children with no mother or father
- **workhouse:** place where poor people worked in exchange for food and a place to sleep

As soon as they arrived at the workhouse, Mr Bumble took Oliver to meet the Board•. The Board consisted of nine or ten fat gentlemen sitting around a table.

‘Boy,’ said one of the fat gentlemen to Oliver, ‘you are an orphan and you must be grateful• for the charity• of the town. Pray hard for the people who feed• you. You are here to learn a trade•, and you will begin your work tomorrow morning. Goodnight.’

And poor little Oliver was sent to sleep on a hard cold bed in a room full of other boys, to be ready for work the next morning.

There was even less food at the workhouse than at the orphanage. The boys got three meals of thin soup a day, with an onion in it twice a week, and half a piece of bread on Sundays. The boys got hungrier and hungrier until one day they decided to do something. One boy had to ask for more food at supper that evening. They drew lots•: Oliver Twist was that boy.

Drawing lots

Work in groups of six.

Put together a collection of ‘lots.’ They can be pencils with one shorter than all the others or pieces of paper, one marked with a sign.

Then draw lots.

Decide on a question to ask the teacher. The student with the shortest pencil or with the paper with a mark must ask the teacher the question.

GLOSSARY

- **Board:** group of people who manage an institution
- **charity:** help given to poor people
- **drew lots:** played a game of chance to choose someone
- **feed:** give someone food
- **grateful:** thankful
- **trade:** job



The evening arrived and the boys took their places in the dining hall. The master of the workhouse stood by the cooking pot and served out the soup. Soon there was no more soup and the boys were desperate with hunger.

Oliver rose from the table and walked up to the master. He held up his bowl and said, 'Please, sir, I want some more.'

The master turned very pale when he heard Oliver's request. The boys froze with fear as they waited for his answer.

'What?' said the master.

'Please, sir,' repeated Oliver. 'I want some more.'

The master hit Oliver on the head with his serving spoon, and called Mr Bumble.

The Board was in a meeting when Mr Bumble rushed in and interrupted them.

'Excuse me, sir!' said Mr Bumble to the gentleman in the high chair. 'Oliver Twist has asked for more!'

'For more?' said the gentleman. 'The boy is an ungrateful criminal and he must leave the workhouse!'

They locked Oliver up. For a whole week, he was locked in a dark, solitary room, crying all day and having nightmares all night.


Hunger

When you are hungry how do you feel?

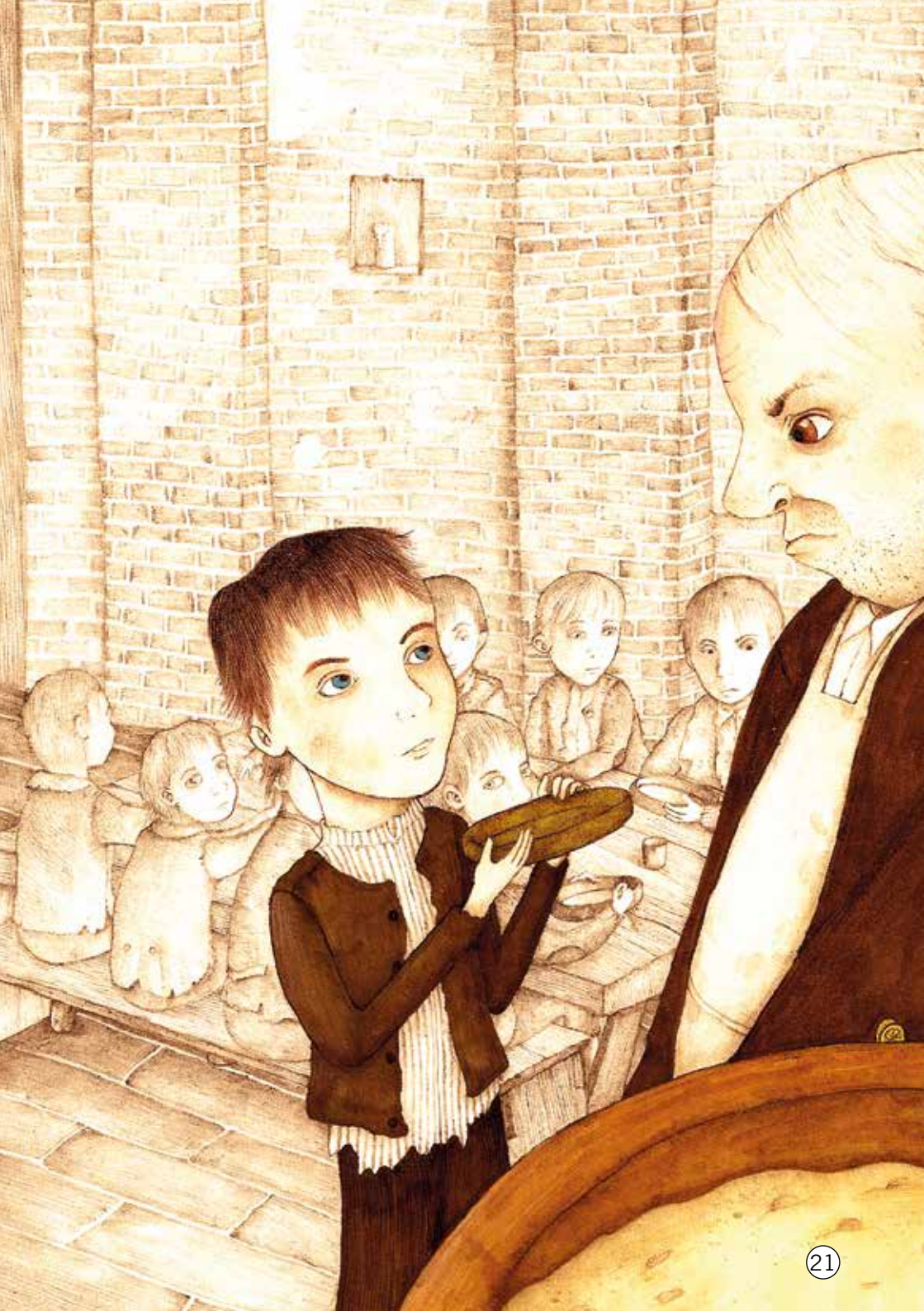


Tell a friend.

GLOSSARY

- **bowl:** 
- **criminal:** person who has committed crimes

- **nightmares:** bad dreams
- **rose:** stood up
- **rushed in:** entered in a great hurry



AFTER READING VOCABULARY

1 Use five of the words in the box to complete the sentences.

apprentice grip pavement trade
illegitimate undertaker evidence ditch

- a An is a person who buries dead people.
- b An..... is a person learning a job.
- c A is that part of a street where people walk.
- d A is a long hole by the side of a road.
- e The parents of an child are not married.

2  Complete the word formation table below. Make sentences with a partner.

VERB	NOUN
PAY	<i>PAYMENT</i>
BLEED
.....	ADVERTISEMENT
BETRAY
.....	PROOF
TREAT
.....	INSTRUCTION
SUFFER
.....	FAILURE

