

“I think it is very adventurous
and I enjoyed it a lot.
I hate Mr Murdstone.” Cal, 12



DAVID COPPERFIELD

CHARLES DICKENS

When David's mother marries the malevolent Mr Murdstone, David's childhood happiness is destroyed for ever.

Can one lonely little boy show the strength and determination to survive the dangers that lie ahead? Travelling along the rocky road from boyhood to manhood, how can David learn who to trust and who to love? Will David's friends bring him happiness or heartache?

In this inspiring tale of trust, betrayal, courage and love, Charles Dickens presents a world of colourful characters to amuse us, astonish us, disgust us and move us to tears. Once encountered, David Copperfield's friends and enemies will never be forgotten.



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Charles Dickens



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Lexile® Level	AR Level	Word Count
840L	5.0	4,733

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Illustrated by Karen Donnelly

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THE CHARACTERS



David Copperfield

David's childhood is shattered when his mother remarries. Is he strong enough to find happiness in spite of the difficulties he faces?

Peggotty

A loyal servant and friend to David's mother. For how long will she be able to help David?



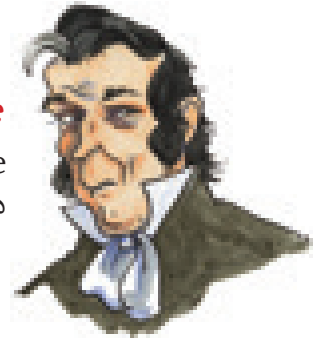
Aunt Betsey Trotwood

David's intimidating aunt. Will she ever accept him as her nephew?



Mr Murdstone

David's cruel stepfather. Will he destroy David and his mother?



Steerforth

David's admired schoolfriend. Does he deserve David's trust?



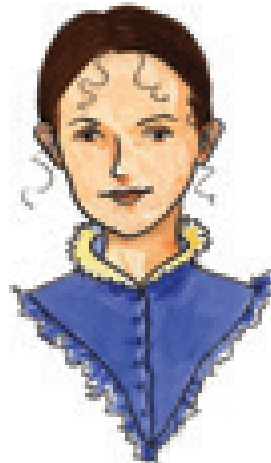
Uriah Heep

Uriah is snake-like in his appearance, but does this mean that David is right to distrust him?



Agnes

Agnes is like a sister to David, who relies upon her support and friendship. Is David being blind?





DAVID COPPERFIELD

That Friday night the storm raged and the wind howled. Rain scratched against the windows, trying desperately to get in. As the clock struck midnight, David's mother cried out with pain. Tiny, pink and naked, David Copperfield was delivered into the world.

As his exhausted mother held him tenderly, he was unaware that the day and time of his birth were bad omens. He was unaware that his father was already dead. He was unaware of the misfortunes and difficulties that lay ahead.

A shrill voice called up the stairs from the parlour, where his Aunt Betsey eagerly awaited the birth of the child, confident that it would be a girl. 'Is she born yet? Come, come, Peggotty, don't dawdle.'

Peggotty, her plump, apple-like cheeks a brighter red than usual, came flustering and



blustering into the parlour from her mistress's room, excited to deliver the news. 'It's a boy!' she gasped. Her bosom swelled with such joy and pride that two buttons popped from her bodice and flew across the room.

Betsey Trotwood silently raised herself from her chair and slowly stooped to pick up her hat. In one fast blast she whacked Peggotty with it. Without a word she marched straight out into the storm, and out of all their lives.



In spite of the ill omens of his birth, the first four years of David's life were happy ones. Loved and guided by his gentle mother and their hard-working servant Peggotty, he grew up honest and trusting, little suspecting how quickly things can change.

Change came one day, in the form of a firm handshake.

'That's the wrong hand, boy.' David looked up. In the face that looked down at him the mouth was smiling, but the cold dark eyes were not. David timidly offered his other hand, and the gentleman grasped it firmly – too firmly for David's comfort.

limitations to their relationship. Dora dies an early death, telling Agnes that she wants her to be David's next wife.

Back in time

David Copperfield is Dickens' most autobiographical novel. When Dickens was twelve years old, his father was sent to a debtor's prison. The young Charles had to work in a warehouse to earn money for the family. David's career follows the same pattern as Dickens' – law clerk, journalist, novelist.

Victorian England was in a period of great transition. Having been an agricultural, rural economy, it was moving swiftly towards industrial nationhood. A 'middle class' was emerging, with considerable economic and political influence. However, the divide between the rich and the poor was quickly widening. Dickens shows the weak position of poor people. *David Copperfield* is only saved and allowed an education because Aunt Betsey is wealthy.

The majority of Victorian children did not receive a formal education. It was not until 1891 that they were entitled to free state education. Through the difference between Salem School and Mr Strong's school, Dickens shows that cruelty and parrot-fashion learning are ineffective compared with education that enables students to develop their imaginations and morals in a caring environment.

Finding out more

We recommend the following books and websites to gain a greater understanding of Charles Dickens' and *David Copperfield*'s England:

Books

- Terry Deary, *Loathsome London* (Horrible Histories), Scholastic, 2005.
- Terry Deary, *Vile Victorians* (Horrible Histories), Scholastic, 1994.