

LIONEL BART'S

# OLIVER!

## A Cardinal for Kids Study Guide



**Oliver!** is the musical adaptation of Charles Dickens's timeless novel *Oliver Twist*.

After running away from an orphanage, young Oliver meets the Artful Dodger and is welcomed into a gang of child pickpockets led by the conniving and charismatic Fagin. The gang, and the friendship of the warm-hearted Nancy, provides Oliver with

a refuge from the dark streets of nineteenth century London, England. After Oliver is captured for a theft he did not commit, he is rescued by Mr. Brownlow, a kind and wealthy gentleman who offers Oliver a home. Fagin and his cohort, Bill Sykes, plot to kidnap him back, threatening Oliver's chance of discovering the true love of a family.

To help students prepare for attending a live theater performance, check out our "What to Expect When You See a Play" information online on MCPL's First Theater Experiences page:

<http://mcpl.info/childrens/first-theater-experiences>



Study guide developed with assistance from Monroe County Public Library and Cardinal Stage Company Education Committee



Monroe County  
Public Library



# OLIVER!

## Meet the Author: **Charles Dickens**

British novelist Charles Dickens was born on February 7, 1812, in Portsmouth, England. Over the course of his writing career, he wrote the beloved classic novels *Oliver Twist*, *A Christmas Carol*, *Nicholas Nickleby*, *David Copperfield*, *A Tale of Two Cities*, and *Great Expectations*. His last novel, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, was unfinished when he died in 1870. Many of Dickens's experiences as a child are reflected in his stories.

Dickens was the second of eight children, and his family often did not have enough money to pay their bills. When Dickens was just 12 years old he had to leave school and find work to help support his family. Dickens started working as a newspaper reporter in the late 1820s. His work as a reporter gave him practice in observing and listening to people, describing events, and in writing swiftly and clearly.



© Pictorial Press/Alamy Images via World Book Online

Dickens wrote some of his first novels in monthly installments known as serials. The story of *Oliver Twist* was actually written over the course of three years, from 1837 to 1839.

## Historical Background

In 1837, Queen Victoria started her reign as the ruler of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. The time of her reign, from 1837-1901, is known as the Victorian era. Great Britain was regarded as the world's superpower during this time period and many people in England enjoyed great wealth. But the rapid growth and change of cities that occurred in the 1800s did not benefit everyone. To support the development of new industrial markets, child labor was the norm. Children as young as five years old worked long hours in coal mines and factories, as servants and chimney sweeps.

While Dickens incorporated his own childhood experiences into *Oliver Twist*, he also wrote the novel in response to the social conditions he observed and injustices he perceived, such as England's Poor Law, established in 1834. The Poor Law was supposed to provide assistance to people in poverty. People with no means to support themselves could apply to work in regional workhouses. But the workhouses were unpleasant and actually resembled prisons. Government officials thought the harsh conditions of the workhouses would provide added incentive for people to be self-sufficient and not dependent upon charity. But some people turned to crime instead to avoid going to the workhouses.

*Oliver Twist* is considered Dickens's first extended work of social criticism.





## World Book Online

World Book Online features articles on a wealth of topics, written at different reading levels for students in primary, secondary and advanced grades. Articles also can be translated into dozens of different languages. To learn more about Charles Dickens and the story of *Oliver Twist*, or Queen Victoria and the United Kingdom, use your Monroe County Public Library card to connect to World Book Online: <http://mcpl.info/worldbook>

To learn more about the author and the life of children in Victorian England, borrow these books from Monroe County Public Library:

- *Charles Dickens: England's Most Captivating Storyteller* by Catherine Wells
- *Charles Dickens: Scenes From an Extraordinary Life* by Mick Manning
- *Rags and Riches: Kids in the Time of Charles Dickens* by Mary Pope Osborne
- *Victorian England* by Clarice Swisher

See also:

BBC: History for Kids - Children in Victorian Britain

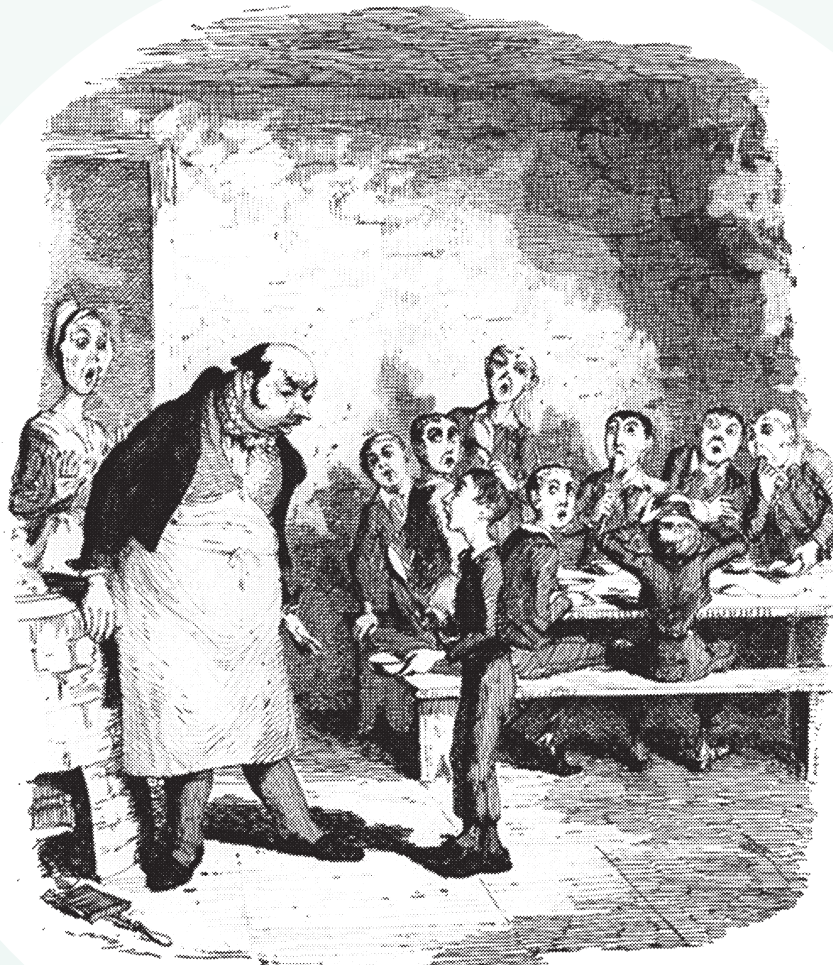
[http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/primaryhistory/victorian\\_britain/](http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/primaryhistory/victorian_britain/)

Engraving (1838) by George Cruikshank; The Newberry Library, Chicago  
via World Book Online

# OLIVER!

Have a heart that never hardens, and a temper that never tires, and a touch that never hurts.

– Charles Dickens



# OLIVER!

## Words in the Play

### Places:

- Workhouse - A poorhouse in which paupers were given work
- Larder - pantry or room where food is kept

### Food:

- Gruel - a light, usually thin cooked cereal made by boiling meal, especially oatmeal, in water or milk
- Pease pudding - A pudding made chiefly of egg and strained peas
- Saveloy - A highly seasoned, dried sausage
- Crumpet - a round, soft, unsweetened bread, similar to a muffin; slang for an attractive woman
- Vittles - archaic slang for food

### Money Terms:

- Guineas - a British gold coin taken out of circulation in the early 1800's, worth about 21 shillings
- Pound - a coin with the value of one-pound sterling
- Farthing - a bronze coin worth 1/4 of a penny; withdrawn from circulation in 1961; also slang for something very small and worthless.

### Things/Descriptions:

- Beak - nose
- Furbiloes - a ruffle, flounce, or bit of showy or fussy trimming
- Cheerio - British slang for goodbye and good luck.
- Jemmy - a crowbar; prying something open with a bar

### People/Insults:

- Cadge - 1. To borrow without intent to repay 2. To beg or obtain by begging
- Pauper - a person without any means of support, usually depending on public welfare
- Tinker - originally a travelling mender of pots and pans, but also used as slang for a clumsy or mischievous child
- Sallywag - a scamp or rascal
- Toff - a fashionable person who wants to be considered a member of the upper class
- Slummin' - to visit a place considered to be of low status
- Mealy-faced - lacking healthy coloring; pale
- Coffin-follower - poor people were hired by undertakers to act as mourners at funerals, silently following the coffin with suitable dark clothes and sad expressions
- Bow Street Runners - London's first professional police force, a small group of men who worked out of the Magistrate's office and generally served notices and warrants
- Bloke - a man
- Magistrate - a civil officer charged with administration of the law
- Beadle - a parish officer serving minor duties



## Activities to do before or after the play...

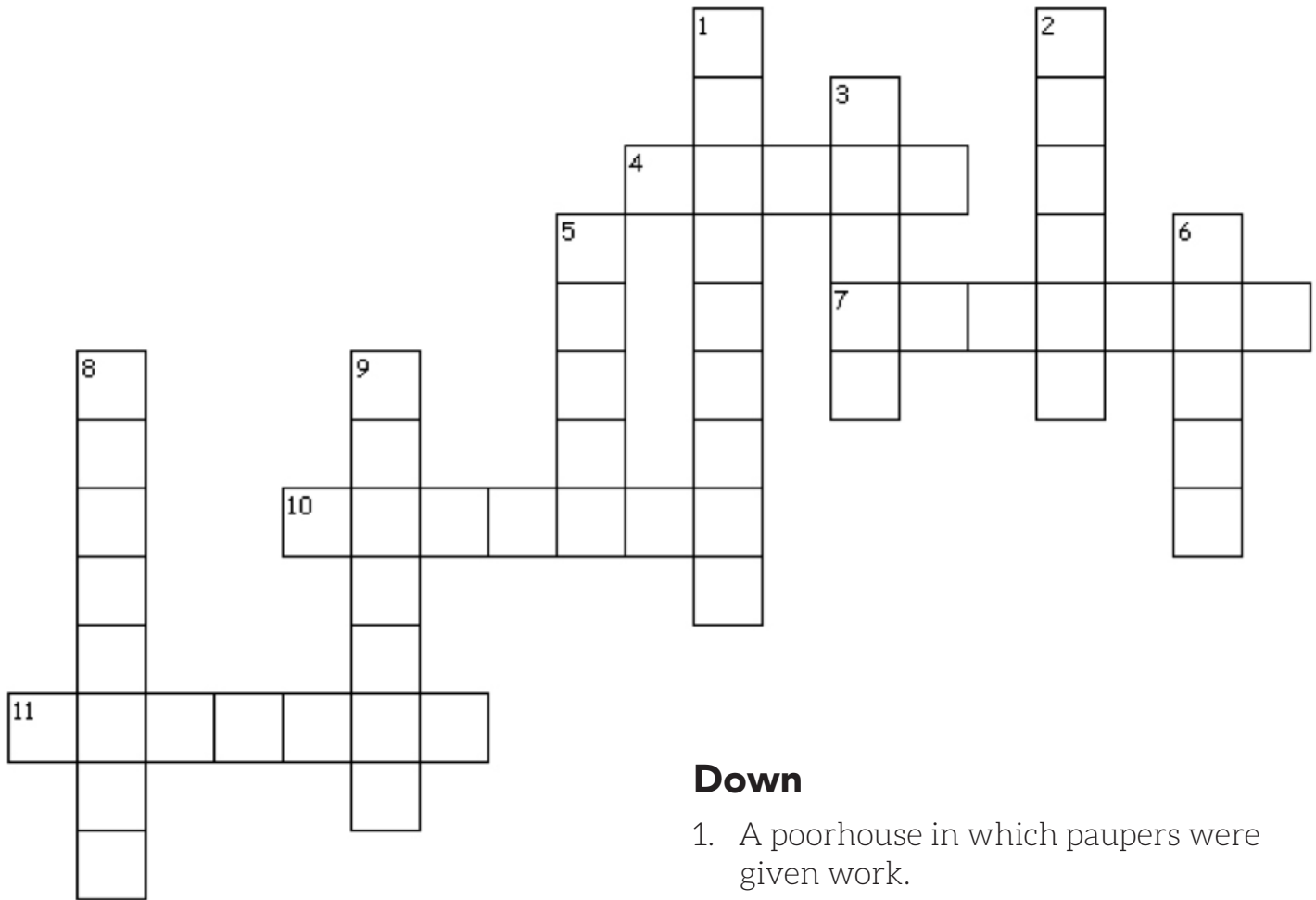
- **Creative Writing:** Give students the list of vocabulary words and have them choose a certain number of words to incorporate into a piece of creative writing. For example, ask students to write a short story incorporating 7 vocabulary words, or have students draw a comic strip using 3 vocabulary words.
- **Synonym and Antonym Activity:** Ask students to define the word “glorious” and to write a word that means the same thing as glorious, and a word that means the opposite of glorious. Have students use their synonyms and antonyms in a sentence.
- **Descriptive Writing:** Ask students what their favorite food is and to describe that food. Have students pretend they are describing the food for someone who has never seen it or tasted it before. What does the food look like, taste like, smell like?

## After you see the play: things to talk and write about...

- What song stuck with you the most? Why?
- What scenes or moments in the play did you find most significant or memorable? Why?
- Who are the good guys in the story of Oliver? Who are the bad guys? What makes them good or bad?
- Is it ever okay to take something that belongs to someone else without their permission?
- Why does Nancy go along with Fagin and Bill’s plan to recapture Oliver? Does she have another option? What are your thoughts?
- In the nineteenth century, poverty was thought to be the result of moral failings: you were poor because you were bad. Do we have different attitudes today?
- Could the story of Oliver happen today? Why or why not?
- Who should take care of children when they don’t have a mom or dad?
- What are some ways that our community helps people who don’t have enough food to eat?
- Discuss or write a paragraph explaining what you think happens to Oliver after the play ends. Describe what his life is like as he gets older. Mail your idea to Cardinal Stage Company: 900 S Walnut St, Bloomington, IN 47401

# Oliver! Vocabulary

## Places, Food, and Money



### Across

4. A light, usually thin, cooked cereal made by boiling meal, especially oatmeal, in water or milk.
7. A highly seasoned, dried sausage
10. A British gold coin taken out of circulation in the early 1800's, worth about 21 shillings
11. Archaic slang for food

### Down

1. A poorhouse in which paupers were given work.
2. Pantry or room where food is kept.
3. A pudding made chiefly of egg and strained peas
5. To borrow without intent to repay *OR* To beg or obtain by begging
6. A coin with the value of one pound sterling
8. A bronze coin worth 1/4 of a penny; withdrawn from circulation in 1961; also slang for something very small and worthless.
9. A round, soft, unsweetened bread, similar to a muffin; slang for an attractive girl



# Oliver! Food Matching

Can you match the food mentioned in *Oliver!* to the picture?  
Draw lines to connect the word to the picture of the food.

**Gruel** - A light, usually thin, cooked cereal made by boiling meal, especially oatmeal, in water or milk.



**Pease pudding** - A pudding made chiefly of egg and strained peas



**Saveloy** - A highly seasoned, dried sausage



**Crumpet** - a round, soft, unsweetened bread, similar to a muffin



Write the word that goes along with these pictures. Listen for these words in the songs the actors sing during the play:



\_\_\_\_\_

2

\_\_\_\_\_



\_\_\_\_\_



\_\_\_\_\_



\_\_\_\_\_



\_\_\_\_\_

# **Oliver! Family Portraits**

On the front side of this page, draw a picture of your family. On the back side, draw a picture of Oliver's family. Discuss or write your response to the question: What does it mean to be a family?