



**CHARLES DICKENS**

## Biographical Task - Charles Dickens



**Task:** Match each question with the correct answer.

You will see that Dickens showed great resilience in his childhood and that some very important people admired the way he communicated his creative ideas in his writing.

1. Where was Charles Dickens born?	a. In a factory
2. Which member of Dickens' family was put in prison for failing to pay his debts?	b. 10
3. Where did Dickens work when he was a child?	c. Queen Victoria
4. What was the name of Dickens' first successful novel?	d. Westminster Abbey
5. When was Dickens born?	e. Portsmouth
6. How many children did Dickens have?	f. Pickwick Papers
7. Who did Dickens write and perform plays for?	g. The poor
8. Where is Dickens buried?	h. His Father
9. Who did Dickens write about in many of his novels?	i. 1812

## Contextual Task - An Interview with Mr Dickens for *The Victorian Reader Magazine*

**Mr Dickens, you spent a lots of your time living in London but you also have a close connection with Rochester in Kent and the local areas surrounding it. Can you tell us more about how you came to know this place?**

My family and I moved to Chatham when I was 5 years old and I have lots of fond memories of the area, particularly the town of Rochester. My Father was a clerk in the Naval Pay Office so we moved quite frequently back in those days.

**Tell me about some of your childhood memories of Rochester and the local area.**

I used to love going on long strolls with my Father and exploring the beautiful Kent countryside. One of my favorite places to take a stroll with my Father was the grounds of Cobham Hall, just outside Rochester. There was a huge house on top of a hill and I remember my Father saying to me that if I worked hard enough, I might live in that house one day. Well, I did work hard and bought Gad's Hill Place in 1856. Although I owned more than one house, this was where I spent most of my time for the last 14 years of my life.

**Good for you! How much did Rochester influence your work?**

I used Rochester as inspiration for some of the now famous settings in my novels. For example, Satis House in *Great Expectations* is based on a place called Restoration House, which is in the centre of Rochester. It is called Restoration House because King Charles II stayed there the night before the Restoration (this was when he returned to the throne after Oliver Cromwell had been in charge).

**Mr Dickens, lots of readers would love to find out more about the history of the town you grew up in and returned to in later life. Can you tell us some interesting facts about Rochester?**

You may be surprised to know that Rochester became a city in 1227 during the reign of Henry III but in 1998 it lost its city status and is now a town. Rochester Cathedral was built in 604 and is the second oldest Cathedral in the country. As well as hosting religious services, it is also now used for school presentation events and graduations for students at Kent University. It wasn't until 1088 that Rochester Castle was built. It still stands today and visitors can even climb right to the top and admire the beautiful views. There are also the castle gardens, where concerts and fairgrounds are frequently held.

**It sounds like there's lots to do and see in Rochester; perhaps we should visit one day! Thank you for your time, Mr Dickens.**

## Questions:

1. How old was Dickens when he moved to Chatham?
2. Where did Dickens enjoy taking strolls with his Father?
3. Give one example of how Rochester influenced Dickens' work.
4. Where does Restoration House get its name from?
5. Who was on the throne when Rochester became a city?
6. Give one example of something Rochester Cathedral is used for.
7. When was Rochester Castle built?
8. Name one activity that visitors can enjoy on a visit to Rochester Castle.

## Contextual Task - Ode to Rochester

What festivals does the town of Rochester keep?

Quite a few but I'll start with the one they call Sweeps.

The Sweeps Festival celebrates the start of summer

As this was when young chimney sweeps could exchange hard work for slumber.

Visitors from all over the land visit Rochester each year

To take part in the dancing, joy and cheer.

There are always hundreds of Morris dancers lining the streets,

You can hear them coming with their ringing bells and stamping feet.

There are two other festivals you need to decipher....

Both celebrate the work of Charles Dickens, the talented writer.

In June every year the streets come alive with characters he created

As people dress up in amazing costumes; the spectators are elated!

There's Miss Havisham and Pip and Oliver too,

Look out! There's Fagin and he's coming for you!

Last but not least there's a special time in December

When Christmas is celebrated and we all remember

How the story of *A Christmas Carol* made us laugh and cry,

When old Scrooge looks back at the years gone by.

So as you can see, historic Rochester is the place to be.

Maybe one day you'll visit and be amazed by what you see!



## Questions

1. What are the three festivals celebrated in Rochester every year?
2. What does the Sweeps Festival traditionally celebrate?
3. What could chimney sweeps stop doing at the start of summer?
4. Which group of dancers attend the Sweeps Festival?
5. When do the two festivals that celebrate Charles Dickens take place?
6. Give an example of a character you might see at one of the festivals.
7. Which novel is celebrated every December in Rochester?

## Reading Tasks - Charles Dickens

This is an extract from the beginning of the novel *Hard Times*. Mr Gradgrind is a teacher and here he is addressing a group of his students.

Dickens uses a list of interesting **adjectives** here. These give the impression that the classroom is not a very friendly or welcoming place. It is very empty and this implies that no one looks after it properly.

The word 'square' is repeated several times in this extract. The **repetition** emphasises the rigid and strict nature of Gradgrind's character. Like a square, he is not flexible and this makes me think he is a very unforgiving teacher.

This **metaphor** creates a clear image for the reader of quite a stern looking character.

Dickens does not tell the reader who this character is straight away. This creates a sense of mystery and builds **suspense**.

The scene was a **plain, bare, monotonous vault of a school-room**, and **the speaker's** square forefinger emphasised his observations by underscoring every sentence with a line on the schoolmaster's sleeve. The emphasis was helped by the speaker's **square wall of a forehead**, which had his eyebrows for its base, while his eyes found commodious cellarage in **two dark caves**, overshadowed by the wall. The emphasis was helped by the speaker's mouth, which was wide, thin, and hard set. The emphasis was helped by the speaker's voice which was inflexible, dry, and dictatorial. The emphasis was helped by the speaker's hair which bristled on the skirts of his bald head, **a plantation of firs** to keep the wind from its shining surface, all covered with knobs, **like the crust of a plum pie**, as if the head had scarcely warehouse room for the hard facts stored inside. The speaker's obstinate carriage, **square coat, square legs, square shoulders** – nay, his very neckcloth, trained to take him by the throat with an unaccommodating grasp, like a stubborn fact, as it was – all helped the emphasis.

**"In this life, we want nothing but Facts, sir; nothing but Facts!"**

This **simile** suggests that Gradgrind's head is very bumpy and uneven, just like the crust of a pie! This is an image that all readers can relate to.

Caves are often associated with darkness and mystery; this **metaphor** creates an image of a miserable and quite frightening character.

This **direct speech** from Gradgrind is what the extract has been building up to. The repetition of 'Facts' shows that he is not interested in creativity or individuality from his students.

This is an extract from the novel *Oliver Twist*. Oliver is living in a workhouse as he is an orphan and has nowhere else to go. In this extract Dickens describes what meal times are like for the boys.

What kind of image of the hall is created here?

What do we usually associate 'festive' with? Are the boys joyful and well fed? Which technique is Dickens using here?

Dickens uses a third person narrator. How does this help the reader understand the characters better?

The room in which the boys were fed, was **a large stone hall**, with a copper at one end: out of which the master, dressed in an apron for the purpose, and assisted by one or two women, ladled the gruel at mealtimes. Of this **festive composition** each boy had one porringer, and no more — except on occasions of great public rejoicing, when he had two ounces and a quarter of bread besides.

The bowls never wanted washing. The boys polished them with their spoons till they shone again; and when they had performed this operation (**which never took very long, the spoons being nearly as large as the bowls**), they would sit staring at the copper, with such **eager eyes**, as if they could have devoured the very bricks of which it was composed; employing themselves, meanwhile, in sucking their fingers most assiduously, with the view of catching up any stray splashes of gruel that might have been cast thereon. Boys have generally excellent appetites. Oliver Twist and his companions **suffered the tortures of slow starvation** for three months: at last they got so voracious and **wild with hunger**, that one boy, who was tall for his age, and hadn't been used to that sort of thing (for his father had kept a small cook-shop), hinted darkly to his companions, that unless he had another basin of gruel *per diem*, he was afraid he might some night happen to eat the boy who slept next him, who happened to be a weakly youth of tender age. He had a **wild, hungry eye**; and they implicitly believed him. A council was held; lots were cast who should walk up to the master after supper that evening, and ask for more; and it fell to Oliver Twist.

What do learn about the size of the bowls? Why do you think Dickens uses brackets here?

Dickens uses a special kind of alliteration here. Do you know what it is called? How do these words make you feel about the boys?

What do these adjectives suggest about how hungry the boy is? Which technique does Dickens use here?

What does the word 'wild' make you think about how their hunger is affecting them?

**You will need to use your written communication skills for this task as you will need to make sure that you answer the questions in a clear and focused way.**

**You will need to use your organisation skills for this activity because there are lots of questions on different parts of the extract.**

**You will also need to use your written communication skills to make sure you write the answers to the questions in a clear and focused way.**

**Writing task – Charles Dickens' *Hard Times***

It is clear that Dickens wanted readers to fear and dislike Mr Gradgrind rather than find him to be an entertaining character. How far do you agree with this statement?



**Commissioned by The PiXL Club Ltd.**

This resource is strictly for the use of member schools for as long as they remain members of The PiXL Club. It may not be copied, sold, or transferred to a third party or used by the school after membership ceases. Until such time it may be freely used within the member school.

All opinions and contributions are those of the authors. The contents of this resource are not connected with, or endorsed by, any other company, organisation or institution.

PiXL Club Ltd endeavour to trace and contact copyright owners. If there are any inadvertent omissions or errors in the acknowledgements or usage, this is unintended and PiXL will remedy these on written notification.