

Great Books: *Great Expectations*: Teacher's Guide

Grade Level: 9-12

Curriculum Focus: Literature

Lesson Duration: Two to three class periods

Program Description

Part fairy tale, part mystery, and part horror story, *Great Expectations* holds a mirror up to London's stratified Victorian society to unfold a working-class boy's quest to become a gentleman.

- I. Introduction (13 min.)
 - II. Dickens' Serials (12 min.)
 - III. A Mirror for Society (13 min.)
 - IV. A True Gentleman (14 min.)
-

Lesson Plan

Student Objectives

- Understand the differences between totalitarianism and democracy.
- Discover how a writer considers theme, plot, characters, setting, and point of view.

Materials

- Access to a photocopier
- *Great Expectations*, by Charles Dickens

Procedures

1. Give students the following background as a lead-in to a group project of collaborating on a short story:

Dickens wrote his novels in installments published in newspapers. Then he would listen for feedback from his readers. They would let him know if they liked the direction in which the story was progressing or whether they wanted the story to take another turn or a character to behave differently. Then he would rework his ideas for the next chapter to reflect his audience's opinions. Only then would he publish his next chapter.

2. Assign students to work together in pairs. Tell them that the entire class is going to participate in a group writing activity on one short story based on a theme. The pairs will work serially:

One pair after another will produce a short story that treats one of the following themes, or generalizations about life, from Dickens's *Great Expectations*.

- Loyalty to family or friends
- The power of love
- The importance of acting sympathetically toward those who are less fortunate
- The need for reform in educational and legal systems
- The class may also suggest an alternative theme from the novel.

3. Review other important elements of a short story.

- The plot is the sequence of events that occur in the story. It begins with a narrative hook and must involve a conflict that the main character faces. It builds to a climax, or point of highest interest, before the main character solves the problem and learns something about life.
- The characters are the individuals featured. A short story may have one or a few main characters and one or a few minor characters.
- The setting refers to the time and place in which the story occurs. A short story often has only one or a few settings, as opposed to a novel, which may have multiple settings.
- The point of view is the angle from which the story is told: first person by the narrator or third person by someone outside the story.

4. Review the prewriting phase.

- Having chosen a theme, the class must agree on a plot that will showcase the selected theme. Remind students that people usually write best when they write about what they know. Let them brainstorm ideas and then settle on one plot idea.
- Next, ask students to come up with at least two main characters to inhabit the plot— one who confronts the problem, another who helps get around the problem.
- As they come up with possible characters, have students fill in a chart with information on each character's age, size, outstanding features, clothing, personality, and characteristics of speech and behavior.
- Ask students to imagine when and where the characters exist, jotting down on another chart details about time of year, historical period, locale, and weather.
- Have students concur on the use of first- or third-person narrator in their story.
- Create an outline that students can refer to when they're ready to draft their story. Below is an example:

A. Beginning

1. Introduce the main character.
2. Tell where the character is.
3. Start the plot: What happens first?

B. Middle

1. Explain the main character's problem.
2. Introduce other characters as necessary, perhaps in a new setting. Use dialogue as appropriate.
3. Move the plot along by telling what problems the character or characters run into. Build suspense.

C. Ending

1. At the point of highest interest, tell what your character or characters do.
 2. Tell what the characters' action leads to.
 3. Tell what the final outcome is.
5. Explain that writing, the next stage of the process, is based on the prewriting notes and how it will progress:
- Select one pair of students to write jointly the first or several paragraphs.
 - Select a second pair of students, who will add one or several paragraphs to move the story along.
 - Select a third pair and so on. A pair may also contribute the contents of a diary or letter that is important to the plot, instead of narrative paragraphs.
 - With one exception, all pairs will take turns writing until the story is finished. The exception is the pair of students designated the editors; their contribution will come later in the writing process.

Although the students will follow the prewriting notes about story basics, each pair will have a chance to build on or change the direction of the story. To keep the entire class involved in the story's progress, have someone read aloud the ongoing draft periodically.

6. After every pair of students, except the editors, has contributed to the story, and all writers are satisfied with the story, have students come up with a story title. Allow the writers some time away from the manuscript.
7. With the entire class, share the checklist below about revising and editing.

Content

- Does the text clearly present a character facing the problem, lead up to a solution, and always indicate reactions by characters in the story?
- Does the story show rather than merely tell?

Style

- Is the narrative smoothly written?
- Is the dialogue realistic?
- If there is no dialogue, would adding it improve the story?

Grammar, Usage, Mechanics

- Check for correct capitalization, spelling, and matters such as agreement, comparison, and pronoun references.
 - Give a photocopy of the manuscript to the two student editors; have them apply this editing checklist to the draft.
8. The editors may make changes on the photocopy itself, or they may suggest in notes how they think the writers should revise the story.
 9. At the end of the revising and editing process, distribute a clean revision to the students for their journals.
 10. Have the class discuss the advantages and disadvantages of developing a story by committee.

Assessment

Use the following three-point rubric to evaluate students' work during this lesson.

- **3 points:** Students actively participated in class discussions; worked collaboratively in pairs and with the whole group without teacher interference; actively participated in self-evaluation of the collaborative story; drew insightful conclusions based on the lesson.
- **2 points:** Students participated somewhat in class discussions and the self-evaluation of the collaborative story; worked collaboratively in pairs and with the whole group without much teacher interference; drew some conclusions based on the lesson.
- **1 point:** Students did not participate in class discussions; needed hands-on teacher guidance to keep them on track while working in pairs and with the whole group; had difficulty drawing conclusions based on the lesson.

Vocabulary

aristocracy

Definition: A governing body or upper class usually made up of an hereditary nobility

Context: He was awed by the stately homes of the aristocracy and encouraged by his father, a Royal Navy clerk, he dreamed of a grand future for himself.

benefactor

Definition: One who makes a gift or bequest

Context: He announces that Pip is to receive a small fortune from a benefactor who wishes to remain anonymous.

epic

Definition: Extending beyond the usual or ordinary, especially in size or scope

Context: The journey of Philip Pirrip from the shadows of society up to dizzying heights is an epic one.



parliament

Definition: An assemblage of the nobility, clergy, and commons called together by the British sovereign as the supreme legislative body in the United Kingdom.

Context: Almost immediately, he began to make a name for himself reporting parliamentary proceedings for the *Daily Press*.

recluse

Definition: A person who leads a secluded or solitary life

Context: Pip is introduced to a different sort of prison altogether when he's invited to play at the house of Miss Havisham, a rich recluse who has locked herself away from the world.

smitten

Definition: Affected deeply with great feeling

Context: Not surprisingly, Estella wins the game, and with it, Pip's undying love. He is completely smitten.

Academic Standards

Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL)

McREL's Content Knowledge: A Compendium of Standards and Benchmarks for K-12 Education addresses 14 content areas. To view the standards and benchmarks, visit link:

<http://www.mcrel.org/compendium/browse.asp>

This lesson plan addresses the following national standards:

- Language Arts – Writing: Uses the general skills and strategies of the writing process, Uses the stylistic and rhetorical aspects of writing, Uses grammatical and mechanical conventions in written compositions

The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE)

The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) and the International Reading Association have developed national standards to provide guidelines for teaching the English language arts. To view the standards online, go to <http://www.ncte.org/about/over/standards/110846.htm>

This lesson plan addresses the following NCTE standards:

- Students participate as knowledgeable, reflective, creative, and critical members of a variety of literacy communities.
- Students read a wide range of print and non-print texts to build an understanding of texts, of themselves, and of the cultures of the United States and the world; to acquire new information; to respond to the needs and demands of society and the workplace; and for personal fulfillment. Among these texts are fiction and nonfiction, classic and contemporary works.
- Students use spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes (e.g., for learning, enjoyment, persuasion, and the exchange of information).



- students read a wide range of literature from many periods in many genres to build an understanding of the many dimensions (e.g., philosophical, ethical, aesthetic) of human experience.
-

Support Materials

Develop custom worksheets, educational puzzles, online quizzes, and more with the free teaching tools offered on the Discoveryschool.com Web site. Create and print support materials, or save them to a Custom Classroom account for future use. To learn more, visit

- <http://school.discovery.com/teachingtools/teachingtools.html>
-

DVD Content

This program is available in an interactive DVD format. The following information and activities are specific to the DVD version.

How To Use the DVD

The DVD starting screen has the following options:

Play Video – This plays the video from start to finish. There are no programmed stops, except by using a remote control. With a computer, depending on the particular software player, a pause button is included with the other video controls.

Video Index – Here the video is divided into four parts (see below), indicated by video thumbnail icons. Watching all parts in sequence is similar to watching the video from start to finish. Brief descriptions and total running times are noted for each part. To play a particular segment, press Enter on the remote for TV playback; on a computer, click once to highlight a thumbnail and read the accompanying text description and click again to start the video.

Curriculum Units – These are specially edited video segments pulled from different sections of the video (see below). These nonlinear segments align with key ideas in the unit of instruction. They include onscreen pre- and post-viewing questions, reproduced below in this Teacher's Guide. Total running times for these segments are noted. To play a particular segment, press Enter on the TV remote or click once on the Curriculum Unit title on a computer.

Standards Link – Selecting this option displays a single screen that lists the national academic standards the video addresses.

Teacher Resources – This screen gives the technical support number and Web site address.



Video Index

I. Introduction (13 min.)

An overview of Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations* and an introduction to its author, main character, and some of the book's central themes.

II. Dickens' Serials (12 min.)

Like Dickens' other stories, *Great Expectations* is published as a serial and is an instant hit. Authors, actors, and scholars discuss the many interpretations of Miss Havisham and Pip's desire to become a gentleman.

III. A Mirror for Society (13 min.)

A tour of real-life settings Dickens used in his novels and examples of how Pip's obsession with Estella and changed relationship with Joe reflect the author's life and the British class system at the time.

IV. A True Gentleman (14 min.)

Pip's world collapses and he makes a new start, this time as a true gentleman. Dickens returns to America before his death, where his legacy lives on through such organizations as the Dickens Project.

Curriculum Units

1. Introduction: *Great Expectations*

Pre-viewing question

Q: Why do you think Charles Dickens called his novel *Great Expectations*?

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question

Q: Compare *Great Expectations* with some modern books or films. What aspects of Dickens' story do you recognize in these modern tales?

A: Answers will vary.

2. A Twist of Fate

Pre-viewing question

Q: How might childhood shame or embarrassment help determine the course of somebody's life?

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question

Q: Why do you think Miss Havisham chose Pip as Estella's playmate?

A: Because she was grooming Estella to seek revenge on men for what had happened to her and Pip was young, impressionable, and poor.



3. Becoming a Gentleman

Pre-viewing question

Q: Why do you think some people are willing to make large sacrifices to achieve their dreams? What would you be willing to give up to achieve yours?

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question

Q: For Pip, what were the costs of becoming a proper English gentleman?

A: He must turn his back on Joe, his adopted father, and gives up his old dreams of being a blacksmith. Instead of following his own path, he forces himself to be a gentleman so that he may win Estella's affections. Despite his efforts, Pip is miserable because Estella does not return his feelings.

4. Pip Comes Full Circle

Pre-viewing question

Q: How would Pip's life have been different if he had not helped the escaped convict as a young boy?

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question

Q: What role does fate play in Pip's life?

A: Fate steps into Pip's life with his first encounter with Magwitch in the cemetery. His life from there is changed forever as Magwitch turns out to be his secret benefactor. Fate also plays a part in Pip's meeting with Estella at the end of the story, when he goes to visit Miss Havisham's house one last time and finds Estella there as well.

5. The Secret Life of Charles Dickens

Pre-viewing question

Q: In what ways can fiction influence real life?

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question

Q: Why did Dickens first publish all his books in serialized form?

A: It allowed him flexibility. It meant he could change the shape of his stories according to readers' reactions.

6. A Writer for Our Time

Pre-viewing question

Q: Why do you think Dickens' books have remained so popular throughout the years?

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question

Q: What made Dickens' writing style so unique?

A: His writing was extremely expressive. Dickens wrote in long, descriptive sentences and was able to capture intricate details of ordinary sights, sounds, and smells.

