Name: _____

Charles Dickens Visits America

In 1842 Charles Dickens was probably the most famous English language author in the world. He was received around the world as a major celebrity, often mobbed by fans. It was in that year that Dickens visited the United States. He wrote and published his thoughts about his visit in a book *American Notes for General Circulation*. Below is a passage about his visit to Washington, D.C.

Chapter VIII

Washington. The Legislature. And The President's House

The President's mansion is more like an English club-house, both within and without, than any other kind of establishment with which I can compare it. The ornamental ground about it has been laid out in garden walks; they are pretty, and agreeable to the eye; though they have that uncomfortable air of having been made yesterday, which is far from favourable to the display of such beauties.

My first visit to this house was on the morning after my arrival, when I was carried thither by an official gentleman, who was so kind as to charge himself with my presentation to the President.

We entered a large hall, and having twice or thrice rung a bell which nobody answered, walked without further ceremony through the rooms on the ground floor, as diverse other gentlemen (mostly with their hats on, and their hands in their pockets) were doing very leisurely. Some of these had ladies with them, to whom they were showing the premises; others were lounging on the chairs and sofas; others, in a perfect state of exhaustion from listlessness, were yawning drearily. The greater portion of this assemblage were rather asserting their supremacy than doing anything else, as they had no particular business there, that anybody knew of. A few were closely eyeing the movables, as if to make quite sure that the President (who was far from popular) had not made away with any of the furniture, or sold the fixtures for his private benefit.

After glancing at these loungers; who were scattered over a pretty drawing-room, opening upon a terrace which commanded a beautiful prospect of the river and the adjacent country; and who were sauntering, too, about a larger state-room called the Eastern Drawing-room; we went up-stairs into another chamber, where were certain visitors, waiting for audiences.

1. Dickens talks about the gardens having the "uncomfortable air of having been made yesterday." Explain how the garden might be a metaphor for the United States.

2. Write a short paragraph comparing the White House that Dickens describes and the White House of today. What is something that happened then that would not happen now. Why?

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