

Charles Dickens

Charles Dickens is one of the most famous English novelists of all time. He was born on February 7, 1812, in Portsmouth, England. He was the second of eight children. His family was poor and his father was sent to prison in 1824 because he borrowed money and could not pay it back. Charles Dickens was only twelve years old at that time.

After his father's imprisonment, Dickens had to work at a boot-blacking factory. When his father paid the money that he had borrowed, Charles could return to school. However, when he was fifteen, he had to stop studying and start working as an office boy to help his family with money.

Dickens became a newspaper reporter and in 1836, he published his first book, *Sketches by Boz*. He also started publishing *The Pickwick Papers*, which became enormously successful. In the same year, he married Catherine Hogarth, the oldest daughter of a respected Scottish journalist and writer.

In 1837, Dickens started publishing *Oliver Twist*. It is about a poor child without parents who has to live in the streets. The book was extremely popular in Britain as well as in America. Dickens continued writing novels and became a literary star. In 1842, he and his wife visited America. Dickens was welcomed as a celebrity there.

In 1843, Dickens published one of his most famous shorter works, *Christmas Carol*. Its main character is Ebenezer Scrooge, a rich old man who hates Christmas and doesn't care about other people. With the help of a ghost, he finds the Christmas spirit and becomes a good person.

In 1850, Dickens started working on *David Copperfield*, although it is probably not Dickens' best novel. It is probably Dickens' most autobiographical book. In 1852-53, Dickens published *Bleak House*. Many people, for example Vladimir Nabokov, think that this is Dickens' best novel.

Dickens continued writing until his death. In 1859, he published *A Tale of Two Cities*, a historical novel that takes place during the French Revolution. In 1865, he had a train accident from which he never fully recovered. He died on June 9, 1870, at Gads Hill Place his country home in Kent, England. His final novel, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, was left unfinished.

1 Read the text and answer the following questions.

- 1 Why was Dickens' father sent to prison? _____
- 2 How old was Dickens when he started working at a boot-blacking factory? _____
- 3 Who was Catherine Hogarth? _____
- 4 What is Oliver Twist about? _____
- 5 Who helps Ebenezer Scrooge to become a good person? _____
- 6 Which of his novels was Dickens' personal favorite? _____
- 7 When does *A Tale of Two Cities* take place? _____

2 Are these sentences true (T) or false (F)?

- 1 Charles Dickens was the oldest child. _____
- 2 When he was fifteen, Dickens worked as an office boy. _____
- 3 When Dickens visited America, people weren't interested in him. _____
- 4 The Pickwick Papers was Dickens first published book. _____
- 5 Oliver Twist was successful in Britain but not in America. _____
- 6 Vladimir Nabokov liked Dickens Bleak House. _____
- 7 Charles Dickens didn't finish his last novel. _____