

BEARING TIME

CHARLES DICKENS

At last, it was evening. The large stone hall of the workhouse filled with hungry, skinny, young orphans dressed in filthy rags. Perhaps the word hungry doesn't accurately describe their grumbling, empty little stomachs. Starving would probably be more suitable. They had three meals a day, which consisted of only one bowl, and no more, of watery, tasteless soup; except on special occasions when they enjoyed a tiny piece of bread, too...

Moments after the food was served, it disappeared. The boys licked bowls, spoons and fingers and searched busily for a splash that they hadn't noticed. Because of this, the bowls never needed cleaning. Then they stared, as they always did, at the huge copper pot that held the soup.

CHARLES DICKENS

The boy next to him nudged him and told him to go and ask for more food. It was time. Perhaps it was the hunger, or the misery that comes with it that gave him courage. He rose from the table and walked up to the master, bowl and spoon in hand, and said:

"Please, sir, I want some more."

The whole room fell silent. The master's face turned white, not believing what he was hearing. He stared at Oliver for a few long seconds, speechless. All eyes were on the master, half fear, half hope.

"What?" he said angrily. Without hesitating, again Oliver asked if he could have some more soup. The master was furious and did not reply. He raised his ladle high, not to serve more soup, but to hit poor Oliver violently on the head.

OLIVER TWIST

It appeared that that evening was no different from any other. It was, though.

Before dinner, all the boys had held a meeting and had made a decision. They couldn't suffer any longer. They had to act and it was Oliver Twist who was chosen to perform the task. First, the boys whispered to each other, then they winked at Oliver.



OLIVER TWIST

The men in charge of the workhouse were shocked when the master rushed into their room.

"I beg your pardon, sir! Oliver Twist asked if he could have some more!"

They quickly decided that they had to do something at once. The next morning, there was a poster at the gate of the workhouse offering five pounds to anyone who would take Oliver Twist off their hands.



1. Why does the writer prefer the word *starving* to *hungry*?

2. What did the orphans eat on special occasions?

3. Why did the boys' bowls never need cleaning?

4. What did the boys decide at the meeting?

5. Why did the boys wink at Oliver?

6. What did Oliver do?