

Introduction

‘Of all my books, I like this the best ... like many fond parents, I have in my heart of hearts a favourite child. And his name is DAVID COPPERFIELD.’

Charles Dickens, Preface to *David Copperfield*

Among the fifteen novels Charles Dickens wrote, *David Copperfield* was his favourite and was based on his own life. The story is set in the 1800s in England, where Dickens lived.

The story is written in the first person. An older David Copperfield tells what he remembers of his life, from the time as a young boy under the care of his mother until he has his own family. David meets a lot of people as he grows up, studies, and works. Some people are very cruel to him. But fortunately, he also meets some very nice people, who make his life happier. Apart from telling us about himself, David tells us how his friends have changed.

Important people in the story

The main character is David Copperfield, who was born into an unfortunate family. He has been looked after by Peggotty, the servant of his family, Mr Murdstone, his stepfather, and Betsy Trotwood, his aunt.

One of David’s childhood friends is Emily, a girl who stays with Peggotty’s family near the sea. Tommy Traddles and James Steerforth are his friends from his first school, Salem House.

Later, Betsy Trotwood’s friend Mr Wickfield introduces David to another school. He makes friends

with Agnes, the daughter of Mr Wickfield, and meets Uriah Heep, a young man who works for Mr Wickfield.

When he has finished school, David starts working for Mr Spenlow. There he meets Dora, Mr Spenlow's beautiful daughter.

About Charles Dickens

Charles Dickens was a very popular writer who lived in England in the nineteenth century. He was born in 1812 in Landport and spent his childhood in Kent. He had seven brothers and sisters and he was the second child in the family. His father had many debts and was put in prison when Charles was about twelve. Charles Dickens had to earn money for his family by working at his relative's factory, labelling bottles for six shillings a week. He attended a day school at the same time. Two years later, he left school and worked at a lawyer's office. He taught himself shorthand when he was sixteen because he wanted to be a reporter. At nineteen he became one of the quickest and most accurate reporters in London. Later, he worked as an editor and a writer.

Dickens never stopped writing after he published his first novel, *The Pickwick Papers* in 1836–37. Usually he published a chapter of a novel every month. He wrote fifteen novels in total, the most popular ones include *Oliver Twist*, *A Christmas Carol*, *David Copperfield*, *A Tale of Two Cities* and *Great Expectations*. His own favourite novel was *David Copperfield*, in which his own life is reflected.

Dickens spent most of his life in London. He died of a stroke in 1870 and was buried in Westminster Abbey.

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An Unhappy Childhood

Early memories

The first people I can remember in my life are my mother and our servant, Peggotty. I did not know my father at all. He had died before I was born.

My mother had pretty hair and a lovely shape, but Peggotty had no shape at all. Her arms were very hard and her cheeks were as red as apples. I was surprised the birds did not come and try to eat her. 5

I can still remember our house, with the bedroom windows open to let the fresh air in. There was a garden, with a high fence round it. I remember seeing butterflies, and fruit trees. The fruit on these trees was riper and sweeter than any I have known since, in any other garden. Sometimes on cold evenings we played games in front of the fire in the sitting room. I remember my mother, out of breath, resting in a chair and twisting the ends of her hair round her fingers. I knew how proud she was of being so pretty. 10 15

Peggotty and I were sitting one night by the fire, alone. I was reading to Peggotty when the bell rang. We went to the door. My mother was there, looking especially pretty. With her was a gentleman.

