

# Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for Great Expectations (Unabridged)

by  
Charles Dickens

## Book Information

Charles Dickens, Great Expectations (Unabridged)

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Interest Level: UG

A tiny orphan boy named Pip acquires a mysterious benefactor who sponsors him to become a gentleman. Years later, Pip confronts his past heartaches and illusions that his "great expectations" have brought upon him.

**Award:** NCTE Notable Children's Books in the Language Arts

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## Main Characters

Abel Magwitch/Mr. Provis a convict to whom Pip brings food and who later pays for Pip to become a gentleman

Biddy a young girl who teaches Pip to read and later becomes a caretaker for Mrs. Joe

Compeyson a former business partner of Magwitch and former convict who seeks to turn Magwitch in to the authorities

Drumle a fellow student who is also boarding with the Pockets and who is wealthy but crude

Estella Miss Havisham's adopted daughter

Herbert Pocket a relative of Miss Havisham who becomes Pip's closest friend in London

Joe Gargery Pip's brother-in-law and best friend; a blacksmith who runs a forge

Matthew Pocket a relative of Miss Havisham who serves as Pip's tutor in London

Miss Havisham an old, bitter, and lonely spinster who lives in a large house in town and pays to have Pip entertain her

Mr. Jaggers a lawyer who represents Pip's patron and acts as Pip's guardian in London until Pip comes of age

Mr. Wopsle a friend of Joe and Mrs. Joe who later becomes an actor in London

Mrs. Joe Gargery Pip's much older and mean-tempered sister who raises Pip after their parents die

Orlick a man who works for Joe in the forge

Pip an uneducated orphan who is raised by his mean-tempered sister and her kind husband; he later is sponsored by an anonymous patron

Uncle Pumblechook Joe's uncle, who considers himself Pip's benefactor for connecting him with Miss Havisham

Wemmick a clerk who works for Mr. Jaggers and becomes a friend and confidant of Pip

## Vocabulary

**indenture** a contract by which a person, as an apprentice, is bound to service

**obsequious** characterized by or showing servile complaisance or deference

**perspicuity** clearness or lucidity, as of a statement

**physiognomy** countenance when considered as an index of character

**plebian** of or pertaining to the common people

**sagaciously** acting with a keen practical sense

**vanquished** overcame

## Synopsis

Philip Pirip, or Pip as he is commonly known, is born to poor parents and orphaned at a young age. He is raised by his heavy-handed older sister and her kind husband, Joe Gargery. As a young boy, Pip is confronted by a convict who demands Pip bring him

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food and a file. Pip does so out of fear. A short time later the man is caught and returned to the prison ship from which he escaped.

Pip is requested to come to the home of an old spinster, Miss Havisham, "to play." This connection is made possible by Joe's Uncle Pumblechook. Pip begins going to Miss Havisham's on a regular basis; he sees many strange and frightening things. While there he meets Miss Havisham's adopted daughter, Estella, who is beautiful but cruel to Pip. Despite the way he is treated, Pip falls in love with Estella. Pip's visits to Miss Havisham continue until she realizes he is old enough to apprentice into the smithy business with Joe. Pip becomes Joe's apprentice but resents it because he feels common and wishes to make more of himself.

Pip's sister, Mrs. Joe, is mysteriously attacked and as a result is unable to care for herself. Bidley is hired to care for her. Soon afterwards, Pip is told he has an anonymous patron who wishes to set him up as a gentleman in London. Pip gladly goes and begins his training as a gentleman.

Years go by and Pip becomes close to Herbert Pocket and Wemmick. Pip continues to visit Miss Havisham, believing she is his patron. He also continues to desire Estella, who refuses his advances and states that she has no feeling in her heart.

One day the convict Pip met in the church graveyard, Abel Magwitch (also known as Mr. Provis), appears in Pip's life and reveals that he was Pip's patron. He returned in order to see Pip spend his money and live as a gentleman. By returning to London, however, the convict risks being recognized and put to death for escaping the Hulks. Pip and Herbert determine they must get Magwitch out of England for his own safety.

Before they are able to carry out their plan, Pip is nearly killed when he is lured into a trap by Orlick, who has secretly been stalking Pip for years. Orlick is angry with Pip for ruining his chances with Bidley. Pip is rescued by Herbert and returns to London. Pip

and Herbert attempt to take Magwitch out of the country by boat but are spotted and caught. Magwitch is returned to London and sentenced to die, but he succumbs to the injuries he received during the escape.

After Magwitch's death, Pip determines he will return to Joe's home and marry Bidley. When he arrives, Joe and Bidley have just married and he wishes them well. Pip decides to join Herbert, and he lives happily with Herbert and his wife. Joe and Bidley have a son whom they have named Pip, and during a visit to them, Pip is reunited with Estella.

## Open-Ended Questions

Use these open-ended questions as the basis for class discussions, student presentations, or extended writing assignments.

### Initial Understanding

What are the two conditions of Pip's great expectations? Why do you suppose they are included?

*He is to keep his name Pip and never to inquire or seek to know the name of his patron. This is the only name by which Magwitch knows him, and he feels Pip should be proud of it and live up to it. Also, it would be easier for Magwitch to eventually find Pip. Magwitch may have wanted to remain anonymous because he is ashamed of his own situation. Perhaps he thinks Pip will refuse the offer if he knows it comes from a convict. He might have wanted to be able to observe Pip without being recognized.*

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## Literary Analysis

The tone of this work is bleak and brooding. What are some of the ways Dickens sets the tone?

*Pip's home with the Gargerys is near the marshes, where the weather is often damp and raw. Their house is cold and sparsely furnished. Their meals are meager. Miss Havisham's estate is in disrepair and the rooms in the house are dark and dusty. Except for Estella, the people are described as disagreeable in appearance. In London, the weather is cold and rainy, and Pip's quarters are cramped and dark.*

## Inferential Comprehension

Pip feels he is superior to Magwitch when he first arrives in London. Through the course of events, he realizes that Magwitch is the better person. What made Pip eventually feel inferior in comparison to Magwitch?

*Pip has been motivated by greed and arrogance rather than love. He has lived his adult life in a self-serving way, forgetting those who loved him most, Joe and Biddy. Magwitch however, has been motivated by his desire to make someone else happy. He even risks his life to see the joy he helped create.*

## Constructing Meaning

What lessons does Pip learn from his experiences and years in London?

*Image and money are not as important as love and loyalty. He discovers what really makes someone a good person. He learns the value of money, and not to make assumptions.*

## Teachable Skills

**Understanding Characterization** Orphans who lived during Dickens's time had a bleak future. Pip was, after all, luckier than Dickens's other famous orphan, Oliver Twist, in that Pip was taken in by his sister. Today, many more options are available for children in need. Have students write a short story about a boy like Pip, but set it

in contemporary times. What would a benefactor do for a poor boy today? How would a modern boy become a "gentleman"? Who would influence his actions?

**Recognizing Cause and Effect** Pip's opinion of Joe and Joe's occupation has been affected the first day he entered Miss Havisham's house and meets Estella. He suddenly feels ashamed of his lowly upbringing and of Joe's common nature. Explain why Estella had this effect on Pip. Have students write about a time when they were ashamed or embarrassed about a person, such as an annoying sibling or something else, such as their clothing or where they live. Who made them feel that way? What did they do? What could they have done differently? Did anything change as a result?

**Recognizing Feelings** Numerous times in his life Pip considered telling Joe the truth about giving the food and file to the convict. Identify why Pip couldn't bring himself to do it and if the truth would have changed Joe's opinion of Pip. Ask students to write about a situation in which they wanted to tell the truth about something but didn't. What were the consequences of keeping the truth from someone? What would have happened if the truth had come out?

**Responding to Literature** Just before publication of *Great Expectations*, Dickens changed the ending. Have students write two epilogues, based on each of the endings. Indicate which of the endings they preferred, and why.