

Charles Dickens 200 Years

A Short Biography

Ex.1. Reading and speaking. In pairs put the events in Dickens' life in order.

- _____ Travels through Canada and the United States.
- _____ Marries Catherine Hogarth.
- _____ Adopts the penname "Boz."
- _____ Purchases Gad's Hill.
- _____ Begins writing "Oliver Twist" .
- 1 Born on Friday, February 7, 1812 in Portsmouth to John, a clerk in the navy, and Elizabeth Dickens.
- _____ Father is arrested for debt.
- _____ Separated from his family, Dickens is put to work in a factory.
- _____ Suffers a stroke on June 8 at Gad's Hill and passes on June 9
- _____ Begins writing "David Copperfield".
- _____ Debut of his amateur theatrical company.
- _____ Health begins to fail, much because of over work.
- _____ Becomes a free-lance reporter.
- _____ Falls in love with Maria Beadnell.
- _____ Falls in love with Ellen Ternan, a young actress.
- _____ His final public readings take place in London.

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Ex.2. Vocabulary: In pairs go through the list of words below and see if you know them.

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to spend

to earn

debt

to force someone to do something

a factory

freelance

to find employment

behind the bars

to join

shorthand

to appear

to get engaged

installment

to hire

a drawing

a novelist

copyright

abolition of slavery

to purchase

a reading

to burry

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Charles Dickens was born on February 7, 1812. He was the son of John and Elizabeth Dickens. John Dickens was a clerk and he didn't make much money. Unfortunately he spent much more than he earned and ended up in prison in 1824. 200 years ago you could go to prison for debt! His wife and children (except Charles) also joined him behind bars. There were many such places all over England. Torn away from his family, the twelve-year-old Dickens was forced to work in a factory. Between 1824 and 1827 Dickens went to school in London. At fifteen, he found employment as a clerk, while he studied shorthand at night. His sad experience in the factory haunted him all of his life. He shared it only with his wife and his closest friend, John Forster. It later became the inspiration for his novels - "David Copperfield" and "Great Expectations".

In 1829 he became a freelance reporter, and in 1830 he fell in love with Maria Beadnell, the daughter of a banker. By 1832 he had become a very successful shorthand reporter of Parliamentary debates in the House of Commons, and began work for a newspaper. In 1833 his relationship with Maria ended, probably because her parents did not think he was good enough for their daughter. In the same year, his first published story appeared, and was followed quickly by a number of other stories and sketches. In 1834 he took the penname of "Boz." His father was once again arrested for debt, and Charles came to his aid. Later in life, his family often asked him for money. In 1835 he became engaged to Catherine Hogarth.

The first series of "Sketches by Boz" was published in 1836. That same year Dickens was hired to write short texts to accompany a series of funny drawings by Robert Seymour. "The Pickwick Papers" continued in monthly installments until November 1837 and it became an enormously popular success. Dickens and Catherine Hogarth got married on April 2, 1836. That same year he became editor of "Bentley's Miscellany" and published the second series of "Sketches by Boz". He also met John Forster, who would become his best friend as well as his first biographer.

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After this early success, Dickens became a full-time novelist. He began writing *Oliver Twist* in 1837 and continued, in monthly installments, until 1839. His son, Charles, the first of ten children, was born in 1837. In 1842, he visited Canada and the United States where he promoted international copyright rules (American publishers were pirating his works) and the abolition of slavery. "A Christmas Carol", the first of Dickens' enormously successful Christmas books was published in December 1844.

In that same year, Dickens and his family travelled through Italy, Switzerland, and France, until 1847. In 1845, Dickens started a theatrical company, which would occupy a great deal of his time from then on. He started writing "David Copperfield" in 1849 and in 1853, he toured Italy. Upon his return to England, Dickens gave the first of many public readings from his own works. In 1856, he purchased Gad's Hill, a house he had admired since childhood. Hans Christian Andersen, whose fairy tales Dickens admired greatly, visited him there often.

Dickens' theatrical company performed "The Frozen Deep" for the Queen, and when a young actress named Ellen Ternan joined the cast in August, Dickens fell in love with her. In 1858, he separated from his wife. For the next ten years he worked very hard, writing more novels and giving public readings. The public readings brought in more money than his books. By 1865, Dickens was in poor health and very overworked. Finally he collapsed, showing symptoms of a mild stroke. Further readings were cancelled, but he began to write "The Mystery of Edwin Drood".

Dickens's final public readings took place in London in 1870. He suffered another stroke on June 8th at Gad's Hill, and died the next day. The last episode of the unfinished "Mystery of Edwin Drood" appeared in September. He lies buried at Westminster Abbey.

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Teacher's Notes

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Ask students to put the events in Charles Dickens' life in chronological order. Introduce the potentially new vocabulary to them and ask them to read the short biography and see if they were right about the order of events.

Answer key:

1. Born on Friday, February 7, 1812 in Portsmouth to John, a clerk in the navy, and Elizabeth Dickens.
2. Father is arrested for debt.
3. Separated from his family, Dickens is put to work in a factory.
4. Becomes a free-lance reporter.
5. Falls in love with Maria Beadnell.
6. Adopts the penname "Boz."
7. Marries Catherine Hogarth.
8. Begins writing "Oliver Twist" .
9. Travels through Canada and the United States.
10. Debut of his amateur theatrical company.
11. Begins writing "David Copperfield".
12. Purchases Gad's Hill.
13. Falls in love with Ellen Ternan, a young actress.
14. Health begins to fail, much because of over work.
15. His final public readings take place in London.
16. Suffers a stroke on June 8 at Gad's Hill and passes on June 9

You may follow up the reading by asking students to find in the text five things which tell them about the times that Dickens lived in.

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