



A Guide to the Life and Work of Charles Dickens: A Brief Biography and Plot Summaries of Ten Novels

James L. Hughes, Charles Dudley Warner

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This Kindle edition (equivalent in length to a physical book of approximately 24 pages) describes the life and work of 19th century English novelist Charles Dickens. The biography portion was originally published in 1919 in the esteemed multi-volume "World Book: Organized Knowledge in Story and Picture"; the plot summaries originally appeared in 1910 in "Warner's Synopsis of Books, Ancient and Modern."

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Barnaby Rudge

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Little Dorrit

Oliver Twist

Our Mutual Friend

A Tale of Two Cities

Sample passages:

(from the biography)

Charles Dickens (1812–1870) was one of the greatest of English novelists and an educational reformer. His works enjoyed in his own day a popularity unmatched in literary history, and they have continued to give constant exquisite pleasure to millions of readers. He was a creator who brought into life almost countless characters as real as the people who walk the streets, and more real to the minds of his readers than the characters described by historians. He made his characters represent activities in the development of great and much-needed social, educational, and industrial reforms. Then, too, he possessed a genuine love for men, a grasp of the humorous and absurd, and a knowledge of life among the lower classes, which are certain to make him live long after more finished writers have lost their hold on the public.

(from the plot summaries)

David Copperfield: When "David Copperfield" appeared in 1850, after "Dombey and Son" and before "Bleak House," it became so popular that its only rival was "Pickwick." Beneath the fiction lies much of the author's personal life, yet it is not an autobiography. The story treats of David's sad experiences as a child, his youth at school, and his struggles for a livelihood, and leaves him in early manhood, prosperous and happily married. Pathos, humor, and skill in delineation give vitality to this remarkable work; and nowhere has Dickens filled his canvas with more vivid and diversified characters. [Biographer John] Forster says that the author's favorites were the Peggotty family, composed of David's nurse Peggotty, who was married to

Barkis, the carrier; Dan’el Peggotty, her brother, a Yarmouth fisherman; Ham Peggotty, his nephew; the doleful Mrs. Gummidge; and Little Em’ly, ruined by David’s schoolmate, Steerforth. “It has been their fate,” says Forster, “as with all the leading figures of his invention, to pass their names into the language and become types; and he has nowhere given happier embodiment to that purity of homely goodness, which, by the kindly and all-reconciling influences of humor, may exalt into comeliness and even grandeur the clumsiest forms of humanity.” Miss Betsy Trotwood, David’s aunt; the half-mad but mild Mr. Dick; Mrs. Copperfield, David’s mother; Murdstone, his brutal stepfather; Miss Murdstone, that stepfather’s sister; Mr. Spenlow and his daughter Dora (David’s “child-wife”); Steerforth, Rosa Dartle, Mrs. Steerforth, Mr. Wickfield, his daughter Agnes (David’s second wife), and the Micawber family, are the persons around whom the interest revolves. A host of minor characters, such as the comical little dwarf hairdresser, Miss Mowcher, Mr. Mell, Mr. Creakle, Tommy Traddles, Uriah Heep, Dr. Strong, Mrs. Markleham, and others, are portrayed with the same vivid strokes.

About the authors:

Charles Dudley Warner (1829-1900) was an American author, editor, and lecturer. Other works include “The Gilded Age: A Tale of Today” (co-authored with Mark Twain), “My Summer in a Garden,” and “As We Were Saying.” James L. Hughes (1946-1935) was a Canadian author and educator. Other works include “Dickens as an Educator,” “Training the Children,” and “Teaching to Read.”

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Michael Larose:

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