



Reading Level 2: Charles Dickens

7th February 2012

Topics: books, reading, social change

Learning topics:

- vocabulary
- present perfect

1	It has been 200 years since the birth of the author ¹ Charles Dickens. A ceremony in Westminster Abbey,
2	London, with the Prince of Wales and the actor Ralph Feinnes celebrated ² the anniversary ³ today.
3	Charles Dickens published ⁴ his first books in the 1830s and they have never been out of print since then.
4	Have you read any Dickens? You have probably heard the names of some of his works, at least ⁵ .
5	
6	One of Dickens' most famous books is 'Oliver Twist', which describes the awful conditions of workhouses for
7	children and the poverty of inner city London. You have heard of Oliver Twist, haven't you?
8	'A Christmas Carol' is a story about a factory owner who does not care about his employees ⁶ . Its main
9	character is called 'Ebenezer Scrooge ⁷ '. The moral of the story is that individuals should be responsible for
10	all members of society. Perhaps Dickens' most popular novel ⁸ , 'David Copperfield', is also his most
11	autobiographical ⁹ . It's plot ¹⁰ tells the story of a poor boy as he grows up in a difficult world.
12	
13	The 1830s were a time of great social change in Britain. It was the start of modern democracies that try to
14	improve their populations and help the poorest people. During Dickens' lifetime, the population of London
15	rose from one million to three million people. The large numbers of poor people were challenging ¹¹
16	established ideas that poverty was a natural economic condition.
17	
18	Dickens' novels informed people about the poverty in parts of England like London and Yorkshire.
19	But his books became bestsellers because of the detailed descriptions of interesting characters. They helped
20	to shape the political discussions in Britain, and may have helped to improve the working conditions in
21	factories, the rights of the poor, and public health. 'Dickensian' now means '19 th Century poverty'.
22	
23	Dickens was very famous and became rich within his lifetime. He never stopped writing about the poor and
24	also helping them. For example, he supported some projects that helped young women in London.
25	When he died in 1870, people were travelling by steamships and railways instead of by horses and coaches ¹² .
26	As technology changed, so did society. Almost since he started to write, Dickens' books have helped to shape
27	life in Britain. Since he died, people have remembered him for his social work as well as a writer, but his
28	books will continue to be classic works of literature for many years to come.
29	
30	Have you been inspired to try reading one? If you read an original version, you might find some of the
31	language difficult. Perhaps you could browse ¹³ the bookshop shelves for an 'easy reader' edition ¹⁴ - before
32	you buy it, you could flick through the pages ¹⁵ to see whether it suits you or not.

¹ author = Schriftsteller(in)

² celebrate = feiern

³ anniversary = Jahrestag

⁴ to publish = veröffentlichen

⁵ at least = mindestens

⁶ employee = Angestellte

⁷ scrooge = Geizhals

⁸ novel = Roman

⁹ autobiographical = autobiografisch

¹⁰ plot = Handlung

¹¹ challenge = herausfordern, infrage stellen

¹² coach = Kutsche

¹³ to browse (in a shop) = sich in einem Geschäft umsehen/herumstöbern

¹⁴ edition = Ausgabe

¹⁵ to flick through the pages / to browse a book = ein Buch durchblättern

Level 2 questions

Present Perfect (and other tenses!)

1. On the next page is a gapfill exercise, where some of the verbs have been taken out.

Can you write the verb in the correct tense by looking at the context and signal words in the sentences?

Check your answers with the original text.

Tip: actions in the present perfect did not happen at a specific time; and they have a link to the present.

2. Which Present Perfect signal word is used a lot in the text?
3. In line 26, why does the word 'started' in 'Almost since he started to write,' not take the present perfect?

Vocabulary

4. Read the text again and collect all the vocabulary connected to writing books.

(Don't forget – you can save your own vocabulary list in the 'Writing' page on the level123english website)

Answers

2. The word 'since' is used a lot. In English, 'since' is a signal word for the Present Perfect or Present Perfect Continuous.
3. 'Almost since he started to write' defines a point in time in the past, like saying 'Since 1935'.
The verb that takes the present perfect is what happened since that point until now – 'his books have helped to...'
4. author; to publish; to be out of print; book; works; story; character; plot; novel; autobiographical; bestseller; to write; writer; classic works; literature; original version; language; edition; bookshop; to browse (shelves/book); to flick through the pages

Present Perfect (and other tenses!) gapfill exercise:

It _____ (be) 200 years since the birth of the author Charles Dickens.

A ceremony in Westminster Abbey, London, with the Prince of Wales and the actor Ralph Fiennes

_____ (celebrate) the anniversary today. Charles Dickens _____ (publish) his first books in the 1830s and they _____ (never, be) out of print since then.

_____ you _____ (read) any Dickens? You have probably heard the names of some of his works, at least.

One of Dickens' most famous books is 'Oliver Twist', which describes the awful conditions of workhouses for children and the poverty of inner city London. You _____ (hear) of Oliver Twist, haven't you?

'A Christmas Carol' is a story about a factory owner who does not care about his employees.

Its main character is called 'Ebenezer Scrooge'. The moral of the story is that individuals should be responsible for all members of society. Perhaps Dickens' most popular novel, 'David Copperfield', is his most autobiographical.

Its plot _____ (tell) the story of a poor boy as he grows up in a difficult world.

The 1830s _____ (be) a time of great social change in Britain. It was the start of modern democracies that try to improve their populations and help the poorest people. During Dickens' lifetime, the population of London _____ (rise) from one million to three million people. The large numbers of poor people were challenging established ideas that poverty was a natural economic condition.

Dickens' novels _____ (inform) people about the poverty in parts of England like London and Yorkshire. But his books were popular because of the detailed descriptions of interesting characters.

They helped to shape the political discussions in Britain, and may have helped to improve the working conditions in factories, the rights of the poor, and public health. 'Dickensian' now _____ (mean)

'19th Century poverty'.

Dickens was very famous and became rich within his lifetime. He never _____ (stop) writing about the poor and also helping them. For example, he supported some projects that helped young women in London.

When he _____ (die) in 1870, people were travelling by steamships and railways instead of by horses and coaches. As technology changed, so did society. Almost since he _____ (start) to write, Dickens' books _____ (help) to shape life in Britain. Since he died, people _____ (remember) him for his social work as well as a writer, but his books _____ (continue) to be classic works of literature for many years to come.

_____ you _____ (be) inspired to try reading one?

If you _____ (read) an original version, you _____ (find) some of the language difficult.

Perhaps you _____ (browse) the bookshop shelves for an 'easy reader' edition - before you buy it, you could flick through the pages to see whether it suits you or not.