



Reading Level 3: Charles Dickens

7th February 2012

Topics: books, reading, social change

Learning topics:

- vocabulary
- connectives
- past perfect
- passive

1	The 200 th anniversary – bicentary – of the birth of Charles Dickens was marked in Westminster Abbey, London,
2	today at a ceremony that was attended by the Prince of Wales and the actor Ralph Feinnes, among others.
3	Charles Dickens’ books have been continuously published since the 1830s, which was a time of great social
4	change in Britain and perhaps the start of modern democracies that intervene in the social affairs of their
5	populations in order to alleviate ¹ the suffering of the poorest.
6	During Dickens’ lifetime, the population of London increased from one million to three million, and the vast
7	numbers of new urban ² poor were challenging Malthusian preconceptions ³ of natural economic laws.
8	
9	One of Dickens’ most famous books is ‘Oliver Twist’, which describes the dismal ⁴ conditions of workhouses for
10	children and of the squalor ⁵ of inner city London. ‘A Christmas Carol’ is a moralistic fable ⁶ , critical of the
11	indifference ⁷ of the rich to the poor, in this case of a factory owner to his employees. It crystallised the concept
12	of individual responsibility for all members of society. However, perhaps his most popular novel is ‘David
13	Copperfield’, which is considered to be his most autobiographical, telling the story of a disadvantaged boy
14	growing up in a difficult world.
15	
16	Dickens’ novels certainly helped to inform the public about the poverty in parts of England like London and
17	Yorkshire. Even though these themes had not previously been popular, his detailed descriptions of engaging ⁸
18	characters turned his novels into bestsellers. His characters provided a focus for the political debate in Britain
19	and may have helped achieve the legislation ⁹ which improved working conditions in factories, the rights of the
20	poor and working classes ¹⁰ , and public health. Indeed, the very term ‘Dickensian’ was coined to describe 19 th
21	Century poverty. Nevertheless, Dickens didn’t intervene ¹¹ directly into politics.
22	
23	Dickens became extremely famous and also wealthy within his lifetime, but despite that he didn’t stop writing
24	or campaigning on behalf of the poor, for example supporting a project that helped young women in London.
25	By the time he died in 1870, the era of travel by horse-and-coach had given way to steamships and railways.
26	If Dickens hadn’t written his books, perhaps the social conditions in Britain wouldn’t have changed as much.
27	Today, his legacy as a social philanthropist and campaigner is remembered and commemorated ¹² alongside his
28	literary legacy as one of the most popular and enduring ¹³ writers of all time. How about picking up a Dickens
29	and having a browse through it? The language style is challenging due to its age – but it’ll be worth the effort!

¹ alleviate = abbauen / lindern / verringern

² urban = städtisch

³ preconception = vorgefasste Meinung

⁴ dismal = kläglich, furchtbar

⁵ squalor = Schmutz

⁶ fable = Sage

⁷ indifference = Gleichgültigkeit gegenüber

⁸ engaging = bezaubernd

⁹ legislation = Gesetze

¹⁰ working class = Arbeiterklasse / -Schicht

¹¹ intervene = einschreiten, eingreifen

¹² to commemorate = gedenken

¹³ enduring = dauerhaft, bleibende



Level 3 questions

Connectives

1. There are lots of connectives/conjunctions which link clauses within a single sentence or one sentence to another.

How many can you identify?

To extend your own use of English, try forming a sentence of your own with each connective.

Past Perfect

2. There are examples of the Past Perfect in lines 17, 25 and 26.

Use the use of the Past Perfect to help identify which action came (or would have come) first in each sentence.

Passive

3. Here are some sentences from the Level 2 text.

Can you turn them into passive (you might need to change the verbs in the sentences)?

Have a go on your own first, and then find the equivalent sentences in the Level 3 text to see how it was done here.

- a) A ceremony in London with the Prince of Wales celebrated the anniversary today.
- b) The books have never been out of print since then.
- c) David Copperfield is also his most autobiographical [book].
- d) 'Dickensian' means '19th Century poverty'
- e) People today remember Dickens for his social conscience

Answers

1. Connectives: that; which; in order to; and; However; Even though; Indeed; Nevertheless; but; despite that; for example; If.
2. the unpopularity of the themes *was before* his novels became bestsellers.
travel changing into steamships/railways *was before* Dickens' death in 1870.
the books not being written *would have been before* the changing of the social conditions in Britain