Introducing Mr Dickens
Lesson activities

1. Research Charles Dickens

Activity 1

Find out as much as you can about Charles Dickens.

- His life
  Where and when did he live and die?  What sort of man was he?  What about his family?

- His works
  What did he write?  How was his work published?  Which are his most famous novels?  What did people think of his novels at the time?  How would you describe his style of writing and his choice of subject matter?

- His times
  What was life like when Dickens was alive?  Try and find out about new industry, life for the poor, schooling, Christmas ..

Activity 2

Complete Table 1 with your findings.

Activity 3

Produce a Charles Dickens leaflet or poster that provides information about the man, his life, his works and his times.
2. A Christmas Carol: Do you know the story?

A Christmas Carol is one of Dickens’ most famous works. See if you know the story by putting the events below into the right order.

1. Scrooge is visited by the ghost of Christmas Past who shows him some sad and happy scenes from his own childhood: Scrooge all alone in the schoolhouse; Belle breaking off their engagement because he loves money more than her; Belle happy with her new family.

2. Scrooge is a mean miser who hates Christmas. He refuses to give money to the poor, never visits his nephew Fred and he is a terrible boss; he does not pay Bob Cratchit enough money, he does not allow him time off, he does not allow him extra coal for his fire in the winter.

3. Scrooge is visited by the ghost of Christmas Future who shows Scrooge that nobody will care when he dies. He also shows the Cratchit family mourning for Tiny Tim.

4. Scrooge resolves to be a better person. He orders an enormous turkey for the Cratchits, gives money to the charity men and visits his nephew.

5. Scrooge is visited by the ghost of Christmas Present who shows Scrooge the happy but poor Cratchit family. The spirit reveals that Tiny Tim will die unless he is helped. The Ghost of Christmas Present also takes Scrooge to his nephew Fred’s house where a party is in full swing and Fred says he pities Scrooge.

6. Scrooge is visited by Marley’s ghost who shows him how terrible life after death is if you have been mean during your life.

If this is too tricky, try putting them into lists under these sub-headings:

A. Scrooge at the beginning of the story

B. What happens to change Scrooge

C. How Scrooge has changed by the end of the story
3. **A Christmas Carol: Attitudes toward Christmas**

Charles Dickens is associated with Christmas as we know it, mainly because of his book *A Christmas Carol* where we meet the miserly Scrooge and the poor Cratchit family. Scrooge realises the error of his ways with the help of four ghosts, Marley’s ghost and the ghosts of Christmas past, Christmas present and Christmas future, and eventually he becomes more generous.

1. Sort out the statements below into 2 lists: those in favour of Christmas and those against Christmas.

2. Which statements do you think Scrooge might have made? Why?

3. In your own words, explain Scrooge’s attitude toward Christmas.

‘.. the only time I know of, in the long calendar of the year, when men and women seem by one consent to open their shut-up hearts freely, and to think of people below them as if they really were fellow-passengers to the grave, and not another race of creatures bound on other journeys.’

‘I have always thought of Christmas time, when it has come round .. as a good time; a kind, forgiving, charitable, pleasant time.’

‘And therefore, uncle, though it has never put a scrap of gold or silver in my pocket, I believe that it has done me good, and will do me good; and I say, God bless it!’

‘At this festive season of the year it is more than usually desirable that we should make some slight provision for the poor and destitute, who suffer greatly at the present time. Many thousands are in want of common necessaries; hundreds of thousands are in want of common comforts, sir.’
4. A Christmas Carol: Scrooge writes his first Christmas card

Imagine you are Scrooge and have just been visited by the three spirits. The visits have made you realise that you need to mend your ways. You decide to write a Christmas Card apologising for your faults, and promising to make amends.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character</th>
<th>Reason for apology</th>
<th>Promise for the future</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Bob Cratchit | Not paying him enough wages and overworking him  
Not allowing him coal for his fire | To increase his wages and work him less hard.  
To give him more coal. |
| Nephew Fred | Not seeing enough of him. | To spend more time with him. |
| Tiny Tim | Not caring that he was ill. | To help him in the future. |
| Charity workers | Refusing to give money to the poor | To give large sums in future. |

**YOUR APOLOGY**

Choose who you want to send the card to. Say sorry for your past meanness. Using the table above, decide which particular bad deed you want to apologise for.

**YOUR PROMISE**

Once you have written your apology, you need to promise to make amends for this bad deed. Explain what you have learned about the importance of giving and helping others.

**YOUR CHRISTMAS CARD**

Now make your Christmas card. Remember to include the illustration on the front, a printed message (for example 'Merry Christmas'), and your personal message (write this neatly on the left hand side of the inside of the card).
5. Nicholas Nickleby: Chapter 8 – Mr and Mrs Squeers

Mr and Mrs Squeers run Dotheboys hall, a school for young boys. Below is a description of the couple and their attitude toward the boys. Would you like to go to Dotheboys? What sort of people are the Squeers?

Complete the passage below by filling in the gaps. All of the words that you need are at the bottom of the page. However, be careful: not all of the words belong to the passage!

Now, the fact was, that both Mr and Mrs Squeers viewed the boys in the light of their proper and natural _________; or, in other words, they held and ________ that their business and profession was to get as much from every boy as could by possibility be screwed out of him. On this point they were both _________, and behaved in unison accordingly. The only _________ between them was, that Mrs Squeers waged war against the enemy openly and fearlessly, and that Squeers _________ his rascality, even at home, with a spice of his habitual deceit; as if he really had a __________ of someday or other being able to take himself in, and persuade his own _________ that he was a very good fellow.

covered
friends
considered
enemies
mind

selfish
difference
agreed
understanding
notion

See extract 1 for the complete passage.
6. Nicholas Nickleby: Chapter 8 - Dotheboys Hall

Here Dickens describes Dotheboys Hall and the boys who live there.

Read the extract. Look particularly at the adjectives written in **bold**. They are listed below. All of these are negative adjectives - they make Dotheboys sound horrible! Dickens has chosen his words very carefully to make sure that the reader knows how terrible and sad a place Dotheboys Hall is. Look again at the name of the hall. What does it suggest to you?

**Activity 1**

You are going to experiment with Dickens’ language. You need to complete Word Chart 1. For each of the words listed you must add a **synonym** (a word which means the same) and an **antonym** (a word which means the opposite). You will need a thesaurus to help you with this! Two of the examples have been done for you.

**Activity 2**

a. Now read the extract again. This time add your synonyms. How does it sound?
b. Read it one more time, this time using your antonyms. How does it sound?
7. Nicholas Nickleby: Chapter 8 – What's on the menu at Dotheboys hall?

Nicholas Nickleby is hired as Mr Squeers’ assistant. In this extract he sees the boys at the school being fed for the first time.

Activity 1

Read Extract 2. Look at the words and phrases in bold. Complete Word Chart 2, matching the words with the definitions.

Activity 2

Now answer the following questions:
1. What does Mrs Squeers give all the boys before they get their porridge?
2. Why don't the boys want to eat it?
3. How does she make the boys eat it?
4. Nicholas is given something else to eat with his porridge. What is it? Why does he get extra?

Activity 3

Extract 3 is one of the most famous Dickensian scenes. It is where Oliver Twist, living in the workhouse, asks for more gruel and trouble follows. Once again the food on offer is far from delicious, and there is not enough of it.

Read the extract and answer the following questions:
1. What does the wild eyed boy say he will do if he does not get more to eat?
2. How is Oliver chosen to be the one to ask for more?
3. What does the master do when he hears Oliver's request?

Activity 4

Now imagine your favourite meal. Describe it in detail and explain why you like it so much!
8. Nicholas Nickleby: Chapter 8 - Lessons at Dotheboys

In this extract Nicholas Nickleby sees his first lesson at Dotheboys.

Read extract 4.

Activity 1

Mr Squeers has a strange approach to teaching that he calls the 'practical' approach. Name three 'practical' activities the boys do at Dotheboys.

Activity 2

Compare the lessons at Dotheboys with your own lessons at school. How are they different?

Activity 3

Create a Dotheboys Timetable showing all the lessons the boys at Dotheboys might have.
9. Nicholas Nickleby: Consolidation activities

The three tasks below require you to use all of your knowledge about Dotheboys Hall.

Task 1

Imagine you are one of the boys at Dotheboys. Write a diary entry that describes your life. Try to include:

- Your thoughts about Mr and Mrs Squeer
- A description of what it is like living at Dotheboys Hall
- A description of meal times
- A description of your lessons

Task 2

You are a school inspector writing a report about Dotheboys Hall. Remember to write in a more formal style and include the following:

- Your opinion of Mr and Mrs Squeers
- An account of living conditions at the hall
- An account of the food provided
- An account of lessons

Task 3

Mr and Mrs Squeers decide to produce a leaflet to advertise Dotheboys Hall. Write the leaflet they produce. You might like to use the following sub-headings:

- Efficient hosts
- Fine living
- Healthy foods
- Practical learning
10. Great Expectations: Pip in the Churchyard

At the beginning of Great Expectations we meet the hero, Philip Pirrip. He has a strange meeting with an unusual man.

Read extract 5.

Activity 1

Read the passage carefully (more than once!) and answer the questions carefully and in full sentences.

1. Where did Pip get his name?
2. Where did Pip get his first impressions of his parents?
3. Pip thinks of his father as a square and stout man. Where did he get this idea from? Write Philip Pirrip in a square and stout style of writing.
4. What happened to Pip's five younger brothers?
5. The second paragraph describes the landscape vividly. Pick out five adjectives that are used to describe the landscape and try to explain the effect they have on Pip.
6. Look closely at the paragraph that begins 'A fearful man ... '. What impression is created of the man? What do you think might have happened to him?
7. What is meant by the phrase 'When the Church came to itself.'? What is happening to Pip at this point in the story?
8. Why does the man start to run away and then turn back?
9. The man asks for two things from Pip. What are they? Why does he want them?
10. What does the man say he will do to Pip if he doesn't do as he asks?
11. The man says he would like to be a frog or eel. Why do you think he says this?
12. Pip looks back and sees a 'gibbet'. What do you think this is? Who does Pip think the man might be?

Activity 2

Imagine Pip and the man meet again the next day, as arranged. Describe what happens, as fully and imaginatively as you can.
11. Great Expectations: Miss Havisham

In this part of the story Pip is taken to meet Miss Havisham for the first time. As you will see, she is rather strange!

Read Extract 6.

Activity 1 - Investigation!

1. Once you have read the extract several times, look closely at the writing highlighted in **bold**. Your task is to work out what has happened to Miss Havisham and these are your clues. To help you with this, you need to answer the following questions:

   - Which room is Miss Havisham in?
   - Describe the room in your own words.
   - What is she wearing?
   - Is she completely dressed? What is missing?
   - What does she seem to be in the middle of doing?
   - What state are her clothes in?
   - At what time have all the clocks stopped?

2. Now look back at your answers and work out Miss Havisham’s sad story. Explain:

   - What she was doing before the ‘crushing blow’
   - What the ‘crushing’ blow was
   - When it happened (be precise!)
   - The result on her heart and her personality
   - What she has done since the tragedy

3. Write up your findings as a psychiatrist’s report!
12. Martin Chuzzlewit: Characters

Charles Dickens is famous for creating amusing characters, or caricatures.

Activity 1

Find out what a caricature is. See if you can find any examples.

Read the extracts from Martin Chuzzlewit.

Activity 2

Complete Table 2 by translating Dickens' words into your own!

Activity 3

Choose one or two of the characters described. Draw a picture of them. Label your picture with Dickens' own words.

Activity 4

Write your own amusing character description, with a picture. Decide which aspects of your character you would like to emphasise first!