

DAVID COPPERFIELD

by Charles Dickens



THE AUTHOR

Charles Dickens (1812-1870) was the second of eight children in a family plagued by debt. When he was twelve, his father was thrown into debtors' prison, and Charles was forced to quit school and work in a shoe-dye factory. These early experiences gave him a sympathy for the poor and downtrodden, along with an acute sense of social justice. At the age of fifteen, he became a clerk in a law firm, and later worked as a newspaper reporter. He published his first fiction in 1836 - a series of character sketches called *Sketches by Boz*. The work was well-received, but its reception was nothing compared to the international acclaim he received with the publication of *The Pickwick Papers* in the following year.

After this early blush of success, Dickens took on the job as editor of *Bentley's Miscellany*, a literary magazine in which a number of his early works were serialized, including *Oliver Twist* (1837-9) and *Nicholas Nickleby* (1838-9). He left to begin his own literary magazine, *Master Humphrey's Clock*, in 1840, and over the next ten years published many of his most famous novels in serial form, including *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1840-1), *A Christmas Carol* (1844), and *David Copperfield* (1849-50), perhaps the most autobiographical of all his novels. Other works were serialized in *Household Words* between 1850 and 1859, which was then succeeded by *All the Year Round*, which he edited until his death in 1870, publishing such novels as *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859), *Great Expectations* (1860-1), and *Our Mutual Friend* (1864-5). A workaholic to the end, Dickens died of a stroke in 1870 after having penned a chapter of *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, his final (and unfinished) novel, the previous day.

As far as his personal life was concerned, Dickens was a tireless writer and speaker, but his own personal insecurities made him very difficult to live with. He married Catherine Hogarth in 1836 and, though they had ten children together, their relationship grew increasingly strained until they finally divorced in 1859. He traveled extensively, including making several trips to America (he never much liked the country or its people), and was frequently called upon to read from his own writings, drawing large and enthusiastic crowds. Dickens also spoke out on a variety of social issues, including American slavery and the lack of copyright laws that made it far too easy for unscrupulous people to steal his writings, as well as the abuses of industrial society that play such a prominent role in his novels.

Autobiographical elements in *David Copperfield* include Dickens' experience working in a factory as a child, reflections on his father's influence in his life (Micawber is largely based on Dickens' father), his work as a newspaper reporter writing on the debates in Parliament, his development as a novelist (the book is written in the first person by a writer looking back on his formative years), and his experiences in matters of the heart. Near the end of his career, Dickens admitted that, of all the "children" he had produced, he loved *David Copperfield* the most.

PLOT SUMMARY

The story begins with the widowed Clara Copperfield awaiting the birth of her first child. She receives a surprise visit from her husband's aunt, Betsey Trotwood, who insists the child will be a girl, and should be named after her. The child is, in fact, a boy, and she leaves, greatly disappointed. The boy who is born is David Copperfield, the protagonist.

His early years are happy, as he lives with his mother and her housekeeper Peggotty, but when Clara falls in love with Edward Murdstone, David's life takes a turn for the worse. When David is sent off with Peggotty to Yarmouth to spend a few weeks with her brother, he meets Emily, his first love, and her cousin Ham, both of whom are under Mr. Peggotty's care. When he returns, he finds that his mother has married Murdstone. Murdstone is a harsh, cruel man who beats David and browbeats Clara into submission with the help of his sister Jane. After David resists Murdstone's harsh treatment, he is sent off to Salem House, a miserable school under the oversight of Mr. Creakle, a brutal and incompetent master. There he meets Steerforth and Traddles - the first a hero to the youthful David, though completely unworthy of his admiration, and the second a kindly and cheerful boy who will become a lifelong friend. After a semester at Salem House, David receives word that his mother and her newborn son had died, and he returns home. It is obvious that the Murdstones want nothing to do with him. Peggotty is fired as housekeeper, and she marries the coach-driver Barkis and moves back to Yarmouth.

David, meanwhile, is sent to work in a factory in London at the age of ten. He hates his job and feels that the men and boys around him are beneath him, though he gains some consolation from the Micawber family, with whom he lodges. Micawber is an incompetent optimist, totally incapable of handling money, but constantly certain that "something will turn up." When the Micawbers leave London, David runs away from the factory and walks across the country to Dover, seeking shelter from his eccentric great aunt Betsey Trotwood. She takes him in and adopts him, refusing the claim that the Murdstones stake to him, and he lives happily with her and her feeble-minded friend Mr. Dick.

She then sends him to Canterbury to the school of Dr. Strong, a capable and kindly instructor. While in Canterbury, he lodges with Mr. Wickfield, who is Betsey's lawyer, and meets his daughter Agnes, who becomes his dearest friend. He also encounters Wickfield's clerk, the simpering and hypocritical Uriah Heep, who hides behind a mask of humility. Potential trouble looms on the horizon as we observe that Wickfield drinks too much, and that Dr. Strong's very young wife Annie may be too fond of her cousin Jack Maldon.

When David completes school, he again encounters Steerforth. The two of them visit Yarmouth, where David introduces Steerforth to his friends the Peggottys. By this time, Ham and Emily are engaged, but Steerforth notices the lovely Emily. He acts in a friendly manner toward the Peggottys and becomes popular among the townsfolk, but inwardly despises them as his inferiors.

When David returns to London, he pursues a career as a law clerk, and becomes reacquainted with his old friend Traddles, who is now studying to become a lawyer. David accepts employment

a Spenlow and Jorkins, and soon falls in love with Spenlow's daughter, the lovely but weak Dora. He courts her secretly, but when he declares his intentions, Spenlow denies his permission. Shortly thereafter, Spenlow dies and Dora is given into the care of her elderly maiden aunts.

Meanwhile, David hears that Barkis is dying and returns to Yarmouth. While he is there, Barkis dies, but the greater tragedy is that Emily, despite being engaged to Ham, has run away with Steerforth to become a lady. Daniel Peggotty vows to spend the rest of his life, if necessary, to find her. When David calls on Mrs. Steerforth, she insists that she will never allow her son to marry Emily, and will disown him if he tries. To her way of thinking, the whole thing is Emily's fault for seeking to rise above her status in society. Her companion, Rosa Dartle, who has long been in love with Steerforth, flies into a jealous rage.

David, no longer able to work at Spenlow and Jorkins, takes a job as secretary to Dr. Strong, while Micawber has become a clerk at Wickfield and Heep (Uriah has insinuated himself into the business by blackmailing Wickfield, and has been named a partner). David soon marries Dora. Though they love each other dearly, it soon becomes obvious that she is totally helpless as a homemaker, and is intellectually unsuited to her husband. David, meanwhile, becomes a newspaper reporter, writing about the debates in Parliament, and ultimately a famous novelist.

Meanwhile, Steerforth has cast Emily aside and tried to give her to his manservant Littimer. Emily runs away and finds her way to London, where she encounters Martha Endell, a "fallen woman" whom she had helped many years before. Martha tips off David and Mr. Peggotty, and Emily is reunited with her foster father, who plans to take her to Australia, where her shame is unknown.

With the help of Micawber, Traddles, Betsey, Mr. Dick, and David, Uriah's perfidy is exposed and his attempt to marry Agnes is prevented. In gratitude, Betsey offers to finance a trip to Australia for the Micawbers, who decide to emigrate along with Daniel Peggotty, Emily, Daniel's boarder Mrs. Gummidge, and Martha Endell. Betsey also regains her home in Dover, which was thought to have been lost through the machinations of Heep. Ultimately, both Heep and Littimer wind up in jail because of fraud and theft, respectively.

Following a miscarriage, Dora dies. Meanwhile, Ham is killed in a terrible storm off the Yarmouth shore; ironically, the man he dies trying to save is Steerforth, who is also killed. Peggotty, now left alone, becomes the housekeeper for Betsey, while David travels abroad for three years to assuage his grief. When he returns, he inquires about Agnes, and his aunt leads him to believe she has "an attachment." David is convinced that he has ruined any chance he had of gaining Agnes' love by treating her like a sister for all these years and seeking her advice when courting the objects of his many romantic attachments. When questioning Agnes about her "attachment," it soon becomes obvious that he is the object of it. The two profess their love and soon marry, living happily ever after.

MAJOR CHARACTERS

- David Copperfield - The protagonist of the novel, David's father dies before his birth, and his mother follows when he is still quite young. He is treated badly by his stepfather Mr. Murdstone and her sister. They send him to work in a factory at the age of ten. He later runs away to live with his great-aunt, from whence he goes to school, becomes a law clerk, then a court reporter, and finally a famous novelist. Among the many loves of his life, he marries Dora Spenlow, who dies a few years later, then Agnes Wickfield.

- Clara Copperfield - David's mother, a kind but weak-willed woman who is dominated by her second husband and dies shortly after the birth of her second child.
- Clara Peggotty - The Copperfields' housekeeper, she is unfailingly kind and loyal to David. She marries Barkis, lives for a while in Yarmouth, and later becomes Betsey Trotwood's housekeeper after Barkis dies.
- Edward Murdstone - Clara Copperfield's second husband, he is cruel and harsh to both David and his mother. He beats David after he resists his harsh treatment, sends him off to a pitiful school, then makes him work in a factory.
- Jane Murdstone - Edward's sister, she assists her brother in completely breaking the will of Clara Copperfield. She later becomes the hired companion of Dora Spenlow.
- Mr. Barkis - A kind cart-driver who transports David on many of his childhood journeys, he uses David to communicate his marriage proposal to Peggotty, who finally accepts him.
- Daniel Peggotty - Peggotty's brother, he is fisherman in Yarmouth. He is a widower who adopts his niece Emily and his nephew Ham after their parents die, and takes Mrs. Gummidge, a widow, into his home. He gives up everything to search for Emily after she goes astray, and, after he finds her, emigrates to Australia with her and Mrs. Gummidge.
- Emily Peggotty - "Little Em'ly," a beautiful young girl, is David's first love. Because of her desire to rise above her station in life and become a lady, she runs off with Steerforth instead of going through with her planned marriage to her cousin Ham. After years of disgrace living abroad, she returns to London, where her uncle finds her and takes her off to Australia.
- Ham Peggotty - Daniel's nephew and Emily's cousin, he is a fine, simple young man who wants nothing more than to marry Emily and live the life of the sea. When Emily runs off with Steerforth, he recklessly throws himself into every rescue party that is required at Yarmouth, and finally dies in a horrendous storm. Ironically, the man he swims out to save is Steerforth, who also dies in the tempest.
- Martha Endell - A young Yarmouth woman who has fallen into immorality, she is treated kindly by Emily, and plays a key role in helping Daniel to find Emily after her own fall. She, too, emigrates to Australia, where she later marries.
- Mrs. Gummidge - A widow who is taken in by Daniel Peggotty, she spends most of the early part of the novel bemoaning her lost husband. She later becomes a strong support to Peggotty in his grief, and accompanies him to Australia.

- James Steerforth - A proud, handsome young man whom David first encounters at the horrid school at Salem House, the two later become good friends, though Steerforth from the beginning takes advantage of David. When he accompanies David on a trip to Yarmouth, he meets Emily, and decides to steal her from the ruffian Ham for the sport of it. She falls for him, and the two run away without benefit of marriage. Steerforth later dies in a great storm off the coast of Yarmouth.
- Mrs. Steerforth - Steerforth's mother, who spoils him terribly and blames David, Emily, and her family for all her son's troubles.
- Rosa Dartle - A young woman who serves as a companion to Mrs. Steerforth, she was disfigured when Steerforth threw a hammer at her in his youth. She retains an unrequited love for him, and in her bitterness lashes out, first at David, then at Emily, and finally at Mrs. Steerforth, blaming them for her misery.
- Littimer - Steerforth's manservant who assists him in his scheme to seduce Emily. When Steerforth tires of Emily, he offers to let Littimer marry her. Emily then runs away. Littimer finally winds up in prison after stealing money from another employer.
- Miss Mowcher - A fat dwarf who does Steerforth's hair, she plays an unwitting role in the seduction of Emily. She vows vengeance against Littimer, who tricked her into the scheme, and later reveals his thievery to the authorities.
- Tommy Traddles - Another fellow student of David's at Salem House, Traddles is a friendly and harmless boy who is taken advantage of by the harsh master of the school. He and David become lifelong friends. He becomes a lawyer, plays a key role in bringing down Uriah Heep and his conspiracy, and marries Sophy Crewler.
- Sophy Crewler - The daughter of a country parson and the chief support of her many siblings, she marries Traddles after he establishes himself in the law.
- Mr. Creakle - The brutal master of Salem House, he beats David and Tommy whenever the opportunity presents itself. He later becomes the supervisor of a prison, and stupidly considers Heep and Littimer to be among his model prisoners because of their humility.
- Charles Mell - David's first teacher at Salem House, he is a good man who is fired by Creakle after Steerforth defies his authority. He goes to Australia and prospers as a teacher there.
- Wilkins Micawber - A cheerful man who can't handle money to save his life but is constantly convinced that "something will turn up" momentarily, David stays at his house while he is going to school at Salem House. They become friends, though Micawber is constantly being taken off to debtor's prison or threatened with a similar fate. Micawber later becomes a clerk for Uriah Heep, and plays a key role in denouncing his perfidy and bringing him down. The Micawbers emigrate to Australia, where he becomes a successful farmer and magistrate. Micawber, who constantly writes high-sounding letters, is based on Dickens' own father.

- Emma Micawber - Micawber's faithful and long-suffering wife, who constantly asserts that she "never will desert Mr. Micawber."
- Dr. Strong - The master of the school attended by David in Canterbury after he runs away to live with Betsey Trotwood, Strong is a good and kind man, obsessed with working on a dictionary that he never seems to finish.
- Annie Strong - Dr. Strong's much-younger wife, she is faithful to her husband despite the fact that her family tries to take advantage of him. She is falsely accused of being in love with her cousin Jack Maldon.
- Mrs. Markleham - Annie's mother, who lives with the Strongs and is constantly begging for money for the members of her family. Referred to as the "Old Soldier."
- Jack Maldon - Annie's cousin, a lazy ne'er-do-well who tries to seduce Annie, despite the fact that Dr. Strong finds a job for him in India.
- Mr. Wickfield - Betsey Trotwood's lawyer, David stays with him while he is attending school in Canterbury. Wickfield, a widower, cares only for his daughter Agnes. He drinks too much to drown his sorrows, and is almost ruined by the perfidy of his clerk, Uriah Heep.
- Agnes Wickfield - A cherished friend to David from the time he meets her, she patiently stands by him through a series of childish crushes, including his marriage to Dora Spenlow, though she has loved him and no one else all her life. Uriah Heep has designs on her, but he is foiled in his attempt to force her to marry him. After Dora's death, she becomes David's second wife and true soul-mate.
- Uriah Heep - Wickfield's clerk, a hypocritical, insinuating, devious villain. He manipulates all around him by pretending to be "umble," though his bitterness at the poverty of his upbringing and his hatred for all who have what he wants (especially David) drive his every action. He gradually takes over Wickfield's business, robs and cheats him, and attempts to force him to give him Agnes' hand in marriage (he also tried to stir up suspicion between Dr. Strong and his young wife about her supposed relationship with Jack Maldon). He is foiled in this attempt by a coalition of Micawber, Betsey Trotwood, Mr. Dick, David, and Traddles. He eventually winds up in prison for fraud.
- Mrs. Heep - Uriah's mother, she shares his venality and assists in his schemes.
- Mr. Spenlow - A lawyer to whom David is apprenticed after he finishes school, Spenlow is a strict man who becomes furious when David announces his desire to marry his daughter Dora.

- Dora Spenlow - A delicate young thing with whom David falls head-over-heels in love, she is both mentally and physically weak. After they marry, it becomes obvious that they are not suited for one another, though they continue to love each other deeply. She never does learn to run a household, and dies following a miscarriage from which she never fully recovers. Before her death, she tells Agnes that none but her should ever take her place.
- Julia Mills - Dora's friend and companion who assists in David and Dora's attempts to meet behind her father's back. She eventually travels with her father to India, where she marries a wealthy man and becomes an unhappy snob.
- Betsey Trotwood - David's great aunt to whose home in Dover he flees after being mistreated by the Murdstones. An eccentric, kind-hearted woman with a forbidding exterior, she loves and assists David and many other characters in the story. She is forever chasing donkeys off the lawn of her house.
- Richard Babley (Mr. Dick) - A feeble-minded man who has been taken in by Betsey Trotwood, he works continually on a long book (the Memorial) that never gets finished because King Charles I keeps intruding on the manuscript (he believes King Charles' brains somehow found their way into his head after the king was beheaded). He fastens the pages of the Memorial to huge kites, which he then flies in pleasant weather.
- Mrs. Crupp - David's landlady in London, she is lazy and a bully. When Betsey Trotwood moves in with David, Mrs. Crupp wisely stays to herself.

NOTABLE QUOTATIONS

“Whether I shall turn out to be the hero of my own life, or whether that station will be held by anybody else, these pages must show.” (David, p.49)

“As to any recreation with other children of my age, I had very little of that; for the gloomy theology of the Murdstones made all children out to be a swarm of little vipers (though there *was* a child once set in the midst of the Disciples), and held that they contaminated one another.” (David, p.105)

“Barkis is willin’.” (Barkis, p.115)

“We were very happy; and that evening, a the last of its race, and destined evermore to close that volume of my life, will never pass out of memory.” (David, p.168)

“No words can express the secret agony of my soul as I sunk into this companionship; compared these henceforth everyday associates with those of my happier childhood - not to say with Steerforth, Traddles, and the rest of those boys; and felt my hopes of growing up to be a learned and distinguished man, crushed in my bosom.” (David, p.210)

“If a man had twenty pounds a-year for his income, and spent nineteen pounds nineteen shillings and sixpence, he would be happy, but ... if he spent twenty pounds one he would be miserable.” (Micawber, p.221)

“I remember how I thought of all the solitary places under the night sky where I had slept, and how I prayed that I never might be houseless any more, and never might forget the houseless.” (David, p.255)

“But there is no one I know of, who deserves to love *you*, Agnes. Someone of a nobler character, and more worthy altogether than anyone I have ever seen here, must rise up, before I give *my* consent. In the time to come, I shall have a wary eye on all admirers; and shall exact a great deal from the successful one, I assure you.” (David, p.333)

“The time came in its season, and that was very soon, when I almost wondered that nothing troubled his repose, as I looked at him. But he slept - let me think of him so again - as I had often seen him sleep at school; and thus, in this silent hour, I left him. - Never more, oh God forgive you, Steerforth! to touch that passive hand in love and friendship. Never, never, more!” (David, p.498)

“I’m a going to seek her, fur and wide. If any hurt should come to me, remember that the last words I left for her was, ‘My unchanged love is with my darling child, and I forgive her!’” (Mr. Peggotty, p.534)

“Whenever I have not had you, Agnes, to advised and approve in the beginning, I have seemed to go wild, and to get in all sorts of difficulty. When I have come to you, at last (as I have always done), I have come to peace and happiness. I come home, now, like a tired traveller, and find such a blessed sense of rest.” (David, p.631)

“There can be no disparity in marriage like unsuitability of mind and purpose.” (Annie Strong, p.729)

“But, he led me to the shore. And on that part of it where she and I had looked for shells, two children - on that part of it where some lighter fragments of the old boat, blown down last night, had been scattered by the wind - among the ruins of the home he had wronged - I saw him lying with his head upon his arm, as I had often seen him lie at school.” (David, p.866)

“Mr. Murdstone sets up an image of himself, and calls it the Divine Nature.” (Mrs. Chillip, p.906)

“As you were then, my sister, I have often thought since, you have ever been to me. Ever pointing upward, Agnes; ever leading me to something better; ever directing me to higher things!” (David, p.916)

“We were married within a fortnight. Traddles and Sophy, and Doctor and Mrs. Strong, were the only guests at our quiet wedding. We left them full of joy; and drove away together. Clapsed in my embrace, I held the source of worthy aspiration I had ever had; the centre of myself, the circle of my life, my own, my wife; my love of whom was founded on a rock!” (David, p.938)

ESSAY QUESTIONS

Discuss the following in a five-paragraph essay:

1. Compare and contrast Dora Spenlow and Agnes Wickfield, the two wives of the protagonist in Charles Dickens' *David Copperfield*. How do the similarities and differences between the two women illuminate David's character and his growth over the course of the novel?
2. Discuss the use of foreshadowing in Charles Dickens' *David Copperfield*. In a story written in the first person by someone looking back on the major events of his life, such a technique can be used to prepare the reader for events later in the story. Choose three examples of foreshadowing in the book and discuss how they influence the reader's perceptions of events. Be specific.
3. Charles Dickens' *David Copperfield* is the story of a writer, and it contains many autobiographical elements. While the character of David is in many ways a surrogate for the author, other characters, such as Micawber, Mr. Dick, and Dr. Strong also serve to demonstrate the struggles that attend the development of the writer's craft. Using these three characters as well as the protagonist, discuss what the novel communicates about what is involved in becoming a successful writer.
4. Discuss Charles Dickens' understanding of love in *David Copperfield*. How do the changes in the protagonist's experience of love help to communicate the ideas of the author? Do you consider his view of love to be biblical? Why or why not? Be sure to use specific events and quotations from the novel to support your arguments.
5. Discuss the effectiveness with which the Charles Dickens conveys the experience of childhood in *David Copperfield*. Though the story is written from the point of view of an adult, the protagonist's memory of his childhood experiences is so vivid that the reader can see those events through the eyes of a child. How does Dickens accomplish this? Cite specific stylistic elements in your discussion of the writer's craft.
6. In Charles Dickens' *David Copperfield*, the author uses the characters of Wilkins Micawber and Edward Murdstone to convey the two sides of his own father's personality - the blind optimist who was unable to hold a regular job and was perpetually in debt, and the cruel taskmaster who sends his own son to work in a horrible factory at the age of ten. Do you think using two characters to portray the two sides of his father - and thus two aspects of his own life growing up - was an effective literary technique, or would he have communicated his own experience better by blending the two into a single character? Support your arguments with details from the novel.
7. Among other things, Charles Dickens' *David Copperfield* is a critique of the British class system - a theme Dickens often dealt with in his writings. What elements of the story help to convey the author's views of class divisions in England? What, in fact, *are* his views on the subject? Support your arguments with specifics from the novel.

8. In Charles Dickens' *David Copperfield*, the author tends to separate different characteristics of women into contrasting foils. For instance, Dora and Agnes picture women as objects of romance and as soul-mates, while Clara Copperfield and Clara Peggotty typify them as objects of beauty and gentility and nurturing domestics. Discuss the effectiveness of this use of foils by focusing on one of the pairs above. What picture of womanhood results from Dickens' technique? Is it a biblical one? Why or why not?
9. Discuss the concept of redemption as it appears in Charles Dickens' *David Copperfield*. Focus on one character who experiences redemption, and describe of what that redemption consists. Does Dickens have a biblical view of sin and redemption? Why or why not?
10. Discuss the role played by Australia in Charles Dickens' *David Copperfield*. By the time the story ends, a large number of secondary characters have emigrated. Why? What is the author trying to communicate by this literary device?
11. One of the notable aspects of Charles Dickens' *David Copperfield* is that, by the end of the novel, all the loose ends of the plot have been neatly tied up. As a reader, do you find this satisfying, or do the series of coincidences in the latter chapters strain your credulity? Use specifics from the closing chapters of the book to support your assessment of the author's plot denouement.
12. In Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*, Miss Prism, in describing her lost three-volume novel, says, "The good ended happily and the bad unhappily; that is the meaning of fiction." Whether such a conceit is "the meaning of fiction" or not, it certainly was a commonplace of the nineteenth-century English novel. One of the greatest examples of this is Charles Dickens' *David Copperfield*. Dickens created in his novels a moral universe, in which good was rewarded and evil punished. How does *David Copperfield* fit this mold? From a Christian standpoint, how do you react to such an approach to the writing of fiction? Support your conclusion, both from the novel and from Scripture.
13. Choose one character in Charles Dickens' *David Copperfield* and discuss how that character changes over the course of the novel. What causes the changes you observe? What does this say about the author's view of maturation and development, of sin and redemption?
14. Discuss the role of the narrator in Charles Dickens' *David Copperfield*. Do you consider David a reliable teller of the story of his own life? Why or why not? What aspects of the narrative lead you to trust or mistrust the point of view from which the story is being told? Use specifics to support your argument.
15. Charles Dickens' *David Copperfield* and Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* are both first-person narratives extending from childhood through a happy marriage at the end. Compare and contrast the two stories with respect to narrative technique. Be specific.
16. Discuss the extent to which Charles Dickens draws the reader into the narrative by the use of sensory imagery in *David Copperfield*. Give specific examples of this literary technique and describe how it enhances the reader's appreciation for the story.

17. Though Charles Dickens' *David Copperfield* is written in the first person throughout, it employs a dual perspective because the narrator, though writing as an adult, recounts the feelings he had when the events actually took place. How does this dual perspective influence the reader? Do you consider it an effective technique, or would a single perspective have been more helpful in assessing (or feeling) the events as they are described?
18. Charles Dickens' *David Copperfield* begins with the words, "Whether I shall turn out to be the hero of my own life, or whether that station will be held by anybody else, these pages must show." After reading the book, what conclusion would you draw? Was David the hero of his own life, or is there a character in the story more deserving of the title? Support your argument with specifics from the novel.
19. Who is the narrator's hero in Charles Dickens' *David Copperfield*? What makes this character admirable in David's eyes? What does a person's choice of hero tell you about his character? Use specific events and quotations from the novel to support your conclusion.
20. Many critics have remarked upon the extent to which the protagonist of Charles Dickens' *David Copperfield* is a passive observer of his own life. In most of the crucial scenes, David is an onlooker rather than a central participant. What is the effect on the reader of this technique? Does it keep you from really knowing or identifying with David, or does it force you to know him through the medium of his language rather than through his actions? Support your conclusion with specifics from the novel.
21. Some critics have argued that the central theme of Charles Dickens' *David Copperfield* is the education of the protagonist's "undisciplined heart." Do you agree with this assessment? Why or why not? What is an "undisciplined heart"? Support your argument with details from the novel.
22. If Murdstone and Micawber are pictured as bad fathers in Charles Dickens' *David Copperfield*, what is the author's understanding of what makes a good father? Is this concept personified by a character or characters in the book? Use specifics to support your argument.
23. In Charles Dickens' *David Copperfield*, the character of Uriah Heep serves as a foil for the protagonist. How are they similar? How do their differences serve to accentuate David's character and themes the author wishes to bring out? Be specific.
24. One of the prevailing metaphors in Charles Dickens' *David Copperfield* is that of the sea. Discuss how the image of the sea is used in the novel, and how it helps to convey the author's ideas. Use specific examples to support your argument.
25. In Charles Dickens' *David Copperfield*, the protagonist asserts that "trifles make the sum of life." Do you agree that it is the everyday events and commonplaces of life that give it its texture and meaning rather than the major crises on which people more often tend to focus? Why or why not? Support your conclusion with details from the novel.

26. Charles Dickens' *David Copperfield* is full of comic characters and incidents. Discuss the role of comedy in the story. Is it mere comic relief, varying the tone of the tale in order to set off more effectively the serious bits, or does it play an essential role in communicating the author's themes and ideas about the nature of human life? Support your conclusion with specific from the book.
27. Critic David Daiches argued concerning Charles Dickens that "the weakness of his philosophical equipment prevented him from indicating any satisfactory moral base from which to contemplate the ultimate issues of human life, and thus led him into sentimentality and melodrama in order to cover up, as it were, this lack," and thus "his solution to social problems went no further than suggesting that people simply stop behaving cruelly." How does this lack of moral base on the part of the author manifest itself in *David Copperfield*? Had he been a Christian, might he have addressed the social problems with which the novel deals differently? How? Support your argument with specifics from the novel.
28. Christian apologist Francis Schaeffer observed that Western society had for quite a while been "living on borrowed capital." He meant that, while cutting-edge thinkers in the West had long ago rejected the Bible and Christian doctrine, they still attempted to maintain a vaguely Christian morality in society despite having rejected the foundation upon which such morality was based. To what extent is the truth of Schaeffer's statement reflected in Charles Dickens' *David Copperfield*? Discuss ways in which the novel advocates Christian morality without the need for Christianity. Is this possible? Can society function in this way? Why or why not? Support your arguments with specifics from the novel.
29. The Victorian novel was often an uncomfortable mixture of Romanticism and Realism. Certainly this is true of the novels of Charles Dickens. Discuss the elements of both literary movements found in *David Copperfield*. If you were forced to choose, would you say that the novel is more Romantic or more Realistic? Why? Support your conclusion with specifics from the story.
30. G.K. Chesterton, writing about Charles Dickens' *David Copperfield*, argued that "the true way to overcome the evils in class distinction is not to denounce them as revolutionists denounce them, but to ignore them as children ignore them." Use specific incidents and characters from the novel to support Chesterton's assertion.
31. G.K. Chesterton, writing about the treatment of youth and young manhood in Charles Dickens' *David Copperfield*, said, "... the less afraid he is of his enemies the more cravenly he will be afraid of his friends. Herein lies indeed the darkest period of our ethical doubt and chaos. The fear is that as morals become less urgent, manners will become more so; and men who have forgotten the fear of God will retain the fear of Littimer. We shall merely sink into a much meaner bondage. For when you break the great laws, you do not get liberty; you do not even get anarchy. You get the small laws." Use specifics from the novel to illustrate the truth of Chesterton's comment. In what ways do we see the same tendencies at work in the youth of our own society?

32. G.K. Chesterton, when describing Charles Dickens' father, said, "He seemed only a wordy man, who lived on bread and beef like his neighbours; but as bread and beef were successively taken away from him, it was discovered that he lived on words." It is generally acknowledged that the character of Wilkins Micawber in *David Copperfield* is based on John Dickens. How does Chesterton's description of the elder Dickens fit the character created by his son? Use specifics from the novel to support your argument.
33. G.K. Chesterton, when describing Charles Dickens' *David Copperfield*, said that "he has created creatures who cling to us and tyrannise over us, creatures whom we would not forget if we could, creatures whom we could not forget if we would, creatures who are more actual than the man who made them." What makes the characters in Dickens' great novel so real to the reader? Support your arguments with specifics from the novel.
34. Literary critic G.K. Chesterton, his work on Charles Dickens, said, "It is the whole point of *David Copperfield* that he has broken out of a Calvinistic tyranny which he cannot forgive." Neither Dickens nor Chesterton was any friend of Calvinist theology. In fact, Dickens caricatured the remnants of Puritanism frequently in his books, most notably in the present case through Edward Murdstone and his sister Jane. How do these caricatures represent a misunderstanding of Calvinism? Why would genuine Calvinists repudiate the behavior of the Murdstones? Be sure to cite specifics from the novel in making your arguments.
35. Compare and contrast the views of love found in Anthony Trollope's *Barchester Towers* and Charles Dickens' *David Copperfield*. In your essay consider the authors' views on the motivations of men and women, the characteristics essential for love to blossom, and the requirements for a good marriage.
36. Charles Dickens' *Bleak House* was written shortly after the completion of *David Copperfield*. Compare and contrast the heroines of the two stories, Esther Summerson and Agnes Wickfield. Be sure to discuss both their characters and their roles in the plots of the two novels.
37. Compare and contrast the protagonists in Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations* and *David Copperfield*. Which do you think does a more effective job of character development? Which character do you find more attractive, and why?
38. Victorian novels often satirized the English educational system. One such novel is George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss*, where the schoolmaster Rev. Stelling is held up to ridicule. Compare and contrast Eliot's criticism with the treatment by Charles Dickens of Mr. Creakle in *David Copperfield*.
39. Charles Dickens was often accused of making the heroes of his books the least interesting characters in them. Such a charge has frequently been leveled against the protagonists of *Nicholas Nickleby* and *David Copperfield*. Do you agree with the critics' assessment of these leading men? Why or why not? Choose one of the novels and support your conclusion with telling details and quotations.

40. In Anthony Trollope's *The Warden*, he includes a satirical passage clearly aimed at Charles Dickens, whom he calls Mr. Popular Sentiment. Examine the passage in chapter 16 and give special attention to his description of the purposes and characters of a novel. What aspects of Dickens' writing does Trollope criticize? How does he deviate from these characteristics in his own work? Use *David Copperfield* as a source from which to draw examples to illustrate Trollope's critique.
41. The protagonist of Rudyard Kipling's *Kim* is an orphan - a condition he shares with many of Charles Dickens' heroes, including David Copperfield. Compare and contrast the portrayal of orphans by the two authors. Why does one picture the condition of the parentless child as a tragedy to be remedied while the other sees it as a source of glorious independence to be cherished?
42. Both Robert Louis Stevenson's *Kidnapped* and Charles Dickens' *David Copperfield* are coming-of-age stories. Compare and contrast the two novels, both in terms of their protagonists and in terms of the factors the authors employ to bring about the maturation process. Which of the two Davids do you find more admirable? Why?
43. Both Robert Louis Stevenson's *Kidnapped* and Charles Dickens' *David Copperfield* are coming-of-age stories. Stevenson and Dickens are both noted for their ability to create memorably eccentric characters, and this is certainly true of the villains of these two novels. Compare and contrast the money-grubbing antagonists in the two books - Ebenezer Balfour and either Edward Murdstone or Uriah Heep. Pay particular attention to their greed, hypocrisy, and the tactics they employ in seeking to gain the fortunes of the protagonists.
44. Charles Dickens is known for his ability to create memorable characters. He was particularly effective in portraying sniveling, manipulative hypocrites. Compare and contrast Seth Pecksniff in Dickens' *Martin Chuzzlewit* with Uriah Heep in *David Copperfield*. Which character is more believable? Which is a more threatening villain? In your analysis, be sure to consider the other qualities of the two men in addition to their hypocrisy and show how those other qualities influence your assessment.
45. In both Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park* and Charles Dickens' *David Copperfield*, the protagonists are not united with their soul-mates until the very end of the novel. Edmund and Fanny on the one hand and David and Agnes on the other had known each other since they were children and valued one another as trusted friends, but the men in each case were slower than the women to realize the true nature of the relationship. When they finally propose, Agnes tells David, "I have loved you all my life," while Fanny only reveals to Edmund "the delightful and astonishing truth" of her long attachment after they commit themselves to one another. Compare and contrast the two couples with regard to the development of their relationships and why the men take so long to realize the extent to which they are loved.

46. Nora Helmer in Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House* and Dora Spenlow in Charles Dickens' *David Copperfield* are both portrayed as childish and ill-equipped for the marriages in which they find themselves. Compare and contrast the two women. What are the important differences between them? To what extent are these factors of how they are treated by their husbands?