

**STUDY
REVISE** **AND**
for GCSE

Great Expectations

by Charles Dickens

- ▼ Written by experienced teachers and examiners
- ▼ Guides you to the best understanding of the text
- ▼ Get your best grade

Peter Morrisson

Series Editors:
Sue Bennett and Dave Stockwin

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Characterisation

Target your thinking

- What is the difference between a 'rounded' character and a 'flat' character? (A02)
- Why does Charles Dickens create both types of character? (A02)
- What methods does Dickens use to reveal his characters to the reader? (A02)
- For what purposes does Dickens use his characters? (A02)

Characters and caricatures

In *Great Expectations*, as in all of Charles Dickens' novels, the reader is introduced to a wide array of characters who vary in the degree to which they can be acknowledged as fully developed individuals. Dickens' 'rounded' characters are the fuller, three-dimensional figures, such as Pip and Estella. They resemble real people in that they are composed of many different personality traits which often conflict. Importantly, rounded characters are capable of change and growth. These tend to be the characters with whom we, as readers, are most emotionally involved.

There is another, far more populous, species of character in *Great Expectations*, however: the caricatures. A few of these are more developed and rounded than the others, a good example being Joe. Generally, however, the caricatures are creatures who do not show much, if any, insight into the true nature of others or themselves. Therefore, their comments on the purpose of life, or on the merits and demerits of other characters within the novel, can rarely be trusted.

The caricatures are 'stock' characters who are rarely capable of change. The caricatures exhibit a restricted range of human thought, emotion and behaviour and are essentially used to illustrate a limited number of human characteristics, such as greed, envy and self-interest. They are frequently employed in order to highlight a moral point or theme that the author wishes to express to the reader and they are often satirised and ridiculed for their own moral short-sightedness.

Such caricatures include Mrs Joe and Pumblechook. As well as providing moral instruction, both of these characters also help to create humour.

GRADE BOOSTER

When writing about character, it is important to show the examiner that you understand that characters are not real people but are instead creations of the author, which have been designed partly for the purposes of advancing the plot or developing themes.

There are also the 'darker' caricatures, such as Compeyson and Orlick. Both of these characters demonstrate that sin results in either death or imprisonment and their impact on the reader is designed to be much more serious. They help to create suspense because of the threat that they pose to the more sympathetic personalities within the novel. Furthermore, they fill the reader with a sense of moral outrage because of their cruel mistreatment of others.

GRADE BOOSTER

Try to demonstrate an awareness that stock characters are a form of caricature. Orlick and Compeyson, for example, are stock villains, whereas Wopsle is a stock fool.

How Dickens reveals character

The personality of a character can be revealed in a variety of ways:

- Through their actions – what the character does and how this affects other characters, for good or ill.
- Through their dialogue – what the character says and what other characters say about that character.
- Through their thoughts – the secret unexpressed hopes, desires and perceptions that the character may inwardly conceive but does not wish to divulge to other characters. Of course, these are more difficult to reveal in a first-person narrative like *Great Expectations* as the narrator can really have a detailed knowledge only of his or her own thoughts and feelings. The reader is unlikely to tolerate too high a level of intuitive guesswork regarding the thoughts and feelings of other characters. Such a god-like omniscience (all-encompassing knowledge) is more the preserve of a third-person narrator.
- Through the narrator – the observations of the narrator on the personality and behaviour of other characters.
- Through the author's use of imagery (metaphors, similes and personifications).

Great Expectations is a first-person narrative and, therefore, the reader should be wary of taking all of Pip's comments at face value. Dickens, however, is clearly presenting the Pip who relates the story as an individual who has arrived at a deep spiritual and moral awareness and who is, therefore, somebody the reader can trust, even though in his younger years he makes some understandable mistakes.

The character analyses that follow present evidence derived from all of the above ways in which Dickens reveals his major characters to the reader.

Pip

- Makes tremendous moral and spiritual growth throughout the novel.
- Has a natural nobility of speech and manner despite his humble origins.
- Has a strong sense of right and wrong and is very much affected by conscience.
- Falls deeply in love with Estella at first sight.
- Desperately wishes to become a gentleman so as to be worthy of Estella's higher social status.
- Suffers much unhappiness and dissatisfaction as a result of his infatuation with Estella.
- Becomes corrupted by the shallow values of status and wealth as he aspires to rise in society.
- Ultimately becomes ashamed of his own ungrateful and ungenerous behaviour towards Joe and Biddy.
- Rediscovered the naturally affectionate nature of his original childhood self.

Pip's name may well be symbolic of the emotional, intellectual and spiritual growth that he makes throughout the novel, a pip being a seed. This ability to evolve and grow distinguishes him from most of the other characters, who largely remain static.

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Dickens often associates his characters with images that provide a strong clue as to their respective personalities, for example Pip's own name. Showing an understanding of this in your exam responses will improve your mark for A02.

In the opening sentence, Pip immediately introduces himself as the novel's narrator and sets about recounting the chance encounter with Magwitch that ultimately determines his fate. The older narrator

Build critical skills

The technique of giving a character a name that reflects their personality or appearance is known as charactonym. Try to find other examples of this technique in the novel.

Symbol: the use of something concrete, for example the name 'Pip', to represent something abstract, for example spiritual growth. It is a way of representing an idea more vividly (clearly) and more poetically.

describes his younger self as 'the small bundle of shivers' (Chapter 1, p.4) who studies the graves of both of his parents and all five of his brothers. A number of sympathetic circumstances are immediately established: he is an orphan, he is frightened by the stormy weather, and he is about to be roughly manhandled by an apparently fierce and murderous convict.

In his dealings with the convict Magwitch, Pip's essentially virtuous nature is instantly established. In response to Magwitch's rough questioning, the young Pip truthfully and respectfully recounts his family circumstances, while simultaneously revealing a degree of spirit and courage that gains the reader's respect:

I was dreadfully frightened, and so giddy that I clung to him with both hands, and said, 'If you would kindly please to let me keep upright, sir, perhaps I shouldn't be sick, and perhaps I could attend more.'

(Chapter 1, p.5)

GRADE BOOSTER

Notice Dickens' skilful use of dialogue to immediately establish character. It is one of the techniques you should refer to and exemplify in the exam if asked to comment on how Dickens reveals character.

The young Pip's words reveal impeccable good manners, a mature vocabulary and a sophisticated use of grammar that is generally lacking in Dickens' lower-class characters. This contrasts sharply with the clumsy sentence structures and often inaccurately pronounced vocabulary that Magwitch uses to terrorise Pip.

Through his absolute terror of Magwitch, Pip is forced to enter into a pact involving the theft of food and a file from his foster parents, Joe and Mrs Joe Gargery. This promise causes an internal moral conflict that results in such an extreme degree of distress that it drives the plot for the first five chapters. Because the young Pip has such a highly developed sense of right and wrong, he is torn between keeping his promise to Magwitch and stealing from his beloved Joe. Dickens depicts this moral dilemma with an intensity far beyond what would be expected of a child of just seven years of age. Pip the narrator describes how his younger self agonises over 'the dreadful pledge I was under to commit a larceny on those sheltering premises...' (Chapter 2, p.10).

The next significant event in Pip's moral and spiritual evolution is his first encounter with Estella at Satis House. This meeting proves to be the cause of young Pip's dissatisfaction with his life. Almost immediately, he begins to lose sight of his own moral compass and of the moral superiority of the person who had hitherto been most important to him, his loving but child-like foster father, Joe.

His first encounter with Estella and Miss Havisham deludes him into mistaking arrogance and cruelty for superiority. This, combined with the young Estella's great beauty, results in an infatuation that prevails throughout the rest of the novel and which, until the latter stages, becomes the guiding principle that motivates Pip to seek social status over truth and integrity. Consequently, his proposed future as an

apprentice at the forge, which had long been the dream of both Pip and Joe, now becomes viewed as demeaning.

As Pip's sense of shame at the sturdiness of Joe's working boots and the roughness of his skilled blacksmith's hands suggests, only the shallow and unproductive life of a gentleman will suffice. Of course, Pip the narrator recognises the lack of wisdom in his younger self's hotly declared adolescent ambition, when he immediately qualifies it as being a 'lunatic confession...' (Chapter 17, p.129).

Towards the end of Volume I, Pip's wish to be a gentleman is indeed granted, this being part of the fairy-tale quality of the novel. As in most fairy tales, however, it is wise to be careful what you wish for. The life of a gentleman, as depicted in Volume II, leads Pip into irresponsibly extravagant ways, which quickly result in debt, depression and a lack of direction and satisfaction. Worse still, Pip's extravagant lifestyle also leads to the corruption of his best friend, the otherwise virtuous Herbert Pocket. Through Pip's severe lapses in both judgement and behaviour, Dickens demonstrates the moral inadequacies of the upper-class society into which Pip has successfully moved.

Ultimately, what restores Pip to the upright moral certainties that he possessed as a child is the knowledge that his status as a gentleman is founded on the wealth of an ex-convict. As a result, his social standing is invalid in the eyes of the snobbish upper-class world to which he has aspired. Furthermore, Pip now realises that his wealth does not derive from Miss Havisham, as he had mistakenly believed. Pip the narrator explains how it became apparent to his younger self that his hopes had all been 'a mere dream; Estella not designed for me...' (Chapter 39, p.323). The immediate realisation that follows, now that the illusion has been dispelled, is that of his own 'worthless conduct' towards Joe and Biddy (Chapter 39, p.323).

The return of this instinctive sense of right and wrong, which Pip had possessed as a child, becomes the guiding principle that steers him through Volume III, the concluding part of the novel. Pip shows compassion and affection towards the ex-convict Magwitch, secretly ensures that Herbert's fortunes are advanced, generously forgives Miss Havisham for the misery she has caused him, and reconciles himself with both Joe and Biddy, whom he now views with the respect that their upright characters so clearly deserve.

His reward for the painful spiritual journey that he has undertaken during the course of the novel is his ultimate union with his heart's desire – Estella – but not with the unfeeling damaged child of Satis House. He is to be accompanied through the rest of his life by a mature woman who, through her own painful progress, has now learnt the innate value of the unconditional love that Pip has long offered. As she openly declares

GRADE BOOSTER

When writing about character in the exam, you are more likely to gain a higher grade if you use terms that show a precise understanding of specific aspects of personality: for example, for Pip words such as 'innocent' and 'naïve' instead of 'good'.

Key quotation

'And Joe and Biddy both, as you have been to church to-day, and are in charity and love with all mankind, receive my humble thanks for all you have done for me, and all I have so ill repaid!'

(Chapter 58, p.479)

GRADE BOOSTER

The examiner will be impressed by an analysis of Pip that looks beyond his personality in order to consider how Dickens uses this character for ulterior purposes such as developing theme, for example the theme of how shallow and pointless the upper class can be.

Key quotation

Pip explains to Biddy: 'The beautiful young lady at Miss Havisham's, and she's more beautiful than anybody ever was, and I admire her dreadfully, and I want to be a gentleman on her account.'

(Chapter 17, p.129)

herself, it is a love that she had once 'thrown away when ... quite ignorant of its worth' (Chapter 59, p.484). The journey that Pip has shared with the reader illustrates the novel's essential moral theme: that it is the quality of the individual that really counts, not the eminence of their social position.

Estella

- Adopted and educated by Miss Havisham to break men's hearts.
- Beautiful.
- Proud and arrogant.
- Indifferent to her own fate and that of others.
- Under the direction of Miss Havisham for most of the novel.
- Eventually breaks free from Miss Havisham's control but only to make a disastrous marriage to Bentley Drummle.
- Exhibits emotional and spiritual growth as a result of her own pain and suffering.
- Ultimately comes to recognise the value of such powerful and positive emotions as love, forgiveness and remorse.

Estella is the heroine of *Great Expectations*. She is one of the few characters who is never mocked by Dickens' ironic narrative voice. As a result, there is a genuine element of tragedy about Estella, which arises from her status as the victim of Miss Havisham's obsessive and pathological desire for vengeance. Estella, the natural daughter of Magwitch and Molly, was adopted by Miss Havisham at the age of three in order to become a weapon against men. As Herbert says:

'That girl's hard and haughty and capricious to the last degree, and has been brought up by Miss Havisham to wreak revenge on all the male sex.'

(Chapter 22, p.177)

By this point in the novel, Herbert's assessment of Estella's character has been well confirmed to the reader by her previous behaviour towards Pip. When the two meet as children she treats him with condescension, contempt and cruelty. At their first encounter, she insolently demands to know 'Why don't you cry?' (Chapter 8, p.65). At their second meeting, the mature Pip narrates that 'she slapped my face with such force as she had' (Chapter 11, p.82), as Dickens establishes that she is consistently insulting. She then disappears from Pip's life for an unspecified period of years. While Pip has become Joe's apprentice, Miss Havisham triumphantly declares that Estella has been sent abroad:

'Abroad ... educating for a lady; far out of reach; prettier than ever; admired by all who see her.'

(Chapter 15, p.116)



▲ Estella and Pip

Miss Havisham's cruel assertion that Estella is far beyond Pip's grasp may also provide the reader with a clue to the charactonym of her name: 'Estella' means star-like. This deliberate symbolism is reinforced during Pip's first visit to Satis House when Pip the narrator describes how 'her light came along the long dark passage like a star' (Chapter 8, p.59). The image is continued when Pip describes how it was 'as if she were going out into the sky' (Chapter 8, p.64).

On her return from France as a young lady of approximately 20, there appears to be a marked improvement in Estella's demeanour. Her manners and behaviour are now those of an apparently sophisticated young lady rather than of a spiteful and spoiled child. On meeting her again at Satis House, Pip the narrator comments on how Estella was 'condescending to me as a brilliant and beautiful woman might' (Chapter 29, p.237). Beneath the veneer, however, is the damaged child who still is incapable of adult empathy, understanding and attachment.

Key quotation

...suffering has been stronger than all other teaching, and has taught me to understand what your heart used to be. I have been bent and broken, but – I hope – into a better shape.

(Chapter 59, p.484)

By the end of the novel, however, Estella has grown into a mature woman as a result of the brutal nature of her marriage to Drummle. Consequently, she is capable of recognising the value of Pip's love and

Key quotation

...I thought long after I laid me down, how common Estella would consider Joe, a mere blacksmith: how thick his boots, and how coarse his hands.

(Chapter 9, p.72)

Key quotation

'Oh! I have a heart to be stabbed in or shot in, I have no doubt,' said Estella, 'and, of course, if it ceased to beat I should cease to be. But you know what I mean. I have no softness there, no – sympathy – sentiment – nonsense.'

(Chapter 29, p.237)

Build critical skills

Again, notice the different ways in which Dickens reveals character: Estella's actions, Estella's remarks about herself, Herbert's observations, the narrator's observations and Dickens' use of imagery. Why do you think Dickens reveals evidence about his characters through a variety of means?

The most appropriate definition for the way **irony** has been used here would be 'contradiction'.

Key quotation

...she had the appearance of having dropped, body and soul, within and without, under the weight of a crushing blow.
(Chapter 8, p.61)

so finally is worthy to be his companion. Her painful journey, however, illustrates the heart-felt Dickensian theme of how adults often damage children as they mindlessly pursue their own agendas.

Miss Havisham

- Wealthy heiress and inheritor of a brewery business that she has allowed to fall into disuse.
- Locked in a time warp stemming from the exact moment at which she was jilted at the altar by Compeyson on her birthday.
- Reclusive and lives in a virtual prison of her own making.
- Fundamentally motivated by her desire 'to wreak revenge on all the male sex'.
- Egocentric and incapable of empathy until near the end of her life.
- Mentally ill and most likely anorexic.

Miss Havisham's name may be symbolic, being a compound of the verb 'have' and the noun 'sham', meaning something false. The irony of 'having' fits in well with the name of her mansion, Satis House – *satis* being Latin for 'enough'. Materially, Miss Havisham can have anything she wants, but spiritually she is clearly impoverished. Through his characterisation, Dickens demonstrates to the reader an essential moral message/theme – that wealth is not enough and that, without love, money is not worth having.

Blinded by hate, Miss Havisham wilfully chooses to live in the moment of the greatest crisis of her life, that being twenty minutes to nine on an unspecified birthday sometime in the past, when Compeyson cruelly jilted her. This is signalled by a number of facts: all of her clocks have been stopped at this time, she still wears her now heavily decaying wedding dress, and the wedding table remains set with a rotting wedding cake at its centre.

Her physical appearance is denoted at various times in the novel by such words as 'skeleton' (Chapter 8, p.58), 'corpse-like' (Chapter 8, p.60), 'grave-clothes' (Chapter 8, p.60) and 'spectre' (Chapter 17, p.125). The impression is of an under-nourished recluse whose only release from her insanity will be death. Her emaciation may well be a result of an eating disorder, to which Jaggers refers when, as Pip the narrator recalls, 'he asked me how often I had seen Miss Havisham eat and drink...' (Chapter 29, p.241).

Build critical skills

How else does Dickens use food to reveal character? Look, for example, at the theft of the pork pie and other items for Magwitch in Chapters 2 and 3, and the Christmas feast in Chapter 4.

Dickens subtly develops the connection between Miss Havisham, food and death in a variety of ways. On the table where the uneaten wedding cake decays (uneaten, that is, apart from the gnawing of hungry mice), Miss Havisham expects to be laid out when dead (Chapter 11, p.89). On the previous page (Chapter 11, p.88), she envisages how her grasping relatives will 'come to feast upon me' once she is dead. And much later in the novel, Dickens extends the metaphor when he has Pip the narrator describe Miss Havisham's desperate admiration of Estella as being as if 'she were devouring the beautiful creature she had reared' (Chapter 38, p.302).

GRADE BOOSTER

There are various reasons why a writer might use a metaphor but, in general, they are used to create a more vivid picture of the original thing that is being described to the reader. Metaphors can also make the writing more poetic, humorous or dramatic.

This pattern of cannibalistic imagery powerfully associates Miss Havisham's psychological and spiritual starvation with Compeyson's cynical rejection of her on her wedding day. It also links this rejection with her equally cynical exploitation of Estella. Furthermore, it helps to portray Miss Havisham as another genuinely tragic figure who, like Estella, is spared the comic mocking narrative tone to which so many of the other characters are subjected.

Dickens underlines both the physical and spiritual deterioration of Miss Havisham in his characterisation of Satis House. The once-thriving brewery has now fallen into disuse and both the grounds and the buildings are heavily neglected. Pip the narrator portrays it as a 'dismal' property, which is 'rustily barred' (Chapter 8, p.55) and has a 'rank garden' full of 'tangled weeds' (Chapter 8, p.64).

Again, the imagery used here is intentional. The frequent references to 'wilderness' and 'weeds' are emblematic of humanity's great 'fall'. There is a biblical echo here of Adam and Eve, who were corrupted by Satan and so fell from grace, ultimately being expelled from the Garden of Eden to the wilderness beyond. The wilderness imagery thus points to the moral corruption of Miss Havisham. The frequent references to bars suggest the way in which Miss Havisham has made herself a prisoner of the painful rejection that she cannot overcome.

Metaphor: a comparison in which one thing is said to be another thing which it literally is not, or when a thing is described as doing something which it is normally not literally possible to do. In this instance, Miss Havisham's relatives will not literally 'feast' upon her corpse.



▲ Miss Havisham

Build critical skills

Read the description of Miss Havisham on page 60 (Chapter 8), from 'It was then I began to understand...' to '...would have struck her to dust'. Compare this with the description of the wedding dining room in Satis House on page 84 (Chapter 11): 'I crossed the staircase landing...' to '...transpired in the spider community'. Consider how many parallels Dickens has intentionally created between Miss Havisham and her house in these two extracts.

Build critical skills

Consider how Dickens frequently presents Joe as a model of Christian virtue for Victorian readers of the novel. Find examples of Christian imagery in the characterisation of Joe to support this reading of him.

It is only when she is close to death and, as she prophesied, is laid out on her bridal table, that she finally is able to comprehend the extent of the harm that she has inflicted on both Pip and Estella. Her last words to Pip are an impassioned plea for forgiveness (Chapter 49, p.403).

Joe Gargery

- Comically clumsy and awkward, in both manner and speech.
- Has a natural nobility.
- Unconditionally loving and nurturing.
- Subservient to Mrs Joe.
- A formidable opponent to anybody else when roused.

Joe is one of the many static characters who do not alter, apart from by ageing, during the course of the novel. His main function is to highlight Pip's moral deterioration after he becomes a gentleman and rejects Joe for being a social embarrassment. Also, as with Magwitch, Joe is further evidence of the important social theme: that goodness is not tied to class.

Dickens' characterisation of Joe is complicated, however, by the fact that the narrative voice of the mature Pip veers between gross comic ridicule and sincere and reverential respect, a good example of the latter being in Chapter 18 when Pip the narrator refers to Joe's tender touch as being like 'the rustle of an angel's wing!' (Chapter 18, p.141).

Joe is a blacksmith and is married to Pip's elder sister, who savagely dominates the two of them through a combination of random violence and verbal humiliation. She treats both the seven-year-old Pip and the adult Joe as children and Joe readily responds to that status, blithely repeating the mantra 'ever the best of friends'.

True to his subordinate status within his own house, he is completely unable to protect either himself or Pip from Mrs Joe's habitual use of Tickler. This potential moral lapse on the part of the otherwise saintly Joe is justified in Chapter 7 (pp.49–50), when Joe explains how the memory of his abusive father towards his mother inhibits him from taking a stand, lest he too should become an abusive husband.

The paradox, however, is that despite this cowering subservience to Mrs Joe, Joe is the only character in the novel to intimidate the formidable Jaggers (Chapter 18, p.142). He is also able physically to subdue the powerful and brutal Orlick (Chapter 15, p.115).

As a result of his great timidity and frequent verbal and physical clumsiness, Joe readily becomes the object of the narrator's satirical wit. His greatly exaggerated mispronunciations of such words as 'outdacious' (Chapter 9, p.72) and 'architectooralooral' (Chapter 27, p.222) are regularly used for comic effect. He also has a habit of repeating words or

phrases obsessively, for example the word 'bolt' in Chapter 2, which gives him an imbecilic air. His sentences are often also long and rambling as he awkwardly struggles to come to the point.

When Dickens chooses to do so, however, the same character can be remarkably wise and astute, as in Chapter 15 (p.110) when he advises the adolescent Pip of the impropriety of visiting Miss Havisham again as she may suspect his motives. He is also quick to realise that the change in Pip's social status after he moves to London makes their association both uncomfortable and undesirable (Chapter 27, p.224).

As well as a natural wisdom, Joe has an innate nobility lacking in so many of the novel's characters, which, for example, makes him appreciate the value of love over money, hence his rejection of Jaggers' offer of twenty guineas in return for Pip's freedom from his apprenticeship (Chapter 18, p.141).

The depth of unconditional love that Joe offers to Pip is symbolised by fire, not just the fire in the forge where Joe pursues his trade but also the fire in the hearth, at which he and the young Pip used to sit. Joe is the young Pip's only source of warmth and affection in a world that is both literally and metaphorically cold. It is no accident, therefore, that when the mature Pip returns to the forge after eleven years of living abroad, he finds Joe once again by his hearth but, this time, in the company of Pip junior.

Abel Magwitch

- Pip's mysterious benefactor.
- Victim both of society and of Compeyson.
- Common-law husband of Molly, Jaggers' maid.
- Transported for life to Australia.
- Becomes a wealthy sheep farmer and stock breeder.
- Estella's real father, though this is not revealed until late in the novel.

Magwitch's first name, Abel, is another example of Dickens' use of charactonym. Although Magwitch may look like a desperate murderer at various points in the novel, his forename identifies him as a victim as opposed to a slayer. Cain and Abel were sons of Adam and Eve, and it was Cain who committed the first ever murder when he killed his brother. The biblical Abel is also a shepherd, which further strengthens the comparison. The religious symbolism inherent in this name ties in well with Dickens' deliberate use of the marshes, which suggest the hostile world to which Adam and Eve (and all mankind) were expelled after their rebellion against God. This is the morally flawed, fallen world that humanity has inherited. Hence the references in Chapter 5 to a 'dismal wilderness' with its 'wicked Noah's ark'.

Key quotation

'If you can't get to be uncommon through going straight, you'll never get to do it through going crooked.'

(Chapter 9, p.72)

GRADE BOOSTER

Imagery refers to the use of such techniques as metaphor and simile. An imagery pattern is when an image is repeatedly used within a text in order to reinforce an impression of someone or something. Examiners are impressed if you are able to write about stylistic features.

Magwitch is another of the limited number of characters in *Great Expectations* who grow through time. He is crucial to the development of the plot as he is the unnamed benefactor behind Pip's sudden change in circumstances. Furthermore, because he insists on secrecy, Magwitch's structural role in the novel is to enable both Pip and the reader to be misled into assuming that Miss Havisham is the benefactor and, more importantly, into assuming that it is Miss Havisham who has ultimately destined Pip to be betrothed to Estella. As well as helping to drive the action of the entire novel, Magwitch also provides much of the tension and suspense that engage the reader's interest in the opening chapters. On his first appearance, Magwitch is a desperate figure, prepared to cut the throat of a young child (Chapter 1, p.4). Dickens subtly maintains sympathy for him, however, by referring to his hunger, his various wounds and his uncontrollable shivering. His second meeting with Pip (Chapter 3, p.19) reveals a gentle and more gracious nature as he politely thanks Pip for the food. His violent struggle with Compeyson (Chapter 5, p.36), however, reminds us that this is a dangerous man.

Key quotation

'...blast you every one, from the judge in his wig, to the colonist a stirring up the dust, I'll show a better gentleman than the whole kit on you put together!'

(Chapter 40, p.332)

Build critical skills

Read Magwitch's account of his early life on pages 346–47 (Chapter 42), beginning 'Dear boy and Pip's comrade...' and ending '...wore out my good share of key-metal still'. Consider the various ways in which society has failed Magwitch and thus driven him to crime.

Magwitch is soon transported to Australia for the various crimes he committed with Compeyson and, once there, he makes a fortune. He risks all some 16 years later, to return to England to reveal himself as Pip's true benefactor. The reader's first impression of him at this point is not favourable. Dickens purposefully reminds us of his violent past by the fact that he frequently brandishes a knife and utters such threatening statements as 'don't catch hold of me. You'd be sorry arterwards...' (Chapter 39, p.315). The most disturbing aspect of his character, however, is his controlling sense of proprietorship over Pip: 'If I ain't a gentleman ... I'm the owner of such' (Chapter 39, p.321). It is also clear that his motives for advancing Pip are essentially self-serving and are bound up in his desire to assert his supremacy over an established order that has previously made him feel powerless and inferior.

It is not long, though, before Dickens tones down these initial blusters of arrogance and bravado to reveal a man who has greatly mellowed as a result of the hardships of his life. As Herbert remarks to Pip, 'I thought he was softened when I last saw him' (Chapter 50, p.405).

His reasons for making Pip a gentleman are also revised in a way that creates compassion for Magwitch. It becomes clear that he was moved by the young Pip's loyalty towards him and that Pip's sincerity rekindled the love that he felt for his own lost daughter, whom he believes to be dead until the very last moments of his life when Pip reveals that she is a beautiful and wealthy lady.

Magwitch gains most sympathy at the end of the novel, when he is once again betrayed by the villain Compeyson just as he is on the point of escaping to safety. The severe injuries that he sustains while avenging

himself on Compeyson, and his harsh treatment by a judicial system that would prefer to hang him before he can die of his life-threatening injuries, ensure his full rehabilitation in the eyes of the reader. Magwitch represents the theme of the essential goodness of a common man despite all of the social disadvantages that he has faced in life. Dickens has clearly designed him as a deliberate contrast to the corrupt and immoral behaviour of such social 'superiors' as Compeyson and Miss Havisham.

Magwitch is also crucial in Pip's rehabilitation. Pip's compassion and recognition of Magwitch's worth as a human being finally put an end to the superficial snobbery that has beset him since he became a gentleman. By the end, not only is Pip able to appreciate Magwitch's humanity, he has also learnt to appreciate the moral superiority of Joe and Biddy and, hence, the shame of his own ingratitude towards them.

Key quotation

...he pondered over the question whether he might have been a better man under better circumstances. But, he never justified himself by a hint tending that way, or tried to bend the past out of its eternal shape.

(Chapter 56, p.456)

GRADE FOCUS

Grade 5

To achieve Grade 5, students will demonstrate a clear understanding of how and why Dickens uses language, form and structure to create characters, supported by appropriate references to the novel.

Grade 8

To achieve Grade 8, students will examine and evaluate the ways that Dickens uses language, form and structure to create characters, supported by thoughtfully chosen and well-integrated references from the novel.

REVIEW YOUR LEARNING

(Answers are given on p.100.)

- 1 Name three of the methods that Charles Dickens uses to reveal his characters.
- 2 What does 'charactonym' mean?
- 3 Which of the characters reviewed in this section develop or change?
- 4 What changes take place in Pip during the course of the novel?
- 5 In what ways could Miss Havisham and Estella be seen as the victims of others?
- 6 What themes or ideas might Magwitch represent?