

# Student's Worksheet

## Outstanding British Writers

(Dickens, Shaw)

**Charles Dickens**

### Life

Charles Dickens (1812 – 1870) was the greatest representative of realism of the 19<sup>th</sup> century England and one of the world's most famous novelists.

He was born in Portsmouth as the second of eight children of a naval clerk. The family moved to London where he attended school. But his education was interrupted as his father was imprisoned for debts. Little Charles was sent to work. He pasted labels on bottles in a blacking factory. He felt humiliated both by his father's imprisonment and his work. This experience affected his whole life and can be found in his later works (e.g.: the debtor's prison in *Little Dorrit* or the blacking factory in *David Copperfield*).

A small legacy saved the family and after his father had been released from prison and had a job as a reporter, Dickens was sent to school for two more years.

After his school days he became a clerk to a firm of solicitors. In 1832 he became a Parliamentary reporter, later he worked for the *Morning Chronicle*.

In 1835 Dickens published a collection of short humorous Sketches under the pen name of Boz, which was the nickname of one of his brothers. In 1836 after a year of engagement during which he wrote *The Pickwick Papers*, he married Catherine Hogarth, the daughter of the editor of the *Evening Chronicle* and a year later the first of their ten children was born. *The Pickwick Papers* brought Dickens a fame. Within a few years he became an international literary celebrity, famous for his humour, satire, and keen observation of character and society.

After writing about 15 novels, 4 short story collections, 5 Christmas books, a lot of Christmas numbers for magazines, some poetry and even 2 plays, on 8<sup>th</sup> June 1870 Dickens died. He is buried in Westminster Abbey in London.

## Work

Most of Dickens's major novels were first written in monthly or weekly instalments in journals such as *Master Humphrey's Clock* and *Household Words*, later reprinted in a book form.

He is mainly appreciated for his true description of the life of poor people in England in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. His novels have autobiographical features, because he himself suffered a lot in his childhood. Another characteristic feature of his works is a happy ending.

### **The Pickwick Papers (The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club)**

This humorous novel made Dickens famous at the age of 24.

The main character is Mr. Pickwick – a stout middle-aged good-natured wealthy man – the founder and the president of The Pickwick Club. He and his three friends make journeys to places remote from London and report on their findings to the other members of the club. Their travels throughout the English countryside by coach provide the chief theme of the novel. The members of the club get into all sorts of droll predicaments, from which they are often extricated by Sam Weller - Mr. Pickwick's servant. The relationship between the idealistic and unworldly Pickwick and the cockney Weller has been likened to that between Don Quixote and Sancho Panza.

### **Oliver Twist**

It is a life story of a poor orphan who was born in a workhouse. He runs away from an unhappy apprenticeship to London where he meets a leader of a gang of pickpockets. He is trained to become one of them, but is rescued by Mr. Brownlow. However, he is kidnapped again by the gang and after many difficulties he finds happiness and receives the property left him by his hitherto unknown parents. Dickens believed in the triumph of good which leads Oliver out of the crime. The story has been the subject of numerous film and television adaptations.

### **David Copperfield**

This Dickens' masterpiece contains a lot of autobiographical features. David is born as a posthumous child. When he is seven years old his mother remarries. His step father treats him very badly and the things get worse after his

mother's death. David's stepfather sends David to work for a wine merchant in London. He runs away and walks from London to Dover to find his only relative - unmarried aunt Betsy Trotwood who brings him up. As David grows to adulthood, a variety of characters enter, leave, and re-enter his life. In the end David marries the beautiful but naïve Dora Spenlow, who dies after failing to recover from a miscarriage early in their marriage. David then searches his soul and marries the sensible Agnes, who had always loved him and with whom he finds true happiness. David and Agnes then have at least four children, including a daughter named after his aunt Betsey Trotwood.

The other important novels are e.g.:

**Nicholas Nickleby**

**Old Curiosity Shop**

**Little Dorrit**

**Bleak House**

**Hard Times**

**Great Expectations**

**A Tale of Two Cities**

**A Christmas Carol**

This novella is a story of Mr. Scrooge, a bad man, who becomes another person after a visit of three ghosts that show him what he is like now and what his death will be like if he doesn't improve his ways.

Reading of the story at Christmas has become a tradition in Britain and the story has been adapted into a film, an opera, a ballet and a musical.

Dickens was a great story teller, but the plots of his stories are often sentimental and always with happy endings. His heroes don't develop and are idealised. On the other hand he created a gallery of unforgettable types representing all social classes.

**Task 3: Are these statements true or false?**

**True**

**False**

- 1) Charles Dickens came from a rich family.
- 2) His childhood was happy.
- 3) His first novel was Oliver Twist.
- 4) The Pickwick Club was established as a corresponding society.
- 5) Mr. Scrooge is the main character in Hard Times.
- 6) The debtors' prison is described in Little Dorrit.
- 7) Mr. Pickwick's servant's name is Weller.
- 8) Betsey Trotwood was Dickens' aunt.
- 9) Olive Twist is a life story of an orphan.
- 10) Dickens is buried in Portsmouth.

## George Bernard Shaw

George Bernard Shaw (1856 – 1950) was an Irish playwright and a co-founder of the London School of Economics. He was born in Dublin. His father was a public servant and his mother was a professional singer.

He went to school in Dublin and at the age of 15 he started to work in an office. A year later his mother and sisters moved to London, but he stayed with his father. He joined his mother in London in 1876. He visited public libraries and the British Museum reading room where he studied and began writing novels which were rejected.

Influenced by his reading, he became a dedicated socialist and a charter member of the Fabian Society, a middle class organization established in 1884 to promote the gradual spread of socialism by peaceful means. In the Fabian Society he met Charlotte Payne-Townshend who he married in 1898. They had no children.

He started to work as a journalist and a critic, was elected as a local councillor to the London County Council and started to write plays. His first plays – **Widowers' House and Mrs. Warren's Profession** shocked the public with its open discussion of the problems of prostitution. He wrote 63 plays criticising the middle class and the social hypocrisy.

Historical themes are found in **Caesar and Cleopatra** and **St. Joan**. **Candida** and **Getting Married** deal with the problem of women and their position in the family and society. In **The Devil's Disciple** and **Major Barbara** he expresses his negative attitude to militarism.

His most famous play is **Pygmalion**. The play became also popular thanks to musical *My Fair Lady* which is based on it.

Shaw was a master of the spoken word and excelled in writing witty and interesting dialogues. He is the only person to have been awarded both a Nobel Prize in Literature (1925) and an Oscar (1938), for his contributions to literature

and for his work on the film *Pygmalion* (adaptation of his play of the same name).

### Pygmalion

Pygmalion is a satire on a high society. It's a story of a poor Cockney flower girl Eliza Doolittle who rises in society by having been given a good pronunciation and behaviour by professor Higgins.

Professor Higgins, the famous phonetician, meets Eliza in Covent Garden where she is selling flowers and he bets with his friend Colonel Pickering he will make her a lady by teaching her a good pronunciation and behaviour. He will take her to the ambassador's garden party and nobody will recognize she belongs to the lower class. After a lot of humorous scenes at the ball Eliza is really taken for a duchess. But in the end she leaves Higgins and becomes independent.

**Task 3: Who are these characters in the play? Match the items:**

Mr. Higgins

Eliza Doolittle

Fredy Eynsford Hills

Alfred Doolittle

Mrs. Higgins

Colonel Pickering

Mrs. Eynsford Hills

Mr. Higgin's mother

Eliza's father

Professor of phonetics

Mr. Higgin's old friend

A man who loves Eliza

Fredy's mother

Cockney flower girl

**Task 4: The Shaw's play is called Pygmalion. Who was Pygmalion?**

**Task 5: Eliza is a Cockney flower girl. What is it Cockney?**

**Task 6: Translate this from Cockney to English:**

- a) The joint of beef is out for Judy and Punch.
- b) Don't raise yer Rolls to yer trouble and strife.



INVESTICE DO ROZVOJE VZDĚLÁVÁNÍ