

You little devil!

Read the passages below from Chapter 1 of *Great Expectations* by Charles Dickens and answer the questions underneath each passage.

'At such a time I found out for certain, that this bleak place overgrown with nettles was the churchyard; and that Philip Pirrip, late of this parish, and also Georgiana wife of the above, were dead and buried; and that Alexander, Bartholomew, Abraham, Tobias, and Roger, infant children of the aforesaid, were also dead and buried; and that the dark flat wilderness beyond the churchyard, intersected with dykes and mounds and gates, with scattered cattle feeding on it, was the marshes; and that the low leaden line beyond, was the river; and that the distant savage lair from which the wind was rushing, was the sea; and that the small bundle of shivers growing afraid of it all and beginning to cry, was Pip.'

1. What do you notice about the sentence structure above?
2. What effect does it create?
3. Underline all the words/adjectives to do with darkness and sadness in this passage. What mood/atmosphere is created?

"Hold your noise!" cried a terrible voice, as a man started up from among the graves at the side of the church porch. "Keep still, you little devil, or I'll cut your throat!"

4. What is your first impression of this mysterious figure?
5. How does Dickens surprise the reader?

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‘A fearful man, all in coarse grey, with a great iron on his leg. A man with no hat, and with broken shoes, and with an old rag tied round his head. A man who had been soaked in water, and smothered in mud, and lamed by stones, and cut by flints, and stung by nettles, and torn by briars; who limped, and shivered, and glared and growled; and whose teeth chattered in his head as he seized me by the chin.’

6. Underline all the verbs in this passage.
7. What impression do we get of the convict from these verbs?

“O! Don’t cut my throat, sir,” I pleaded in terror. “Pray don’t do it, sir.”

8. Underline the emotive language in the quotation above. What effect does it create?

‘After darkly looking at his leg and me several times, he came closer to my tombstone, took me by both arms, and tilted me back as far as he could hold me; so that his eyes looked most powerfully down into mine, and mine looked most helplessly up into his.’

“Now lookee here,” he said, “the question being whether you’re to be let to live. You know what a file is?”

“Yes, sir.”

“And you know what wittles is?”

“Yes, sir.”

After each question he tilted me over a little more, so as to give me a greater sense of helplessness and danger.”

9. How do these passages build up tension?

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“There, sir!” I timidly explained. “Also Georgiana. That’s my mother.”

10. Underline the adverb in this passage. What effect does it create?

‘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.”’

11. What is the effect of using the first person?

‘At the same time, he hugged his shuddering body in both his arms – clasping himself, as if to hold himself together – and limped towards the low church wall.’

12. How does Dickens create an image of vulnerability?

13. What is surprising about this?

‘my young eyes ...’

14. What is significant about this phrase?

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‘... the sky was just a row of long angry red lines and dense black lines intermixed. On the edge of the river I could faintly make out the only two black things in all the prospect that seemed to be standing upright; one of these was the beacon by which the sailors steered – like an unhooped cask upon a pole – an ugly thing when you were near it; the other a gibbet, with some chains hanging to it which had once held a pirate. The man was limping on towards this latter, as if he were the pirate come to life, and come down, and going back to hook himself up again.’

15. What techniques have been used in this passage? What effect do they create?

‘I looked all round for the horrible young man, and could see no signs of him. But, now I was frightened again, and ran home without stopping.’

16. What is effective about the ending of this chapter?

Extension questions

17. What impression do you get of the character of Pip in this opening chapter? Support your answer with quotations (PEE).

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18. How does Dickens create tension and suspense in this chapter through:

- setting
- characterisation
- mood/tone?

19. *What do you expect to happen in the rest of the novel?* Give reasons to support your ideas.

Writing task

Write the opening chapter to a novel creating tension and suspense throughout.

- Think about your setting and characterisation
- Give your chapter an interesting title
- Hook the reader from the opening paragraph
- End on a cliff-hanger?

You might include:

- Short sentences for effect
- Ellipsis
- Adjectives/adverbs
- Figurative language (similes, metaphors, personification)
- Repetition
- Senses