

## Themes

Below are some of the themes in the novel. Try to answer the questions and write notes on how these themes connect to the **characters**, **plot** and **setting**. Then add in any other themes you can think of.

<b>Wealth</b>	How many ways can you find in which the characters perceive the meaning of wealth in different ways? For example, Pip tries to improve his social status by spending his newly acquired wealth. How do other characters measure wealth and how important is it to them? Does wealth affect decisions made by the characters?
<b>Love</b>	Love is presented in different ways in this novel. You see romance, love of family, infatuation, and friendship among other kinds of love. Who loves who and in what ways?
<b>Deceit</b>	This novel deals with the aspirations of a number of characters who use deceit. Which characters are deceitful and which are honest? Are there occasions why deceit actually works for good? Do any characters deceive themselves?
<b>Society or Class</b>	Victorian society was very rigid. It was very difficult to move between classes. Do you see the barriers between classes in this novel? Try drawing a diagram of the characters' social hierarchy. What does Pip lose, and what does he gain from his efforts to be a 'gentleman'?
<b>Time</b>	Dickens measures time in different ways throughout this novel. Some characters are impatient and want a speedy result. In other ways time moves very slowly and a character may be stuck in time somewhere. For which characters is time important?
<b>Criminality/ Right and Wrong/ The Law Justice</b>	Do you consider that Dickens was asking people to consider how just the legal system was in 1860? Do the punishments fit the crimes? Is social status a factor in the way the law is carried out? Are we being asked to think about what is right and wrong? If so, what do you think is right and wrong in the novel?



Write notes on any themes you would like to add. Try to rank the themes and decide which are most important. What evidence/quotations have you found to support your ideas? Are these themes connected to settings in any way (for example, Miss Havisham and the theme of time is connected to the interior of her mansion, Satis House and the objects within it)? Share your list with others. Are your views the same or different to others'?

## Quotations and themes

Fill in the table below. The first one has been done for you. For the last two themes try also to find some relevant quotations from the novel to support your explanation.

Quote	Theme	Explanation
"I wished Joe had been rather more genteelly brought up, and then I should have been so too."	Class	Pip wants to belong to the world of Miss Haversham but he is well aware of his shortcomings in their eyes and he does not know what might be the correct response in their eyes.
"I wonder he didn't marry her and get all the property," said I."	Wealth	
"The marriage day was fixed... she afterwards stopped all the clocks."	Time	

"You made your own snares.  
I never made them."

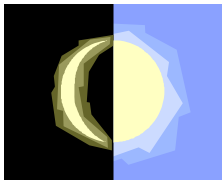
Deceit

Love

The Law

Dreams/  
Aspirations

## Signs and symbols – watch out for these appearing in the text



**Darkness/  
light**

Look at descriptions of the light in different settings reflecting the time of day, the seasons and mood. What places are dark? Does this relate to a particular event? Which characters are described as bright? How is the forge described in relation to its surroundings? Who has to use candles – and where? Look at the language that Dickens uses. Pick out words relating to light/darkness.



**The weather**

Often the weather is not good and this can relate to what is happening. For example, the mist on the marshes could be suggesting mean that something is hidden or will be revealed. Are there any other situations where the weather suggests what is happening?



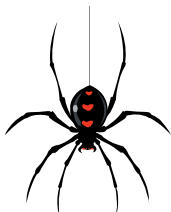
**Miss  
Havisham's  
garden**

Often references to gardens in literature are to make you think of the Garden of Eden in the Bible. This garden is the opposite. What is the message that this garden conveys to you? Who meet in the garden? What might this garden tell us about their relationship?



**Locks/keys**

Needed to shut away prisoners and to keep places locked away. Think about how secrets being locked away might relate to the keys and locks. Which characters are physically, emotionally or mentally locked?



**Insects**

Spiders have covered Miss Havisham's room with their webs. What else might this indicate? Can you find anywhere else where insects are involved?

You may have noticed other symbols in the novel. Does Dickens do this instinctively or do you think he plans this purposely to entertain the reader more? How does symbolism enrich the novel?

## Dickens as commentator

As well as being a master of telling a great story, Dickens also used his writing to comment on Victorian society. After reading an account of Dickens' life, attempt to answer the questions below. Produce a list of bullet points and note where in the text you find your evidence for your views.

## Social Status/Mobility



Victorian society held view that people had a fixed place within the social order, and they should be content with this. Who your parents were was the key to your place in society. To be 'well born' was more important than how much money you had. Those who worked hard and gained wealth would not automatically be accepted into polite society. To move up in the world was difficult. This was the class system.

- What do the characters in *Great Expectations* show you about the class system?
- Who are the characters who 'know their place'?
- Who are the characters that demonstrate mobility between classes? Who has moved from their real place in the social system? How did they manage to do it?
- Define a 'gentleman'. Who have the appearance of a gentleman and who is the *real* gentlemen?

## Work



One of the indicators of the social order was the ability to live to a high standard without the necessity of working to earn money. Dickens personally succeeded in moving class by his own efforts, through working as a writer and journalist. He was able to buy the house he had admired as a child, one way of establishing yourself in your neighbourhood. Look at what Dickens does with his characters where work is concerned.

- Who is a worker?
- How does this affect their place in society?

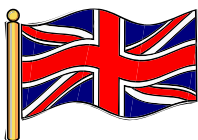
## The Law/Justice



*Great Expectations* has crime and punishment as a central theme. The death sentence was common. Convicts were transported to Australia. Punishment was often for what we would now consider minor crimes. People were imprisoned for debt.

- How many examples of crime are shown in the novel?
- What does Dickens show about the criminal system?
- What changes do you think that Dickens would hope to see?

## The status of England



This is an era where Britain had a high status in the world. England was the forerunner of the Industrial Revolution and was known as 'the workshop of the world'. This country also had an expanding overseas empire and as a result was a wealthy nation. Dickens concerns were for the bottom members of society. Wealth did not filter down to the poorest members of society.

- Where does Dickens show us how the poor and dispossessed live in this novel?