

## CHARLES DICKENS



**Charles John Huffam Dickens** (February 7, 1812 – June 9, 1870) was an English writer and social critic. Charles Dickens was born in Portsmouth, England. When Charles was ten years old, his family moved to Camden, London. He worked in a blacking (shoe polish) factory there while his father was in prison for debt. This experience left profound psychological and sociological effects on Charles. It gave him a first-hand acquaintance with poverty and made him the most vigorous and influential voice of the working classes of his age. Charles's hard times in the factory gave him ideas for many of his novels. Later Charles' father paid off his debts and was released from prison. Charles then finished his schooling and got a job as an office boy for an attorney. He found that job boring, so he taught himself shorthand and became a journalist who reported on the government. In 1834, still a newspaper reporter; he adopted the soon-to-be-famous pseudonym **Boz**. Dickens's first book, a collection of stories titled Sketches by Boz, was published in 1836.

Even though he did not have a formal education, he wrote many different kinds of works. Dickens published well over a dozen major novels and novellas; a large number of short stories, including several Christmas-themed stories; a handful of plays; and several non-fiction books. Dickens's novels were initially organized in weekly and monthly magazines and then reprinted in standard book formats.

He lectured and performed many readings. He was an active letter writer and edited a weekly journal for 20 years. He also battled for children's rights, education, and other social changes. He created some of the world's best-known fictional characters. Many believe he is the greatest novelist of the Victorian era. His works were quite popular during his lifetime and by the 20th century, critics and scholars had recognized him as a literary genius. His novels and short stories are still read by many today. A Christmas Carol, Oliver Twist, Great Expectations, and A Tale of Two Cities are his most famous works.

Dickens has been praised by fellow writers—from Leo Tolstoy to George Orwell, G. K. Chesterton and Tom Wolfe—for his realism, comedy, prose style, unique characterizations and social criticism. The term *Dickensian* is used to describe something that is like that of Dickens and his writings, such as poor social conditions or comically repulsive characters. Charles Dickens is thought of by many as the greatest creator of character in English fiction after Shakespeare. Dickensian characters are among the most memorable in English literature, especially because of their playful names. Characters such as Ebenezer Scrooge, Tiny Tim, Jacob Marley, Bob Cratchit, Oliver Twist, Fagin, Bill Sikes, Pip, Miss Havisham, David Copperfield, Mr Micawber, Abel Magwitch, Daniel Quilp, Samuel Pickwick and Uriah Heep are so well-known that they are thought to be part of British culture.

Charles Dickens died at home on June 9, 1870, after suffering a stroke. Contrary to his wish to be buried in Rochester Cathedral, he was buried in the Poets' Corner of Westminster Abbey.