Great Expectations: an EMC Study Guide
Credits

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Cover: Front cover shows Charlotte Rampling as Miss Havisham in the BBC adaptation of Great Expectations (1999); Back cover shows ‘By Hammer and Hand, all Arts doth Stand (The Forge)’, William Banks Fortescue (c.1855-1924)

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Also to David Farr for permission to use extracts from his adaptation of Great Expectations for the Old Vic Theatre Company, Bristol (2003).

Unless otherwise credited, film stills used throughout the publication are from Great Expectations (1946), d. David Lean.

Further resources

Great Expectations on film and video

Some key film and television adaptations available on video and DVD are:
• Black and white film d. David Lean (1946), starring John Mills and Alec Guinness.
• Loose adaptation of Dickens’ story (in the same vein as Clueless, although this film is still called Great Expectations) d. Alfonso Cuarón (1997), starring Ethan Hawke, Gwyneth Paltrow and Ann Bancroft.
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Using ‘Studying Great Expectations’

The guide is divided into five sections:

- Ongoing activities
- Reading the novel (includes suggestions for before and during reading, along with the text of the novel)
- After reading (includes contextual material)
- 24 Assignments
- A summary (with a chart showing the division of the novel into its original instalments on page 127).

‘Reading the novel’ contains nineteen substantial extracts from Charles Dickens’ *Great Expectations*, plus an ongoing summary of any episodes which have been omitted. Together these form a complete route through the novel, meaning there is no need for a separate text.

To allow teachers the choice of working through the extracts as they appear in this guide, or of picking and choosing their own route through, each assignment title indicates which extracts would be particularly relevant to that assignment.

The chapter-by-chapter summary on pages 121-126 could be used to ensure that pupils only reading a few of the extracts retain a sense of the novel as a whole. On the other hand, some of the most able pupils may wish to read the whole novel, in conjunction with the material in this study guide, in which case the extracts here could provide the basis for the class focus.

A wide variety of activities has been provided for each extract and it is not imagined that pupils will work through all the activities for every extract. It may be that even where pupils are reading all nineteen extracts, only certain ones will be selected for focused work.

The activities all encourage pupils to engage with the text through a variety of approaches and learning styles. Drama, media, speaking and listening, creative writing, practical and visual approaches are used throughout the ‘Reading the novel’ section, both to ensure that pupils’ interest is maintained and to provide a stimulating and accessible way into the more rigorous analysis of the text.
Charles Dickens wrote *Great Expectations* more than 150 years ago. This means that you might find some of the language a bit tricky to understand. Don’t worry if you don’t understand all the words he uses, or if the way he expresses himself seems difficult to follow at first. If you are struggling, try reading the passage aloud – the way people would have done when it was first published. If you can, read it aloud in groups with each person taking on the part of one character.

**Reading diary**

As you read you will find it helpful to keep a journal or reading diary to explore your response to *Great Expectations* and to note down anything you are puzzled about or would like to talk about in class. You could organise your ideas and questions under the headings suggested here.

- Characters and relationships
- Plot
- Themes
- The way the story is written (for example the use of dialogue, description, humour, suspense, word choices and so on)
- Anything you learn, or want to discover, about where and when the story is set

**Role-on-the-wall**

Role-on-the-wall is a drama activity which will help you keep track of your response to the characters (for example what happens to them, the role they play in the story, the way they change and develop, and their relationships with other characters). Although you can tackle this activity individually, it works best if you do it as a class.

Draw an outline character shape to represent each character in the play and stick these up on the wall. Outside each shape write comments on how the character behaves in public. Choose short quotations to illustrate the points you make. Inside each shape write comments and quotations showing what the character is really like.

Use different coloured pens to show what is learned in different extracts. This will help you to see how your impression of a character is built up throughout the novel. You could also use this template to record what is learned about the character from what they do, what they say, what others say about them and so on.
Before reading

Talking about ‘expectations’

Talk about what you understand by the word ‘expectations’. As a class collect together as many different uses of the word ‘expectations’ and ‘expect’ as you can.

What expectations do you have of yourself? What expectations do others have of you?

The story you are going to read is called Great Expectations. What ‘expectations’ does the title raise in you about the sort of story this might be?

Included below and on page 7 is a selection of images used on the cover of different editions of Great Expectations.

Look at the covers closely and use them to add to your expectations of the story.

Reading the novel – Before reading
Reading the novel – Before reading

Telling a story – a drama activity

Before beginning to read Charles Dickens’ story, work in small groups to improvise a five minute play with the title Great Expectations. Base your story on one or more of the ‘ingredients’ in each of the categories listed below.

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A novel in instalments

Great Expectations was originally published in 1861 in 36 weekly instalments in All the Year Round, a periodical (or magazine) edited by Charles Dickens. When he began to write and publish Great Expectations sales of the magazine were falling.

How do you think publication in parts might have affected the way Dickens wrote the story? Do you think the falling sales of the magazine might have influenced the story he decided to write?
Section 1 – Pip and the convict

Reading extract 1 – A meeting in the marshes

Before reading – first memories

In pairs, talk briefly about either one of your very earliest memories or your memories of something that frightened you as a child. As you talk, jot down key words and phrases to help you capture this memory in writing.

Write four or five sentences from the point of view of your younger self, re-creating what this remembered experience felt like at the time. Bring your description to life through your use of adjectives, similes and metaphors.

Read through your description and add comments from the perspective of your older, more mature self looking back. What does your older self think about your younger self and the experience you had? The example below shows you the sort of thing you might write.

Up until this point I had been under the impression that I was as tall and as grown-up as the people I could see about me.

There were giant children everywhere with huge arms and legs, all of them running towards me, swooping down to pick me up. I turned away and hid my face in my mother's skirt. A whistle blew and a tall old lady came and pulled me away from my mother. I turned round and saw her walking away. My mother had left me in this noisy, shouty place. I was on my own.

Little did I realise that this would happen day after day. For many weeks I felt sure that this time she really had left me for good.

Representations on film

Included on pages 12-13 are some still images from the first scene of David Lean’s film adaptation of Great Expectations.

Use the images to do one of the following activities.

• Tell the story of what you think is happening from the point of view of one of the characters in the scene.
• Tell a story about the characters (in the third person, using ‘he’, ‘she’ and ‘they’ rather than ‘I’).
• Describe the scene, the characters and what seems to be happening in as much detail and as accurately as you can.
• Describe the scene in a way which creates a particular atmosphere (for example sinister, mysterious, exciting or dramatic).
• In pairs, improvise a scene between the two characters.
• Give each still image a caption and explain your choices to another person.

As a class, share the work you have done on this scene and talk about the expectations you now have of the story they represent.
The first two paragraphs – who is telling the story?

Great Expectations is told from Pip's point of view. The narrator who tells the story is the grown-up Pip, remembering his childhood. Charles Dickens manages to show the reader what Pip felt like as a young child at the same time as letting us know how Pip the grown-up narrator feels towards his younger self.

Read the first two paragraphs. What do you learn about the young boy Pip? What can you tell about the older Pip who is telling the story? Can you tell what he thinks about his younger self? Look closely at the extract and pick out one or two phrases which give you a clue.

My father's family name being Pirrip, and my christian name Philip, my infant tongue could make of both names nothing longer or more explicit than Pip. So, I called myself Pip, and came to be called Pip.

I give Pirrip as my father's family name, on the authority of his tombstone and my sister – Mrs Joe Gargery, who married the blacksmith. As I never saw my father or my mother, and never saw any likeness of either of them (for their days were long before the days of photographs), my first fancies regarding what they were like, were unreasonably derived from their tombstones. The shape of the letters on my father's, gave me an odd idea that he was a square, stout, dark man, with curly black hair. From the character and turn of the inscription, 'Also Georgiana Wife of the Above,' I drew a childish conclusion that my mother was freckled and sickly. To five little stone lozenges, each about a foot and a half long, which were arranged in a neat row beside their grave, and were sacred to the memory of five little brothers of mine – who gave up trying to get a living, exceedingly early in that universal struggle – I am indebted for a belief I religiously entertained that they had all been born on their backs with their hands in their trousers-pockets, and had never taken them out in this state of existence.

Listening to ‘A meeting in the marshes’

Now listen to the whole of extract 1 ‘A meeting in the marshes’ being read out loud.

A meeting in the marshes

My father's family name being Pirrip, and my christian name Philip, my infant tongue could make of both names nothing longer or more explicit than Pip. So, I called myself Pip, and came to be called Pip.

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Ours was the marsh country, down by the river, within, as the river wound, twenty miles of the sea. My first most vivid and broad impression of the identity of things, seems to me to have been gained on a memorable raw afternoon towards evening. 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.

'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!'
Reading the novel – Pip and the convict

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.

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

‘Tell us your name!’ said the man. ‘Quick!’

‘Pip, sir.’

‘Once more,’ said the man, staring at me. ‘Give it mouth!’

‘Pip. Pip, sir.’

‘Show us where you live,’ said the man. ‘Pint out the place!’

I pointed to where our village lay, on the flat in-shore among the alder-trees and pollards, a mile or more from the church.

The man, after looking at me for a moment, turned me upside-down, and emptied my pockets. There was nothing in them but a piece of bread. When the church came to itself – for he was so sudden and strong that he made it go head over heels before me, and I saw the steeple under my feet – when the church came to itself, I say, I was seated on a high tombstone, trembling, while he ate the bread ravenously.

‘You young dog,’ said the man, licking his lips, ‘what fat cheeks you ha’ got.’

I believe they were fat, though I was at that time undersized for my years, and not strong.

‘Darn Me if I couldn’t eat ‘em,’ said the man, with a threatening shake of his head, ‘and if I han’t half a mind to!’

I earnestly expressed my hope that he wouldn’t, and held tighter to the tombstone on which he had put me; partly, to keep myself upon it; partly, to keep myself from crying.

‘Now then, lookee here!’ said the man. ‘Where’s your mother?’

‘There, sir!’ said I.

He started, made a short run, and stopped and looked over his shoulder.

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

‘Oh!’ said he, coming back. ‘And is that your father alonger your mother?’

‘Yes, sir,’ said I; ‘him too; late of this parish.’

‘Hal!’ he muttered then, considering. ‘Who d’ye live with – supposin’ you’re kindly let to live, which I han’t made up my mind about?’

‘My sister, sir – Mrs Joe Gargery – wife of Joe Gargery, the blacksmith, sir.’

‘Blacksmith, eh?’ said he. And looked down at his leg.

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.

‘You get me a file.’ He tilted me again. ‘And you get me wittles.’ He tilted me again. ‘You bring ‘em both to me.’ He tilted me again. ‘Or I’ll have your heart and liver out.’ He tilted me again.

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.’

He gave me a most tremendous dip and roll, so that the church jumped over its own weather-cock. Then, he held me by the arms, in an upright position on the top of the stone, and went on in these fearful terms:

‘You bring me, to-morrow morning early, that file and them wittles. You bring the lot to me, at that old Battery over yonder. You do it, and you never dare to say a word or dare to make a sign concerning your having seen such a person as me, or any person sumever, and you shall be let to live. You fail, or you go from my words in any partickler, no matter how small it is, and your heart and your liver shall be tore out, roasted and ate. Now, I ain’t alone, as you may think I am. There’s a young man hid with me, in comparison with which young man I am a Angel. That young man hears the words I speak. That young man has a secret way pecooliar
to himself, of getting at a boy, and at his heart, and at his liver. It is in vain for a boy to attempt to hide himself from that young man. A boy may lock his door, may be warm in bed, may tuck himself up, may draw the clothes over his head, may think himself comfortable and safe, but that young man will softly creep and creep his way to him and tear him open. I am a keeping that young man from harming of you at the present moment, with great difficulty. I find it very hard to hold that young man off of your inside. Now, what do you say?

I said that I would get him the file, and I would get him what broken bits of food I could, and I would come to him at the Battery early in the morning.

‘Say Lord strike you dead if you don’t!’ said the man.

I said so, and he took me down.

‘Now,’ he pursued, ‘you remember what you’ve undertook, and you remember that young man, and you get home!’

‘Goo-good night, sir,’ I faltered.

‘Much of that!’ said he, glancing about him over the cold wet flat. ‘I wish I was a frog. Or a eel!’

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. As I saw him go, picking his way among the nettles, and among the brambles that bound the green mounds, he looked in my young eyes as if he were eluding the hands of the dead people, stretching up cautiously out of their graves, to get a twist upon his ankle and pull him in.

When he came to the low church wall, he got over it, like a man whose legs were numbed and stiff, and then turned round to look for me. When I saw him turning, I set my face towards home, and made the best use of my legs. But presently I looked over my shoulder, and saw him going on again towards the river, still hugging himself in both arms, and picking his way with his sore feet among the great stones dropped into the marshes here and there, for stepping-places when the rains were heavy, or the tide was in.

The marshes were just a long black horizontal line then, as I stopped to look after him; and the river was just another horizontal line, not nearly so broad nor yet so black; and 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. It gave me a terrible turn when I thought so; and as I saw the cattle lifting their heads to gaze after him, I wondered whether they thought so too. 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.