

How does dickens
present the theme of
childhood in oliver
twist.

[People](#), [Charles Dickens](#)



This essay shows the theme of childhood in Charles Dickens in the book Oliver Twist. Oliver Twist's story begins with his birth in a workhouse. His mother dies shortly after giving birth to him, though long enough to kiss him on the forehead. As an illegitimate workhouse orphan Oliver seems doomed to a life of misery. Though deprived of education, affection and adequate food, Oliver still manages to triumph from rags to riches, when he finally finds happiness with his Aunt Rose Maylie and his guide Mr Brownlow. Oliver Twist is born into poverty as an orphan with no known family or inheritance. He is forced to be the property of the workhouse. He spends several years there where he is overworked, and suffers from exhaustion and malnutrition. Even though he is exposed to these injustices, he feels safe there, this being the only home he's ever known. Throughout the book Oliver has support from lots of different people, for example Fagin, Nancy, Mr Brownlow, and The Maylies. However Fagin's friendship was used for Fagin's personal gain. Oliver was exploited just as many children in Victorian Britain were. Charles Dickens was a social commentator of a period when social class was important and where lower classes were stereotyped as being evil untrustworthy crooks, and were to be avoided. Another example is the blatant anti-Semitism in the book. Fagin is constantly referred to as 'The Jew'. in Victorian times Jewish people were seen as immigrants, and people treated them with much the same discourtesy. Though in Dickensian Times racism was not a recognized form of prejudice so these comments would have been acceptable. Today it is strongly recognized and such references to his race would be unethical. Dickens spoke about social conditions at that time, and sympathized with the affected people. His childhood was a great

influence on his writing, especially in *Oliver Twist*. He himself was born into a debtor's prison and experienced similar social conditions. *Oliver Twist* starts off in the lowest class and gradually ends up in a middle class family.

Victorian society associated positive qualities with the middle class. Dickens is stating that Oliver gets social status through luck, and is the same person irrespective of his social standing. He is saying that society is unfair to judge people's characters by their social class, which is one of the main themes in the book. Oliver's family only emerges at the end of the novel, though Fagin temporarily takes the place of a father figure. This is shown when Oliver is described as "one of his boys". Mr Brownlow also acts as a substitute father when he takes Oliver under his wings and looks after him. Oliver experiences cruelty from several people. Bill Sikes is a regular abuser to Oliver, the difference here though is that he also abused Nancy, to the extent that he murdered her. Another person who is cruel to him is Mr Sowerberry, who for a short period is Oliver's master. Mr Sowerberry mistreats him until he is forced to run away. However, there are still places with kindness and sympathy shown in this novel. Such acts are shown by more prominent characters. First of all there is Mr Brownlow who takes him in off the streets and makes it his business to help him. Another is Nancy, who despite her loyalty to her partner Bill Sikes, tries to protect Oliver as best as she can. This shows a lot of kindness in Victorian Britain. Oliver is exposed to crime many times in the novel, for instance with Fagin and Bill Sikes. One of the main acts with Fagin is when he was sent out with the Artful Dodger and Charlie Bates pick pocketing. Oliver watches in horror as he witnesses Dodger attempting to steal a wallet from a respectable old gentleman, who

is later known to be Mr Brownlow. Another memorable occasion was when Sikes used Oliver's stealth and vulnerability. In one of his schemes to overturn a house; this is later discovered to be that of The Maylies. In both cases there are positive outcomes to the crimes, and they both coincidentally bring about characters like Mr Brownlow, and The Maylies, who help to secure Twist's future. After carefully studying the novel Oliver Twist, I conclude Dickens tried to socially change the way children were portrayed in Britain. He acknowledged the problem and made it his duty to make a change. His efforts worked and in our times modern day care-homes replace the orphanages of Dickensian Britain. Due to Dickens writing, the workhouses were abolished. Therefore I think Dickens did very well on awakening the society to these conditions.