

Great expectations, opening paragraph question essay sample

[Literature](#), [Russian Literature](#)



Charles Dickens wrote *Great Expectations* in December 1860. It was originally published in serial form in a magazine. The story is set around 1812 and is about an orphan, Pip, tracing his life from early childhood until adulthood. Charles Dickens was brought up in poverty and in his times if you didn't have much money life could be cruel and you could end up in debtors prison or the poor house working in terrible conditions. Dickens uses his own experience to reflect detailed accounts of wealthy middle class people to the poverty stricken working class families. *Great Expectations* is a story about love and personal development. It is also a constant learning process for Pip as well as the audience.

In *Great Expectations*, Charles Dickens uses a range of techniques to put us into Pip's perspective. Throughout the story Dickens uses the first person point of view so that you know Pip is narrating. This is effective in making us see things from Pip's point of view, and helps us understand his emotions, and how he is feeling. We can tell that Pip is older and looking back on past events because he uses sophisticated vocabulary, which we would usually associate with an adult, such as 'explicit' and 'my infant tongue'. He also says 'so I called myself Pip' this gives us the impression that the story is retrospective. A range of complex sentences are also used, which suggests an adult is narrating.

Pip is about seven years old when the novel opens; Dickens catches the reader's attention and sympathy in the first few pages. It begins with a dreary impression – the foggy marshes. Pip is alone in the cemetery and in being an orphan; we can assume he experiences aloneness and isolation

later in the novel. His views about his family's tombstones are quite humorous and convincing as the sort of misunderstanding that a child might make; they also introduce the theme of failure to communicate. The first chapter immediately involves the reader because of Pip's terrifying encounter with the convict. The terror and the helplessness of childhood are captured in Pip's identifying himself as "the small bundle of shivers growing afraid" as well as his loss and confusion of identity. The convict who terrorizes Pip also introduces the theme of crime and Pip's connection to criminality.

The characters introduced in the first chapter are important to the story. Pip is the first character to be introduced and from this we can tell he is going to be the main character. As he is alone in the cemetery we assume he is a lonely child with not many friends or family. As we read on this is confirmed as he tells us about the tombstones. We are also briefly introduced to Pip's sister Mrs. Joe Gargery and her husband Joe Gargery. Just by their names we can tell a few things about their characters; Mrs. Joe Gargery sounds hard and abrupt and we never find out her real name. By taking on the name of her husband it makes her sound quite manly. Her husband is referred to as just Joe Gargery, not Mr. Joe Gargery. This makes us feel as if he's less important than his wife and also makes him feel more friendly and approachable.

The convict is the other important character introduced in the first chapter. He is introduced quite dramatically and gives the story excitement and edge. He is first described as "A fearful man, all in coarse grey with a great iron on

his leg.” this makes him sound quite frightening but Dickens then goes on to say “ A man who had been soaked in water, and smothered in mud, and lamed by stones, and cut by flints, and stung by nettles...” this list of suffering of the convict makes us feel sorry for him and the repetition Dickens uses here also adds effect. The convict uses rough language different to Pip’s young and innocent vocabulary. This helps to give us an idea of what sort of man he is and the difference between their lives. When the convict tips Pip upside down and makes threats we are reminded of his danger but when he asks where Pip’s mother is and Pip points towards the gravestone he makes a short run before he realises that Pip’s mother is dead. This shows the convict is quite afraid and vulnerable himself. This part of the chapter not only makes us feel sympathetic towards both Pip and the convict but also is infused with humour, which captures the reader’s interest.

The setting we are first introduced to is the foggy marshes. It is quite a dreary scene and is often referred to later in the book. The description of the marshes is vivid and gives the impression of death and emptiness. I think it shows that the marshes is almost a forgotten place, “ At such a time I found out for certain that this bleak place overgrown with nettles was the churchyard...” this shows that the graveyard is not taken care of or visited by many people. I think in some ways this also shows how Pip is feeling. Pip uses words such as ‘ dark’ and ‘ flat’ to describe the wilderness beyond the churchyard, which also gives an eerie impression of emptiness. Pip then goes onto describe the sea as “ The distant savage lair from which the wind was rushing...”. This makes the sea seem scary and dangerous. The setting

makes you feel quite sympathetic towards Pip and it really shows his loneliness and isolation.

The atmosphere in the first chapter is quite scary and bleak when it is described by the adult Pip but the younger Pips description of the events give the chapter quite a comical and humorous feel. Although you feel as if at the time the events would have been serious to Pip, his childish views give the story a nice atmosphere but when the adult Pip puts his views across it becomes quite a scary and lonely atmosphere. The mix of the two atmospheres gives the story a surreal feeling and sets the scene really well.

A few of the main themes can also be detected within the first chapter.

Identity is quite a strong theme that comes across during the first chapter.

Pip's comical views on his parents show how he makes mistakes by assessing people by the way they appear not as they are. Another theme that comes across is respectability. When Pip is first approached by the convict he calls him 'sir' although he is not a gentleman and is not respectable. I think this also shows Pip's confusion about identity. Later in the story Pip is referred to as sir but he is not a nice person either. This shows that at that time people were separated by class and those who had more money were thought to be of a higher class. The convict also introduces the theme of crime and punishment to the story. I think this also part of the identity theme as throughout the story our views on the convict change. Also the theme of power and powerlessness is hinted at.

In conclusion I think the opening chapter was an effective introduction to the rest of the novel. Dickens careful use of characterisation and language adds humour to the story and his descriptive passages provide a vivid image for the reader to add suspense and tension. The themes and characters are well thought out and the plot is always moving forward. By using first person it feels as if Pip is talking to the reader, which makes the reader feel involved and intrigued as to what is going to happen next. The opening chapter is really good and gives a good impression as to what the rest of the book will be like.