

"great expectations" by charles dickens essay sample

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



“ Great Expectations” by Charles Dickens Essay Sample

In this essay I am going to study chapters 1 - 3 and discuss how the author's choice of setting helps us to understand what is happening in the novel, understand and appreciate the characters, learn more about 19th century life, understand the writers purpose and to appreciate the writers skill.

In the novel, Pip meets the convict in the graveyard, which is marshland, overgrown with nettles; it is a “ dark flat wilderness beyond the churchyard”. The writer's language is used to describe the settings and is very detailed, with lots of long, complicated words. The language also helps to show where Pip is positioned in society at this time in the novel. He helps the convict out and in return, without Pip knowing, he gets Pip to help Miss Havisham. He then gives Pip a great amount of money and property, which is progress from the poverty and struggle in the working class to the ease and richness as a gentleman in the noble class. Pip's kindness is repaid for in the end. In Victorian days a gentleman meant that you had money, you owned property and business, you did not have to work for money and you mixed in high society.

There are 4 characters that I am going to focus on in this novel and they are Pip, the convict and Mr and Mrs Joe Gargery. As Pip is the main character I will start with him. His real name is Phillip Pirrip but when he was an infant all he could say was ‘ Pip’ so he came to be called that. Pip is in the working class, which is the bottom out of the 3 main classes in those days; these are working, middle and nobility. Later on in the novel he goes up to the middle

class and he has moved from the marshlands to London. Pip is also noted as a very generous and kind character because when the convict asks him for a file and whittles, he does not only get these items but also food and brandy. He does this out of kindness because he knows that the convict is also hungry and thirsty. Pip's father and mother, Phillip and Georgina, and his 5 brothers, Alexander, Bartholomew, Abraham, Tobias and Roger are dead and buried. He is therefore an orphan and his sister, Mrs Joe Gargery, has taken him in. Pip gave up the struggle of life early on " by throwing me - I often served her as a connubial missile", he is used to the cruelty and struggle. This is significant because later on in the novel he leaves this all behind and moves to the middle class.

Mr and Mrs Joe Gargery are the guardians of Pip. Mrs Joe Gargery is more than 20 years older than Pip and she brought him up " by hand". She has " black hair and eyes, and such a prevailing redness of skin." She has a tall and bony figure and almost always wears a coarse apron and a " square impregnable bib that was full of pins and needles." She " is not a good-looking woman" and she laid down on Pip and Mr Joe Gargery quite a lot. Mr Joe Gargery is " a fair man, with curls of flaxen hair on each side of his smooth face, and with eyes of such a very undecided blue that they seemed to have somehow got mixed with their own whites." He was a mild, good-natured, sweet-tempered, easy-going, dear fellow.

In the first chapter Pip meets a convict in a graveyard. The convict is a fearful man, " all in coarse grey, with a great iron on his leg." He has no hat, broken shoes and an old rag tied around his head. He is soaked in water,

smothered in mud, lamed by stones, cut by flints, stung by nettles and torn by briars. He limps, shivers, glares and growls. He scares Pip by threatening and bullying him. This particularly shows that adults are in charge instead of children but later on in the next chapter the convict talks to Pip much more like an equal. The threatening description of the convict is significant for the rest of the novel because it scares you. However, later on in the novel he is kind and thankful to Pip, " thankee, my boy, I do." The convict's character has changed from the threatening one in chapter 1 to the gentle one in chapter 3.

19th century life had many difficulties. Many people had to struggle with problems like poverty, death, disease and cruelty. The author shows how Pip struggles with the death of his family. Pip is an orphan, which is an inconvenience for her, as she has to look after him as well as feeding and cleaning for Mr Joe Gargery. She often beat Pip; cruelty was very often used for discipline. Adults were always in-charge and children were always looked upon with less importance, the main attitude towards children in the 19th century was not to good. Mrs Joe Gargery brought Pip up " by hand", this means that she had to bring him up all by herself through the struggle and poverty of 19th century life, Pip however misunderstands the meaning of " by hand".

There were three main types of classes then and starting from the highest up in society they were the aristocracy class or nobility class, who were mostly gentlemen and ladies. Then there was the middle class or bourgeoisie class, who owned the working class. Finally there was the working class, who

were split into 2 different groups. This class system is extremely different to our system nowadays.

The author's purpose of this novel is to get across to the reader the hardships of Victorian life, overcoming adversity and the success story of Pips one act of kindness which had a knock on affect. The overcoming of hardships and adversity was very hard in Victorian times. To overcome poverty, disease, cruelty and death is very unusual but Pip overcomes his poverty, the convict's disease, Mrs Joe Gargerys cruelty and the death of his parents and 5 brothers. He only succeeds because of his one act of kindness that he performed for the convict, bringing him a file, some whittles, food and drink. This act of kindness has a knock on affect and Pip gains from this.

The author's skill is shown in many different ways. He uses a lot of detail when describing the settings. When he describes the marshlands he says " the marsh country, down by the river" " dark flat wilderness beyond the churchyard, intersected with dykes and mounds and gates," it carries on for a while because he uses as much detail as possible to give the best impression of the settings. When he describes characters he does not uses as much detail as with the settings. " a fair man, with curls of flaxen hair on each side of his smooth face, and with eyes of such a very undecided blue that they seemed to have somehow got mixed with their own whites." He does not need as much detail because you do not need to say too much about a character to picture them in your minds eye. With the plot he uses quite a lot of description to say what is happening in the novel. He also gives a few hints along the way about what will happen later in the novel. He uses

pathetic fallacy with the settings, the dull marshes are foreboding and this emphasises Pips position in society at this time. This is how the author uses language as a skill.

In conclusion to studying chapters 1 - 3 and discussing the authors choice of setting to help us to understand what is happening in the novel, understand and appreciate the characters, learn more about 19th century life, understand the writers purpose and to appreciate the writers skill. After doing this I have come up with the idea that the authors choice of settings describes each different point separately but in a different way. Also each setting helps us by reflecting on every point in someway or another.