

# Great Expectations

Charles Dickens

## Teacher notes: *Great Expectations*

**Curriculum references:** Years 5–6

**Programme of study:** Reading comprehension

Children should be taught to:

- maintain positive attitudes to reading and understanding of what they read by:
  - increasing their familiarity with a wide range of books, including myths, legends and traditional stories, modern fiction, fiction from our literary heritage, and books from other cultures and traditions
- understand what they read by:
  - checking that the book makes sense to them, discussing their understanding and exploring the meaning of words in context
  - asking questions to improve their understanding
  - drawing inferences such as inferring characters' feelings, thoughts and motives from their actions, and justifying inferences with evidence
  - identifying how language, structure and presentation contribute to meaning
- discuss and evaluate how authors use language, including figurative language, considering the impact on the reader
- provide reasoned justifications for their views.

## Running the task

- The children should have had prior experience of reading older literature.
- Explain that this extract is from a novel called *Great Expectations* and was written in the 1860s by Charles Dickens. As it is set in Kent in the early 1800s, it was a historical novel when it was written. Ask if they have heard of the author or his books – the children may be familiar with *A Christmas Carol*. Ask what they would expect from a book written so long ago. Discuss language and lifestyle differences.
- Set the scene: A young boy called Pip has met an escaped convict called Magwitch, who makes Pip bring him some food; Pip is so scared that he steals a pie from home. Talk about the situation. How would the children feel if they were in that position? What would they do?
- Explain any vocabulary. The extract is set in the marshes, which have dykes (ditches) and banks. Cannons and guns were placed in the Battery to defend the coastline from invaders.
- Read out the extract. The children should discuss it in small groups, talking about how the writer portrays Pip's feelings. Discuss how the ox is described, and how Pip thinks of all things as human (from the ox to the dykes). Have the children ever felt like that?
- As a plenary, ask the children to discuss how this scene would be different if you described it today. Encourage them to choose three sentences to write in a modern form on a sheet of paper.

## Assessment guidance

Use the list below to identify the content domains that the children are working on in this task.

Typically, children working at the expected standard will:

- show an understanding of the meaning of vocabulary in context **2a**
- make developed inferences drawing on evidence from the text **2d**
- explain and justify inferences, providing evidence from the text to support reasoning **2d**
- identify/explain how the choice of language enhances the meaning of texts. **2g**

## What to expect

- 1 In the first paragraph, which words or phrases give the impression that the narrator (Pip) is in a hurry?** (2g)

Most children should be able to pick out at least one phrase; they are particularly likely to identify “*running at everything*”. Some children working at greater depth within the expected standard will be able to identify other words that suggest urgency such as “*bursting*”, and may note that the word “*running*” is repeated later in the passage.

- 2 What words and phrases tell you that the narrator has done something *he knows* is wrong?** (2g)

There are a number of words and phrases for children to pick out. Children working towards the expected standard should note “*thief*”. Children working at greater depth within the expected standard may find more examples, including “*Somebody-else’s pork pie*”, “*awakened conscience*” and “*accusatory manner*”.

- 3 The ox reminds Pip of a minister in the church who wears a white clerical collar. What other ways did the ox make him feel bad? Tick *True* or *False* to the following statements.** (2d)

Most children working at the expected standard should be able to answer this question correctly. Children working towards the expected standard might suggest that the ox stopped him escaping. Explain that although the ox might have got in Pip’s way, the text does not provide evidence that it stopped him.

- 4 What clues in the text tell you it was written about 150 years ago?** (2a)

Children working towards the expected standard should be able to pick out obviously antiquated language such as “*such Larks*”. Children working at greater depth within the expected standard may comment that the references to leg-irons, being “*regularly bound*” and the “*Battery*” set it in the past.

- 5 How does Dickens create the atmosphere of cold, damp and mist? Pick out at least *three* phrases he uses to do this and explain how they help to create the effect.** (2g)

Most children will pick out the more obvious references to cold, damp and mist. Children working at greater depth within the expected standard should also identify the way things loom suddenly out of the mist and the condensing breath of the oxen, which make the scene more vivid.

- 6 Pip compares the cold with the leg-iron of the man he is going to meet. What effect does that have?** (2g)

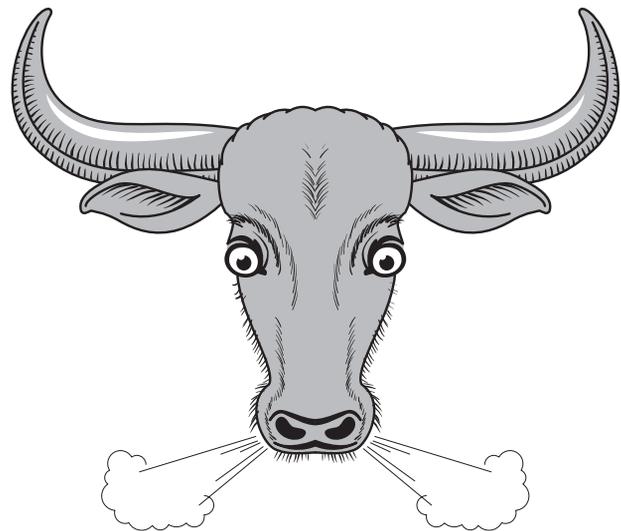
Most children will grasp that the physical feeling could be the same. Children working at greater depth within the expected standard may understand that the word “*riveted*” denotes that both are trapped and chained: the man by his leg-iron; Pip by being forced to steal, and his subsequent feelings of guilt.

- 7 What did Joe mean by “*such Larks*”? What does this tell you about the relationship between Joe and Pip?** (2d)

The children should understand that this means they will have fun. They may infer that Pip and Joe are friends or brothers, unless they understand the reference to an apprenticeship.

## From *Great Expectations* by Charles Dickens

The mist was heavier yet when I got out upon the marshes, so that instead of my running at everything, everything seemed to run at me. This was very disagreeable to a guilty mind. The gates and dykes and banks came bursting at me through the mist, as if they cried as plainly as could be, “A boy with Somebody-else’s pork pie! Stop him!” The cattle came upon me with like suddenness, staring out of their eyes, and steaming out of their nostrils, “Halloa, young thief!” One black ox, with a white cravat on – who even had to my awakened conscience something of a clerical air – fixed me so obstinately with his eyes, and moved his blunt head round in such an accusatory manner as I moved round, that I blubbered out to him, “I couldn’t help it, sir! It wasn’t for myself that I took it!” Upon which he put down his head, blew a cloud of smoke out of his nose, and vanished with a kick-up of his hindlegs and a flourish of his tail.



All this time I was getting on towards the river; but however fast I went, I couldn’t warm my feet, to which the damp cold seemed riveted, as the iron was riveted to the leg of the man I was running to meet. I knew my way to the Battery, pretty straight, for I had been down there on a Sunday with Joe, and Joe, sitting on an old gun, had told me that when I was ’prentice to him, regularly bound, we would have such Larks there! However, in the confusion of the mist, I found myself at last too far to the right, and consequently had to try back along the river-side, on the bank of loose stones above the mud and the stakes that staked the tide out.

Name:	Class:	Date:
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Read the text, then answer the questions.

1 In the first paragraph, which words or phrases give the impression that the narrator (Pip) is in a hurry?

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2 What words and phrases tell you that the narrator has done something *he knows* is wrong?

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3 The ox reminds Pip of a minister in the church who wears a white clerical collar. What other ways did the ox make him feel bad? Tick **True** or **False** to the following statements.

	True	False
It looked at him as if it was accusing him of doing something bad.		
It stared at him.		
It stopped him escaping.		

4 What clues in the text tell you it was written about 150 years ago?

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5 How does Dickens create the atmosphere of cold, damp and mist? Pick out at least **three** phrases he uses to do this and explain how they help to create the effect.

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6 Pip compares the cold with the leg-iron of the man he is going to meet. What effect does that have?

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7 What did Joe mean by “*such Larks*”? What does this tell you about the relationship between Joe and Pip?

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