

Great Expectations Study Guide

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Synopsis

Young Pip, orphaned and living with his abusive older sister, Mrs. Joe, is visiting the graves of his parents, feeling sorry for himself in the old churchyard on Christmas Eve, when he is accosted by a convict escaped from the prison galleys just over the marshes. Upon learning that Pip lives with his sister, who is married to the village blacksmith Joe Gargery, the convict tells Pip to bring him a file and food the next morning or he'll have Pip's life.

Frightened for his life, poor Pip saves his bread from dinner and raids the family pantry the next morning. He takes the file and food to the convict, but on the way encounters another man who is also clearly an escaped convict. When the first convict learns of the second escapee, he becomes agitated, and little Pip slips away as the convict furiously files away at his leg irons.

Later, as his family and friends wait for the Christmas pork pie that Pip knows he has stolen and given to the convict, soldiers appear at the door and ask Joe the blacksmith to fix a lock they need as they prepare to recapture two escaped convicts. When the soldiers move out on their mission, Joe, Mr. Wopsle, and Pip decide to tag along. They come upon the two convicts struggling, Pip's convict holding the other and calling out for the soldiers. When he sees Pip sitting atop Joe's shoulders, he says he must confess something, then confesses to stealing food and a file from the blacksmith's house. Joe is astounded, but tells the convict he is welcome to it.

Some time later, Joe's Uncle Pumblechook comes to Mrs. Joe with the news that Miss Havisham, an eccentric rich woman in town, has asked him to find a young boy to come to the house to play. With the hope that there may be some benefit to the situation, Pumblechook and Mrs. Joe decide Pip will begin going to Miss Havisham's. Satis House is unlike anything in Pip's experience, as is old Miss Havisham. Jilted in her youth on the day of her wedding, Miss Havisham has laid waste to her estate, stopping time and all progress at the minute of her devastation. Dressed always in her bridal dress, living amongst the ancient ruins of her bridal feast, Miss Havisham festers in her bitterness. Into this ruin she has brought Estella, an orphan girl whom she adopted and is teaching to live without love, to torture and destroy men's hearts with her beauty and coldness. Pip immediately becomes her first victim.

When Pip sees himself through Estella's eyes, he sees only a crude country boy, unworthy of a gentlewoman such as herself. From that day onward, he determines to make himself a gentleman. And when, several years later, the attorney Mr. Jaggers finds him to tell him that someone, someone who must remain anonymous, has given Pip "great expectations," and he must move to London to be educated as a gentleman, it appears that Pip's fortunes, and love, are made.

Charles Dickens fills this coming of age story with inciteful, absurd, and unforgettable characters as Pip grows up to learn about life, people, and himself, and discovers that great expectations come with their own risks.

Chapters LIII–LIX

Vocabulary:

In each of the following groups of words, four of the five words have the same or nearly the same meaning. Cross out the one word in each group that does not share a common meaning, then pick a word from the Word Box to replace the crossed out word.

Word Box

indelible descried fervently entreat	goad interminable abstinence derived	haggard querulous pathetically scourge	contrite sauntered vestige
---	---	---	----------------------------------

1. prod
provoke
stab
sting
tempt
-

2. refuse
implore
beg
plead
beseech
-

3. viewed
saw
commenced
distinguished
noticed
-

4. petulant
confused
peevish
complaining
fretful
-

5. obtained
gained
acquired
proceeded
procured
-

6. remorseful
regretful
penitent
unrepentant
sorry
-

7. tentative
permanent
lasting
enduring
unfading
-

8. affliction
servile
bane
curse
menace
-

9. strolled
ambled
walked
meandered
veered
-

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Analysis:

7. The first two paragraphs of Chapter LIII contain an example of two metaphors, anthropomorphism, and pathetic fallacy. Underline the words that make up these literary techniques, then write each phrase next to the appropriate technique.

It was a dark night, though the full moon rose as I left the enclosed lands and passed out upon the marshes. Beyond their dark line there was a ribbon of clear sky, hardly broad enough to hold the red large moon. In a few minutes she had ascended out of that clear field, in among the piled mountains of cloud.

There was a melancholy wind, and the marshes were dismal. A stranger would have found them insupportable, and even to me they were so oppressive that I hesitated, half inclined to go back.

Metaphors: _____

Anthropomorphism: _____

Pathetic Fallacy: _____

8. Dickens uses two cases of anaphora near the middle and near the end of Chapter LIV. What are they, and what is Dickens emphasizing with them?
9. At the end of Chapter LIV, Pip says that Magwitch “need never know how his hopes of enriching me had perished.” What does Pip mean that Magwitch’s hopes of making Pip wealthy had perished?

Do you think Pip was right to keep this information from Magwitch? Why?

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10. Chapter LV is very different from the chapters around it. Explain how it is different. Do you think it is juxtaposition or comic relief? Why do you think Dickens placed this chapter in the middle of chapters dealing with Magwitch's capture and imprisonment?
11. To what story is Pip alluding at the end of Chapter LVII when he mentions the two men who went to the Temple to pray? Where is that story found? How does that story affect the way in which you see Magwitch and his death?

Dig Deeper:

12. Who does Orlick blame for the bad things that have happened in his life? Who does Pip say is responsible for the problems in Orlick's life? Who do you think is responsible?
13. Orlick denies any responsibility for Mrs. Joe's attack, even though he also tells Pip how he attacked her. He instead claims someone else bears the blame because of the other person's, and his own, circumstances. Read Jeremiah 2:34–35; Ezekiel 18:20; Galatians 6:4–5, 6. What do these verses say about where responsibility lies for our actions? If we sin, who bears the responsibility for our sins?

How does this relate to Magwitch and his attitude at the end?

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14. In Chapter LIV, Magwitch tells Pip,

I was a-thinking through my smoke just then, that we can no more see to the bottom of the next few hours, than we can see to the bottom of this river what I catches hold of. Nor yet we can't no more hold their tide than I can hold this. And it's run through my fingers and gone, you see!

What is Magwitch saying here? Summarize his statement in your own words. What is the context of this statement?

15. Read Matthew 6:25–27, 31–34 and Psalm 139. How do Magwitch's statements compare with the verses in Matthew? According to both passages, where should we put our faith and trust for the future? Why?

16. In the last chapter of the novel, when Estella asks Pip, "And you do well, I am sure?" Pip answers, "I work hard for a sufficient living, and therefore—Yes, I do well!" What does Pip mean by this, and how is this a change from when he first knew Estella when they were children?

Read Ephesians 4:28; 1 Thessalonians 4:11–12; 2 Thessalonians 3:10–12; Titus 3:14. What do these verses say about work and what are the reasons for working? How does this reasoning correspond with Pip's attitude toward work?

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their wealth brings and then to focus on their wealth more than on God. This is the lesson that Pip should have learned from this passage, that worldly wealth does not provide spiritual salvation and nothing is more important than God, and therefore he needs to remain humble and reliant on God.

18. Answers may vary. Pip says that his sentiment—that it was a bad side of human nature—was correct, but that he was applying it to the wrong person. In other words, yes, a bad side of human nature was being shown in this exchange, but *he* was the one exhibiting it, not Biddy. The key phrase is “waiving its application,” by which he means changing the application from Biddy, as he intended it when he was young, to himself, as he now understands it looking back.

Expectations:

Pip: Expectation—We have now come to Pip’s “great expectations,” the promise of property and being raised as and becoming a gentleman. Effect—At this point, all is grand. Pip gets money, a tutor, a companion, lodgings in London. We do begin to see a sense of superiority creep in, however, along with a patronizing attitude.

Chapters XX–XXVI

Vocabulary:

Accept answers that are close in meaning. 1. harmful/good or benign; 2. generous/selfish; 3. fickle/consistent; 4. permeated/empty; 5. greedy/generous; 6. vulnerability & innocence/skeptical & hard; 7. necessary/optional; 8. embarrassment/not caring; 9. wise/foolish; 10. wild & promiscuous/well-behaved; 11. absurd/sensible; 12. matters, be of importance/unimportant, useless; 13. greed/generosity; 14. charm/repel; 15. roomy/small; 16. sullen/cheerful; 17. stupidity/cleverness

General:

1. Pip says, “while I was scared by the immensity of London, I think I might have had some faint doubts whether it was not rather ugly, crooked, narrow, and dirty.” He was not really very impressed.
2. The clerk tells Pip to walk around the corner to Smithfield and he ends up at Newgate Prison, where the “partially drunk minister of justice” offers to take him to see a trial for a slight fee, and ends up showing him the gallows, where people are whipped, the Debtors’ Door, and other macabre places. The places and the minister’s clothing, which are mildewed and clearly come from hanged criminals, give Pip a “sickening idea of London.”
3. Barnard’s Inn is a complex of what we would call apartment buildings and is where Matthew Pocket lives. Pip calls it “the dingiest collection of shabby buildings ever squeezed together in a rank corner as a club for Tom-cats.” Then in the next paragraph he makes it sound worse.
4. Pip is surprised to find that Matthew Pocket is “the pale young gentleman” with whom he fought at Miss Havisham’s.
5. He asks Pip to call him by his “christian name, Herbert,” and he decides to call Pip Handel because the composer Handel “wrote a charming piece of music . . . called the Harmonious Blacksmith.”
6. Portable property is anything of value that can be easily moved, such as the jewelry Wemmick carries. All of Wemmick’s jewelry—rings, brooches, etc.—are tokens given to him by criminals represented by him and Mr. Jaggers.
7. Mr. Jaggers instructs his housekeeper to show them her wrists. Mr. Jaggers has them notice how powerful her wrists are and tells them that he has never seen anyone, man or woman, who has stronger wrists than she does. One of her wrists is deeply scarred.