



‘Great Expectations’

by Charles Dickens

A Revision Guide from William Ellis

OCR GCSE ENGLISH LITERATURE: a guide to the examination of the 19th century novel, 'Great Expectations' by Charles Dickens

Exploring modern and literary heritage texts (J352/01)

For William Ellis students, section A is on 'An Inspector Calls'; section B is on 'Great Expectations'. Other texts will be in the exam booklet but these are for other schools.

This guide is for Section B, 19th century prose: 'Great Expectations' (chosen by William Ellis School)

Each student will need to write one essay on the novel. It will be marked out of a total of 40. The highest mark band is a level 6, the lowest a level 1. Please do not confuse these with grade levels 9–1, despite the terminology being confusing; a level 6 response will indicate those working at the highest grade levels (we presume 9, 8 and possibly 7).

The marks are allocated for different skills. You will see that A01 and A02 are the most valuable skills for this essay:

A01: 8.75%

A02: 8.75%

A03*: 5%

A04: 2.5%

What the AOs (assessment objectives) are measuring

A01: *Read, understand and respond to texts: maintain a critical style; develop an informed personal response; use textual references, including quotations, to support and illustrate interpretations.*

A02: *Analyse the language, form and structure used by a writer to create meanings and effects, using relevant terminology where appropriate.*

***A03:** *Show understanding of the relationships between texts and the contexts in which they were written.*

A04: *Use a range of vocabulary and sentence structures for clarity, purpose and effect, with accurate spelling and punctuation. (1-4 marks available)*

*What the board says about context in the 19th century prose fiction

"In this Section, candidates will have knowledge of contextual factors for their studied texts and will use this to develop their response to the question. Candidates should only refer to contexts that are relevant to the specific question asked. The questions are worded to prompt candidates to consider relevant social, historical or cultural contexts, or relevant generic literary contexts, such as the conventions of science fiction writing or the Gothic."

(Please note that this advice refers to the whole range of 19th century novels set by the board, so the reference to the Gothic is really mostly relevant to 'Jane Eyre' and 'The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde', science fiction to 'The War of the Worlds'. For WES students, it should be interpreted in relation to 'Great Expectations', and thus might

include Victorian justice, the Church, social reform, class, notions of morality, crime and punishment, the novel's publication in instalments, the traditions of the *bildungsroman*, the country and the city, gender roles and expectations, and much more.)

Students will have a **choice of two questions** on their novel.

1) **The first of these is an extract question**, where an extract is printed and a question set that links to the particular episode set but also requires an **exploration** of 'elsewhere in the novel'.

The advantage of this sort of question is that students have a piece of the novel printed in front of them and can rely on it to spark off further ideas. They have a ready source of quotations that may then evoke links (continuities and contrasts) to other parts of the novel.

An example would be a half-page extract from when Pip is first being delivered to Satis House by Mr Pumblechook. The question at the top of it could be *'Explore how Dickens presents ideas about human weaknesses through the presentation of Pumblechook, in this extract and elsewhere in the novel.'*

2) **The second style is an open question** which will follow the extract option, and is what we call, as a shortcut, a 'big question'. This style of question will present a statement or signal a particular theme and ask students to explore at least two moments from the novel to support their ideas.

The advantage of this sort of question is that it allows a greater element of choice for students and there is perhaps a wider range of ways to answer the question successfully because of its freedoms. It might be better for more confident students or those with stronger essay writing skills who can organise their own ideas effectively.

An example would be this statement: *'Mr Wemmick is the best example of a character who knows how the world works and how best to survive in it.'* How far do you agree with this view? Explore at least two moments from the novel to support your ideas.

Teacher advice:

We are not ruling out either sort of question for individual students: all students should read both options and make their own wise decision. Each question will suggest a different theme or character focus and so one might appeal much more than the other. They will be able to practise both sorts in class and for homework. However, we often find that the extract question offers a level of support because the students can *begin* with the section of text in front of them. That said, if fine language analysis and detection of thematic links are not strengths, it is not an easier option. If the extract does not come alive to the student with suggestions of evidence that can be used to answer the question after reading it closely, then looking at the open question below instead is advised.

Crucial advice for A01:

The key to answering either question well and getting strong A01 marks is organizing an argument. For the extract question, this means first briefly giving the context of the extract set (what has just happened and what follows it) whilst signaling how it provides

an example of the theme indicated being played out, and then proving this, with strong links to other parts of the novel. For the big question, the argument should open with a response to the critical opinion given and then point out how evidence linked to it can be delved into through close analytical attention to two, perhaps three, important moments from the story, backed up with fine detail.

Nobody who does not weave in literary language and apt quotations or other details that are analysed for their significance and creative impact will be able to score more than the lowest bands.

Learning quotations and using them effectively...over to you.

We are aware that this has been a stumbling block for some students preparing for mock exams on the other texts. There is no short-cut to this and teachers cannot do it for students. Without being able to use (cite) quotations or refer to identifiable details that are effectively analysed even a strongly argued, thoughtful, well written essay won't be able to reach middle or top bands.

There is no such thing as 'ten quotations you must know on *Great Expectations*'. Nor would the exam board appreciate it if we had students rote learning the same small bank of famous quotations. Examiners reward thoughtful, personal responses, not rote-learnt quotations that are mangled to 'fit' any potential question that comes up.

So, the best we can do is suggest each student comes up with a bank of their own favourites. It should be remembered that sometimes even a word or emblematic phrase might suffice, for example **Joe Gargery's 'What larks, Pip!', Mr Wemmick's constant references to his 'Walworth' self** and what that signifies, or **Magwitch's troubled apologies for appearing 'low'** when he meets grown up Pip. When you begin to think about it even for a minute, you'll remember that hearing **Magwitch call Pip 'my gentleman'** makes Pip flinch, or **Estella bullying young Pip for his 'common' ways** cuts Pip's sensitive heart, that **Pumblechook's** pumping of Pip's hand in congratulation is accompanied by **ingratiating repetition of 'May I?'**. Even those little fragments have a world of associations and ideas attached to them.

All we can do for now is suggest that, as well as these tiny little quotations that you probably hardly realise you know already, you pick out a dozen or so more, or a score if you have the stamina, and learn them. Believe it or not, it is possible. Any parents/teachers old enough to have done O levels or the first couple of years of GCSEs will tell you that, as will any student who has done A level literature in the last 10+ years.

So next is a chart to fill with some of your favourites. That done, write them on the fridge, on the bedroom ceiling, chant them to the dog, the cat or the goldfish. Doodle them, draw them or sing them. Flick through your book and look back at the ones your teachers advised you to highlight or colour in, but only write them up if you can imagine how you might use them, or if their imagery is so evocative that you like them enough to learn them and begin to think about them. Watching the good film versions again might help too (we recommend the David Lean version of 1946, and the BBC's 2012 adaptation).

Context/page:	
Quotation 1:	
Quotation 2:	
Quotation 3:	
Quotation 4:	
Quotation 5:	
Quotation 6:	
Quotation 7:	
Quotation 8:	
Quotation 9:	
Quotation 10:	
Quotation 11:	
Quotation 12:	

This is just a suggestion for the bare minimum number. Feel free to take it further. Ensure you choose ones that are memorable, and think about where each should begin and end as a poorly cut out quotation is useless.

Embedding quotations (i.e. tucking them comfortably into your sentences) and using them effectively:

Show you can analyse and weave in quotations to develop a clear and well thought out point.

Remember:

1) The noun 'quotation' (or 'quote' for short) is banned in your essay: if you are about to write it in a sentence, stop and think about what your quotation actually is. So is it, for example:

- an image, or imagery?
- an answer/response/retort/riposte?
- a plea/promise/pledge?
- a statement/threat/warning/caution?
- a metaphor/simile/motif/symbol/refrain?
- a verb/adverb/pronoun/adjective?
- a comment/remark/aside/sneer/insult?
- piece of dialogue/dialect/rhetoric/reflection/observation?

We could go on for a long time, but the point should be clear: 'quotation' should not be written. If you are about to write it, stop and think of an alternative that will allow you to gain AO1 literary terms credit instead.

2) You should never write something like 'Miss Havisham *quotes* 'Come closer, Pip'. She is not quoting, you are. Again, it should be thought of as a banned word. There are only very rare occasions when one character quotes something that has been said before, like Pip quoting his sister's phrase that she brought him up 'by hand', so it is hardly ever accurate to use it.

3) Your quotation has to fit the grammar of your sentence. This means that you either cut a word or two that isn't needed from its front or end OR, more likely, you adapt your sentence to fit the chosen quotation. The latter can't be changed as it is the author's own words.

4) A quotation should not generally appear at the start of a sentence (only very rarely does this work). Instead, it should be embedded (tucked in) as in this example:

When Pip reflects that **'Tickler was a wax-ended piece of cane, worn smooth by collision with my tickled frame'** he draws attention to some of the misery of his own childhood, taking on the irony of his sister's name for the weapon used against him in a wistfully humorous way that suggests both a lack of self-pity but also a sense of how he has survived hardship. He can perhaps forgive the wrongs done against him, as someone who has done great wrongs himself that need to be forgiven.

5) The quotation you use to make a point should be followed by some sort of analysis or interpretation. Never summarise the quotation. That is worthless.

Pick three of your quotations and create a mind-map/diagram around them. Then use your notes to write three short paragraphs. Here is an example of one.

Quotation:

Narrator in volume one describing the menacing shape of the prison ship from the marshes as they run down the escaped convicts

'like a wicked Noah's ark'



My paragraph:

When Pip describes how the prison ship first appeared to him as a child, he is clearly haunted by the memory. The grotesquely distorted simile of the ark, normally associated with children's Bible stories and the idea of the preservation of life, shows how forcefully he was struck by the experience: an image of hope is transformed to one of ugly, menacing despair. Later, when Pip moves to London, the metaphor of 'Newgate cobwebs' replaces that image, but in both Dickens seems to be reminding his readers of the grim reality of the justice system. Even those outside the prisons' walls are tainted by their existence and there are vivid reminders of the suffering of those inside, one of whom was so nearly Pip himself.

A03: Contextual comment

Context marks may be awarded for essay content that ranges across the novel, and that puts in context a theme or character (that is often how it appears in the mark scheme for the extract question), or it can be something more particular about the world of the novel, for example something that comments on the treatment of child convicts. The sample paragraph above, for example, would gain context marks, as well as A01 and A02 marks.

We have deliberately fed in quite a lot to do with this over our reading of the whole novel, as your homework booklet from the spring will remind you, amongst other things.

Three of the most important contextual themes to explore are undoubtedly:

- crime and punishment
- the idea of the 'gentleman'
- women in Victorian England

You will be given some extra work on these areas to do at home over the half-term, but you may also want to look at some useful websites. We particularly recommend the British Library site <https://www.bl.uk/victorian-britain> (it has some perfect material on 'GE' here) and the Victorian Web: <http://www.victorianweb.org>

Interpreting mark schemes:

To be perfectly honest, these are of limited value, in one sense, to those untrained to read them, in that sometimes they are full of adjectives that can be susceptible to being valued differently. Teachers tend to get to get to know what is meant and are used to their quite subjective terms. Here is the level 5 (old style B+?) descriptor. The one above it relies on words like ‘perceptive’, ‘sustained’, ‘skilfully interwoven’ to mark the difference. The one below tends to use ‘some’ to suggest unevenness, the very lowest descriptors rely on the word ‘limited’ and other synonyms. Remember up to 4 marks are added for A04.

Level 5 (25–30 marks)

Convincing critical style in a well-developed personal response to both text and task

- Convincing critical style maintained in a well-developed personal response to the text, showing some insightful understanding (AO1)
- Textual references and quotations are well–selected and fully integrated (AO1)
- Thoughtful and developed analysis of writer’s use of language, form and structure to create meanings and effects (AO2)
- Good use of relevant subject terminology (AO2)
- Convincing understanding of context which informs the response to the text (AO3)

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