

RAINFORD HIGH ENGLISH DEPARTMENT – YEAR 8 VICTORIAN LITERATURE KNOWLEDGE ORGANISER

Symbolism:

Oliver Twist

Characters' Names: The names of characters represent personal qualities. The name “Twist,” alludes to the reversals of fortune that he will experience.

London Bridge: Bridges exist to link two places that would otherwise be separated. The meeting on London Bridge represents the collision of two worlds unlikely ever to come into contact—the idyllic world of Brownlow and Rose, and the atmosphere of degradation in which Nancy lives.

Jane Eyre

The Red-Room: This can be viewed as a symbol of what Jane must overcome in her struggles to find freedom, happiness, and belonging. Here, Jane's position of exile and imprisonment first becomes clear.

David Copperfield

The Sea: The sea represents an unknown and powerful force in the lives of the characters and it is almost always connected with death.

Like death, the force of the sea is beyond human control.

Flowers: Represent simplicity and innocence. For example, David has the nickname ‘Daisy’ as he is naïve.

Motifs:

David Copperfield

Mothers and Mother Figures - Almost invariably, good mother figures produce good children while bad mothers yield sinister offspring.

Physical Beauty - Physical beauty corresponds to moral good. Those who are physically beautiful, like David's mother, are good and noble, while those who are ugly, like Mr. Murdstone, are evil, violent, and ill-tempered.

Oliver Twist

Disguised or Mistaken Identities - The plot revolves around the various false identities that other characters impose upon Oliver, often for the sake of advancing their own interests. Only when every character's identity is known with certainty does the story achieve real closure.

Surrogate Families - Before Oliver finds his real family, a number of individuals serve him as substitute parents, mostly with very limited success.

Jane Eyre

Substitute Mothers - Jane encounters a series of nurturing and strong women on whom she can model herself, or to whom she can look for comfort and guidance: these women serve as mother-figures to the orphaned Jane.

Fire and Ice – This appears throughout the novel. Fire represents Jane's passions, anger, and spirit, while ice symbolizes the oppressive forces trying to extinguish Jane's vitality. Fire is also a metaphor for Jane, as the narrative repeatedly associates her with images of fire, brightness, and warmth.

Key Themes:

Gender: Rights and privileges of Victorian women were limited, and women had to live with hardships and disadvantages. Gender roles strongly influenced people's behavior and identities, and women endured condescending attitudes about a woman's place, intelligence, and voice. There were sharp distinctions between men's and women's rights during this era; men were allotted more stability, financial status and power over their homes and women. Women did not have the right to vote, sue, or own property.

Class: Victorian Britain was a society dominated by class distinction. With an elite dedicated to leisure while many in the working class struggled to eat, the gap between rich and poor seemed insurmountable.

Religion: The people of England were very religious. There were many who regularly visited the church. People were not only very religious but also were god fearing.

Key Characters:

Charlotte Bronte - Jane Eyre:

Jane Eyre - The protagonist and narrator of the novel, Jane is an intelligent, honest, plain-featured young girl forced to contend with oppression, inequality, and hardship.

Edward Rochester - Jane's employer and the master of Thornfield, Rochester is a wealthy, passionate man with a dark secret that provides much of the novel's suspense.

Charles Dickens - Oliver Twist

Oliver Twist - The novel's protagonist. Oliver is an orphan born in a workhouse, and Dickens uses his situation to criticize public policy toward the poor in 1830s England.

Fagin - A conniving career criminal. Fagin takes in homeless children and trains them to pick pockets for him.

Charles Dickens – David Copperfield

David Copperfield - The protagonist and narrator of the novel. David is innocent, trusting, and naïve even though he suffers abuse as a child

Agnes Wickfield - David's true love and second wife.

James Steerforth - A condescending, self-centered villain.

Language:

Imagery: Language that creates vivid sensory ideas in the reader's mind, such as a representation of a specific picture or sound. E.g. In Jane Eyre, bird imagery describes to the reader how Jane is trapped like a caged bird, how she develops the bravery to take flight and how she returns.

Simile: An explicit comparison between two things using ‘like’ or ‘as’.

Metaphor: An implicit comparison between things not using ‘like’ or ‘as’.

Personification: Attributing human-like qualities to objects, ideas or animals.

Motif: A motif is any recurring element that has symbolic significance in a story. Through its repetition, a motif can help produce other literary aspects such as theme or mood.

Plot Summary:

Oliver Twist - Oliver Twist is the story of a boy born outside of marriage, brought up in an orphan's institution that starves its children to death. Escaping from this horror to London, Oliver falls in with a gang of criminal children led by a grown up, Fagin. The gang leads Oliver into a life of crime and peril, and he is soon in trouble. Oliver is rescued by a wealthy victim (in fact his grandfather). Oliver sees the full force of brutality unleashed on his former criminal comrades.

Jane Eyre - *Eyre* opens with Jane, an orphaned, isolated ten-year-old, living with a family that dislikes her. She grows in strength, excels at school, becomes a governess, and falls in love with Edward Rochester. After being deceived by him, Jane goes to Marsh End, where she regains her spirituality and discovers her own strength. By novel's end, Jane is a strong, independent woman.

David Copperfield - David Copperfield is the story of the narrator's life from early childhood to maturity. David had led a happy life until his mother's second marriage to Murdstone, who beats David severely and whose treatment breaks his mother's spirit and finally causes her death. Murdstone sends David to Salem House, a school presided over by a cruel master. Murdstone, sends David to work for his business in London. David runs away to his great-aunt Betsy Trotwood, who sends him to school in Canterbury. He studies law under Mr. Spenlow and falls in love and marries his daughter Dora. David becomes a skilled journalist, but shortly after, his wife Dora dies. David begins his career as a popular novelist and remarries.

Social & Historical Context:

Victorian literature is literature written in England during the reign of Queen Victoria, or roughly from 1837-1901.

Childhood & Education: In early Victorian Britain, many children did not go to school and school had not yet become compulsory. Working class families relied on their children to work to bring in extra money to survive. Girls, of all social classes, tended not to go to school in early Victorian times. With the exception of a small number of wealthy girls who attended boarding school or were taught by a governess at home.

Social Class: The Victorian society was divided into Upper Class, Middle Class, and Working Class. The Upper Class was in a powerful position giving them authority, better living conditions, and other facilities. The Victorian period was very prosperous for the middle class due to industrialisation. Middle-class people also owned and managed vast business empires. The lowest among the social hierarchy were the working class. The working class was the worst affected class in the Victorian times. Lack of money resulted in a negligible food supply.

Health: Infectious diseases were the greatest cause of Victorian mortality. Most of these, such as smallpox, tuberculosis and influenza, were old scourges, but in 1831, Britain suffered its first epidemic of cholera.

Industrialisation: The Industrial Revolution in the mid-century of the era brought about drastic changes in the standard of living of the Victorian Middle-Class people. These revolutions opened the doors for more job opportunities and earn a decent living. This, in turn, had a positive impact on the education of children. Women also participated in the paid workforce in increasing numbers.