**Oliver Twist**

**Discussion Questions**

**Chapters 1-8**

1. Describe the circumstances surrounding Oliver Twist’s birth. Note the origin of his name and his early attributes. Discuss the rationale for Oliver being “farmed out” to the branch workhouse and the living conditions of the children who are sent there. Note Mr. Bumble’s characteristics, and his role in Oliver's life. What is Dickens’ attitude towards Bumble and what he represents? How can you tell?

2. Discuss the cause/effect of Oliver's great gruel transgression. What is the resulting action on the part of the parish board? Analyze the bartering for Oliver's services. What two types of work are considered for his apprenticeship? Where does he end up? Why? Note the implications of fate in each outcome.

3. Discuss Oliver’s initial treatment at the Sowerberry household. Note Noah Claypole’s idea of class structure and how this affects Oliver. Examine the cause/effect of Oliver’s eventual retaliation against Noah.

4. Examine the circumstances surrounding Oliver’s first apprenticeship experiences with Mr. Sowerberry, and the impact this has on him. What messages might Dickens be sending to the public in his portrayal of the paupers’ death and burial?

5. What events and circumstances lead Oliver to London? Describe his journey to London. Describe the characteristics of Jack Dawkins – aka, The Artful Dodger. Where does the Dodger take Oliver? Take special note of the description of Fagin upon his first meeting with Oliver. Is the description of Fagin intended to remind you of another famous literary figure?

**Chapters 9-22**

1. Examine Oliver’s first foray into the world of crime. Apply the adage, “There is no honor among thieves” to the scene.
2. Analyze the significance of Oliver’s appearance in court. What is the result of his trial and why? What is Dickens’ intention here? Contrast Oliver’s interlude in Mr. Brownlow’s home with his previous life and note Oliver’s reaction. Discuss Oliver’s interaction with Mrs. Bedwin and Mr. Brownlow. What item in Brownlow’s home is of special interest to Oliver?
3. Examine circumstances leading to the search for Oliver and the role played by both Nancy and Bill Sikes in his retrieval. Describe Bill Sykes. What does the way he treats other characters reveal about him? Also, what is the implied profession of Nancy and Bet?
4. Describe Fagin’s plan with regard to the robbery. Continue to note Dickens’ brilliant characterizations of Oliver, Fagin, and Sykes, especially. Discuss how Fagin, Sykes, and Nancy each interact with Oliver in the days prior to the robbery. How does each attempt to ‘prepare’ him, and how does Oliver react to each?
5. Discuss the attempted robbery. Note Sikes’ partners in the crime and Oliver’s role.

**Chapters 23-30**

1. Examine the interaction between Mr. Bumble and Mrs. Corney. Analyze the inferences concerning Bumble’s motives for wooing Mrs. Corney. Take note of the irony in the point of view Bumble and Mrs. Corney have about the paupers. Discuss Mrs. Corney’s visit to the workhouse and the interaction between her and Old Sally.
2. Examine Fagin’s reaction to Oliver’s being left at the scene of the robbery. Examine what Fagin’s visit to Nancy reveals. Note the reaction to Oliver’s plight.
3. Analyze introduction of Monks into the plot and the inference of a connection between Monks and Oliver.

**4.** Discuss the attributes of the following characters and examine the reaction to Oliver: Giles, Brittles, Rose, Mrs. Maylie, and Mr. Losberne. Discuss Rose’s response to Oliver and correlate this with what has been revealed about him in the plot.

**Chapters 31-38**

1. Compare/contrast Oliver’s time in the Maylies’ home with that of his other homes. Note his response to their kindness. Throughout these chapters, make note of the symbolism of Dickens portrayal of country living, especially in contrast to living in London.
2. Examine the circumstances surrounding Rose’s illness. Discuss the outcome of her illness and analyze Oliver’s reaction. Summarize the dialogue between Harry and Rose. What is the agreement that they reach?
3. Note the significance of Oliver’s chance encounter when he goes to mail a letter to Dr. Losberne.
4. Take note of the newlywed Bumbles’ wedded bliss. Note the symbolism of the setting at the start of Chapter 37. Who do the Bumbles go to meet? What transpires at this meeting? What is the significance of Oliver’s identity, and who wants it to remain a secret? Why? Take note how Dickens at this point begins to draw various character threads together.

**Chapters 39-47**

1. Discuss the circumstances leading to Nancy’s discovery of the plot between Monks and Fagin, as well as her reaction to the information. How has Dickens been subtly shaping Nancy’s character to react the way she does? How, at this point, do you predict her character may continue to evolve?
2. Analyze the content and importance of Nancy’s dialogue with Rose. Compare/contrast the two women and analyze their interaction. Note the symbolism of London Bridge – their designated meeting place.
3. Discuss the missing member of Fagin’s gang and the impact of his loss on Fagin and Bates. Discuss the reappearance of Noah Claypole and Charlotte. Note the reasons why Noah left and his treatment of Charlotte. Conveniently for the plot, whom do Noah and Charlotte meet upon their arrival in London? Describe their interaction. What does this suggest about Noah’s character? To what use does this person eventually put Noah? How does this make Noah crucial to the plot?
4. Comment on the continuing evolution of Nancy’s character. What is the source of her internal struggle? Discuss the circumstances surrounding her failure to keep her initial appointment with Rose. When they do meet, what do Rose and Brownlow try to persuade her to do? Why does she refuse?
5. Take note of Brownlow’s reaction to Nancy’s description of Monks. What are your theories about this connection? How does this exhibit Dickens’ sense of craft as an author, and how might this type of writing have appealed to his Victorian readership?

**Chapters 48-53**

1. Detail Sykes’s actions after the events of the last chapter. Give evidence of how Dickens portrays his emotional/mental state. What is the symbolism of the fire?
2. Discuss the confrontation between Monks and Brownlow and analyze the significance of Brownlow’s revelations. How plausible are the coincidences that are revealed in this section?
3. Discuss the fate of Fagin and his gang – especially the following characters: Fagin, Bates, Sykes, Nancy, and The Artful Dodger. To what degree does Dickens embrace realism in the portrayal of these characters at the end of the novel versus writing for the moral sensibilities of his Victorian audience? Are the two concepts mutually exclusive?
4. Discuss Oliver’s return to his birthplace and his reaction to the revelations about his parentage. How do these revelations connect him to the other characters of the novel (Rose, Brownlow, Monks)? Analyze the significance of the revelations about the letter and the will. Note the effect on the Bumbles of Monks’ confession. Note the circumstances of Rose’s identity and their effect on her relationship with Harry.
5. Having read this novel, what did you learn about the Victorian Era? How is this novel reflective of major issues of the time? What elements of his society does Dickens explore? Struggle with? Criticize? Celebrate?