

## British Masterpiece

# from *Great Expectations*

Novel by Charles Dickens



Charles Dickens



**READING 5A** Analyze how complex plot structures and devices function and advance the action in a work of fiction. **7** Analyze how patterns of imagery create meaning in metaphors, passages, and literary works.

**BACKGROUND** Charles Dickens (1812–1870) brought to fiction a new degree of realism, yet his novels can also be powerfully moving, highly sentimental, and uproariously funny by turn. Never forgetting his own harsh adolescence, Dickens focused on problems of the poor or unfortunate in most of his work, often exposing social ills in the hope of reforming them. *Great Expectations*, one of Dickens's later novels, is the first-person story of Philip Pirrip, nicknamed Pip, an orphan who all his life is helped financially by a mysterious benefactor. In time he comes to believe that this benefactor is Miss Havisham, elderly guardian of Estella, the young woman with whom he falls in love. In the following scene, Pip meets both Miss Havisham and Estella for the first time.

**LITERARY ANALYSIS** As you read, notice Dickens's use of **sensory details**, details that appeal to the five senses—sight, smell, hearing, taste, and touch. These details help reveal specific traits of the three characters. For example, the dialogue illustrates Estella's haughtiness as she ridicules Pip: "He calls the knaves, Jacks, this boy!" Pip's dialogue shows him as insecure and uneasy. When Miss Havisham asks Pip what he thinks of Estella, he hesitates before stammering, "I don't like to say." Details that describe Miss Havisham's appearance paint her as strange and "corpse-like," sitting in a "withered bridal dress" that looks like "grave-clothes." Even the details that describe the setting contribute to an understanding of Miss Havisham's eccentric nature. The stopped watch and clock, the return of a jewel to its exact location, and the yellow shoe atop the dressing table show how time has stopped for Miss Havisham.

**WRITE** After you read, write a brief paragraph describing an object, person, or place as it appeared in the past and as it appears in the present. Try to use sensory details that appeal to all five senses to describe how your subject has changed over time.

### FROM GREAT EXPECTATIONS

Miss Havisham beckoned [Estella] to come close, and took up a jewel from the table, and tried its effect upon her fair young bosom and against her pretty brown hair. "Your own one day, my dear, and you will use it well. Let me see you play cards with this boy."

"With this boy! Why, he is a common labouring-boy!"

I thought I overheard Miss Havisham answer—only it seemed so unlikely—"Well? You can break his heart."



“What do you play, boy?” asked Estella of myself, with the greatest disdain.

10 “Nothing but beggar my neighbour, Miss.”

“Beggar him,” said Miss Havisham to Estella. So we sat down to cards.

It was then I began to understand that everything in the room had stopped, like the watch and the clock a long time ago. I noticed that Miss Havisham put down the jewel exactly on the spot from which she had taken it up. As Estella dealt the cards, I glanced at the dressing-table again, and saw that the shoe upon it, once white, now yellow, had never been worn. I glanced down at the foot from which the shoe was absent, and saw that the silk stocking on it, once white, now yellow, had been trodden ragged. Without this arrest of everything, this standing still of all the pale  
20 decayed objects, not even the withered bridal dress on the collapsed form could have looked so like grave-clothes, or the long veil so like a shroud.

So she sat, corpse-like, as we played at cards; the frillings and trimmings on her bridal dress, looking like earthy paper. I knew nothing then of the discoveries that are occasionally made of bodies buried in ancient times, which fall to powder in the moment of being distinctly seen; but, I have often thought since, that she must have looked as if the admission of the natural light of day would have struck her to dust.

“He calls the knaves, Jacks, this boy!” said Estella with disdain before our first game was out. “And what coarse hands he has! And what thick boots!”

I had never thought of being ashamed of my hands before; but I began to consider  
30 them a very indifferent pair. Her contempt for me was so strong, that it became infectious, and I caught it.

She won the game, and I dealt. I misdealt as was only natural, when I knew she was lying in wait for me to do wrong; and she denounced me for a stupid, clumsy labouring-boy.

“You say nothing of her,” remarked Miss Havisham to me, as she looked on. “She says many hard things of you, but you say nothing of her. What do you think of her?”

“I don’t like to say,” I stammered.

“Tell me in my ear,” said Miss Havisham, bending down.

40 “I think she is very proud,” I replied in a whisper.

“Anything else?”

“I think she is very pretty.”

“Anything else?”

“I think she is very insulting.” (She was looking at me then, with a look of supreme aversion.)

“Anything else?”

“I think I should like to go home.”