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Great Expectations

Charles Dickens · *1860–61 · original English text*

A village boy is lifted into the dream of becoming a gentleman, and learns, at great cost, what gentleness actually is. Pip's shame before Joe, his pride in London, and his discovery of the true hand behind his fortune force him to choose gratitude, truth and mercy over rank.

THE CENTRAL QUESTION

What makes a gentleman — money and manners, or gratitude, truth and mercy?

"I have been bent and broken, but—I hope—into a better shape."
Estella · Chapter LIX

Pip's "great expectations" come from a convict, not from Miss Havisham. The book's goods are Joe's constancy, Pip's late repentance, the effort to save Magwitch, and a humbler friendship with Estella. Gentility without goodness is only a costume.

KEY CHARACTERS

Pip
pride, shame, late repentance

Joe Gargery
constancy and unlearned goodness

Magwitch
the convict; gratitude and fatherhood

Miss Havisham
frozen grief turned to harm

Estella
raised to be heartless; later humbled

Herbert Pocket
true friendship

Jaggers
the lawyer; evidence, not looks

Wemmick
the clerk with a private heart

Compeyson
the gentleman-criminal

A LAWYER'S RULE — AND A BETTER ONE

"Take nothing on its looks; take everything on evidence. There's no better rule."
Jaggers to Pip · Chapter XL

Grades 9–12
Read the full text free at classicslaunch.org.

01
The Marshes
CHAPTERS I–VI
A frightened kindness that will shape the whole story.

- Orphaned **Pip** lives with harsh Mrs. Joe and the blacksmith **Joe Gargery**
- On Christmas Eve he meets an escaped convict on the marshes and brings him food and a file
- The convict is recaptured; he claims to have stolen the food himself, shielding the boy
- Joe's goodness is already the standard Pip will later fail

> *"So, I called myself Pip, and came to be called Pip."*
> **Pip** · Chapter I

02
Satis House
CHAPTERS VII–XIX
Shame is planted, and a false hope is named.

- Pip is sent to play at Satis House for **Miss Havisham**, who stopped her clocks after being jilted
- He falls under the spell of proud **Estella**, raised to break men's hearts
- He grows ashamed of Joe and of the forge
- A lawyer, **Jaggers**, announces "great expectations": Pip is to be a gentleman in London
- Pip assumes Miss Havisham is his secret patron and leaves Joe with a mixture of love and snobbery

03
London Expectations
CHAPTERS XX–XXXVIII
The costume of a gentleman, and a heart still uneducated.

- Pip lives with **Herbert Pocket**, who becomes a true friend
- He spends freely, falls into debt, and neglects Joe
- Estella is presented in society; Miss Havisham's purpose is clearer
- Estella tells him she has no heart to give
- Pip still believes his fortune and Estella are parts of one design

> *"You must know," said Estella, condescending to me as a brilliant and beautiful woman might, "that I have no heart,—if that has anything to do with my memory."*
> **Estella** · Chapter XXIX

04
The Second Father
CHAPTERS XXXIX–XLIV
The source of the money is not the ruined bride, but the convict.

- The returned convict **Abel Magwitch** (Provis) reveals that he is Pip's benefactor
- He has made a fortune in New South Wales and come back, at the risk of his life, to see his gentleman
- Pip's disgust gives way, slowly, to duty and then to care
- He tells Miss Havisham the truth and pleads for Herbert and for Estella
- Estella will marry the brutal Drummle

> *"Look'ee here, Pip. I'm your second father. You're my son,—more to me nor any son."*
> **Magwitch** · Chapter XXXIX

05
The River
CHAPTERS XLV–LVI
Loyalty now costs something.

- Pip, Herbert and Startop try to get Magwitch safely out of England
- Pip is nearly murdered by Orlick; he is saved and joins the escape
- They are intercepted; Magwitch is wounded and taken
- Compeyson, the other convict and Miss Havisham's jilter, is drowned
- Magwitch is condemned, but dies in prison knowing Pip's gratitude; his hidden daughter is Estella

06
A Better Shape
CHAPTERS LVII–LIX
Repentance, repair, and a quieter hope.

- Pip falls ill; Joe comes to London, pays the debts, and nurses him with old tenderness
- Miss Havisham, before her death, has asked to be forgiven and has helped Herbert secretly
- Pip works abroad with Herbert, humbler and useful
- Years later he meets Estella in the ruins of Satis House; both have been bent and broken
- This text has Dickens's revised ending: they leave together, and Pip sees "no shadow of another parting"

> *"I took her hand in mine, and we went out of the ruined place; and, as the morning mists had risen long ago when I first left the forge, so the evening mists were rising now, and in all the broad expanse of tranquil light they showed to me, I saw no shadow of another parting from her."*
> **Pip** · Chapter LIX

Pride & Shame · Gratitude · True Gentleness · Mercy · Repentance · Loyalty

What to watch for as you read

GRADES 9–12

1. Joe is the book's moral measure. Watch how Pip sees him at the forge, in London, and in the sickroom.
2. The convict on the marshes and the benefactor in Chapter XXXIX are the same man. What has to change in Pip before he can love him?
3. Miss Havisham's revenge uses Estella as a tool. Who, in the end, is most injured by that design?
4. Jaggers says to trust evidence, not looks. Apply that rule to Magwitch, to Compeyson, and to Pip's idea of a gentleman.
5. This edition uses Dickens's revised close: hope of a life with Estella, not a final separation. Read the last sentence slowly.
6. Notice how often hands, mists, and the forge return in the last chapter, binding the end to the beginning.

Quotations are verbatim from the original English text, Project Gutenberg #1400, the public-domain text hosted at classicslaunch.org/works/great-expectations/. Citations give book and chapter (or canto and line) so every line can be checked.