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Oliver Twist
Charles Dickens

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Response Journal

To The Student

Although we may read a novel, play, or work of non-fiction for enjoyment, each time we read one, we are building and practicing important basic reading skills. In our ever-more complex society, in which reading has become more and more crucial for success, this, in itself, is an important reason to spend time reading for enjoyment.

Some readers, however, are able to go beyond basic reading techniques and are able to practice higher thinking skills by reflecting on what they have read and how what they read affects them. It is this act of reflection—that is, stopping to think about what you are reading—that this journal is attempting to encourage.

To aid you, we have included writing prompts for each section; however, if you find something that you wish to respond to in the book more compelling than our prompts, you should write about that. We hope you enjoy reading this book and that the act of responding to what you have read increases this enjoyment.

After you read the indicated sections, choose the questions to which you will respond. Keep in mind that there are no right or wrong answers to these prompts, and there is no one direction in which you must go.

About the author and novel

1. When reading a classic novel such as *Oliver Twist*, knowing some background helps you to appreciate such a novel even more. Most of the action takes place in London, England, before 1850. Do a small outline drawing of England, Wales and Scotland and with a circle show exactly where London is located on the map. Write your researched answers after the following questions:
 - Who was the ruling monarch of England when Dickens published *Oliver Twist* there?
 - To whom was this monarch married and was it a long, happy marriage?

The Author's preface (1841)

2. We are fortunate to have Dickens' own words in the 1841 Preface. Because of them, we know what his intentions were in creating the characters in the novel. The skill of summarizing is one that will come in handy in all students' lives. In the format shown, please summarize how Dickens feels other writers handle evil characters and how he feels evil characters should be portrayed. Use the words from the Preface, being careful to use quotation marks. The first one is given as an example.

Characters/Other Writers
"seductive fellows, faultless
in dress"

Characters/Dickens
"dim the false glitter"

3. Write a brief paragraph about what features most characterize what we know today as "The Victorian Age." Include your feeling about whether or not you would like to be living today in such an age and why.

Oliver Twist

7. Mr. Gamfield's cruel beating of the donkey shows just what kind of wicked man he is. Oliver is rightly terrified to be put to work as an apprentice under him. We see that this chimney sweep is even paid (albeit only three pounds) to accept Oliver, which brings to mind slave conditions. Remember, it is 1830 in England and at that time slavery was still legal in the United States.

Imagine that you are the real Charles Dickens. Write a real letter that he would have written to the editor of the London Times, which tells of his rage at the inhuman conditions suffered by English orphans and American slaves. Use the following format:

To the Editor of The London Times:

I am outraged to learn of the plight of a ten-year-old orphan named...

Sign your letter:

"With every respect,
Charles Dickens"

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14. Mrs. Sowerberry is, to put it mildly, a terrible woman. She is cruel, unfeeling, and treats Oliver very badly. Hopefully, you do not know of a real-life woman who is like Mrs. Sowerberry. Think about all the older women you know, including your own mother or guardian. Without using any real names (you could use something like Ms. or Mrs. "A," etc.) write a brief profile about this woman. Include a physical description, her good qualities, and examples of things she has done which make you like and/or respect her.
15. Oliver meets an odd character, a boy dressed in a man's coat and using the mannerisms of a man, who goes by the nickname "The artful Dodger." The Dodger leads Oliver, at night, through the streets of London. Even though Oliver has lived in poverty his whole life, he has never seen any place more dirty or horrible than here in London. Oliver begins to consider running away after seeing many drunken and unsavory-looking people.

You are an advice columnist who receives a letter from a reader who is "getting a bad feeling" about a certain person. Using an example of a situation from your own life, where your instincts told you something wasn't quite right, give advice to your anxious reader.

16. Even though there are no illustrations in this novel, Dickens' descriptions are very vivid. On a piece of notebook-size paper (unlined if possible), make a detailed drawing of Fagin's dirty, cluttered back room when Oliver first sees it. Use as much of Dickens' description as you can and label each of the characters with their names.

Chapters 13-15

20. Anti-Semitism is hostility, prejudice, or discrimination against Judaism or Jews. Do you think that Dickens portrays Fagin's character as anti-Semitic? After reading the chapter, answer the following questions:
- How many times is the word "Jew" or "the Jew" used in the chapter?
 - What negative words are used with regard to Fagin in the chapter?
 - Why do you think Dickens portrayed Fagin in such a negative fashion as a Jewish person?

Write a paragraph stating whether you believe Fagin is portrayed negatively or positively, based on your findings from the questions above.

21. In this chapter we see the behavior of many of the unlawful characters. On a notebook-size piece of paper (unlined if possible), draw and label pencil portraits of the following characters:
- Fagin
 - Bill Sikes
 - Nancy
 - The Artful Dodger
 - Charley Bates
22. After Oliver has sufficiently recovered from his illness, Mr. Brownlow asks to see Oliver in his study. When Oliver enters Mr. Brownlow's study, he is amazed to see so many books.

We often take for granted things, such as books, that are readily available to us. If you were stranded on a remote island and only had three books in your possession, what would you want them to be and why? Briefly describe each book; and, remember, these may be your only tie to the outside world that you will be able to have for the rest of your life.