



*Dickens photographed in New York City in 1867  
at the studio of Jeremiah Gurney and Son.*

# Charles Dickens

Born on February 7, 1812 to a Naval Pay Office clerk, Dickens spent his early years in London, a period of his life he would later describe as idyllic. His fondly remembered childhood came to an abrupt end, however, when his family found themselves in debtor's prison in 1824 due to his father's financial mismanagement. At the age of 12, Dickens was sent to work ten-hour days at a shoe polish factory to earn extra money for his family. The harsh working conditions made a lasting impression on the young Dickens, undoubtedly shaping his convictions on social reform, status, and the corruption of innocence—prevalent themes in his writing.

In 1829, Dickens first tried his hand at writing as a free-lance reporter at Doctor's Commons Courts, eventually finding steady work at a newspaper. Dickens' first published collection, *Sketches by Boz*, was a set of periodical sketches, the success of which led to the serialization of his first novel, *The Pickwick Papers*. Released in

monthly, two-chapter installments, *The Pickwick Papers* was unprecedentedly popular, a publishing phenomenon, and it launched Dickens' literary career.

Most of Dickens' works, including *Oliver Twist*, *David Copperfield*, *Hard Times*, *Little Dorrit*, *A Tale of Two Cities*, and *Great Expectations*, were published serially, explaining Dickens' tendency towards cliff-hanger chapter endings. Sudden plot twists and suspenseful foreshadowing ensured his audience would continue to subscribe. *Great Expectations*, Dickens' thirteenth novel, was published weekly in the magazine *All the Year Round* from 1860-1861. Based on the suggestion of his son, Edward, Dickens rewrote the ending of *Great Expectations* (the ending which you'll see onstage tonight) after the novel had already been completed to give the characters more resolution.

At the age of 24, he married Catherine Hogarth and together they had ten children, but separated in 1858 due to, as Dickens himself described, being "temperamentally unsuited" for one another. Although charismatic and successful, Dickens is believed to have had an insecure and difficult personality.

Over the course of his life, Dickens boasted a highly prolific career, writing over 25 books, managing a theatrical company, traveling internationally, and attending scores of public readings, a demanding schedule that eventually took a toll on his physical well-being. As his health deteriorated, and against his doctor's advice, Dickens maintained his productive fervor and in 1870, at the age of 58, he died from a stroke.

*Research compiled from: <http://www.victorianweb.org/authors/dickens/dickensbio1.html>*