

Nicholas Nickleby

Charles Dickens





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What's the book about?

Discuss these questions.

- 1 Look at the picture on the front cover and think about city life in the 1800s. How was life worse for: poor people? women? children?
- 2 What other books by Charles Dickens do you know? What qualities do they share?
- 3 Imagine these people are strangers at a party. Who would you talk to first? Who would you not talk to? Why?



1.2 What happens first?

Look at the pictures on pages 1–11. Do you think these statements are true (✓) or false (X)?

- 1 Ralph Nickleby, the man in each of the first three pictures, is very popular.
- 2 Nicholas Nickleby and his family (page 4) are happy.
- 3 Nicholas (pages 8–9) goes on a long journey.
- 4 Smike (page 11) is afraid of Nicholas.

Uncle Ralph

*'I can understand a broken neck or a broken leg,
but not a broken heart.'*

Mr Ralph Nickleby closed the thick book that contained the names of all the people who **owed** him money. His money-lending business was doing well, he thought with a satisfied smile. Life had never been better. It was true that he had never married, he had no friends and he was unpopular with his neighbours, but he did not care. People admired him because he was rich, and that was good enough for him. In his world, money was the only thing that mattered.

While Mr Nickleby was congratulating himself on his own success, there was a knock at the door. A tall, middle-aged man with strange, wild eyes walked into the room. It was Newman Noggs, Mr Nickleby's **clerk**.



owe /əʊ/ (v) to have to pay someone that you have borrowed money from
clerk /kla:k/ (n) someone who works at a desk in an office

‘What do you want, Newman?’ Mr Nickleby said, annoyed by his interruption.

‘I have a letter for you,’ the clerk replied, one eye looking at his employer, the other looking out of the window.

‘Well, bring it here, man!’ Mr Nickleby said impatiently.

Newman took the letter carefully out of his badly fitting suit, carried it slowly across the room and gave it to his employer.

Mr Nickleby read it quickly. ‘My brother’s dead,’ he said. ‘That was sudden.’ He stood up, walked across to the window, and stared thoughtfully through its dirty glass into the smoke-blackened **yard** behind his house.

‘Children alive?’ Noggs asked.

‘Unfortunately for me, yes,’ Mr Nickleby said. ‘Both of them. And the mother, too. No money, and now they expect me to take care of them. They’re all in London now, waiting for my help. What do I care about them? *I* never met them.’

Noggs looked at his employer’s back with a strange **expression** on his face. It was not exactly a smile, but it was not a look of sadness either. Nobody could ever understand the expressions on Newman Noggs’s face.

‘Get me my coat and gloves, Newman,’ Mr Nickleby suddenly decided, turning away from the window. ‘I have a visit to make.’

Mr Nickleby walked quickly to the Strand, one of the busiest streets in London. He knocked several times on the door of a small house and waited. The door was finally opened by a servant girl.

‘Is Mrs Nickleby at home?’ he demanded.

‘You mean Miss La Creevy?’ the girl replied.

‘No, I mean Mrs Nickleby!’

‘Show the gentleman up, Hannah,’ a voice called from inside the house.

Mr Nickleby walked straight past the servant girl into the hall of the house and quickly up the stairs. On the first floor he met a small, bird-like, middle-aged woman wearing black gloves and a yellow cloth tied around her head.

‘My name’s Miss La Creevy,’ the woman said with a friendly smile. ‘I’m an artist. Would you like me to paint your picture for you? You have a wonderfully serious face. Such strong eyes!’

‘I’m not here for a painting, madam,’ Mr Nickleby replied impatiently. ‘I’m looking for a Mrs Nickleby. Is she here?’

yard /jɑ:d/ (n) an area of land with a wall around it next to a building

expression /ɪk'spreʃən/ (n) a look on someone’s face

A lady from the country and her two children have rented a room on the second floor,' the woman said. 'She's a **widow**.'

'A *poor* widow?'

'I'm afraid so.'

'That's her,' Mr Nickleby **sighed**.



widow /'wɪdəʊ/ (n) a woman whose husband has died

sigh /saɪ/ (v) to breathe out heavily when you are tired, bored or annoyed

Charles Dickens

les Dickens

British English

Classic

After his father's death, Nicholas has no money, no job and a family to support. His only hope is Uncle Ralph, a cold-hearted money-lender with unpleasant, dangerous friends. Can Nicholas and his family find happiness, or will his uncle manage to destroy them?

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Charles Dickens

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