



PLAYHOUSE
THEATRE COMPANY

GLYNIS LEYSHON
ARTISTIC DIRECTOR



OLIVER!



PLAY GUIDE

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Several websites, online encyclopaedias, and textbooks were used in the collation of information in this guide. Some of the most relevant sites are included in the section, “Internet Sites of Note”

WELCOME

This booklet was created to help audience members explore the play beyond the actual performance. If you have any questions, comments or suggestions for the guide please contact Meredith Elliott, Corporate Communications Manager at 604.629.2097 or by email at melliott@vancouverplayhouse.com.

About the Company

The Playhouse Theatre Company is dedicated to producing live theatre of the highest quality – to presenting a stimulating and challenging repertoire of plays that speak to today’s audiences. This year the Playhouse presents a five-play mainstage subscription series running from October to April.

The Playhouse was founded in 1962 to provide the people of British Columbia with their first professional, live theatre. Since then it has grown from a core of volunteers operating out of basement offices into one of the country’s leading regional theatre companies, presenting an outstanding selection of plays produced by the very best actors, directors, designers and craftspeople from across the country.

INFORMATION FOR STUDENTS

- The actors can see and hear the audience just as the audience can see and hear them!

Talking during a show (even in a whisper), fidgeting, rustling papers or candy wrappers all disturb the actors’ concentration and disrupt the performance.

Audience responses like laughing or clapping can inspire the actors to do their best work. This interplay is the essence of live theatre.

- Objects of any kind thrown on stage pose a serious hazard to actor safety and are also extremely disruptive to the performance.
- Each school group is assigned specific seats. Please remain in your designated area.

DID YOU KNOW? MORE ABOUT THE PLAYHOUSE'S EDUCATION INITIATIVES

Talkbacks

Following every student matinee and select evening performances, students and teachers are invited to remain in their seats to ask questions of the actors. *How does an actor prepare for a role? Do actors rehearse every day? How do the actors personally handle a play's difficult issues?*

***Oliver!* runs approximately 2 hours and 20 minutes including one intermission. Please plan to stay for approximately twenty minutes after the end of the performance.**

Artists and the Classroom (*Exclusive Benefit to Series Subscribers*)

A theatre artist from one of several disciplines will come and speak to your class for approximately one hour. Your students will have the opportunity to converse with a professional actor, playwright, designer or director and find out how they are preparing for current Playhouse productions.

Production Centre Tours

Students can take a guided tour of the 25,000 square foot Production Centre where they will explore scenery and prop shops, the wardrobe department and rehearsal halls. The Playhouse recently moved into a new facility on East 2nd Avenue, which will be the company's home until 2010.

Salon Saturdays

The second Saturday matinee of each production features our Salon Saturday pre-show chat. Explore the issues and ideas at the heart of each production with speakers who provide in-depth knowledge about the play, the playwright or the design. The talk begins at 1pm, one hour prior to the matinee performance, and takes place in the salons just off the main lobby.

The Salon Saturday for *Oliver!* takes place on Saturday, December 1 and will feature Errol Durbach, Professor Emeritus of Theatre Studies at UBC. Professor Durbach will talk about the social issues in *Oliver!* as well as the depiction of Fagin in various adaptations.

For information about any of our education programmes, please contact Meredith Elliott, Outreach and Education at 604.629.2097 or by email, melliott@vancouverplayhouse.com.

Oliver! AT A GLANCE

NUTS AND BOLTS

Oliver! was first presented in London, where it played for 2,618 performances at the New Theatre. It played for 774 performances on Broadway at the Imperial and Shubert Theatres starring Georgia Brown and Clive Revill as Nancy and Fagin. It has been revived on Broadway several times, as in 1984 at the Mark Hellinger Theatre, and in London in 1994 at the Palladium starring Jonathan Pryce as Fagin.

Time and Place: England, mid-19th century

Running time: 2 hours and twenty minutes including one fifteen minute intermission

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

The Boys Chorus

Between the workhouse boys and Fagin's gang, the Playhouse stage will be filled with 22 budding young musical theatre stars. The boys, who come from across the Lower Mainland and Victoria, were selected from nearly 200 hopefuls, who auditioned over two days at the Playhouse Production Centre. Brian Riback (*Oliver*) and Morgan Roff (the Artful Dodger) are both making their professional theatre debut.

Dark and Light

Designer John Ferguson refers to his set as a "dark Victorian crucible." The world that *Oliver* lives in is one of poverty and despair, one not unlike the neighbourhood just a few blocks away from the Vancouver Playhouse Theatre. Lionel Bart's music and lyrics may seem incongruous in a dark Dickensian tale, but they are an important reminder that life cannot exist without hope, and that we all need to find the light, for ourselves and others.

WHAT IT'S ABOUT

Oliver Twist is a young orphan, who has spent all his young life in a workhouse. His mother died in childbirth and he never knew his father. Conditions are harsh for the young boys, and when *Oliver* asks for a second helping of gruel, the workhouse master decides he's a troublemaker and sells him as an apprentice to the local undertaker. Life there is no easier, and *Oliver* runs away, walking to London, where he meets a cocky young lad, the Artful Dodger. The Dodger introduces him to Fagin and his gang of young pickpockets, who welcome *Oliver* to their thieves den. But on his first assignment, *Oliver* is arrested, released and taken to the home of a kindly benefactor, who may just hold the key to *Oliver's* happiness.

WORDS TO REMEMBER

"Please sir, I want some more." *Oliver*

"That boy was born to be hung, Mrs. Corney." Mr. Bumble

"What a fine thing capital punishment is! Dead men never repent; dead men never bring awkward stories to light." Fagin

SYNOPSIS

A group of young boys, inmates of a workhouse in rural England, long for a diet that consists of more than just gruel [FOOD, GLORIOUS FOOD]. One of them, Oliver, hesitantly asks for a second helping. The parish beadle, Mr. Bumble, is horrified. No boy has ever asked for more food before [OLIVER].

The board of the workhouse instructs Bumble to sell Oliver off and get him out of their hair. They don't want anything to do with an orphan who will cause trouble. Bumble offers Oliver to the local undertaker for five pounds. The undertaker, Mr. Sowerberry, is struck by the melancholy expression on Oliver's face and thinks he would make an excellent mute for children's funerals, following the coffin with a silent, mournful appearance [THAT'S YOUR FUNERAL].

The Sowerberrys feed Oliver some leftover scraps for the dog and show him to his bed under the counter. Alone and locked amongst the coffins, Oliver wonders if he'll ever find someone who will love him [WHERE IS LOVE?].

The next morning, the undertaker's assistant Noah kicks on the door until Oliver opens it. He makes fun of Oliver and then insults his mother. When he tells Oliver that his mother is better off dead, Oliver attacks him. Noah calls for help and Charlotte, the maid, and Mrs. Sowerberry grab Oliver and lock him in a coffin.

Noah runs to get Mr. Bumble, who tells Mrs. Sowerberry that Oliver is acting up because he was fed too generously. When they let Oliver out of the coffin, he runs away. Mr. Bumble tells the workhouse matron, Widow Corney, what happened, and they are amazed Oliver didn't murder them all in their sleep. Mr. Bumble kisses Widow Corney [I SHALL SCREAM]. The workhouse master is dying and Mr. Bumble suggests that he would be the ideal candidate, not just for the position, but also to set up housekeeping with Widow Corney. Both his proposals are accepted.

A week passes and Oliver has walked nearly to London. When he stops to rest his feet, he meets a boy, who strikes up a conversation and offers him a heel of bread. He asks Oliver if he has a place to stay in London and when Oliver admits that he has nowhere to go and no money, the boy says he knows a place where they can both spend the night. He introduces himself as Jack Dawkins, better known as The Artful Dodger, and tells Oliver he'd be more than welcome to stay at Fagin's hideaway [CONSIDER YOURSELF].

The Dodger introduces Oliver to Fagin, the leader of a gang of young pickpockets. Fagin offers to teach Oliver the tricks of his trade [PICK A POCKET OR TWO]. Oliver proves to be a quick study and is welcomed into the gang.

The next morning, Fagin looks around carefully to make sure nobody is watching and takes a small box from a hiding place in the floor. He goes through his treasure, remembering former gang members who died by the hangman without revealing the whereabouts of the hideaway. He notices that Oliver is awake and watching him, and threatens him with a toasting fork. When he realizes that Oliver didn't see the hiding place, he pretends he was just joking, and tells Oliver to wash himself with the warm water. When Oliver turns his back, Fagin quickly hides the box again.

The gang is visited by Nancy, a reckless woman with a drinking problem. Fagin advises her to cut back on the gin, but Nancy has few pleasures in life [IT'S A FINE LIFE]. Fagin introduces her to Oliver, who bows politely to her curtsy. The others find the display amusing, and Nancy and the Artful Dodger make fun of the finer manners of the gentry [I'D DO ANYTHING].

Fagin sends the boys out to work the streets, assigning the Dodger to show Oliver the ropes. He wishes Oliver good luck on his first job and the boys head off [BE BACK SOON]. Their first mark is a gentleman, Mr. Brownlow, who is browsing at a bookstore. The bookseller sees the boys pick Mr. Brownlow's pocket and sounds an alert. The Dodger and another boy, Charley Bates, run away, but Oliver is unable to escape and is turned over to the police.

That evening, Fagin and Nancy are drinking at a local saloon [OOM-PAH-PAH], when Bill Sikes walks in. Sikes is a former member of Fagin's gang and Nancy's lover. He is a very dangerous man [MY NAME].

The Dodger and Charley rush in and tell Fagin that Oliver has been captured. They waited outside the courthouse, where they saw Oliver being taken away by Mr. Brownlow to his home in Bloomsbury. Fagin is furious. He points out that things will go badly for everybody, including Sikes, if Oliver informs on the gang.

Sikes suggests that they send someone to spy on Oliver and find out if he's said anything. They decide Nancy is the best person for the job, since the police don't know she's part of the gang. She refuses, but Sikes hits her and tells her to obey. Nancy reluctantly agrees [AS LONG AS HE NEEDS ME].

Oliver lies in bed at Mr. Brownlow's house, listening to people advertise their wares outside [WHO WILL BUY?]. He is happy for the first time in his life. Mr. Brownlow has been caring for him for the past two weeks, drawn by a startling resemblance Oliver bears to his dead daughter. The doctor pronounces Oliver recovered from his fever and exhaustion. He's not so certain about Oliver's character, however, warning Brownlow that the boy is just a common thief.

The bookseller's errand boy drops off some books, but leaves before Brownlow can send back payment. Oliver volunteers to deliver it and takes a five-pound note and some books to return. Nancy and Sikes are waiting for him, however, and Nancy grabs him, telling the curious bystanders that Oliver is her brother who ran away from home. When Oliver tries to protest, Sikes hits him over the head with a book and drags him away.

They take him back to Fagin's hideout, where Fagin immediately relieves Oliver of the five pounds and his fancy new suit. Sikes, however, takes the money for his trouble, and gives Fagin the books instead. Oliver begs him to send back the books and the money, but Fagin tells him that Brownlow will think he stole the money and wash his hands of him.

Oliver tries to run away, and when Sikes goes after him, Nancy tries to stop him from hurting Oliver. Sikes knocks her away, but she gets up and prevents Fagin from hitting Oliver with a club. She tells Fagin that if he hurts Oliver, she'll go to the police, even if it means she hangs alongside them all.

Fagin thinks she's joking, but she's determined to protect Oliver and regrets having brought him back to Fagin. Fagin tells Sikes to keep an eye on Nancy and the Artful Dodger to keep an eye on Oliver. He'll take care of himself. He wonders if it's not time to make a life change [REVIEWING THE SITUATION].

Back at the workhouse, Mr. Bumble is now regretting his marriage. Mrs. Bumble is equally unimpressed with her new husband. But their bickering is interrupted by word that one of the workhouse inmates is dying and urgently needs to speak with Mrs. Bumble.

Old Sally confesses that she once nursed a young woman who gave birth to a boy and then died. She stole a gold locket from the dead woman and has regretted it ever since. The woman was Oliver's mother, and the Bumbles realize that he must have come from a rich family. Mr. Bumble goes to see Brownlow, who has been advertising for information about Oliver. When Brownlow sees the locket, he realizes it belonged to his dead daughter Agnes. Oliver is his grandson.

He threatens to relieve the Bumbles of their posts for keeping the information from him all these years. Just then, Nancy demands to see Mr. Brownlow. She tells him that she stole Oliver away, but that she wants to help him return. She tells Brownlow she'll bring Oliver to him on the London Bridge between eleven and midnight, but only if he comes alone.

Brownlow offers to keep her safe, but Nancy refuses to abandon Sikes, even though she knows it could be her death. She goes back to the hideaway, not knowing that Charley has been following her. When she takes Oliver to the bridge that night, Sikes is waiting for her. He accuses her of betraying him and then beats her to death with a cudgel.

Mr. Brownlow arrives in time to see Sikes drag Oliver away. He sees Nancy's body and calls for police.

Sikes takes Oliver to Fagin's hideaway. When Fagin realizes what Sikes has done, he tells the boys to scatter. A mob is after Sikes now, however, as he tries to escape with Oliver over the rooftops. Someone spots Sikes, but he threatens to kill Oliver unless they let him go. Sikes is shot down and Oliver nearly falls off the roof, but a policeman rescues him. He's reunited with Mr. Brownlow, who takes him home.

Fagin emerges from the shadows, and wonders what he'll do now. The Artful Dodger joins him and they head off to plan a new life of crime.

THE SONGS

Act I

Food, Glorious Food ~ Oliver & Boys

Oliver ~ Mr. Bumble, Widow Corney, Board Members and Boys

Boy for Sale ~ Mr. Bumble

That's Your Funeral ~ Mr. & Mrs. Sowerberry & Mr. Bumble

Where is Love? ~ Oliver

I Shall Scream ~ Mr. Bumble & Widow Corney

Consider Yourself ~ Artful Dodger, Oliver & Boys

Pick a Pocket or Two ~ Fagin & Boys

It's A Fine Life ~ Nancy, Bet & Boys

I'd Do Anything ~ Artful Dodger, Nancy, Oliver, Bet, Fagin & Boys

Be Back Soon ~ Fagin & Boys

Act II

Oom-Pah-Pah ~ Bet & Pub Patrons

My Name ~ Bill Sikes

As Long As He Needs Me ~ Nancy

Who Will Buy? ~ Oliver & Street Criers

It's A Fine Life (reprise) ~ Nancy, Bill Sikes, Fagin & Artful Dodger

Reviewing the Situation ~ Fagin

Oliver (reprise) ~ Widow Corney & Mr. Bumble

As Long As He Needs Me (reprise) ~ Nancy

Reviewing the Situation (reprise) ~ Fagin

THE CHARACTERS

The Parish Workhouse

Workhouse Boys: Joshua Ballard, Sam Charles, Flynn Dixon Murdock, Aidan Drummond, Ben Freemantle, Ben Frost, Gordon Grice, Kevin Johnson, Nicholas Lee, Jeremy Levine, Bryce MacGregor, Joey Marshall, Sean Mathieson, Morgan Roff, Austin Rothwell, Cameron Saundry, Ethan Shankaruk, Wyatt Sjoberg-Fox, Dylan Sloane, Zac Vran, Hunter Watson

Oliver Twist: Brian Riback
Mr. Bumble: Warren Kimmel
Widow Corney: Karin Konoval
Chairman of the Board: Simon Broadbury
Board Members: Tom McBeath, Martin Sims
Apothecary's Apprentice: Aidan Drummond
Old Sally: Anthony Johnston
Annie: Kayla Dunbar

Henry Sowerberry's Coffin Furniture

Mr. Sowerberry: Simon Bradbury
Mrs. Sowerberry: Karin Konoval
Charlotte: Tracy Neff
Noah Claypole: Anthony Johnston

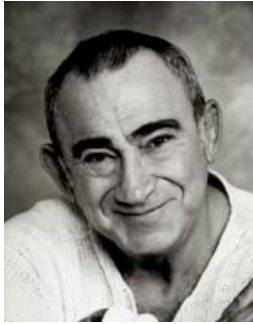
The Thieves' Kitchen

Fagin: Tom McBeath
The Artful Dodger: Morgan Roff
Charley Bates: Aidan Drummond
Fagin's Boys: Joshua Ballard, Sam Charles, Ben Freemantle, Jeremy Levine, Bryce MacGregor, Austin Rothwell, Ethan Shankaruk, Zac Vran, Hunter Watson
Nancy: Karin Konoval
Bet: Tracy Neff
Bill Sikes: Martin Sims

Bloomsbury

Mr. Brownlow: Simon Bradbury
Dr. Grimwig: Warren Kimmel
Parlourmaid: Tracy Neff
Giles: Anthony Johnston
Rose Seller: Kayla Dunbar
Milkmaid: Tracy Neff
Strawberry Seller: Anthony Johnston
Knife Grinder: Martin Sims

ABOUT THE PLAYWRIGHT



Lionel Bart (né Begleiter) was born in Whitechapel, East London, on August 1, 1930, and raised in Stepney, a densely populated inner-city neighbourhood that helped shape the setting and characters of *Oliver!*.

Bart was the youngest child of Galician Jews who immigrated to England to escape the pogroms. He showed early musical promise, but lacked the discipline to study seriously, never learning to read or write music. He won a scholarship to St. Martin's School of Art, but was expelled for "mischievousness."

After performing his National Service with the RAF, he opened a silk-screen printing business with his friend John Gorman, called "G & B Arts." One story is it that he took the name Bart from the name of the firm. Another is that he chose the name after passing St. Bartholomew's Hospital (commonly known as St. Bart's) on the bus.

The business failed, and Bart became involved in Unity, a left-wing theatre club, as an actor, scenic painter and poster designer. He began contributing lyrics to musical revues, and then writing his own plays.

It was as a songwriter that he made his mark, however, when he formed a skiffle group, The Cavemen, in the mid-1950s with Tommy Steele and Mike Pratt. Skiffle was an early form of rock and roll (similar to rockabilly), and Tommy Steele became the first British pop star, thanks in part to hit songs such as, "Rock with the Caveman", "A Handful of Songs" and "Butterfingers" written by Bart, Steele and Pratt. Bart also wrote the hit "Living Doll" for Cliff Richard (called the all-time perfect pop song by Andrew Lloyd Webber) and the theme to the James Bond film, *From Russia With Love*. Between 1957 and 1960, Bart had a song in the Top 20 every week, and won nine Ivor Novello Awards for songwriting. He also received a special Ivor Novello Award in 1986 for lifetime achievement.

His success as a popular songwriter helped finance his theatrical ventures. He wrote several songs for Joan Littlewood's production of *Fings Ain't Wot They Used T'Be*, a Cockney Comedy. This play with music was noted for its use of Cockney dialect and rhyming slang – the programme included English translations of the more unfamiliar phrases. He then wrote the lyrics for *Lock Up Your Daughters* (1959), based on a play by Henry Fielding.

Bart's next musical was his most successful. *Oliver!* (1960) was a hit in both the West End (running 2618 performances) and on Broadway, where it earned Bart a Tony Award for Best Composer and Lyricist. Davy Jones of The Monkees and Phil Collins both played the Artful Dodger in London (Jones also played the role on Broadway). It was made into a successful film in 1968, winning five Academy Awards, and was the last musical (until *Chicago*) and the only G-rated film to win Best Picture. *Oliver!* continues to be one of the most popular stage musicals ever written, but Bart was never able to duplicate that success.

Blitz! (1962) and *Maggie May* (1964) both had respectable runs, but *Twang!* (1965) was a flop and *La Strada* (1969) closed after one performance on Broadway. Bart used his own money to try and keep the shows running, even selling his rights to *Oliver!* for £15,000 (though at one time it was earning £16 a minute). By the early 1970s he was bankrupt, depressed, and an alcoholic. In 1994, however, Cameron Mackintosh revived *Oliver!*, and arranged for Bart to receive part of the royalties.

Lionel Bart died on April 3, 1999 after a long battle with cancer.

ABOUT CHARLES DICKENS



Charles Dickens was one of the most prolific and popular writers of the 19th century. His novels were widely read during his lifetime and continue to delight and inspire readers and writers today.

Dickens was born on February 7, 1812 to John and Elizabeth Dickens. When Charles was five years old, the family moved from Portsmouth to Chatham in Kent and later to Camden Town in London. Dickens enjoyed a carefree childhood of some small privilege, attending a private school for several years. But all that changed when John Dickens, a naval pay clerk, was imprisoned for debt. Charles was forced to work in a boot-blackening factory in order to support his family, most of whom were living in the Marshalsea debtors' prison. Even after the family's fortunes recovered, Dickens continued working in the factory, and his childhood essentially ended.

This experience had a deep and lasting impact on Dickens – his empathy for the working class and the conditions in which they lived and worked informed all his writings, both fiction and non-fiction, forcing his readers to confront and understand social issues.

At 15 he began work as a law clerk and later a court stenographer, but the law didn't interest him as a profession. Instead he made a name for himself as a parliamentary reporter for the *Morning Chronicle*, and began submitting short sketches of London life to periodicals under the pen name Boz. His first book, *Sketches by Boz* was published in 1836 and was followed by *The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club* in 1837. More popularly known as *The Pickwick Papers*, this series of humorous sketches about Sam Pickwick and his valet Sam Weller was a publishing phenomenon that established Dickens as a popular writer.

The success of *The Pickwick Papers* was duplicated many times over the next three decades. His most famous novels, written and published at an amazing rate, include *Oliver Twist* (1838), *Nicholas Nickleby* (1839), *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1841), *Barnaby Rudge* (1841), *Dombey and Son* (1848), *David Copperfield* (1850), *Bleak House* (1853), *Hard Times* (1854), *Little Dorrit* (1857), *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859), *Great Expectations* (1861), and *Our Mutual Friend* (1865). *A Christmas Carol* was written to help offset debts incurred when *Martin Chuzzlewit* (1843) failed to meet sales targets, and was the first of a series of Christmas novels Dickens wrote.

In 1836 he married Catherine Hogarth, with whom he had 10 children. They separated in 1858, but never divorced. Instead he maintained her in a separate household and conducted a long-time affair with the actress Ellen Ternan. Dickens was with Ternan in 1865 when the train he was travelling in was involved in an accident just outside Staplehurst. Several railcars plunged off a bridge that was being repaired, and although Dickens was uninjured, he never recovered emotionally from the experience. He completed only one novel after the accident, leaving *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* unfinished at his death on June 9, 1870, five years to the day of the Staplehurst rail crash.

Dickens was buried in Poets Corner at Westminster Abbey. The inscription on his tomb reads: "He was a sympathiser to the poor, the suffering, and the oppressed; and by his death, one of England's greatest writers is lost to the world."

DIRECTOR'S NOTES

I have yet to learn that a lesson of the purest good may not be drawn from the vilest evil. I have always believed this to be a recognized and established truth, laid down by the greatest men the world has ever seen, constantly acted upon by the best and wisest natures, and confirmed by the reason and experience of every thinking mind. I saw no reason, when I wrote this book, why the very dregs of life, so long as their speech did not offend the ear, should not serve the purpose of a moral, at least as well as its froth and cream. Nor did I doubt that there lay festering in St. Giles, as good materials towards the truth as any to be found in St. James's.

Charles Dickens, from his Preface to *Oliver Twist*

Dickens' humanity shines through in every novel he wrote. And Lionel Bart, using the shorthand of musical theatre, successfully recreated that humanity. Unfortunately, this tale of poverty and society's disenfranchised is as evident today as it was to Dickens in 1837 and to Bart in 1960.

Michael Shamata
Director



Tom McBeath (Fagin), Michael Shamata (Director), Lloyd Nicholson (Musical Director), Scott Augustine (Choreographer) and the Workhouse Boys.

THEMES AND ALLUSIONS

The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly

A full spectrum of human nature exists in *Oliver!* Oliver, himself, is a representation of innocent childhood, pure and untainted by the hardships he's experienced in his young life. In direct opposition to him is Bill Sikes, who is cruel and proud of his violent reputation – "Strong men tremble when they hear it! They've got cause enough to fear it! It's much blacker than they smear it! Nobody mentions my name!" (MY NAME) And Sikes is not entirely without conscience – after his brutal murder of Nancy, he is haunted by his actions and the realization that he is lost without her.

The rest of the characters are a collection of lovable rogues, fallen women, greedy officials, and potential saviours. No-one is entirely good or entirely bad. Mr. Brownlow rescues Oliver, but there is a hint of self-righteousness in his dealings with those of lower station. And Fagin, while a thief and a corruptor of children, provides a better home for his young charges than the workhouse officials, Mr. Bumble and Widow Corney. Nancy is perhaps the most obvious example of this mixture of right and wrong. She agrees to kidnap Oliver, but is later ashamed of her actions, and sacrifices herself to make sure Oliver is reunited with his benefactor.

Belonging

Throughout the story, Oliver is searching for a place to belong, or a person with whom he belongs – "Must I travel far and wide 'til I am beside the someone who I can mean something to?" (WHERE IS LOVE?).

The workhouse is inadequate to meet his basic needs; the undertaker's is a place of emotional and physical torment; Fagin's hideout offers a potential home, but only in a way that is contrary to Oliver's moral character. Finally, he finds a place with Mr. Brownlow, where he thrives, only to be stolen away by Nancy and Sikes. Nancy, however, recognizes that Oliver does not belong in their world, and so risks her life to take him back to his proper place. In the end, it turns out that Oliver does belong with Mr. Brownlow, not just because of his character, but because of his birthright.

Pragmatism

Most of the characters in *Oliver!* are making the best of a bad situation, or taking advantage of others in order to get ahead. Mr. Bumble sells Oliver to the Sowerberrys for five pounds (and the savings of a tiny bit of gruel). The Sowerberrys buy Oliver as an indentured servant, one that will enhance the drama of their funeral processions. Fagin uses his gang of young thieves to provide him with a handsome living. "Why should we break our backs, stupidly paying tax? Better get some untaxed income..." (BETTER PICK A POCKET OR TWO) Nancy recognizes the disadvantages of her life, but is resigned to what she has: "If you don't mind having to go without things, it's a fine life." (IT'S A FINE LIFE) They both recognize the precariousness of their situation, but while Fagin finds the alternatives equally distasteful, Nancy is appalled by what her life has made her become. She knows she can't save herself, but she can save Oliver.

Loyalty

The world of Fagin's gang might not seem to be one where loyalty exists, but the boys are genuinely fond of their ne'er-do-well leader. It might not be a civilized society, but it is a generous one, within its own parameters. The Artful Dodger offers Oliver a place to live, and a share of all they have (CONSIDER YOURSELF). The boys are loyal to Fagin, even unto death, and he genuinely worries about them while they are off thieving (BE BACK SOON).

Perhaps more mysteriously, Nancy is loyal to Bill Sikes, though he clearly abuses her. She is tied to him by love and by the belief that he needs her. She refuses to leave him, even when Brownlow offers her a way out of her life. "I could not be his death," she tells him. But her loyalty is not repaid. Sikes doesn't believe her when she says she didn't betray him, and kills her in a violent rage.

POVERTY AND 19TH CENTURY ENGLAND

Oliver Twist, the novel by Charles Dickens that was the basis for the musical *Oliver!*, is one of the most famous examples of the Victorian social novel, a genre that developed in England in the mid-19th century. Authors such as Dickens, George Eliot, Benjamin Disraeli and Charlotte Brontë wrote about issues such as poverty, class structure, and the effects of the Industrial Revolution in a fictional framework, with the intent of bringing public awareness to the problems in society.

Oliver! is set in Victorian-era England, at a time when there was little public aid for the poor and indigent. Until the 20th century, the Poor Law was the only system of social security in the United Kingdom. The first Poor Law was enacted in 1601. It made provisions to provide relief for those unable to work because of age or illness, to board orphaned or unwanted children, and to provide means for the unemployed to find work.

The Poor Law Amendment Act (1834) was brought in following a Royal Commission into the Operation of Poor Laws, which found that the old system was badly – and more importantly to those in power – expensively run. By the 1840s, all forms of outdoor relief – ie: relief without the requirement of institutionalization – were abolished, and the only public recourse for those in need was to enter a workhouse or risk imprisonment.

Furthermore, workhouses were run in such a way as to make them truly a place of last resort. Food was provided at barely a subsistence level despite heavy workdays, residents were dressed in prison uniforms, and men, women and children were often segregated and families separated. In 1846, a committee of the House of Commons investigated alleged abuses at a workhouse in Andover, discovering that the residents were routinely abused, starved, locked away and sexually assaulted. Although steps were taken to address these inhumane conditions, it wasn't until 1930 that workhouses were finally abolished.

Life wasn't much better outside of the workhouse for the able-bodied poor, particularly children. In 1840 London, only 20% of children in London received any kind of schooling. The rest worked long hours, in poor conditions, for subsistence wages. Before 1833, children as young as three years old were being put to work to help support their family. At that time, a law regulating the textile industry prohibited children under the age of nine from working, but in many other dangerous industries (mining, factories, gasworks, etc.) children still started work at age five.

Oliver's story would have been a familiar one to Dickens' readers. His sale to the Sowerberry's was a common fate of workhouse children, especially in rural areas. Thousands of children were sold into near slavery for a few pounds each, indentured as apprentices to factories and businesses until their 21st birthday. Not only did it provide revenue for the parish council, but it relieved the burden of having to feed and clothe these children.

Times have changed. Or have they? Exploitative child labour is still an issue in many countries around the world. According to UNICEF, 30,000 children die every day as a result of poverty. Half the world's population has no access to sanitation, 20% have no access to clean water. Desperate individuals in China pay as much as \$70,000 to be smuggled illegally into Canada or the United States, often ending up as indentured workers in restaurants, sweatshops, and brothels to pay off their debts.

In 2000 a study commissioned by the Canadian Council on Social Development showed that 156,800 people in Vancouver (or 31% of the population) lived in what Statistics Canada defines as "straitened circumstances," including nearly 10,000 children under the age of five.

Dickens, and his fellow Victorian social novelists, would find no shortage of material today.

GLOSSARY

Beadle

Originally a title given to Saxon officers who summoned householders to council (from the Latin *bidellus generalis*), more recently the term has had both religious and educational connotations. In *Oliver!*, Mr. Bumble is a beadle, a parish constable in charge of charity works.



Bloomsbury

A residential district in north-central London, part of the borough of Camden. It was developed in the 17th and 18th

centuries into a fashionable neighbourhood, noted for its gardened squares. The name is derived from the word Blemondisberi, (the manor of Blemond), named for William de Blemond, a Norman landowner who acquired the land in 1201.

Bob

A slang term for a shilling.

Booty

Plunder or treasure, usually obtained illegally through force or daring.

Bow Street Runners

Considered London's first professional police force, they were a group of individuals formed in 1749 by Henry Fielding and attached to the Bow Street magistrates office. They served writs and arrested offenders under the authority of the magistrate. Fielding's brother John refined the group into an effective police force, adding mounted officers.

Claridge's

A luxury hotel in London, located at the corner of Brook Street and Davies Street. Founded in 1812 as Mivart's Hotel, it was sold in 1854 to the Claridges, who owned a smaller hotel next door. The two hotels were combined and in 1898, the owner demolished the buildings and built the current hotel. In 1945, suite 212 was temporarily ceded from British soil in order to allow Crown Prince Alexander of Yugoslavia to be born on Yugoslavian soil.



Covey

A flock of small birds, especially partridges or quail, or a small group of people.

Ditty

A simple song (eg: "a little ditty about Jack and Diane").

Duchess

The highest rank of peerage in the United Kingdom, it is a title held by the widow or wife of a duke or given to a woman who holds a duchy in her own right.

Earl

A British nobleman next in rank above a Viscount and below a Marquis. The continental equivalent is a Count. As there is no female equivalent, the wife of an Earl is called a Countess. It is an Anglo-Saxon title meaning "chieftain" and was originally used to identify a chieftain who ruled a territory in the king's stead.

Esquire

A term originally used to designate a rank of English landed gentry below a knight, but above a gentleman. Gentlemen were designated with "Mr" before his name, while esquires were designated with an "Esq." after his name. In the United States, it is usually used to designate individuals licensed to practice law.

Fisticuffs

A physical conflict between two or more individuals using bare fists.

Flounce/Furbelow

A strip of pleated or gathered material used as a decoration or trim.

Garter

An elasticized band worn around the leg to hold up a stocking or sock or around the arm to hold up a sleeve.



Greenland

The largest island in the world not considered a continent, Greenland is a self-governing province of Denmark, located between the Arctic and Atlantic Oceans. Although adjacent to North America, it has been associated with Europe since the 10th century,

when it was colonized by Norse settlers. Following the Napoleonic Wars, the 1814 Treaty of Kiel divided the kingdom of Denmark-Norway, leaving Greenland with Denmark. It was granted home rule in 1979.

Gum tree

A type of evergreen tree native to Australia, more formally known as Eucalyptus. It gets its name from the copious sap that forms from a break in its bark. Koalas feed almost exclusively on eucalyptus leaves. The tree also yields an essential oil that has a variety of medicinal, industrial and aromatic uses.



Jamaica

An island nation in the Caribbean Sea, located south of Cuba. It was discovered by Columbus in 1494 and settled by the Spanish, who decimated the original Arawak population. The island was captured by Great Britain in the 17th century and became a crown colony in 1865. It gained its independence in 1962. The main industries in Jamaica revolve around sugarcane and tourism.

Jemmy

An iron or steel crowbar that can be used as a weapon or an instrument for break-ins.

Larder

A cool place for storing food. Larders were common in households prior to the widespread use of refrigerators in the 20th century and were usually built adjacent to the kitchen.

London Bridge

A bridge spanning the River Thames, it was the only river bridge in London until the Westminster Bridge was opened in 1750. The first bridge on the site was built from wood by the Romans around 60 AD. The Old London Bridge (made famous in the nursery rhymes, was built between 1176 and 1209, and lasted more than 600 years. The old bridge was lined with shops and houses – perhaps the earliest example of a shopping mall. It was demolished and replaced in 1831 by the New London Bridge, a five-arched bridge made of granite. It was dismantled in the 1968 and sold as a tourist attraction in Arizona. A new concrete bridge was built in 1973.



Magistrate

A public official who decides cases brought before a court of law in order to administer justice. In England, magistrates, or Justices of the Peace, hear prosecutions on summary offences and have the power to impose fines and short periods of incarceration.

Pease pudding

A baked vegetable dish made from dried split peas cooked with bacon or ham, also known as pease porridge or pease pottage. The dried peas are boiled until tender and then blended to a puree similar in texture to hummus.

**Pence**

A unit of British currency, also known as a penny. Under the current monetary system, there are 100 pence in a pound. Prior to decimalization in 1970, there were 240 pence to the pound. Thus, a shilling, equal to 12 pence, was 1/20 of a pound.

Petticoat

A woman's slip or underskirt that is often trimmed with ruffles or lace, they often were used to give the skirt or dress a fashionable shape. Historically, it also referred to a skirt designed to be worn with a bed gown, bodice or jacket.

Satan

A mythical and Biblical figure in literary and religious traditions, portrayed as an opponent to God. The name Satan comes from a Hebrew word meaning "to oppose" or "adversary." Often identified with the fallen angel, Lucifer, who had been cast out of Heaven after leading a revolt against God, Satan is identified with the Devil. In mainstream Christian thought, he is the servant who tempted Eve with the apple, the accuser of Job, and the tempter of Christ.

**Saveloys**

A type of sausage, popular in England, Australia and New Zealand. Made of pork, saveloys are vivid red in colour and highly seasoned. They are usually served with French fries, but are also popular in a sandwich with pease pudding or stuffing. A similar kind of sausage is known as a Red Hot in the United States.

**Shilling**

A unit of currency, now obsolete in the United Kingdom, but still used in several East African countries. Its value was 12 pennies (pence) or 1/20 of a pound. Equivalent to the new 5 pence coin under decimalization, they remained in circulation until 1990.

**Sixpence**

Also known as a half-shilling or tanner, a sixpence is a former unit of currency in the United Kingdom equivalent to six pennies. It was first minted in 1551 during the reign of Edward VI. When Britain changed to a decimal system of money in 1971, the sixpence became obsolete. They remained legal tender until 1980, however; equivalent to 2.5 pence.

Timbuktu

A city in central Mali near the Niger River. Founded in the 11th century, it was a major trading centre of gold and salt, and a centre of Islamic learning. It was sacked by invaders in 1593 and fell to the French in 1894.



Toddy

A drink made of liquor, sugar and spices, mixed with either hot or cold water and served in a tall glass.

Toff

A British slang term referring to a member of the upper class, especially one elegantly dressed or with affected manners. It is possibly a variant of the word tuft, referring to a tassel worn by students at Oxford and Cambridge.

Togs

A slang term referring to articles of clothing.

The Tower

The Tower of London is located on the north bank of the Thames River, east of the City of London. It was built as a fortress for the British royal family in 1078, and served various purposes, including a residence and jail for prisoners of high status and religious dissidents. Famous prisoners include Henry VI, who was murdered in the Tower in 1471, Sir Walter Raleigh, Guy Fawkes, and Rudolf Hess. It now functions primarily as a museum, housing the crown jewels.

**Traps**

A colloquial term referring to small or portable articles of dress or furniture; goods; luggage; things.

Valet

A man-servant, who looks after a gentleman's clothes and performs various personal services, such as drawing his bath, making travel arrangements and handling household bills.

**Wedgewood**

A china company founded in 1759 by Josiah Wedgwood I, known as the "father of English potters." In 1987, it merged with Waterford Crystal to become Waterford

Wedgwood. Wedgwood china comes in many

patterns, but the most famous is classical decorations in blue.

White-livered

Cowardly or easily frightened.

Windpipe

A lay name for the trachea, a tube through which air passes from the larynx to the bronchi during respiration.

Wipes

Slang term for handkerchief, short for nose-wipes.

Workhouse

An establishment where people unable to support themselves could live and work; workhouses or poorhouses were publicly maintained facilities run by local governments. The 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act in Britain was designed to "reform" relief measures for the poor, including making conditions in



workhouses nearly unliveable. By the 1840s, the setting of *A Christmas Carol*, the only relief available to the poor was the workhouses or debtors prisons. In Victorian times, poverty was viewed as a dishonourable condition and the result of character flaws. The 1913 definition in Webster's exemplifies this bias, defining a workhouse as a place where idle and vicious people are confined to labour. The workhouse shown was built in Nantwich, Cheshire in 1780.

NOTABLE QUOTABLES

"We think sometimes that poverty is only being hungry, naked and homeless. The poverty of being unwanted, unloved and uncared for is the greatest poverty. We must start in our own homes to remedy this kind of poverty." Mother Teresa of Calcutta

"There is an internal landscape, a geography of the soul; we search for its outlines all our lives. Those who are lucky enough to find it ease like water over a stone, onto its fluid contours, and are home. Some find it in the place of their birth; others may leave a seaside town, parched, and find themselves refreshed in the desert. There are those born in rolling countryside who are really only at ease in the intense and busy loneliness of the city. For some, the search is for the imprint of another; a child or a mother, a grandfather or a brother, a lover, a husband, a wife, or a foe. We may go through our lives happy or unhappy, successful or unfulfilled, loved or unloved, without ever standing cold with the shock of recognition, without ever feeling the agony as the twisted iron in our soul unlocks itself and we slip at last into place." Josephine Hart

"The hunger to belong is not merely a desire to be attached to something. It is rather sensing that great transformation and discovery become possible when belonging is sheltered and true." John O'Donohue

From the play:

"Please sir, I want some more." Oliver

"Never before has a boy wanted more." Mr. Bumble

"They're a waste of time, these parish children – they always cost more to keep than they're worth." Mrs. Sowerberry

"I don't mean a regular mute, to follow grown-up people's coffins, my dear, but only for children's funerals. It would be very new to have a mute in proportion, my dear." Mr. Sowerberry

"Bring up some of the cold bits we put by for the dog. He hasn't come home since the morning, so he can go without 'em. I daresay the boy isn't too dainty to eat 'em – are you boy?" Mrs. Sowerberry

"Let him alone? Why everybody lets him alone enough, for the matter of that. His father left him alone. His mother left him alone. They all left him alone, except dear old, kind old Noah." Noah

"You've raised an artificial soul and spirit in him, ma'am, unbecoming of a person of his condition. What have paupers to do with soul or spirit? It's quite enough that we let 'em live. If you had kept the boy on gruel, ma'am, this would never have happened." Mr. Bumble

"That boy was born to be hung, Mrs. Corney." Mr. Bumble

"What a fine thing capital punishment is! Dead men never repent; dead men never bring awkward stories to light." Fagin

"I wonder they don't murder you. / would if I was them. Then I'd – no, I couldn't sell you afterwards, you're not fit for nothing but keeping as a curiosity of ugliness in a glass bottle. And I don't suppose they blow glass bottles large enough." Bill Sikes

"It's rather more 'no' than 'yes' wiv me, Bill." Nancy

"The persons on whom I have bestowed my dearest love, lie deep in their graves; but, although the happiness and delight of my life lie buried there too, I have not made a coffin of my heart." Mr. Brownlow

"I only know two sorts of boys. Mealy faced boys and beef-faced boys." Dr. Grimwig

"Fevers are not peculiar to good people, are they? Bad people have fevers sometimes; haven't they, eh? I knew a man who was hung in Jamaica for murdering his master. He had a fever six times!"
Dr. Grimwig

"Why didn't you write, my dear, and say you were coming? We'd have got something warm for supper." Fagin

"Do you think Nancy and me has got nothing else to do with our precious time, but to spend it kidnapping every young boy as gets away from you?" Bill Sikes

"Here. Start a library." Bill Sikes

"Send him back the books and the money. Keep me here all my life, but pray, pray send them back." Oliver

"The child shan't be harmed unless you kill me first." Nancy

"Keep quiet, or I'll quiet you for a good long time to come. You're a nice one! A pretty subject for the child to make a friend of!" Bill Sikes

"I wish I'd been struck dead in the street before I lent a hand to bringing him back here. From this night forth, he's a thief, a liar, a villain, and all that's bad. Ain't that enough for you, without beating him to death?" Nancy

"Come, come, Sikes. We must have civil words, civil words, Bill." Fagin

"I was out on the streets for you when I was a child half his age!" Nancy

"I sold myself for six teaspoons, a pair of sugar tongs, and a milk-pot, with a small quantity of second hand furniture and twenty pounds cash. I went very reasonable!" Mr. Bumble

"You would have been dear at any price!" Widow Corney

Mr. Bumble: The prerogative of a man...is to...command

Widow Corney: And what's the prerogative of a woman, in the name of goodness?

Mr. Bumble: To obey, madam! Your late unfortunate husband should have taught it to you, and then, perhaps, he might have been alive today. And I wish he was!

"I am a feather for ev'ry wind that blows!" Widow Corney

"In this very room – in this very bed – I once nursed a pretty young creetur, that was brought into the house with her feet cut and bruised with walking. She gave birth to a boy, and then she died."
Old Sally

Mr. Brownlow: Indeed, you are the more guilty of the two, in the eye of the law, for the law supposes that your wife acts under your direction.

Mr. Bumble: If the law supposes that, sir, then the law is a ass! A idiot! If that's the eye of the law, then the law is a bachelor.

"If you knew what I am sometimes, you'd pity me, indeed. But I've stolen away from those who would surely murder me, if they knew I'd been here." Nancy

"When such as I, sir, set our rotten hearts on such as he, and let him fill the place that's been empty all our lives... I can't leave him now. I could not be his death." Nancy

FURTHER EXPLORATION FOR STUDENTS

Poverty

Research England's Poor Laws. What were conditions like for the lower classes in 1843 England? What measures of relief were available prior to the development of the welfare state in the 20th century?

What is life like now for the poorest members of our own society? Think about how much money you require each month to live comfortably. Under the new welfare rates in British Columbia, a single parent with two children can receive up to \$1645.31 per month, including tax credits and federal assistance programmes. A single person with "persistent multiple barriers" that prevent them from working can receive up to \$686.84 per month. Create a monthly budget from that amount, covering all daily necessities. What kind of shelter is possible? What kinds of food?

Musical Adaptations

Turning a dark Dickensian tale into a family musical seems like a stretch, but it resulted in one of the most popular stage musicals of our time. But Broadway musicals have long found their inspiration in novels and plays: *My Fair Lady* is based on Shaw's *Pygmalion*, which in turn was based on a story in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*; *Les Miserables* was based on the Victor Hugo novel; *Spring Awakening* is based on an 1891 German play by Frank Wedekind. More recently, musicals have been adapted from movies (*The Producers*, *Footloose*, *Dirty Rotten Scoundrels*), or drawn from the work of a popular singer or group (*Movin' Out*, *Mamma Mia!*, *Jersey Boys*).

What source material would you choose for the next musical to wow them on the West End? Pick a rock group or singer and find a selection of their songs that could work together to tell a story. Take your favourite book and imagine it in a musical setting. Explore the different challenges of finding a story to go with songs, or songs to go with a story. How do the two elements work together?

Keeping in Touch

Oliver turns out to be the grandson of Mr. Brownlow, the son of his lost daughter Agnes. It's not spelled out in the musical how Agnes ended up alone in the workhouse, but it's clearly an estrangement that pains Brownlow. Have you lost touch with a family member or friend? What reasons were there for the fall-out? Do you plan on keeping in touch with your friends from high school? How have technological advances helped make that easier, especially when people move away?

Gang Culture

Fagin's group of young pickpockets is an early example of a gang led by a predatory adult, albeit somewhat romanticized. What are examples of other gangs in literature or film? How are they portrayed compared to news reports of street gangs today?

Are there gangs in your school? Do you belong to a gang, or have you been pressured to join a gang or intimidated by gang activity? What different kinds of gangs are there? How have they evolved and what function do they serve in street and youth culture?

RECOMMENDED READING & VIEWING

Oliver Twist, Charles Dickens

The novel that formed the basis for the musical.

David Copperfield, Charles Dickens

The most autobiographical of Dickens' novels, it tells the story of a young orphan and his moral and emotional development.

Middlemarch, George Eliot

One of the great novels of the Victorian era, it tells the interwoven story of several families living in a provincial town at the time of the Reform Act.

Vanity Fair, William Makepeace Thackeray

Thackeray was Dickens' main literary rival and *Vanity Fair* was his first published novel under his own name, and his most famous.

Kidnapped, Robert Louis Stevenson

An adventure story about a young man who is kidnapped for his inheritance and narrowly escapes being sold into slavery.

Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, Mark Twain

One of the first great American novels, it chronicles the journey down the Mississippi of a young boy, Huckleberry Finn, and a runaway slave, Jim.

The Quincunx, Charles Palliser

A modern novel, but very reminiscent of Dickens' novels, about a young boy whose uncertain antecedents are the key to a great legacy.

Coningsby, Benjamin Disraeli

An example of the Victorian social novel, set against the background of events following the Reform Bill of 1832, and discussing the need for social justice in Industrial Age England.

Victorian People and Ideas: A Companion for the Modern Reader of Victorian Literature, Richard D. Altick

An introduction to the values and literature of Victorian England.

The Workhouse: An Everyday Tale of Ultimate Degradation, Simon Fowler

A history of the workhouse, from 1696 to 1948, including personal accounts and historical records.

INTERNET SITES OF NOTE

The Playhouse Theatre Company

www.vancouverplayhouse.com

Sign up for the latest news and offers at the Playhouse

Oliver Twist

<http://www.bibliomania.com/0/0/19/46/frameset.html>

Online text of the novel that the musical was based on.

Charles Dickens

<http://www.helsinki.fi/kasv/nokol/dickens.html>

A hub for links about Dickens' work, life and related subjects.

The Victorian Web

<http://www.victorianweb.org/index.html>

An Internet hub for various topics on Victorian England, including politics, philosophy, literature, religion, and science.

Workhouse Children

<http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/IRworkhouse.children.htm>

Some background information on what life was like for children in a workhouse.

CBC News In Depth – Biker Gangs

<http://www.cbc.ca/news/background/bikergangs/>

A backgrounder on biker gangs in Canada

Youth Violence and Youth Gangs: Responding to Community Concerns

http://ww2.ps-sp.gc.ca/publications/policing/199456_e.asp

A study funded by the Ministry of the Solicitor General of Canada and the Department of Justice Canada