

Nicholas Nickleby

Charles Dickens

Retold by
Pieter Koster

Level B2



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Nicholas Meets His Uncle

Preview Questions

1. What kind of job do you want to get when you finish school?
2. Do you need to have a lot of money to be happy?
3. Are you a safe person, or do you take risks?

There was once a gentleman called Mr. Godfrey Nickleby, who lived in London, had a small income, and married late in life. He had two sons, whom he called Ralph and Nicholas. He was able to provide for them only because he unexpectedly inherited his uncle's property. He retired to the country, and when he died, his two sons each received some of the **inheritance**.

The older son, Ralph, had heard stories of his father's earlier poverty and was determined that he would not be poor. He went to London and made as much money as he could and did not care too much about how he made it.

The younger son, Nicholas, had also heard about his father's poverty, but its effect on him was different. He was **cautious** and decided to save what he had and spend very little. He married and had two children, Nicholas and Kate. When Kate was seventeen and Nicholas nineteen, their father had little money left because of the expense of educating the children, and he began to wonder how he could provide for them further.

"Invest," said Mrs. Nickleby. "Think of your brother, Ralph. Where would he be if he hadn't speculated?"

Nicholas Nickleby was not sure this was a good idea, but in the end, he followed his wife's advice. However, he was not lucky and soon lost the small amount of money that he had. This made

him feel ill, and he went to bed, where he began to think about his childhood and the good times he had enjoyed with his brother.

His brother was an unfriendly man who lived and worked in a large house in Golden Square. Nobody knew how he got his money, but everybody knew he was quite wealthy. The houses in that part of London were large but were out of the way, and it did not seem to be a good place to have a business. Ralph Nickleby, however, had lived there for many years. He knew very few of his neighbours, and few of them knew him. He had an employee who did whatever Ralph asked him to do. This man was Newman Noggs, a tall man of middle age with enormous eyes and a red nose. His clothes were very old and too small for him, and he had a strange habit of cracking the joints of his fingers.

“I am going to the London Tavern for a public meeting this morning,” Ralph Nickleby said to Noggs one day. “I shall be walking to Charing Cross after the meeting. If any letters come while I am away, come and meet me and bring the letters with you.”

Noggs nodded just as the bell rang.

Noggs went to open the door. He returned with Mr. Bonney, a pale, untidy man who was very excited.

“My dear Nickleby, I have a cab at the door. We must hurry. Sir Matthew Pupker will chair the meeting, and three **Members of Parliament** are coming to speak. The United City Cake Company will be very successful, I am sure.”

He continued to speak as they went out to the cab. “It is a brilliant idea. Five million pounds of capital was made up of five hundred thousand shares of ten pounds each. The shares will soon be worth more.”

“And when they are . . .”

“We know what to do,” said Mr. Bonney, “and you know

better than anybody! By the way, that man of yours is a very strange man.”

Ralph agreed. “He was once a gentleman who owned horses, but he lost his money and began to drink. He came to me to borrow a pound, but I needed a clerk and I employed him.”

Ralph did not tell Mr. Bonney that he paid Noggs less than a boy of thirteen might earn and that he found him useful because he knew how to keep secrets.

The two men got into the cab and hurried off to the London Tavern for their public meeting. A large number of people had been attracted to the meeting, and they were waiting noisily for it to begin. When Mr. Bonney and Ralph arrived, people began to cheer and clap their hands. The purpose of the meeting was to form a company. People could buy shares in the company for ten pounds each. The money from the shares would be used to build a factory. The company would make cakes and sell them. Everybody who had shares would get some of the profit. Ralph and Mr. Bonney said they would be the best cakes in London. A lot of people wanted to buy shares.

However, Ralph was not very honest. He knew the company would not make any profits, but he would sell his shares before anybody else found this out. He would sell the shares for a profit. This was one way that Ralph became rich.

Everybody at the meeting was so **enthusiastic** that Ralph calculated the shares were probably worth twelve pounds each already and began to think how soon he should begin to sell them.

He enjoyed his lunch and set out on his walk to Charing Cross. On the way, he saw Noggs, who gave him a letter that had arrived. It had a black edge around it, which indicated that it was sad news.

“I wouldn’t be surprised if my brother is dead,” he told Noggs.

“I don’t think you would,” replied Noggs.

N E W W O R D S

Chapter 1

inheritance *n.* a gift passed down from a relative upon their death

cautious *adj.* careful, not taking risks

Member of Parliament *n.* a person who is elected to help rule the country

enthusiastic *adj.* excited; showing that you like something very much

mutter *v.* to say something softly but angrily

portrait *n.* a picture of a person

encourage *v.* to urge or support someone by giving one's approval

Chapter 2

wrinkled *adj.* having many creases, folds, or lines on the skin

sinister *adj.* evil or wicked

timid *adj.* shy; easily frightened

stare *v.* to look hard at something for a long time

Chapter 3

ale *n.* beer

porridge *n.* a hot breakfast cereal made of oats

miller *n.* a person who makes flour

announce *v.* to tell everybody

giggle *v.* to laugh in a silly way

insult *v.* to offend or hurt someone's feelings by saying or doing sth

Chapter 4

chat *v.* to talk together in a friendly way

miserable *adj.* sad and hopeless

disastrous *adj.* very bad

compliment *v.* to praise someone

murmur *v.* to say something softly

faint *v.* to fall unconscious

Chapter 5

drag *v.* to pull something across the ground

fiancé *n.* a man who is engaged to be married

barn *n.* a large shed on a farm

anniversary *n.* the yearly recurrence of the date of a past event

fetch *v.* to go get something or somebody

punch *n.* a fruit drink served at a party, sometimes containing alcohol

Chapter 6

governess *n.* a private teacher

companion *n.* a person employed to assist and spend time with another as a helpful friend

elect *v.* to be selected by voting

Chapter 7

mourn *v.* to feel or show sadness because someone has died

awkward *adj.* lacking grace

stagger *v.* to walk as if you will fall over

Chapter 8

renounce *v.* to give up

resume *v.* to start again

debt *n.* money that you owe someone

Chapter 9

trapdoor *n.* a door that blends into the surface of a ceiling or floor



Nicholas Nickleby

Mr. Gride's Wedding Day

Characters

- Gride:** a very ugly, thin, old man who is about seventy-five years old and horrible
- Peg Sliderskew:** a very ugly old woman who is Gride's servant
- Ralph Nickleby:** a man in his fifties, who is neatly dressed but mean and unhappy
- Bray:** a man in his fifties, who is selfish and quite sick
- Nicholas Nickleby:** a young man
- Kate:** Nicholas's younger sister
- Madeline:** a beautiful young lady who is very sad
- A servant:** an older woman

The play begins in Gride's house. Then it moves to Ralph's house and finally to Bray's house.

- Gride:** *(singing)* Hooray, hooray, hooray!
 Today's my wedding day!
 I'm as happy as can be,
 Cause Madeline's going to marry me!
- (shouting)* Peg Sliderskew, where are you? Time to get up, you old woman. I want my breakfast!

Peg Sliderskew appears, but she is very sleepy and grumpy.

Peg Sliderskew: All right, all right! Don't get too excited. Here it is!

She puts a plate on the table very roughly. Gride sits down and begins to eat greedily.

Peg Sliderskew: (*aside*) So he's getting married! He wants somebody better than old Peg to serve him, and what will happen to me? He promised me his money when he died, but now that pretty young lady will get it.

Gride finishes eating his breakfast and stands up.

Gride: Peg, I'm off to see Ralph Nickleby before the wedding. When I come back, I'll be a married man!
Hooray, hooray, hooray!
Today's my wedding day!

Gride walks to Ralph Nickleby.

Ralph Nickleby: Ah, there you are! Where is the money that you owe me? It has to be paid today.

Gride: I didn't bring it with me, but I will give it to you after the wedding.

Ralph Nickleby: Are you ready?

Gride: Yes.

They begin to walk.

Gride: A strange thing happened last night. A young man came to see me and tried to stop me from marrying Madeline. I think he wants to marry her himself.

Ralph Nickleby laughs.

Ralph Nickleby: Well, you had better be careful. It's fun to take a young lady from her lover and marry her, but it is more difficult and dangerous to keep her!

Introduction

The Life and Adventures of Nicholas Nickleby was Charles Dickens's third novel. It was first published as a series which was completed in 1839. It is not one of Dickens's better known works. Still, there have been plays and movies made based on its plot. And it is very typical of Dickens's style. It deals with the theme of social injustice. This is a major theme that appears over and over again in Dickens's works.

Nicholas Nickleby is the protagonist of the book. He is portrayed as noble and uncompromising. He is passionate and stands up for himself and others. He will not stand by while others are treated badly. As a result, he makes enemies of some evil characters. His main adversary is his uncle, Ralph. This creates a conflict for him because his sister and mother must rely on Ralph for money. This problem motivates Nicholas. He must find a way to take care of them himself.

Like most of Dickens's works, the novel takes place mainly in London. Noble characters are pitted against evil ones. The former begin with a great deal of misfortune. The latter seem to have all the advantages. But good does triumph over evil. The protagonist succeeds thanks to his virtues mixed with some good luck.

Before You Read

I. Look at each word and phrase and then write a few sentences that describe it.

1. Inheritance

2. Family relationships

3. Greed

4. Poverty

5. Royalty

6. Life in the 19th century

II. Scan through the book to answer the following questions.

1. In chapter 1, we discover Nicholas's grandfather. What is his name?

2. In chapter 3, why didn't Smike come out sooner to look after the horse?

3. How much was Mrs. Kenwigs going to pay Nicholas to teach her daughters French in chapter 6?

4. Who was the only person in the company that was not sad that Nicholas was leaving in chapter 12?

5. In chapter 19, where was Noggs trapped?

III. Read each question and give your opinion.

1. How do you think Nicholas will feel when he meets his uncle?

2. Why do you think Smike would want to run away from Dotheboys Hall?

3. What could be a reason that Nicholas decided to leave the theatre company?

4. Why do you think that Nicholas will try to stop a wedding?

5. Why would Ralph feel so bad for discovering a secret?

Nicholas Meets His Uncle

I. Put the sentences in order from 1 (first) to 5 (last).

- _____ Nicholas died.
- _____ Ralph grew up to be rich because he didn't care how he made money.
- _____ Ralph and Nicholas were the sons of Mr. Godfrey Nickleby, who was once poor.
- _____ Nicholas grew up to be careful with money, but eventually he tried investing it and lost it all.
- _____ Ralph visited Nicholas's family and convinced his son, Nicholas, to take a job while he looked after his mother and sister.

II. Choose the best answer.

1. What did Nicholas's wife advise him to do?
 - a. To ask his brother for money
 - b. To save his money
 - c. To invest his money
 - d. To take a second job
2. Why did Ralph keep Noggs employed?
 - a. Because he did not demand much pay
 - b. Because he did not tell others his secrets
 - c. Because he did not ask for much money and could keep secrets
 - d. Because he was blackmailing Ralph
3. Why did Ralph think he would make money on the United City Cake Company?
 - a. Because he planned to sell his shares after they increased in value
 - b. Because he thought the company would be successful since its cakes were so good
 - c. Because he knew the value of the stocks would fall and then he could buy them cheaply
 - d. Because he knew the man who was going to run it was a smart businessman
4. Why was Ralph upset by the letter that Noggs gave him?
 - a. Because it said that his brother had died
 - b. Because it said that his brother's family was coming to London
 - c. Because it said that his brother's family needed money
 - d. Because it said that he had lost his investment

III. Match the word with the meaning used in the chapter.

- | | | |
|-------------------------|---|--|
| 1. cautious | • | • a. to promote, advance, or foster |
| 2. assistant | • | • b. to say something softly but angrily |
| 3. encourage | • | • c. showing that you like something very much |
| 4. enthusiastic | • | • d. to need |
| 5. inheritance | • | • e. the amount of money a person earns through employment |
| 6. mutter | • | • f. one whose job it is to help another do his or her job |
| 7. member of parliament | • | • g. a person who is elected to help rule the country |
| 8. portrait | • | • h. a picture of a person |
| 9. income | • | • i. what you get when a rich relative dies |
| 10. require | • | • j. careful; not taking risks |

IV. Write a summary by answering the questions.

1. What happened after Nicholas's father died?
2. Who did Nicholas meet at Miss La Creevy's house?
3. What did Mr. Squeers advertise for?
4. Who persuaded Nicholas to apply for the job?

Summary: _____
