

Great Expectations

Study Guide

Chapter I

1. How does Dickens begin his story?
2. What narrative point of view has Dickens chosen for this novel?
3. What can the reader expect in a story told from this point of view?
4. How does the action of the story begin?
5. Briefly, describe the convict. What evidence is there that the convict has human qualities and is not merely a criminal?
6. How does Dickens establish that Pip is a young child in this part of the story?
7. Does Pip know the convict is a convict?
8. How does Dickens establish the social class of the convict?
9. On what note of potential foreshadowing does the first chapter end?
10. How does Dickens create some sympathy for the convict?

Chapter II

1. How does the following description of Mrs. Joe Gargery help the reader understand her character?

“My sister, Mrs. Joe, with black hair and eyes, had such a prevailing redness of skin that I sometimes used to wonder whether it was possible she washed herself with a nutmeg-grater instead of soap. She was tall and bony, and almost always wore a coarse apron, fastened over her figure behind with two loops, and having a square impregnable bib in front, that was stuck full of pins and needles.” (Pg. 6)
2. What effect does Dickens achieve by describing Pip as having been “brought up by hand”?
3. Contrast Pip’s description of Mrs. Joe with his description of Joe.
4. What important exposition is the reader given in this chapter?
5. What is Dickens hoping to achieve in the following passage?

“Since that time, which is far enough away now, I have often thought that few people know what secrecy there is in the young, under terror. No matter how unreasonable the terror, so that it be terror. I was in mortal terror of the young man who wanted my heart and liver; I was in mortal terror of my interlocutor with the leg iron; I was in mortal terror of myself, from whom an awful promise had been extracted; I had no hope of deliverance through my all-powerful sister, who repulsed me at every turn; I am afraid to think of what I might have done on requirement, in the secrecy of my terror.” (Pg. 11)
6. What is Dickens hoping to achieve in the above passage?
7. How does learning about the Hulks and the escaped convicts intensify Pip’s horror?

Chapter III

1. What weather condition seems to mirror Pip’s state of mind?
2. In what ways does Pip show himself to be a compassionate young boy?

Chapter IV

1. How does Chapter IV begin and end?
2. What observation does Pip make about Joe’s dress and appearance?
3. What are the sources of humor in this chapter?

Chapter V

1. Why does Pip say to Joe that he hopes the soldiers do not catch the escaped convicts?
2. How is the capture of the two convicts ironic?
3. What does Pip’s convict mean when he says the following to the soldiers after he is caught?

“Mind!” said my convict, wiping blood from his face with his ragged sleeves, and shaking torn hair from his fingers: “I took him! I give him up to you! Mind that!” (Pg. 27)
4. What facts do we learn about the convicts in this chapter?
5. What does the treatment of the stolen pie suggest about the characters of the convict and Joe?
6. Why does the convict go out of his way to clear Pip of any blame for the missing food?
7. What indications are there that the plotline of the convict is not over?

Chapter VI

1. Why does Pip love Joe? What reason does he give for keeping the truth of his crimes from Joe?

Chapter VII

1. Chapter VII is the end of the third weekly installment of the book. What structural purpose does it serve?
2. How again does Dickens indicate Pip's youth and lack of learning?
3. What do we learn about Mr. Wopsle?
4. How are Biddy and Pip alike?
5. Why did Joe not learn to read as a child? What made him marry Pip's sister?
6. Compare Joe's dialect with the convict's in Chapter I.
7. What might Dickens be suggesting by having Joe and the convict use such similar dialects?
8. What does Dickens accomplish at the end of this chapter?
"... what with my feelings and what with soap-suds, I could at first see no stars from the chaise-cart. But they twinkled out one by one, without throwing any light on the questions why on earth I was going to play at Miss Havisham's and what on earth I was expected to play at." (Pg. 40)

Chapter VIII

1. How does Dickens ridicule the city businessmen in this chapter? What does the reader learn about Mr. Pumblechook from a glimpse into his home life?
2. Why is the Manor House also called Satis House?
3. How is the name of the house ironic?
4. What can the reader infer about Miss Havisham from this first introduction?
5. What sympathetic connection does Pip begin to forge with Miss Havisham?
6. Why does Miss Havisham make Estella play cards with Pip? Why is she interested in Pip's opinion of Estella?
7. Explain the new ambivalence developing in Pip's character.

Chapter IX

1. What does Pip mean when he says he did not think his sister and Uncle Pumblechook would understand Miss Havisham even though he did not understand her himself?
2. How does Dickens reinforce Pip and Joe's closeness?

Use the following passage from the book to answer the next two questions.

"That was a memorable day to me, for it made great changes in me. But, it is the same with any life. Imagine one selected day struck out of it, and think how different its course would have been. Pause you who read this, and think for a moment of the long chain of iron or gold, of thorns or flowers, that would never have bound you, but for the formation of the first link on one memorable day." (Pg. 55)

3. What "links" in Pip's "chain" are begun the day he visits Satis House?
4. What effect is created by Dickens allowing his adult narrator to pause in the narrative and address the reader directly?

Chapter X

1. What steps does Pip take to improve himself?
2. How does Dickens suggest the character of the stranger in the pub?
3. What two things does the stranger do to suggest a connection with the convict from the beginning of the book?
4. What is the most likely reason the stranger is at the pub?
5. What is the "invisible gun" referred to in Dickens' description of the stranger? Why does Pip have nightmares after meeting the stranger in the pub?
6. What two major plotlines begin to converge at the end of this chapter?