**Characters in *Great Expectations***

**Pip**

The complex central protagonist and first person narrator, the working class Pip Pirrip is an orphan living with his abusive sister and her gentle husband when the story starts. His destiny as a blacksmith is apparently mapped out for him, and he initially welcomes this vision of his future. But his fateful encounter with an escaped convict and subsequent introduction to middle class gentility in the shape of the ‘honeytrap’ Estella are the catalyst for his moral downfall as he attempts to reinvent himself as a ‘gentleman’.

**Biddy**

Biddy is one of the few literate characters of his own class with whom Pip has anything to do as a child, a trenchant reminder that education in the 1820s was not universal and might even be resisted by working class families. Joe himself is unable to read or write until after the death of his wife, who he explains would view him as a ‘rebel’ with a desire to ‘rise’ out of his station if he attempted to educate himself. Biddy herself has no such desire, and vainly advises Pip to give up his pursuit of the middle class Estella. Pip later implies that Biddy is herself in love with him, but returns to propose marriage just too late, finding that she has already married the faithful Joe.

**Trabb’s boy**

Trabb’s boy, employed by the local tailor, serves something of the function more poignantly fulfilled by Magwitch – he is a comic reminder of Pip’s pretensions but also of the past he cannot fully escape. His own prospects are limited and there is no suggestion that he will achieve prosperity on his own account. Nonetheless he deflates the insecure vanity of the newly made ‘gentleman’ by publicly proclaiming his provincial origins. In chapter 30 Pip is humiliated by the performance of Trabb’s boy:

strutting along the pavement towards me on the opposite side of the street, attended by a company of delighted young friends to whom he from time to time exclaimed, with a wave of his hand, “Don’t know yah!” Words cannot state the amount of aggravation and injury wreaked upon me by Trabb’s boy, when, passing abreast of me, he pulled up his shirt-collar, twined his side-hair, stuck an arm akimbo, and smirked extravagantly by, wriggling his elbows and body, and drawling to his attendants, ‘Don’t know yah, don’t know yah, pon my soul don’t know yah!’ <https://etc.usf.edu/lit2go/140/great-expectations/2574/chapter-30/>

**"Magwitch** **"**

It is unclear just how old Magwitch is, but he would have been tried under the ‘Bloody Code’. Like Pip’s other father figure Joe, he has grown up with very little education, later confiding that ‘A deserting soldier in a Travellers’ Rest, what lay hid up to the chin under a lot of taturs, learnt me to read; and a travelling Giant what signed his name at a penny a time learnt me to write’. Grateful to Pip for trying to save him from the hulks, his tragic mistake is to think that he can use the fortune he acquires in Australia to educate and so ‘make a gentleman’ of him. In one sense he succeeds, but Pip will only learn to love him through rejecting what he gives him.

**Joe**

Pip astutely describes his brother in law Joe Gargery as ‘a sort of Hercules in strength, and also in weakness’. The son of a violently abusive man, he is aware that as a blacksmith his own strength is prodigious and he has a horror of hurting any woman as his own mother was hurt. Ironically this resolution leads him to tolerate Mrs Joe’s ill treatment of Pip, whom she routinely beats for the slightest offence. But Joe is also the real hero of the novel, ultimately identified by Pip as the ‘gentle Christian man’ whose example he has signally failed to follow.

**Compeyson**

A plausible adventurer, the middle class Compeyson has plotted with Miss Havisham’s brother in the pre-history of the novel to humiliate her by becoming engaged to her and then jilting her on the wedding day. He has subsequently become involved with Magwitch, but received a much lighter sentence when they are both tried for the crime he himself engineered. Pip is twice a witness to Magwitch’s assaults on Compeyson, first on the marshes and many years later in the river near Gravesend.

**Miss Havisham**

To Pip Miss Havisham appears always as old and grotesque, being ‘withered’ with ‘sunken eyes’. In his struggle to depict the impression she first makes on him he compares her to a ‘ghastly waxwork’ and a skeleton. It may come as an almost equal shock to the reader that – from the internal chronology later provided by Herbert Pocket – she is probably somewhere in her forties. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MEVl1Ec92s8> But in one sense her age is immaterial, as she deliberately stops all the clocks at the very time of her betrayal by Compeyson on what would have been her wedding day.

**Estella**

The illegitimate daughter of Magwitch and a murderess, Estella has been brought up by Miss Havisham to wreak revenge on men. Beautiful and apparently without feeling, she warns Pip that she has no sense of what a ‘heart’ is in the sense that he uses the word. In the original ending she marries the doctor who has attended her during her abusive marriage to Bentley Drummle, an experience that finally reveals her ability to feel through her capacity for mental suffering. On the advice of Edward Bulwer Lytton Dickens revised this ending so that Pip ‘saw no shadow of another parting from her’.

**Pumblechook**

The pompous corn chandler Pumblechook is every child’s worst nightmare. With a respectable business on the High Street in Rochester, he orchestrates Pip’s invitation to Satis House and takes him there. But:

his conversation consisted of nothing but arithmetic. On my politely bidding him Good morning, he said, pompously, "Seven times nine, boy?" And how should I be able to answer, dodged in that way, in a strange place, on an empty stomach! I was hungry, but before I had swallowed a morsel, he began a running sum that lasted all through the breakfast. <http://www.online-literature.com/dickens/greatexpectations/8/>

Pumblechook later claims that he was Pip’s benefactor and friend, only to denounce him as soon as his fortune is lost.

**Characters in *David Copperfield***

**Mr Murdstone**

Second husband of Clara Copperfield, Mr Murdstone is not a sadist because he takes no enjoyment in anything. But it would take a pedant to spot the difference. Having compared David to a horse or a dog, he stresses the point by whipping him. When David retaliates by biting him, Murdstone despatches him to the brutal regime of Salem House. On his mother’s death David is removed from formal education altogether and put to work ‘not fit for me’ until he finally finds a refuge with Betsey Trotwood.

**Uriah Heep**

Writhing and repulsive, Uriah is the lawyer Mr Wickfield’s insinuating clerk and for a time becomes his partner. As he candidly admits to David, ‘I ate umble pie with an appetite’ to appease his social superiors even as he planned to get his revenge. He wriggles to the top of the provincial ladder by falsifying accounts while his employer is too inebriated to take in what is happening. The ultimate test of Agnes’s virtue is that she almost consents to marry him to save her father from ruin.

**Aunt Betsey**

Betsey Trotwood’s later appearance as a brusque but kindly eccentric can easily eclipse the reader’s first impression of her as the invader of Clara Copperfield’s home hours before she gives birth to a fatherless David. She will take the child in herself when he finally escapes from the brutal Murdstones, but like other characters in the novel, Betsey has secrets to hide.

**Agnes Wickfield**

Pursued by a lustful and ambitious Uriah Heep, Agnes Wickfield has found few admirers among modern readers. One of Dickens’s good daughters and quietly efficient housekeepers, she is (in her defence) notably loyal when a drunken David accosts her in front of her respectable acquaintances at a London theatre. She has to wait for the hardly less insipid Dora to die before finally getting her man.

**Miss Larkins**

‘Perhaps the eldest Miss Larkins may be about thirty. My passion for her is beyond all bounds.’ Looking back on his 17 year old self an indulgent David remembers thinking that at least he would be 21 in a few years, apparently forgetting that the object of his devotion would by then be 34. He is deeply dejected for at least a week when she marries an elderly hop grower by the name of Chestle.