Charles Dickens was a prolific and highly influential 19th century British author, who penned such acclaimed works as 'Oliver Twist,' 'A Christmas Carol,' 'David Copperfield' and 'Great Expectations.'

**Who Was Charles Dickens?**

Charles Dickens (February 7, 1812 to June 9, 1870) was a British novelist, journalist, editor, illustrator and social commentator who wrote such beloved classic novels as Oliver Twist, A Christmas Carol, Nicholas Nickleby, David Copperfield, A Tale of Two Cities and Great Expectations. Dickens is remembered as one of the most important and influential writers of the 19th century. Among his accomplishments, he has been lauded for providing a stark portrait of the Victorian era underclass, helping to bring about societal change. When Dickens died of a stroke, he left his final novel, The Mystery of Edwin Drood, unfinished.

**Charles Dickens’ Books**

Throughout his career, Dickens published a total of 15 novels. His most well-known works include:

'Oliver Twist' (1837-1838)

Oliver Twist, Dickens first novel, follows the life of an orphan living in the streets. The book was inspired by how Dickens felt as an impoverished child forced to get by on his wits and earn his own keep. As publisher of a magazine called Bentley’s Miscellany, Dickens began publishing Oliver Twist in installments between February 1837 and April 1838, with the full book edition published in November 1838. Dickens continued showcasing Oliver Twist in the magazines he later edited, including Household Words and All the Year Round. The novel was extremely well-received in both England and America. Dedicated readers of Oliver Twist eagerly anticipated the next monthly installment.

**'A Christmas Carol'** (1843)

On December 17, 1843, Dickens published A Christmas Carol. The book features the timeless protagonist Ebenezer Scrooge, a curmudgeonly old miser, who, with the help of a ghost, finds the Christmas spirit. Dickens penned the book in just six weeks, beginning in October and finishing just in time for the holiday celebrations. The novel was intended as a social criticism, to bring attention to the hardships faced by England’s lower classes. The book was a success, selling more than 6,000 copies upon publication. Readers in England and America were touched by the book’s empathetic emotional depth; one American entrepreneur reportedly gave his employees an extra day’s holiday after reading it. Despite literary critiques, the book remains one of Dickens’ most well-known and beloved works.

**Dealings with the Firm of Dombey and Son'** (1846 to 1848)

From October 1846 to April 1848, Dickens published, in monthly installments, Dealings with the Firm of Dombey and Son. The novel, which was published in book form in 1848, centers on the theme of how business tactics affect a family’s personal finances. Taking a dark view of England, it is considered pivotal to Dickens’ body of work in that it set the tone for his other novels.

**David Copperfield**' (1849 to 1850)

David Copperfield was the first work of its kind: No one had ever written a novel that simply followed a character through his everyday life. From May 1849 to November 1850, Dickens published the book in monthly instillations, with the full novel form published in November 1850. In writing it, Dickens tapped into his own personal experiences, from his difficult childhood to his work as a journalist. Although David Copperfield is not considered Dickens’ best work, it was his personal favorite. It also helped define the public’s expectations of a Dickensian novel.

**'Bleak House'** (1852 to 1853)

Following the death of his father and daughter and separation from his wife, Dickens’ novels began to express a darkened worldview. In Bleak House, published in installments from 1852 to 1853, he deals with the hypocrisy of British society. It was considered his most complex novel to date.

**Hard Times'** (1854)

Hard Times takes place in an industrial town at the peak of economic expansion. Published in 1854, the book focuses on the shortcomings of employers as well as those who seek change.

**A Tale of Two Cities'** (1859)

Coming out of his “dark novel” period, in 1859 Dickens published A Tale of Two Cities, a historical novel that takes place during the French Revolution in Paris and London. He published it in a periodical he founded, All the Year Round. The story focuses on themes of the need for sacrifice, the struggle between the evils inherent in oppression and revolution, and the possibility of resurrection and rebirth.

***'Great Expectations'*** (1861)

Great Expectations, published in serial form between December 1860 to August 1861 and in novel form in October 1861, is widely considered Dickens’ greatest literary accomplishment. The story, Dickens’ second narrated in the first person, focuses on the lifelong journey of moral development for the novel’s protagonist, an orphan named Pip. With extreme imagery and colorful characters, the well-received novel’s themes include wealth and poverty, love and rejection, and good versus evil.

**Other Novels**

After the publication of Oliver Twist, Dickens struggled to match the level of its success. From 1838 to 1841, he published The Life and Adventures of Nicholas Nickleby, The Old Curiosity Shop and Barnaby Rudge. Another novel from Dickens’ darker period is Little Dorrit (1857), a fictional study of how human values come in conflict with the world’s brutality. Dickens’ novel Our Mutual Friend, published in serial form between 1864 to 1865 before being published as a book in 1865, analyzes the psychological impact of wealth on London society.

Movies

Many of Dickens’ major works have been adapted for film, with some, like A Christmas Carol, repackaged in various forms over the years. Hollywood introduced another twist to the author's celebrated holiday work with the November 2017 release of The Man Who Invented Christmas, starring Dan Stevens as Dickens and Christopher Plummer as his famed fictional character of Ebenezer Scrooge.

**When and Where Was Charles Dickens Born?**

Charles Dickens was born Charles John Huffam Dickens on February 7, 1812, in Portsmouth, on the southern coast of England.

**Family**

The famed British author was the second of eight children. His father, John Dickens, was a naval clerk who dreamed of striking it rich. Charles Dickens’ mother, Elizabeth Barrow, aspired to be a teacher and school director.

Despite his parents’ best efforts, the family remained poor. Nevertheless, they were happy in the early days. In 1816, they moved to Chatham, Kent, where young Charles and his siblings were free to roam the countryside and explore the old castle at Rochester.

**Early Life and Education**

In 1822, the Dickens family moved to Camden Town, a poor neighborhood in London. By then the family’s financial situation had grown dire, as John Dickens had a dangerous habit of living beyond the family’s means. Eventually, John was sent to prison for debt in 1824, when Charles was just 12 years old.

Following his father’s imprisonment, Dickens was forced to leave school to work at a boot-blacking factory alongside the River Thames. At the run-down, rodent-ridden factory, Dickens earned six shillings a week labeling pots of “blacking,” a substance used to clean fireplaces. It was the best he could do to help support his family.

Looking back on the experience, Dickens saw it as the moment he said goodbye to his youthful innocence, stating that he wondered “how [he] could be so easily cast away at such a young age.” He felt abandoned and betrayed by the adults who were supposed to take care of him. These sentiments would later become a recurring theme in his writing.

Much to his relief, Dickens was permitted to go back to school when his father received a family inheritance and used it to pay off his debts. But when Dickens was 15, his education was pulled out from under him once again. In 1827, he had to drop out of school and work as an office boy to contribute to his family’s income. As it turned out, the job became a launching point for his writing career.

**Wife and Children**

Charles Dickens married Catherine Hogarth soon after his first book, Sketches by Boz, was published. The couple had a brood of 10 children.

During the 1850s, Dickens suffered two devastating losses: the deaths of his daughter and father. He also separated from his wife in 1858. Dickens slandered Catherine publicly, and struck up an intimate relationship with a young actress named Ellen "Nelly" Ternan. Sources differ on whether the two started seeing each other before or after Dickens' marital separation; it is also believed that he went to great lengths to erase any documentation alluding to Ternan's presence in his life.

**Early Career as a Journalist, Editor and Illustrator**

Within a year of being hired, Dickens began freelance reporting at the law courts of London. Just a few years later, he was reporting for two major London newspapers. In 1833, he began submitting sketches to various magazines and newspapers under the pseudonym “Boz.” In 1836, his clippings were published in his first book, Sketches by Boz.

In the same year, Dickens started publishing The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club. His series of sketches, originally written as captions for artist Robert Seymour’s humorous sports-themed illustrations, took the form of monthly serial installments. The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club was wildly popular with readers. In fact, Dickens’ sketches were even more popular than the illustrations they were meant to accompany.

He later edited magazines including Household Words and All the Year Round, the latter of which he founded.

**Travels to the United States and Italy**

In 1842, Dickens and his wife, Catherine, embarked on a five-month lecture tour of the United States. Upon their return, Dickens penned American Notes for General Circulation, a sarcastic travelogue criticizing American culture and materialism. Around this time he also wrote The Life and Adventures of Martin Chuzzlewit, a story about a man’s struggle to survive on the ruthless American frontier.

During his first U.S. tour, in 1842, Dickens spoke of his opposition to slavery and expressed his support for additional reform. His lectures, which began in Virginia and ended in Missouri, were so widely attended that ticket scalpers gathered outside his events. Biographer J.B. Priestly wrote that during the tour, Dickens enjoyed "the greatest welcome that probably any visitor to America has ever had.”

“They flock around me as if I were an idol,” bragged Dickens, a known show-off. Although he enjoyed the attention at first, he eventually resented the invasion of privacy. He was also annoyed by what he viewed as Americans’ gregariousness and crude habits, as he later expressed in American Notes.

After his criticism of the American people during his first tour, Dickens launched a second U.S. tour, from 1867 to 1868, hoping to set things right with the public. This time, he made a charismatic speech promising to praise the United States in reprints of American Notes for General Circulation and The Life and Adventures of Martin Chuzzlewit. His 75 readings netted an estimated $95,000, which, in the Victorian era, amounted to approximately $1.5 million in current U.S. dollars.

Back at home, Dickens had become so famous that people recognized him all over London as he strolled around the city, collecting the observations that would serve as inspiration for his future work.Dickens also spent significant time in Italy, resulting in his 1846 travelogue Pictures from Italy.

**When and How Did Charles Dickens Die?**

After suffering a stroke, Dickens died at age 58 on June 9, 1870, at Gad’s Hill Place, his country home in Kent, England. In 1865, Dickens was in a train accident and never fully recovered. Despite his fragile condition, he continued to tour until shortly before his death.

Dickens was buried in Poet’s Corner at Westminster Abbey, with thousands of mourners gathering at the beloved author’s gravesite. Scottish satirical writer Thomas Carlyle described Dickens’ passing as “an event worldwide, a unique of talents suddenly extinct.” At the time of his death, his final novel, The Mystery of Edwin Drood, was unfinished.