

Charles Dickens's

Great Expectations

Adapted by
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SYNOPSIS

The life of the poor country lad, Pip, changes one day when an unknown benefactor sees that the young man is brought to London and made a gentleman. But who is behind Pip's "great expectations," and why is it kept a secret? By the time Pip learns the truth of his circumstances, he has gotten involved with some fascinating people and undergone a vital change of character. This adaptation of a Charles Dickens classic is an excellent choice for schools in that it stays true to the novel, including the amusing theatre scene in which a humorous heckler wreaks havoc during the important "Hamlet" monologue. Four narrators keep the action moving, two actors split the main character, and many of the roles can be doubled. Multiple locations can be quickly suggested with just a set piece or two, making it easy to stage. Full evening.

ORIGINAL PRODUCTION

Theatre Department of the State University of New York College at Cortland, October 1985.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(17 m, 15 w, 4 flexible. With doubling 9 m, 10 w.)

In the Country

Narrators (4): Flex

Young Pip: A boy about ten years old

Abel Magwitch: An escaped convict

Joe Gargery: A blacksmith

Mrs. Joe: His wife

Compeyson: Another convict

Uncle Pumblechook: A relative

Mrs. Wopsle: A widow

Mrs. Hubble: A widow

Sergeant

Soldier

Young Estella: A girl about thirteen years old

Miss Havisham: A wealthy old lady

Biddy: A young country woman

Mr. Jaggers: A lawyer from London

Sarah Pocket: A relative

Camilla: A relative

Pip: A young man

In the City

Mr. Wemmick: Jaggers's clerk

1st Woman

2nd Woman

Herbert Pocket: A young gentleman

Bentley Drummle: A fellow student

Clara Barley: A young lady

Estella: A young lady

Actors (5) in *Hamlet*: Hamlet, Ghost, Ophelia, Gertrude,
Polonius

Heckler: At the theatre

Molly: Jaggers's housekeeper (non-speaking)

Officer: On the galley

Suggested doubling see page 79.

SETTING

The action of the play takes place in the marsh countryside and in London, England during the first half of the 19th century.

PRODUCTION NOTE

The play calls for an open stage with various acting areas. The settings should not be depicted realistically but must be quickly suggested by a prop or a piece of furniture in order for the play to move swiftly. The four narrators may be placed directly within the action or may narrate from the sides of the stage, even using scripts if needed. More than four narrators can be used, of course. Most characters require only one costume and the doubling of parts can be clarified by each character having a separate costume. Suggestions for doubling appear at the end of the script. Although each act is broken up into numbered scenes, the action should be continuous with the narration covering any changes in furniture or props. Prop and furniture list can be found at the end of this script.

ACT I

Prologue

(AT RISE: As lively Victorian MUSIC plays, the ENTIRE CAST gathers on the stage and forms a tableau. The music stops and the narration begins, delivered by the four narrators and the characters themselves.)

NARRATOR ONE: It was over one hundred and seventy-five years ago,

NARRATOR TWO: In the marsh countryside of England,

NARRATOR THREE: Where the river meets the sea and forms long, lonely flatlands,

NARRATOR FOUR: That there lived an honest blacksmith by the name of Gargery...

JOE GARGERY: Joe Gargery. *(Stepping forward, bowing shyly.)* Call me Joe...

ONE: A mild, good-natured fellow,

TWO: Sweet-tempered and easy-going,

MRS. JOE: If not a bit foolish at times! *(Steps forward and gives JOE a look of disgust.)*

THREE: One day,

FOUR: For reasons not easily understood by anyone,

THREE: He married Philip Pirrip's eldest daughter,

ONE: A woman of very strong character,

TWO: And a demanding sort of personality, you might say.

THREE: No one quite recalls her first name now for she was always known as:

MRS. JOE: Mrs. Joe!

FOUR: She was not what you would call a good-looking woman,

(MRS. JOE gives FOUR a dirty look.)

JOE: But she'd had a hard life, you see.

ONE: She had six younger brothers and sisters,

MRS. JOE: Who all died young except for one.

ONE: And then her parents died as well.

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TWO: Leaving Joe and Mrs. Joe to care for the surviving boy who was named Philip,

ONE: After his father,

TWO: Whom he had never seen.

THREE: As a young boy he could not pronounce his full name:

THREE & FOUR: Philip Pirrup.

THREE: But only managed to come out with:

YOUNG PIP: *(Stepping forward.)* Pip!

PUMBLEHOOK: Pip?

MRS. WOPSLE: What did he say?

YOUNG PIP: Pip!

MRS. HUBBLE: What's wrong with the boy?

YOUNG PIP: Pip!

JOE: It was the best he could do.

ONE: So the boy called himself Pip.

TWO: And came to be called Pip.

ONE & TWO: And Pip he remained!

(MRS. JOE grabs YOUNG PIP by the ear and pulls him to the side.)

THREE: Mrs. Joe saw to the rearing of Pip.

MRS. JOE: And brought him up by hand!

THREE: As she often boasted.

FOUR: And Pip, though not familiar with the expression, had a pretty good idea of what it meant.

(MRS. JOE beats PIP with a stick then sets him to scrubbing the floor.)

ONE: And so they lived,

TWO: The three of them,

MRS. JOE: In a house that was humble but well-scrubbed!

JOE: With the blacksmith forge adjoining it.

THREE: It is here, in this desolate land of marshes and mists, that our story begins.

End of Freeview

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