1. Dickens’s life

• Born in Portsmouth in 1812.

• Unhappy childhood: he had to work in a factory at the age of 12 (his father went to prison for debts).

• He became a newspaper reporter with the pen name Boz.

• In 1836 *Sketches by Boz*, articles about London people and scenes, were published in instalments.
1. Dickens’s life

- Success with autobiographical novels:
- Busy editor of magazines.
- Died in 1870.
Charles Dickens

2. The setting of Dickens’s novels

Dickens was the great novelist of cities, especially **London**
→ depicted at three different social levels:

- **the parochial world** of the workhouses → its inhabitants belong to the lower middle class;

- **the criminal world** → murderers, pickpockets living in squalid slums;

- **the Victorian middle class** → respectable people believing in human dignity.

Detailed description of ‘Seven Dials’, a notorious slum district → its sense of disorientation and confinement is clearly expressed in Dickens’s novels.
3. Dickens’s characters

- Dickens shifted the social frontiers of the novel
- the 18th-century realistic upper middle-class world was replaced by the one of the lower orders.
- He depicted Victorian society in all its variety, its richness and its squalor.
Charles Dickens

3. Dickens’s characters

He created:

- **caricatures** → he exaggerated and ridiculed peculiar social characteristics of the middle, lower and lowest classes;
- **weak female characters.**

He was on the side of the poor, the outcast, the working-class.
4. Dickens’s themes

- Family, childhood and poverty — the subjects to which he returned time and again.
- Dickens’s children are either innocent or corrupted by adults.
- Most of these children begin in negative circumstances and rise to happy endings which resolve the contradictions in their life created by the adult world.
5. Dickens’s aim

- Dickens tried to get the common intelligence of the country to alleviate social sufferings.

- He was a campaigning novelist and his books highlight all the great Victorian controversies:
  
  - 1. The faults of the legal system ➔ Oliver Twist, Bleak House
  - 2. The horrors of factory employment ➔ David Copperfield, Hard Times
  - 3. Scandals in private schools ➔ David Copperfield
5. Dickens’s aim

• Dickens tried to get the common intelligence of the country to alleviate social sufferings.

• He was a campaigning novelist and his books highlight all the great Victorian controversies:
  
  • The miseries of prostitution
  
  • The appalling living conditions in slums → *Bleak House*

  • Corruption in government → *Bleak House*
6. Dickens’s style

Dickens’s style → very rich and original

The main **stylistic features** of his novels are:

• long list of objects and people;

• adjectives used in pairs or in group of three and four;

• several details, not strictly necessary.
Dickens’s style → very rich and original

The main stylistic features of his novels are:

• Repetitions of the same word/s and/or sentence structure.

• The same concept/s is/are expressed more than once, but with different words.

• Use of antithetical images in order to underline the characters’ features
6. Dickens’s style

Dickens’s style \(\rightarrow\) very rich and original

The main **stylistic features** of his novels are:

- **Exaggeration of the characters’ faults.**
- **Suspense at the end of the episodes or introduction of a sensational event to keep the readers’ interest.**
Charles Dickens

7. *Oliver Twist* (1838)

- This Bildungsroman (an ‘education’ novel) appeared in instalments in 1837.

- It fictionalises the humiliations Dickens experienced during his childhood.

- The protagonist, *Oliver Twist*, is always innocent and pure and remains incorruptible throughout the novel.

- At the end he is saved from a life of villainy by a well-to-do family.
7. *Oliver Twist* (1838)

The setting is London, Dickens attacked:

- the social evils of his times such as poor houses, unjust courts and the underworld;

- the world of the workhouses founded upon the idea that poverty was a consequence of laziness;

- the officials of the workhouses because they abused the right of the poor as individuals and caused them further misery.
It celebrates *Christmas Eve and Christmas*.

The protagonists are:

- Scrooge, an old, greedy man;
- the ghost Christmas past;
- the ghost Christmas present;
- the ghost Christmas future;
- Bob Cratchit, Scrooge’s long-suffering clerk;
- Tiny Tim, Bob’s crippled son;
- Fred, Scrooge’s nephew.

The ghosts show Scrooge the evils of his existence.
Charles Dickens

8. A Christmas Carol (1843)

Its main themes:

• Redemption and transformation → Scrooge turns from a selfish man to a generous one who understands the importance in taking notice of the people living around us.

• The children of the poor.

Charles Dickens

9. *Hard Times* (1854)

- It is a ‘denunciation novel’ → a powerful **accusation** of some of the negative effects of industrial society.

- The setting → **Coketown**, an imaginary industrialised town.

- **Characters** → people living and working in Coketown, like the protagonist **Thomas Gradgrind**, an educator who believes in facts and statistics.
9. *Hard Times* (1854)

**Themes:**

- a critic of materialism and Utilitarianism;
- a denunciation of the ugliness and squalor of the new industrial age;
- the gap between the rich and the poor.

**Aim** → to illustrate the dangers of allowing people to become like machines.
Charles Dickens

10. 2012: The bicentenary of Dickens’s birth

Dickens’s work transcends his time, language and culture.

**Dickens’s legacy:**

1. He was the man who invented the idea of a white Christmas.

A famous writer stated:

‘Whether the Christmas visions would or would not convert Scrooge, they convert us.’ (G. K. Chesterton, 2007)
10. 2012: The bicentenary of Dickens’s birth

Dickens’s legacy:

2. ‘Dickensian' poverty

Dickens was one of the first to describe the underclass and the poverty stricken in Victorian London.

‘Dickensian’ it has become the easiest word to describe an unacceptable level of poverty.
Charles Dickens

10. 2012: The bicentenary of Dickens’s birth

Dickens’s legacy:

3. Modern character comedy
   ➔ the comic potential of the way his characters talk.

4. The cinema
   ➔ Dickens was a key and important influence in cinema development. He invented the parallel montage where two stories run alongside each other and the close-up.
Charles Dickens

10. 2012: The bicentenary of Dickens’s birth

Dickens’s legacy:

5. **Meaningful names**
   → he refined the practice to suggest characters’ traits and their role.

Some characters have become so recognisable that they have entered the language as nouns → for example, a *Scrooge* = somebody mean-spirited or lacking generosity.
Charles Dickens

10. 2012: The bicentenary of Dickens’s birth

Dickens’s legacy:

6. **Our view of the law** →
   the current view of lawyers
   seems to be partly inspired
by characters such as the
menacing lawyer Mr Tulkinghorn in *Bleak House*

What remains of the issues highlighted by Dickens →
the cost of the legal proceedings, particularly with small civil
claims, is bound to exceed the damages that are obtained.

Dickens was very critical of the way the law discriminated against the poor.