

## **B.A. Second David Copperfield Short Questions**

**1-How important is the role of the father in the novel? Is David affected by the absence of his father in his life? If so, how? If not, how does he manage to overcome this?**

Answer: The role of the father appears to play a key role in the novel, for the two most morally questionable characters, Steerforth and Uriah Heep, grew up without a father figure in their lives. Steerforth even verbally laments this at one point in the novel, envying Ham for this reason, despite Ham's lower-class status. One can argue that David was affected by his lack of a father, with the lack of guidance resulting in the long, arduous journey he must undergo in order to finally find happiness. On the other hand, he was not affected the way Steerforth and Uriah were, for he eventually did find this happiness. This could be due to replacement father figures in David's life, such as Peggotty and Mr. Dick.

**2-Mr. Micawber's character has intrigued many literary analysts over the years, especially due to the fact that he was easily relatable to many during Dickens' time. Why is this so, and what lessons can be learned from this character?**

Answer: Mr. Micawber has a very large family, as was common during Dickens' time. Additionally, he is harangued by creditors, as were many who lived during the Age of Industrialism. He moves from place to place trying to escape his debts, and his view of his situation is far removed from reality. In the end however, he teaches readers that the best way to deal with these issues is to face them head on and to deal with the consequences. No matter how many times he moves, he can never escape from his troubles, providing a lesson for readers.

**3-How does Dickens challenge the accepted views of women during his time to promote the idea of the empowered female?**

Answer: During the time when the novel was written, women were supposed to be obedient housewives, caring for the home and following their husbands all but blindly. David and Dora easily accept that she can be a doll, a child-wife. But the novel immediately opens with a family whose male figurehead is already dead, and despite this fact, the family is content. In fact, the situation sours once a new male figurehead, Mr. Murdstone, appears in their lives. The positions of other single yet strong women in the novel, such as Peggotty and Miss Betsey, are important; consider, for instance, how Miss Betsey endures her ex-husband's extortion.

**4-Does Dickens equate high social class with low moral character and vice versa? Does he equate low social class with unhappiness? Explain with examples from the text.**

Answer: Dickens does not seem to show a correlation between class and character, for Agnes comes from a wealthy family and yet is one of the kindest characters in the novel. Tommy Traddles is the same way: wealthy, yet extremely kind. Uriah Heep, on the other hand is not wealthy but is the novel's villain. Furthermore, Dickens does not seem to equate poverty with unhappiness. The Peggottys are a prime example, especially Ham: poor yet hardworking and, ultimately, happy. The unhappiness and lack of ethics displayed by characters such as Steerforth and the Micawbers stems from greediness and discontentment with their current situations. Dickens reminds us that an individual is responsible for his or own choices, not being a simple product of one's situation.

**5-What role does Australia play in the novel?**

Answer: The land of Australia is a safe haven, a place where people can go and prosper in freedom and with a new life and identity. In the novel it is as more of a reward than a solution to problems or an escape. People only go there once they have faced and solved their problems in England. This can be seen in the case of the Micawbers, who first solve their debt and relational issues and then save enough money to go to Australia. It is also illustrated by Emily, who must return and face the family she ran away from before Mr. Peggotty, who welcomes her back and forgives her, can take her to Australia, where she can start a new life.

**6-Although David is narrating his story as an adult, his memories, as he says, are similar to those of a child. Why does Dickens choose to narrate the story in this way, and how does it affect the way in which it is told?**

Answer: Dickens had a fascination with children and the childish mind, admiring it for its ability to recall many details. In fact, this enables him to fill the novel with many small, seemingly unimportant details that in fact greatly add to character and situational descriptions. An example of this, among many others, is his description of Mr. Murdstone as having "black hair and whiskers" and "ill-omened black eyes." An adult might record these things as well, but they are especially meaningful to a child. Dickens also describes Mr. Murdstone with a childlike fear and mystery that uniquely enhance the character. Furthermore, making David seem more childlike makes him more likeable and associates him with other childlike characters in the novel, such as Ham and Traddles, both of whom are happy and respected in the story. This narration seems generally reliable.

**7-The novel was written by Dickens as something of an autobiography. What elements of the novel coincide with Dickens' own life? Why do you think Dickens made the story deviate from his own life at certain points?**

Answer: Simple research reveals many similarities between the lives of David and Dickens, including their careers as political writers-turned-novelists, troublesome relationships with Dora Spenslow and Maria Beadnell respectively, and time spent working under harsh factory conditions. Of course, their stories are not identical. For example, among other things, Dickens only worked for four months in the sweatshop, while David spent more time there. These elaborations and differences could make Dickens' own feelings about these times in his life more clear to readers, as well as give him some room to comment on the social injustices of his era and achieve his other goals as a novelist.

**8-What significance does David's marriage to Dora have in the novel? Why do you suppose that Dickens chose to have the marriage end with Dora's death?**

Answer: David's marriage to Dora reveals the theme of the "undisciplined heart." David knows even before he has married her that she is not mature and cannot handle household duties; nevertheless, he lets his passion dictate his actions. The marriage cannot last, not least because Dora is used to having her freedom. She, unlike the typical Victorian woman, cannot be bound and trapped by household chores and tasks, but being bound in this way, it is only expected that she must escape it, one way or another. In a society where divorce is frowned upon, a novelist often chooses death as a way for someone to get out of a bad marriage.

**9-There are many references to the sea throughout the novel; what significance do these references have?**

Answer: The sea has a mystical role from the beginning of the novel, when David is born with a caul, which supposedly protects people from death by drowning. It is vast and unpredictable, both beneficial and deadly, for while people like the Peggottys earn a living from the ocean, it also has the power to take away lives, including the fathers of Ham and Emily. It takes Steerforth's life, and when Ham tries to intervene, it takes Ham's life as well.

**10-What role does Uriah Heep play in the novel? Why does Dickens characterize him in the way that he does?**

Answer: Uriah Heep plays the novel's villain and serves as a warning to the readers. He is the quintessential slimy social-climber, who fakes humbleness and humility while going behind people's backs in attempts to boost his own status and demean others. This is seen both physically, through Uriah's slimy appearance, and through the use of foreshadowing, which Dickens uses to predict Uriah's betrayal. Note that Uriah finally seems to experience some moral correction after society (represented first of all by his victims) stands up for a better morality, sends him to prison, and works to make prison truly correctional for him.