



Course Title: Dickens's Masterpiece: *David Copperfield*

Course Code: Lit 118

Instructor: Dr. Rebecca (Becky) Richardson

Course Summary:

In this course we will read *David Copperfield*, which has repeatedly been pointed to as Dickens's masterpiece and his "triumph." It is also his most autobiographical novel. We will consider this famous novel about a young man's life, from birth to adulthood, in its artistic and historical context—how Dickens speaks to debates about childhood and memory, work and class, gender and specifically women's roles in society, and the place of London and the wider British empire. Class will generally involve a 50-minute lecture, a 5-minute break to think over questions and pour a cup of tea, and a 50-minute discussion.

**Please see course page for full description and additional details.*

Note About Live Attendance and Recording:

Class sessions will be recorded, but it is strongly encouraged to attend live as much as possible since half of each class is dedicated to discussion.

I encourage questions and discussions both spoken and written (that is, voiced aloud or written out in the "chat" feature of Zoom, or submitted ahead of time by email or on our Canvas site). These discussions in class often carry over onto our Canvas discussion board or into follow-up conversations.

Grade Options and Requirements:

- **No Grade Requested (NGR)**
This is the default option. No work will be required; no credit shall be received; no proof of attendance can be provided.
- **Credit/No Credit (CR/NC)**
Students must attend at least 5 out of 6 **live** sessions.
- **Letter Grade (A, B, C, D, No Pass)**
Students must attend at least 5 of 6 classes **live** sessions and submit a 1-2 page double-spaced, 12-point-font reading response for each session beyond the first day (5 responses in total).

Please contact the Stanford Continuing Studies office with any questions
365 Lasuen St., Stanford, CA 94305
continuingstudies@stanford.edu
650-725-2650

**Please Note: If you require proof that you completed a Continuing Studies course for any reason (for example, employer reimbursement), you must choose either the Letter Grade or Credit/No Credit option. Courses taken for NGR will not appear on official transcripts or grade reports.*

Tentative Weekly Outline:

Week 1: Introductions and Contexts - Autobiography and the Novel

Overview of Dickens's career, the historical and literary context of *David Copperfield*, and an introduction to the themes to watch for as we start reading.

*Note: No reading required for this class, although it's always encouraged to get a head start on the reading if you wish! Each week we have about 175 pages of reading - although it goes fast, because it's Dickens at his best. But still, a head start this week can give you that extra push with your reading pace and momentum.

Week 2: Childhood, Memory, and Development

For today, read numbers 1-4 of *David Copperfield* (chapters 1 through 12, or up to page 190 in the Penguin Classics edition)

Themes for the week: the overlap between Dickens's life and *David Copperfield*; the novel's theory of memory and use of the *Bildungsroman* (novel of development) and *Künstlerroman* (novel of the artist's development); Dickens's depiction of childhood, family, and education.

Week 3: Journeys and the Memorable Characters Along the Way

For today, read numbers 5-8 of *David Copperfield* (chapters 13 through 24, or up to page 372 in the Penguin Classics edition)

Themes for the week: David's journey and the model of the quest and the "picaresque," Dickens's cast of memorable characters (including Betsey Trotwood and Mr. Dick) and the "character system" of *David Copperfield*.

Week 4: Making One's Way Across Marriage and Career Plots

For today, read numbers 9-12 of *David Copperfield* (chapters 25 through 37, or up to page 551 in the Penguin Classics edition)

Themes for the week: the development of parallel marriage and career plots; comedy and tragedy in Dickens.

Week 5: Class, Gender, and Dickens's Social Commentary

For today, read numbers 13-16 of *David Copperfield* (chapters 38 through 50, or up to page 728 in the Penguin Classics edition)

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Themes for the week: Dickens and social commentary, from class relations (via the character of Uriah Heep) to the role of women (as angels of the house or as “fallen women”).

Week 6: Making a Good End - Exile, Empire, and Second Chances

For today, read numbers 17-20 of *David Copperfield* (chapter 51 through 64, through to the end)

Themes for the week: adulthood and second chances; exile and punishment vs. rewards—or, how Dickens says goodbye to his favorite characters. The legacy of Dickens’s masterpiece.