Charles Dickens (1812 – 70)

• He was born in Portsmouth in 1812.

• When he was 12, his father was imprisoned for debt, so he was sent to work in a factory, an experience which influenced his works.

• Later, he began his career first as a parliamentary reporter and then as a journalist.

• In 1836 he adopted the pen name “Boz” and he published Sketches by Boz, a collection of articles describing London’s people and scenes. Soon after he published The Pickwick papers, which revealed his humoristic and satirical qualities.

• He then started his career as a novelist.

• The protagonists of his autobiographical novels Oliver Twist, David Copperfield and Little Dorrit became symbols of an exploited childhood.

• Other novels, such as Bleak House, Hard Times, Great Expectations deal with social issues and the conditions of the working classes.

• He died in London in 1870 and is buried in Westminster Abbey.
• **Setting**: most of his novels are set in **London**. He knew well the social scene of London, and was critical against the impact of industrialism to society (corruption, public abuses, crimes). He described the **urban slums** using Gothic colours, and emphasized their cruelty. With his novels Dickens made the wealthier classes aware of the condition of the working classes.

• **Characters**: he created **caricatures (stereotypes)**, mainly of the middle and lower classes. He was on the side of the poor, the outcast (differently from the XVIIIth century novel: he didn’t describe the world of the upper-middle class but that of the working class).

• **Children**: children were very often the moral teachers of the adults, and conveyed the **moral message** of the novel. Children of working class families were usually sent to work and exploited by adults. Others became criminals. Dickens was obsessed with children and he presents them as either innocent or corrupted by adults.
Oliver Twist (1837-39)

- It first appeared in instalments and then published as a book
- It is set in London
- Three different social levels are explored:
  1. The world of the workhouse: lower-middle classes, insensible to the feelings of the poor.
  2. The criminal world: Dickens shows how poverty drives many people to crime and violence.
  3. Victorian middle-class: respectable people who believe in moral values.

- Dickens criticized the social evils of his times, he described the appalling living conditions in workhouses. People had to work hard, families were separated, and were given little food and clothing. All this was founded on the idea that poverty was a consequence of laziness.
  Workhouses were run by parishes to relieve the suffering of the poor, but the whole social system didn’t really allow the poors to change their situation and make any social or economic advances.
Text: “Oliver wants some more”

- Where does the scene take place? What happens? Why?
- What are the consequences of Oliver’s request?
- What kind of narrator is used? What point of view is adopted?
- Why does Dickens make a detailed description?
- The narration emphasizes some contrasts between different worlds: talk about them.
Comparison between Dickens and Verga

- Verga described the world of the poor farmers and miners living in Sicily in the 1870s and 1880s.

- Both Oliver Twist and Rosso Malpelo are children exploited by adults. Malpelo is exploited by the adult miners, even if they belong to the same world.

- Both Dickens and Verga **attacked the social evils of their time.** Dickens denounces the exploitation of children in workhouses run by parishes. Verga, in particular, denounces children’s exploitation and the denial of childhood. He also points out how the main social values (family, friendship) are destroyed by a utilitarian concept of life.