

The London that Charles Dickens knew

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INFORMATION

Just as Charles Dickens did with Oliver Twist and in other novels, you need to describe the squalor, disgustingness and horridness of living in London in 1850.

Use your previous work to help you describe the scene. You can also use the information and ideas on this sheet.

TASK

Write a detailed description of a day in 1850s London.

It could be in the FIRST PERSON
[e.g. I smelt the horrid stench of ...]

Or it could be in the THIRD PERSON
[e.g. He smelt the horrid stench of ...]

HELP

- Try to include as many adjectives as possible to bring your description alive. For example, Charles Dickens used: reeking bodies, bewildering scene and dirty figures
- Try to make your writing realistic - don't just create a list of horrible smells. Remember characters!

INFORMATION

Crime, especially theft, was rampant. The police believed that some 20,000 children were being trained in thieving in the 1860s, in the way Dickens described in Oliver Twist.

Rampant = out of control

USEFUL PHRASES

a place of squalid mystery and terror

grimly grotesque

vicious and vile streets

damp and dingy

revolting vermin

QUOTATION FROM DICKENS

"...the cold, wet, shelterless midnight streets of London."

QUOTATION FROM DICKENS

"Now, these tumbling tenements contain, by night, a swarm of misery."

Tenements = slum buildings

INFORMATION

Dickens was able to bring alive the different worlds of London, and especially those in need of reform - the prisons, hospitals, mortuaries, slums, poorhouses, schools, counting houses, law courts, hustings, ministries, factories, shipyards, cab stands and fishmarkets.

INFORMATION

It is suggested that the atmosphere of 1850s London would make us feel instantly sick. To those at the time, it must have smelt horrible - not to mention drinking water from the sewage ridden Thames, manure from horses, plus the stench of hundreds of people rushing about.

QUOTATION FROM DICKENS

"..the old smoke-stained storehouses on either side rose heavy and dull from the dense mass of roofs and gables, and frowned sternly upon water too black to reflect even their lumbering shapes."

Gables = a triangular part of a wall that joins to the roof