

Task C: *Great Expectations* – exploring the nineteenth century context

The tasks below will enable you to broaden your knowledge about the nineteenth century context you'll need for *Great Expectations*.

Outline of key points in the plot: *Great Expectations* is set in the early part of the nineteenth century. It is the story of a young boy, Pip, who meets a rich lady from the upper middle classes, Miss Havisham, and her adopted daughter Estella. They treat him scornfully for being poor, uneducated and without fine manners. This has a significant effect on Pip and he becomes discontented with his life: previously he admired his brother-in-law Joe, a blacksmith, and was keen to take up an apprenticeship with him to learn his trade, but now he develops ambitions to rise in social status and become a “gentleman”.



Task: The novel focuses on class and social status at a time when these things were hugely important. You are going to use the websites below to find out about the social and literary background to *Great Expectations*. Aim to make notes on the following questions:

1. What do you think the term *middle class* meant in the nineteenth century?
2. What do you think is meant by *social mobility*?
3. What were some of the factors that lead to the growth of the middle classes at this time?
4. What do you think was meant by the term *gentleman*?
5. Why might Dickens have decided to write a novel about social class?
6. How might obtaining and reading novels have been different from today?



<https://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles/the-middle-classes-etiquette-and-upward-mobility>

http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/victorians/middle_classes_01.shtml

<http://www.victorianweb.org/history/Class.html>

<http://www.victorianweb.org/history/gentleman.html>

<https://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles/victorian-readers>