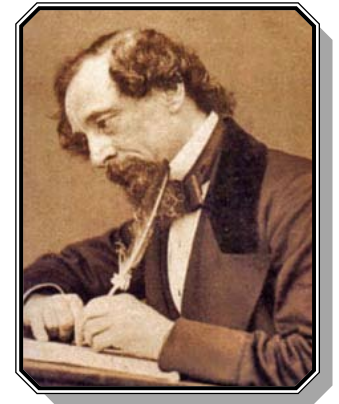


## Charles Dickens: David Copperfield and His Aunt

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Charles Dickens' *David Copperfield*, published in 1849, is one of his most famous works. Dickens tells the life of David from the time he is born until he is an adult. David was born after his father died, and while his mother was very loving, she was also dependent and innocent. His mother married again to Mr. Murdstone when David was seven. Mr. Murdstone was very cruel to David and beat him. David is sent to boarding school and while there, his mother dies. After Mr. Murdstone removes him from school and sends him to work, David runs away to his great-aunt's home.

In the scene below, Mr. Murdstone and his sister have arrived to take David back. David's great-aunt, who is referred to as his aunt, confronts Murdstone about his cruel behavior and refuses to hand David over to his stepfather. His aunt begins the passage, speaking to Murdstone about David's mother.



Charles Dickens

### Chapter 14. My Aunt Makes Up Her Mind About Me

“It was clear enough, as I have told you, years before YOU ever saw her—and why, in the mysterious dispensations of Providence, you ever did see her, is more than humanity can comprehend—it was clear enough that the poor soft little thing would marry somebody, at some time or other; but I did hope it wouldn't have been as bad as it has turned out. That was the time, Mr. Murdstone, when she gave birth to her boy here,” said my aunt; “to the poor child you sometimes tormented her through afterwards, which is a disagreeable remembrance and makes the sight of him odious now. Aye, aye! you needn't wince!” said my aunt. “I know it's true without that.”

He had stood by the door, all this while, observant of her with a smile upon his face, though his black eyebrows were heavily contracted. I remarked now, that, though the smile was on his face still, his colour had gone in a moment, and he seemed to breathe as if he had been running.

“Good day, sir,” said my aunt, “and good-bye! Good day to you, too, ma'am,” said my aunt, turning suddenly upon his sister. “Let me see you ride a donkey over my green again, and as sure as you have a head upon your shoulders, I'll knock your bonnet off, and tread upon it!”

It would require a painter, and no common painter too, to depict my aunt's face as she delivered herself of this very unexpected sentiment, and Miss Murdstone's face as she heard it. But the manner of the speech, no less than the matter, was so fiery, that Miss Murdstone, without a word in answer, discreetly put her arm through her brother's, and walked haughtily out of the cottage; my aunt remaining in the window looking after them; prepared, I have no doubt, in case of the donkey's reappearance, to carry her threat into instant execution.

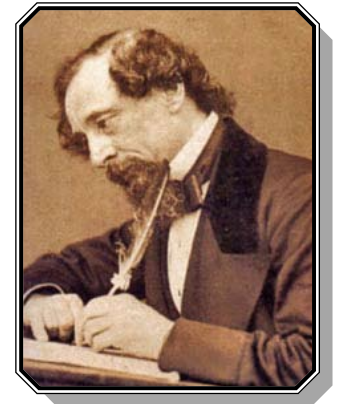
1. What is the “disagreeable remembrance” the aunt refers to?
2. What was one of Mr. Murdstone reactions to the aunt's speech?
3. What does David's aunt threaten to do if Miss Murdstone rides a donkey across her lawn again?
4. The author says David's aunt was prepared “to carry her threat into instant execution.” What does execution mean in this quotation?

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**Student's answers will vary;  
examples of correct answers:**

1. What is the “disagreeable remembrance” the aunt refers to?

**She is referring to how Mr. Murdstone made David's mother unhappy by treating David badly.**

2. What was one of Mr. Murdstone reactions to the aunt's speech?

**He turned pale.**

3. What does David's aunt threaten to do if Miss Murdstone rides a donkey across her lawn again?

**She threatens to knock her hat off and step on it.**

4. The author says David's aunt was prepared “to carry her threat into instant execution.” What does execution mean in this quotation?

**action**