

OLIVER BECOMES AN APPRENTICE

Charles Dickens published Oliver Twist in 1837. It is the story of a poor orphan named Oliver Twist and his many difficulties and adventures as he grows up. In the passage below, Oliver has left the workhouse where he was mistreated. He has been assigned to an undertaker as an apprentice which is a young worker that is paid very little in order to learn a trade or craft.



Charles Dickens

OLIVER TWIST *by Charles Dickens*

FROM CHAPTER IV

‘Here, Charlotte,’ said Mr. Sowerberry, who had followed Oliver down, ‘give this boy some of the cold bits that were put by for Trip. He hasn’t come home since the morning, so he may go without ‘em. I dare say the boy isn’t too dainty to eat ‘em—are you, boy?’

Oliver, whose eyes had glistened at the mention of meat, and who was trembling with eagerness to devour it, replied in the negative; and a plateful of coarse broken victuals was set before him.

I wish some well-fed philosopher, whose meat and drink turn to gall within him; whose blood is ice, whose heart is iron; could have seen Oliver Twist clutching at the dainty viands that the dog had neglected. I wish he could have witnessed the horrible avidity with which Oliver tore the bits asunder with all the ferocity of famine. There is only one thing I should like better;

and that would be to see the Philosopher making the same sort of meal himself, with the same relish.

‘Well,’ said the undertaker’s wife, when Oliver had finished his supper: which she had regarded in silent horror, and with fearful auguries of his future appetite: ‘have you done?’

There being nothing eatable within his reach, Oliver replied in the affirmative.

‘Then come with me,’ said Mrs. Sowerberry: taking up a dim and dirty lamp, and leading the way upstairs; ‘your bed’s under the counter. You don’t mind sleeping among the coffins, I suppose? But it doesn’t much matter whether you do or don’t, for you can’t sleep anywhere else. Come; don’t keep me here all night!’

Oliver lingered no longer, but meekly followed his new mistress.

QUESTIONS Answer the following questions about the passage.

1. Whose food does Mr. Sowerberry and his wife give to Oliver?
2. What does victuals mean here: “a plateful of coarse broken victuals was set before him”?
3. In the third paragraph, the author speaks about a philosopher. What does the author want most for the philosopher to see?
4. Mrs. Sowerberry takes Oliver to sleep among what?
5. Dickens is known for the unusual names he gave his characters. What does the name Sowerberry make you think of?

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QUESTIONS Answer the following questions about the passage.

Student’s answers will vary; examples of correct answers:

1. Whose food does Mr. Sowerberry and his wife give to Oliver?

the dog’s food

2. What does victuals mean here: “a plateful of coarse broken victuals was set before him”?

food

3. In the third paragraph, the author speaks about a philosopher. What does the author want most for the philosopher to see?

He wants to see the philosopher eat the same meal as Oliver with as much enthusiasm because then the philosopher would also be starving.

4. Mrs. Sowerberry takes Oliver to sleep among what?

the coffins

5. Dickens is known for the unusual names he gave his characters. What does the name Sowerberry make you think of?

sour fruit or sour berries