

# REEL TO REAL TEACHERS' RESOURCE

## *Great Expectations*

Understand more about the world of the film  
Key Stage 3–5: English, Drama and History

INTO  
FILM

V&A

## Reel to Real: Great Expectations

### Key Stage 3–5: English, Drama and History

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#### Introduction

This resource is intended for teachers to use with their students on site at the V&A. It was created as part of a partnership with education charity Into Film.

The resource explores the film *Great Expectations*. It guides students to objects in the Museum that provide historical context for the film and suggests topics for discussion. The resource aims to immerse students in the world of the film. We suggest that groups divide into pairs to follow the activities.

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#### Film summary

Charles Dickens wrote *Great Expectations* in 1861 but the story is set earlier in the century. The 1946 film of the book, directed by David Lean, is regularly voted one of the top 20 best British films. The story follows Philip Pirrip (nicknamed Pip) and his painful development from shy country boy to London gentleman. The eccentric Miss Havesham and the damaged Estella have a huge impact on Pip's life. As the secret behind his 'great expectations' is revealed, Pip begins to understand all that he has lost in his pursuit of becoming a gentleman and makes amends.

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#### At the Museum

Use this resource in conjunction with the V&A Map to find objects that provide a context for *Great Expectations*.

##### **Britain 1760–1900, Level 4, Room 125b**

Miss Havesham is a central character in the story. Tormented by having been jilted at the altar years before, she continues to wear her now ragged wedding dress. Find the [Births, Marriages and Deaths](#) area of the room and look at the wedding dress.

Queen Victoria popularised the wearing of a white wedding dress when she wore white to marry Prince Albert in 1840. Before that time, a bride might wear a dress of any colour. Why do you think a white wedding dress continues to be a popular choice today? After watching the film, discuss how you might design a modern-day wedding dress that would sum up the character of Miss Havesham.

In the same room, find the [Expanding Wardrobe](#) case. At the end of the 19th century, a fashionable gentleman might change his outfit six or seven times a day. Pip's character starts out as a downtrodden blacksmith's apprentice but a mysterious benefactor leaves him money with the requirement that he move to London and become a gentleman. Look at the clothes in the case. Which of the accessories might Pip acquire to look like a gentleman? How might you use costume to show Pip's transformation from country boy to city gentleman?

##### **Paintings, Level 3, Room 82**

Find the painting *The Stone Breaker and his Daughter*. From the entrance to this room, it is on the large left hand wall in the bottom right hand corner. The stone breaker is exhausted from his hard physical work, his slumping figure is in contrast to the young girl. What do you think the painter is trying to communicate to the viewer about the nature of hard labour? Does the girl look like she feels pity or derision for the man? How does Pip's attitude to physical labour and money change as the story progresses?

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#### Follow-up activities/find out more

For information about objects relating to Charles Dickens at the V&A, go to: <http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/c/charles-dickens-at-the-v-and-a/>

To find out more about the 19th century, visit: <http://www.vam.ac.uk/page/o-9/19th-century/>

To find out more about the Victorian era, go to: <http://www.vam.ac.uk/page/v/victorian/>

Search the V&A collections: <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/>

The National Video Archive of Performance (NVAP) is a collection of recordings of live UK theatre. Contact [bookings.office@vam.ac.uk](mailto:bookings.office@vam.ac.uk) to make an appointment. A full list of recordings is available here: [www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/t/nvap/](http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/t/nvap/)

Continue learning through film by setting up a free Into Film Club at your school. [www.filmclub.org/](http://www.filmclub.org/) register. Access a catalogue of over 4000 film titles including those in the Reel to Real programme, as well as curriculum-linked resources created in partnership with the V&A. <http://www.intofilm.org/>