

David Copperfield

David Copperfield is a semi-autobiographical novel by the Victorian author, Charles Dickens. The book tells the life story of the main character, David Copperfield. In this extract, David is at boarding school and the headmaster, Mr Creakle, has sent for him to deliver some bad news.

I remember the day clearly — the fog that hung in the air; the ghostly outlines of the hoarfrost that clung to everything; my clammy hair in the icy air. It was a bleak morning.

The schoolroom was dark, only a spluttering candle here and there to illuminate the foggy windows. My classmates' breath wreathed around their heads as they blew on their fingers and tapped their feet.

The breakfast things had been cleared away when Mr Sharp summoned me to the parlour. I had been expecting a hamper from Peggotty, so I leapt to my feet, and the boys around me petitioned me for their share.

10 "Don't hurry, David," said Mr Sharp, surprisingly softly. "There's time enough, my boy, don't hurry."

I hurried away to the parlour; and there sat Mr Creakle with his breakfast and the cane before him, and Mrs Creakle with an opened letter in her hand, but no hamper.

"David Copperfield," said Mrs Creakle, leading me to a sofa and sitting down beside me.

15 "I want to speak to you very particularly. I have something to tell you, my child."

I glanced towards Mr Creakle, who shook his head without looking at me, and turned his attention to a very large piece of buttered toast in his hand.

"You are too young to know how the world changes every day," said Mrs Creakle, "and how the people in it pass away. But we all have to learn it, David; some of us when we are young, some of us when we are old, some of us at all times of our lives."

I looked at her earnestly.

"When you came away from home at the end of vacation," said Mrs Creakle, after a pause, "were they all well?" And after another pause, "Was your mamma well?"

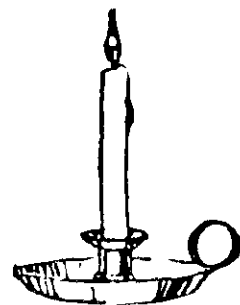
A mist rose between Mrs Creakle and me, and her figure seemed to move in it for an instant.

"She is very dangerously ill," she added.

I understood now.

"She is dead," said Mrs Creakle.

There was no need to tell me so. I had already broken out into a desolate cry, and felt an orphan in the wide world.



An adapted extract from *David Copperfield* by Charles Dickens.

1 The introduction says this text is "semi-autobiographical". What does this mean?

1 mark

2 How does the opening paragraph (lines 1-3) help to set the scene? Why do you think the author chose this setting?

2 marks

3 Read lines 10-11. Write down one thing these lines tell you about Mr Sharp.

1 mark

4 How do you think Mrs Creakle feels in lines 14-15? Explain your answer.

2 marks

5 What do you think the "mist" (line 24) is that arises between David and Mrs Creakle?

1 mark

6 What do you think the word "desolate" (line 29) means?

1 mark

7 How can you tell that this extract is set in the past?

2 marks

Total
out of 10