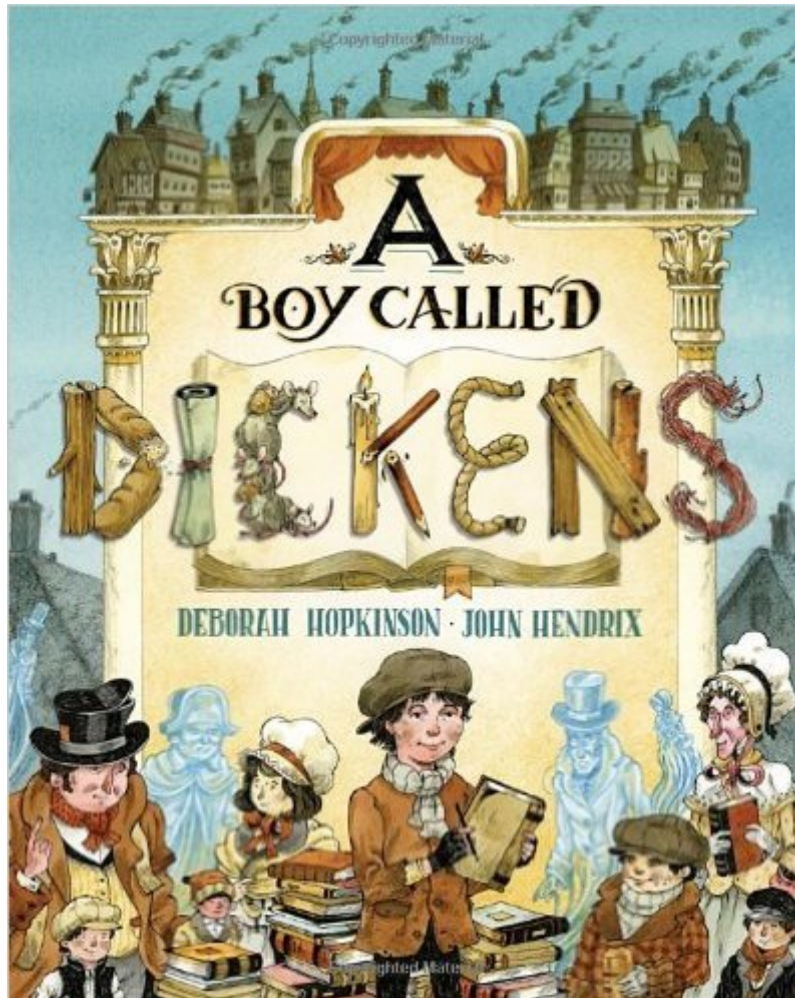


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# A Boy Called Dickens



## Synopsis

For years Dickens kept the story of his own childhood a secret. Yet it is a story worth telling. For it helps us remember how much we all might lose when a child's dreams don't come true . . . As a child, Dickens was forced to live on his own and work long hours in a rat-infested blacking factory. Readers will be drawn into the winding streets of London, where they will learn how Dickens got the inspiration for many of his characters. The 200th anniversary of Dickens's birth was February 7, 2012, and this tale of his little-known boyhood is the perfect way to introduce kids to the great author. This Booklist Best Children's Book of the Year is historical fiction at its ingenious best.

## Book Information

Lexile Measure: 750L (What's this?)

Hardcover: 40 pages

Publisher: Schwartz & Wade; 3rd Print edition (January 10, 2012)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0375867325

ISBN-13: 978-0375867323

Product Dimensions: 9 x 0.4 x 11.1 inches

Shipping Weight: 12.8 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.4 out of 5 stars Â See all reviews Â (9 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #1,071,756 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #94 in Â Books > Children's Books > Biographies > European #649 in Â Books > Children's Books > Education & Reference > Books & Libraries #649 in Â Books > Children's Books > Geography & Cultures > Explore the World > Europe

Age Range: 4 - 8 years

Grade Level: Preschool - 3

## Customer Reviews

My husband and I are great fans of Charles Dickens' works, especially novels like Great Expectations (which is being remade yet again and slated for release in 2012), David Copperfield, Oliver Twist, and A Tale of Two Cities. I was hoping to pass down this love of Dickens to our own daughter who is seven. When I saw this picture book at our well-stocked local library, I knew this would be a great way to introduce Dickens to her. A Boy Called Dickens is a fictionalized retelling of Charles Dickens' life when he was a young boy of twelve, living a destitute life in 1800s London, a city known for being unforgiving to the less fortunate. Dickens' father is in debtor's prison, serving

out a sentence for being unable to pay a debt owed to the baker, and since Dickens' mother and siblings have nowhere to go, they all live at the prison as well. All except Dickens that is - he toils away at a blacking factory, earning a meager sum despite putting in long hours; and, lives in a decrepit dwelling, occupying a cold attic. His only solace is his pencil and slate - tools which help him escape into other worlds, creating stories and characters from his experiences, observations, and from his overabundant imagination. The story is well-told, and even though little is known about this dark period in Dickens' life, it does correlate with some of what we know of his early years, and the author has evidently done some research into this. The illustrations are beautiful, and despite the dark theme of a struggling, neglected child, there is also a ray of hope threaded into the storyline. Dickens did rise above his early disadvantaged life, and became a renowned author whose works continue to be loved two centuries later. This picture book is a great way for children and adults to celebrate Dickens' 200th birthday, and will hopefully encourage young readers to pick up one of his classics.

A Boy Called Dickens is a children's picture book detailing the life of young Charles Dickens. Dickens has a hard life with his father going to Debtor's prison while he was a boy. He was then forced to work in a shoe blacking factory in order to make money to support his family, who were also living in jail with his father. The worst thing to Dickens is the fact that he is unable to read his beloved books and attend school. He makes the most of his adversity and uses his imagination to create wonderful stories. My boys loved A Boy Called Dickens. In fact NPR mentioned Dickens on the radio Wednesday and Kile (just turned six) piped up and said, "Dickens' family was in jail and he worked in a factory. He grew up and wrote lots of books." I was amazed and glad that he was retaining what we had read. He did pick the book to read each night last week so it must have intrigued him. The boys really loved the artwork by John Hendrix, which goes perfectly with the story. Daniel is sure that one of the story creations of Dickens is a pirate from his hat and I went with it. They really like the beginning where the story asks where young Dickens is. They like to look at the picture and find him. They feel sad for him that he can't go to school, but also think it is very cool that he is able to write his own stories and grows up to become a famous author. In other words, the boys found the story interesting, relatable, and educational. Or maybe I found it educational, and they just happened to learn from it! I liked how the tale ends happily and the note about Dickens' life at the end. Overall, A Boy Called Dickens is a children's historical fiction picture book that is sure to delight both children and adults. This review was first published on my blog, Laura's Reviews.

I reviewed this book a few weeks ago, but somehow my review wasn't registered or published at the site. Thus I will try again. Having taught Dickens at the college level for a couple of dozen years, I am enthusiastic about efforts to interest young readers in his own young life--which might later lead to an interest in his extraordinary, and very adult, novels. The text and illustrations are clever and captivating--although the Dickens boy does look a little goofy--and should transport the reader to another time and place, a valiant and valuable thing in this world of short views and unlasting moments. My overall impression is favorable, and I hope the child to whom I gave the book agrees and might eventually read one of Dickens's masterpieces.

We meet the 12 year old Dickens on a cold, gray winter day in London. He is hungry and his school books are pawned. Instead of school, he must work long hours at a blacking factory. His friend, Fagin, begs the young boy to entertain him with stories to pass the long work hours. Later, Dickens makes his way home through the dreary London streets where vendors sell potatoes and chestnuts to the poor. The boy returns home alone to a tiny room, with a cot and shelf and loaf of bread, leaving the reader wondering where his family may be. His entire family is in the debtors prison, including his mother and young siblings who have nowhere else to live. The young Dickens longs to return to school, but there will be more obstacles to overcome before this happens. The illustrations are done in shades of beige, gray and brown to convey how poverty severely limits one's options, while Dickens is painted with an inner light that animates this boy whose aspirations seem near impossible. His future characters are done in ghostly blues, as we discover the people and places that he will later reinvent through his stories such as, "a young gentleman with great expectations...lawyers, clerks, convicts and keepers of old curiosity shops." This story is a nice way of introducing children to this literary genius, and the story will give children a renewed appreciation for school, as the young Dickens's one driving ambition is to return to school! Anyone with a dream that seems out of reach, will be inspired by this tale. The last line will stay with the reader long afterward: "...remember how much we all might lose when a child's dreams don't come true."

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