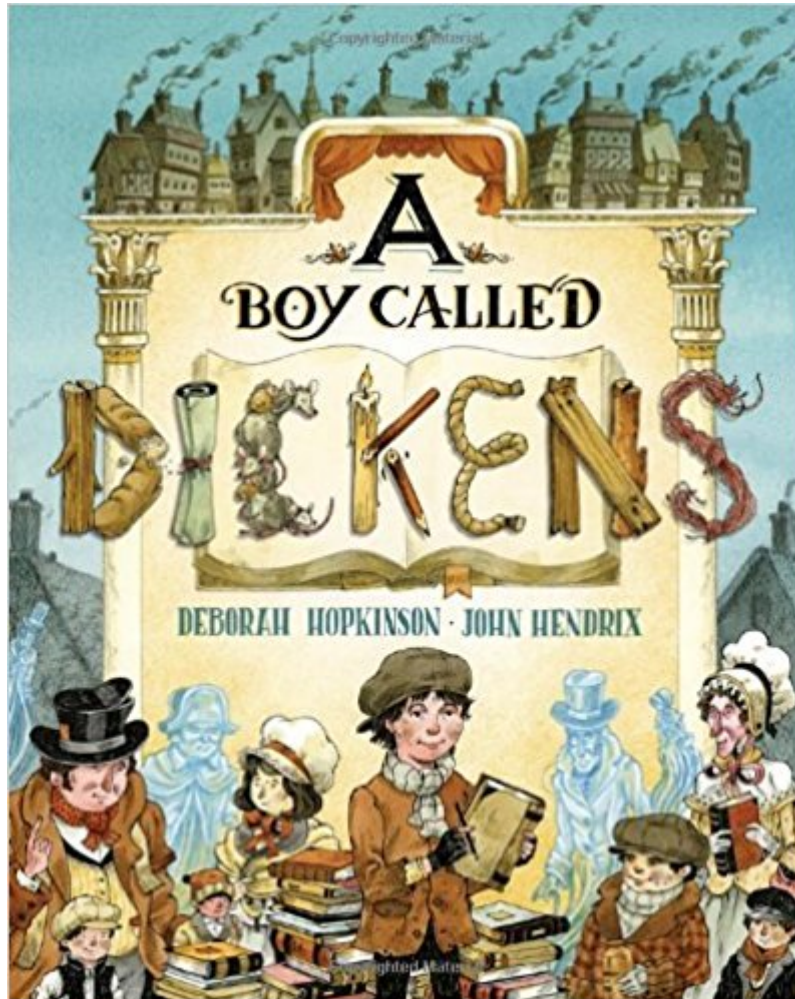




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# A Boy Called Dickens



## 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 10 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #1,081,701 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #94 in [Books > Children's Books > Biographies > European](#) #252 in [Books > Children's Books > Growing Up & Facts of Life > Difficult Discussions > Homelessness & Poverty](#) #652 in [Books > Children's Books > Literature & Fiction > Historical Fiction > Europe](#)

Age Range: 4 - 8 years

Grade Level: Preschool - 3

## Customer Reviews

**\*Starred Review\*** Looking for a picture-book biography of Dickens to celebrate his 200th birthday in 2012? Look elsewhere, as this isn't so much a biography as it is a slice of life, and a revealing one at that. This fictionalized account is set during the time 12-year-old Dickens toiled away in a blacking factory while the rest of his family lived in debtors' prison. To help ease the boredom and stave off hunger, the boy dreams up stories, including a rudimentary seedling of a tale that would become David Copperfield. Even when his family pays off its debt and returns home, the boy who loves books and reading toils away for six shillings a day until shame prompts his

father to finally send the boy back to school. Any story of Charles Dickens is also the story of one of the great atmospheres in literary history, and a central spread of the boy walking home after a grueling work day could well serve as a visual definition of the word Dickensian. In this bustling, grimy scene, Dickens threads his way through "pickpockets; ladies with shattered hopes; a miserly old man; a young gentleman with great expectations; a proud, heartless girl; and keepers of old curiosity shops." Dancing through wide-angled perspectives and tight close-ups, Hendrix's cleanly inked figures are aptly set against cityscapes covered in sooty charcoals. A fine introduction to the writer, and a terrific, completely unpreachy departure point for discussions of child labor and social reform. Grades 3-5. --Ian Chipman

Booklist Best Children's Book of 2012  
Starred Review, School Library Journal, January 1, 2012: "Hopkinson's engaging text invites readers to experience the story with her. full of well-crafted description and detail." Starred Review, Booklist, December 15, 2011: "A fine introduction to the writer, and a terrific, completely un-preachy departure point for discussions of child labor and social reform." Starred Review, Kirkus Reviews, November 15, 2011: "Both accessible and rich in simile and metaphor, this fictionalized biography concerns the budding novelist's coming of age, as he ekes out a living (during his family's stint in debtors' prison) and pursues his dream."

As a fan of Dickens, this was a delight to read. I learned things about his childhood that I wasn't familiar with. After suffering the hardships of child labor and imprisoned parents, Dickens made it in the world as an educated person and talented writer. His love of books and storytelling abilities kept his spirits up during this tough time. The charming illustrations pull us into the time period.

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.

This would make a wonderful introduction to the writings of Charles Dickens for younger people. Dickens is still worthwhile reading, but so many shy away from him. This book just might cause a young person to go ahead and try one of Dickens' books. Beautifully illustrated, too.

Love this picture book!

*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*.

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.

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