

# Transcript

## 3. Listening 1

**Narrator:** Charles Dickens was born in 1812 in Portsmouth, England. He was the second of eight children, and the family moved around before settling in Camden Town, London in 1822. When Dickens' father John was sent to prison in 1824 because he had not paid his debts, the young Charles had to work in a factory to help his family. The terrible conditions there, as well as his experiences visiting his father in prison, inspired some of his later writing. He returned to school for a little while, after his father had paid his debts.

**Narrator:** As a young man, Dickens worked as a political journalist and by 1833 he was writing a series of short humorous articles for newspapers and magazines under the name "Boz." His first novel, *Oliver Twist*, was published in 1838. This was about a poor orphan trying to survive in London's criminal underworld. In total, Dickens wrote fifteen novels with various themes, but all related to social justice.

**Narrator:** Some were biographical – *David Copperfield* (1849) was based on Dickens' own life story. Others, like *Dombey and Son* or *Little Dorrit*, had plots centring around business or the law, with Dickens criticising these organisations' effects on people's lives. *A Tale of Two Cities* was set during the French Revolution. Most of his works were originally written as serials, and the plots had multiple cliff-hangers to encourage people to buy the next magazine or paper.

**Narrator:** However, it is his 1843 short novel, *A Christmas Carol*, that Dickens is perhaps best known for. In this story, a miser called Ebenezer Scrooge is forced to consider the effects of his actions on other people. Dickens' descriptions of Christmas holiday celebrations, particularly food, reflected a new popular focus on this holiday in England.

**Narrator:** Today, when many people think of a traditional Christmas, they are thinking of this story. The customs of sending Christmas cards, decorating Christmas trees and singing Christmas carols also became popular in England around this time. Additionally, Dickens did much to promote the idea of a "white Christmas", or snowy weather during this holiday, as this was what he remembered from his own childhood.

**Narrator:** In fact, the white Christmases of the 1810s were unusually cold and nowadays it rarely snows at this time of year in England. Dickens was well-known around the world and made a lot of money from his writing during his life. He travelled to the United States twice on lecture tours. With his wife Catherine, he had ten children. However, in 1850, his father and one of his daughters died and his writings show a darker world view after this. In 1858, he separated from his wife and started a relationship with an actress.