

Down and Out in Paris and London (Edited)

By George Orwell

Important Note: Make sure that you read Mr. Walter's edited version of the text, posted on the online assignment page!

Chapters 1–17

CHAPTER 1

1. Specifically what sort of people lived in the area that Orwell talks about in the first chapter? What does the opening scene found in the first few paragraphs indicate regarding the street named rue du Coq d'Or? Do you think that the dramatization and dialog are more effective than making specific statements about the street? If so, how?
2. How do the accounts later on in chapter 1 add or detract from the thrust of Orwell's intention of getting the reader to understand the many different aspects of poverty?
3. Orwell's journalistic memoir is about living in poverty in Paris and London (hence the title, *Down and Out in Paris and London*). In chapter 1 of his account, Orwell directly states the effects of poverty on people through his description of the lodgers of Hôtel des Trois Moineaux, such as in his statement: "Poverty frees them from ordinary standards of behavior, just as money frees people from work. Some of the lodgers in our hotel lived lives that were curious beyond words." Do you agree with Orwell that the people were "eccentric" and "half-mad" because of poverty, or do you think that they entered into poverty because they were already odd and living contrary to the "ordinary standards of behavior"? Do you think that there were other aspects that Orwell did not take into account to explain the lodgers' queer ways, such as personality, upbringing, and the French culture? (Orwell distinguishes the English character from the French, such as when he mentions in chapter 2, "I wish one could find a pub in London a quarter as cheery [as the French])?

CHAPTER 2

4. Why do you think Orwell found Charlie "profoundly disgusting to see"? What is the discrepancy between his age and his topic of conversation? What is the meaning of the word "curious" as Orwell uses it in the last sentence of Chapter 2?

CHAPTER 3

5. According to Orwell, what are the certain effects of poverty in terms of self-image or self-esteem? How does it affect one's personal relationships? How prevalent was it in Paris at the time? What is the "great consolation in poverty"?

6. What experience does Orwell relate regarding the second hand shop? Does this passage strike you as antisemitic? (One of his personal friends and biographers T. R. Fyvel, who was Jewish himself, says that Orwell had been accused of being anti-Israel and antisemitic.) Did you notice any other antisemitic sentiments expressed throughout the narrative? (See Chapter 13, among others.) As a writer/journalist writing a narrative, do you think that it is effective to insert personal prejudices and opinions or leave them out? Be able to explain your answer.

CHAPTER 4

7. What humiliating and distressful experience did Orwell have pawning his clothes? Does his relation of the experience show stereotyping of French people?
8. How does Orwell demonstrate his forthrightness in relating his experience? Does he present himself in a bad light? How so?
9. What are the most salient characteristics of Boris, Orwell's "influential friend to fall back on"? How does Orwell reveal Boris's character and personality through his use of dialogue?

CHAPTER 5

10. How does Orwell envision his work at a restaurant? How does this picture match up with reality? Are Orwell's expectations of finding relief from his poverty met through his friend Boris? How does the detail of the bugs add to what Orwell is trying to communicate through his narrative?

CHAPTERS 6 AND 7

11. What details in Boris's letter from his former "girl friend" indicate that Boris was really not her true love? How is Boris's personality further developed in the narrative?

CHAPTERS 8 AND 9

12. Obviously a writer cannot include every detail that happens in an experience, but must instead carefully select specific experiences and snatches of dialog that help communicate his idea. Explain Orwell's inclusion of the following conversation between Boris and Orwell. Also comment on the truth of what is being said.

'Appearance—appearance is everything, mon ami. Give me a new suit and I will borrow a thousand francs by dinner-time. What a pity I did not buy a collar when we had money. I turned my collar inside out this morning; but what is the use, one side is as dirty as the other. Do you think I look hungry, mon ami?'

'You look pale.'

'Curse it, what can one do on bread and potatoes? It is fatal to look hungry. It makes people want to kick you. Wait.'

CHAPTER 10

13. How was Orwell treated as a dishwasher? What details does Orwell include that show the disagreeableness of his position?
14. When Orwell tells Boris that he could not work at the restaurant because they would only hire him for a month and not a fortnight, what is his reaction? What was Orwell's conclusion regarding the morality of his actions? Do you agree with his conclusions? Why does Orwell include this detail?

CHAPTER 11

15. In this chapter Orwell describes the particulars of the working conditions of being a plongeur, or dish washer. Give examples from his narrative in which Orwell describes the claustrophobic cellar and the unbearable heat.

CHAPTER 12

16. What disturbing expose of Parisian restaurants does Orwell make in this chapter? What reflections does Orwell have on the occupation of being a dishwasher?

CHAPTERS 13 AND 14

17. How does class consciousness, or as Orwell puts it, "caste system," work itself out in the restaurant business? Who are the bottom and who are the top? What are the good and bad aspects of each rung of the ladder? What commentary does Orwell seem to be suggesting about class consciousness in general? How does the waiter's position, according to Orwell, affect his political orientation? According to Orwell, how do the various duties or positions affect the conscience of the workers toward the customer, regarding cleanliness, and making false appearances, etc.?

CHAPTER 15

18. What was the purpose of Orwell's re-telling Mario's story? (Be specific.)

CHAPTER 16

19. What point is Orwell giving with the account of the murder at the end of the chapter? What did poverty teach him about sleep and food?

CHAPTER 17

20. What political and sociological statements is Orwell communicating through the story of Furex? What other entertainments were given at the bistro? What was the temporary illusion that the bistro customers were under in the bistro? When did the illusion dissipate? What does Orwell achieve by including so many details that make the evening at the bistro sound so unpleasant?

Chapters 18–23

CHAPTERS 18 AND 19

21. Orwell is mostly remembered today as an author of works that satirize totalitarian regimes, such as the communist U. S. S. R. Indeed in an essay titled “Why I Write,” Orwell indicates that his main motivation in writing is political: What I have most wanted to do throughout the past ten years is to make political writing into an art. My starting point is always a feeling of partisanship, a sense of injustice. When I sit down to write a book, I do not say to myself, “I am going to produce a work of art.” I write it because there is some lie that I want to expose, some fact to which I want to draw attention, and my initial concern is to get a hearing. In what way is *Down and Out in Paris and London* a political statement? In books such as *Animal Farm*, Orwell shows the tactics which communist regimes used to manipulate the people to work its will. *Down and Out in Paris and London* was written in 1933—at least a decade before *Animal Farm*. How does Orwell satirize the communists through Jules in Chapter 19? Identify the irony behind the word “principles” in the following statement made by Jules regarding his stealing milk from the patron of the restaurant where he was working: It wasn’t that I wanted milk, you understand, because I hate the stuff; it was principle, just principle.

CHAPTERS 20 AND 21

22. What effect did the restaurant work have on Orwell and his coworkers?

CHAPTER 22

23. In chapter 22, Orwell muses on the significance of a dishwasher’s job, speculating on “what purpose it serves and who wants it to continue.” Why do the dishwashers, especially the educated ones, not look for better employment or opportunities to improve their working conditions? What animal does Orwell compare manual laborers to? How are they similar? What point is Orwell making about the “luxuries” of life? How is the dishwasher’s work “useless”?
24. According to Orwell, why does the position of dishwasher exist? Would his position be called a “conservative” or “liberal” position? How does this agree or disagree with the apparent position that he takes toward communism? How does Orwell qualify his ideas at the very end of the chapter?

Chapter 24

25. What made Orwell praise England while talking with some Romanians on his way back to England? What sites did they pass that contradicted his statements?
26. Use of dialog and action often helps the author capture the character of those being described. Tell how Orwell is able to accomplish this in this chapter.
27. Discuss Orwell’s observations regarding his change of clothes. How did clothes literally “make the man” in Orwell’s case?

CHAPTER 25

28. How does Orwell contrast London with Paris in this chapter?

CHAPTER 26

29. How does Orwell depict religious hypocrisy among the tramps? How does Orwell insinuate that it is poverty that makes them hypocrites? Although Orwell was not a professing Christian, he admits that “in fairness we ought to have been grateful—still, we were not.” What reason does he suggest throughout the chapter and the entire narrative for not being grateful? Is Orwell making a statement against the tramps for their ungratefulness?