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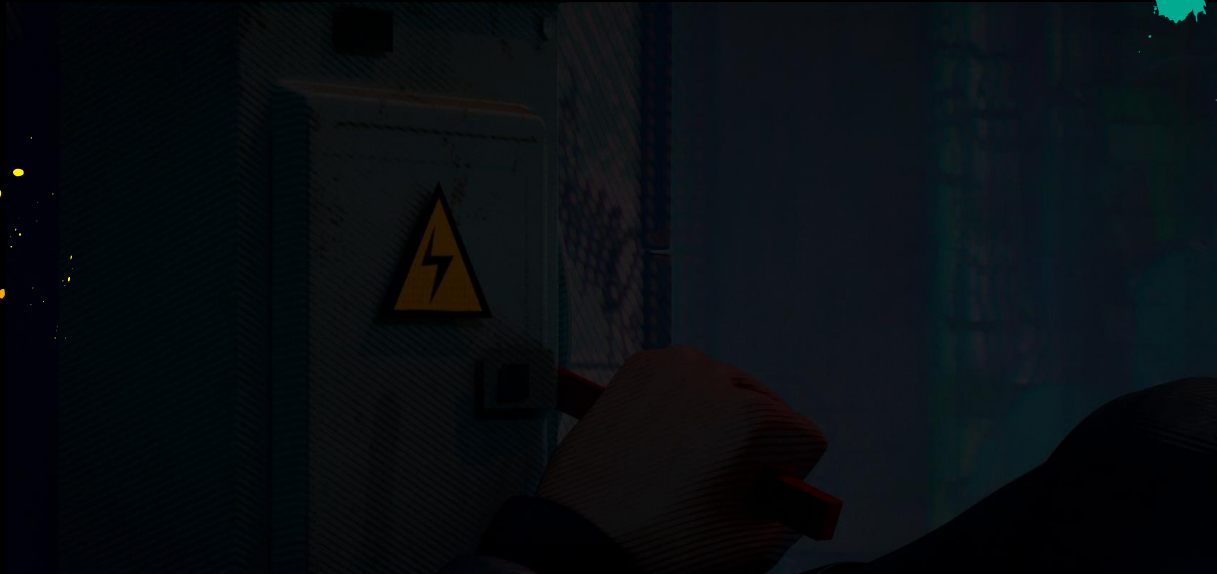
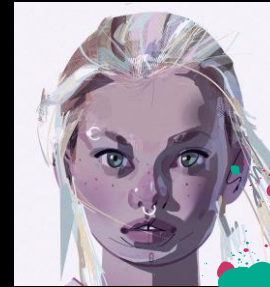
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GREAT EXPECTATIONS

THE LIVING PAST IN LITERATURE





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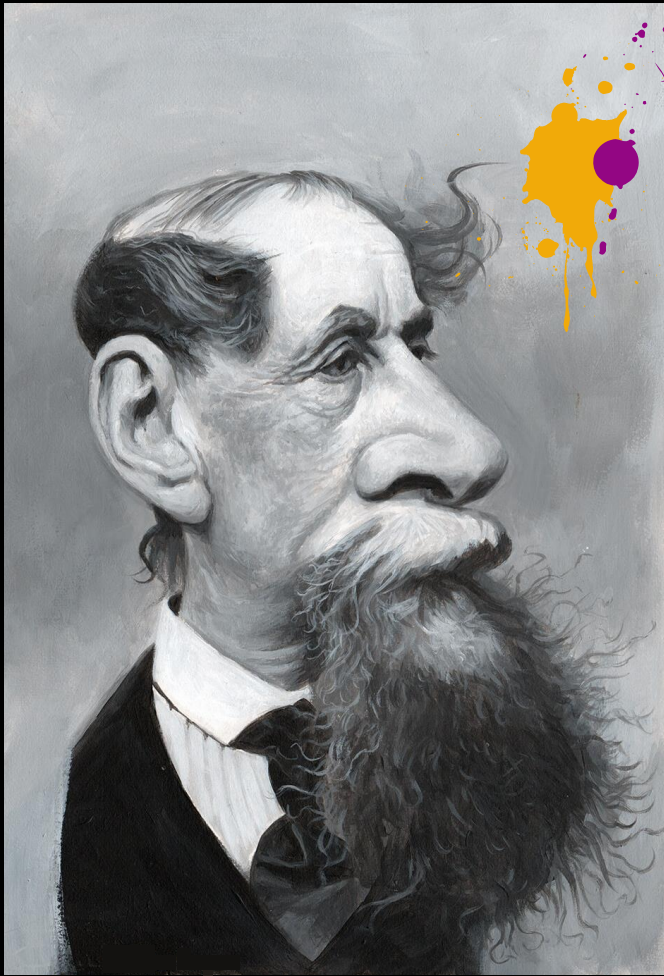
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CHARLES DICKENS

Reflecting on his own childhood, Charles Dickens (1812-1870) described himself as “a very small and not over-particularly-taken-care-of boy”—a boy who would become, through incredibly hard work and creative genius, one of the best known and best loved authors of the Victorian period (qtd. in Aubineau 9). And Dickens has lasted. His inventiveness of plot and character, his generous spirit, and his observant eye and ear continue to entertain and reward readers. Reading Dickens links us to the past and demonstrates that the past has much to say to the present. T. S. Eliot somewhere envisioned a work of literature that would cut across all stratifications of taste. I suppose that on the available evidence *Great Expectations* (1861) lives up to Eliot’s ideal as nearly as any novel in English now being read; and in the past sixty years, certainly, since Bernard Shaw’s judgment of it as Dicken’s “most compactly perfect book,” it has retained not only its place in the pantheon of English fiction but also its overarching appeal (qtd. in Rosenberg xi). Even readers who have not turned a page of

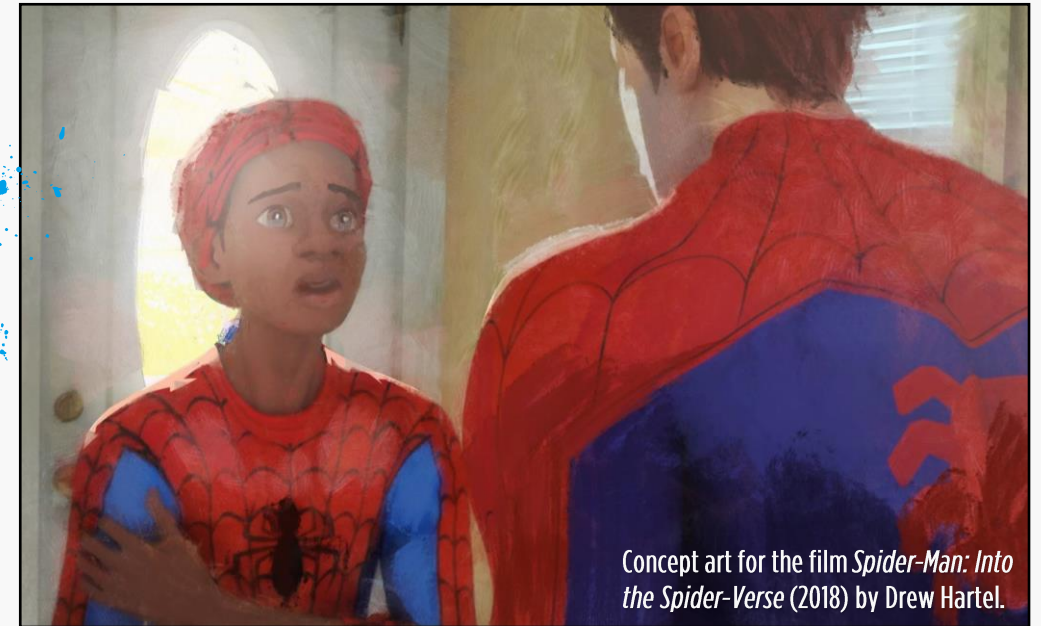
Dickens since reading *A Christmas Carol* (1843) in elementary school will find themselves caught up in the story of young Pip, a poor blacksmith’s apprentice who unexpectedly receives great wealth, education, and training to become a gentleman. The recent inclusion of *Great Expectations*, as one of the texts assigned to Miles at Visions Academy, in the 2018 film *Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse* furthers the novel’s appeal to a new generation of readers and expands its reach across stratospheres and into parallel universes. True to Dickens, the film is about how we relate to other people’s stories while creating our own.

What is a Coming-of-Age Story?

A *Bildungsroman* is a German word which means “novel of formation.” The subject of these novels is the development of the protagonist’s mind and character in the passage from childhood through varied experiences—and often through a spiritual crisis—into maturity; this process usually involves recognition of one’s identity and role in the world. The mode began in

Germany, but the term has been expanded to classify books from all around the world, including, of course, Charles Dickens’s *Great Expectations* (1861).

An important subtype of the *Bildungsroman* is the *Künstlerroman* (or “artist-novel”), which represents the development of novelist or other artist from childhood into



a stage of maturity that signifies recognition of the protagonist’s artistic destiny and mastery of an artistic craft. Dickens’s *David Copperfield* (1850) can be considered an early instance of this type.

In *Unbecoming Women: British Women Writers and the Novel of Development* (1993), Susan Fraiman analyzes novels about “growing up female”; she proposes that the *Bildungsroman* is a “progressive development” toward “masterful selfhood.” What coming-of-age novels have you read?

What is Gothic Literature?

The word *Gothic* originally referred to the Goths, an early Germanic tribe, and then came to signify “medieval.” The Gothic novel, or Gothic romance, is a type of prose fiction that flourished through the early nineteenth century. The locale was often a gloomy castle furnished with dungeons, subterranean passages, and sliding panels; the typical story focused on the sufferings imposed on an innocent heroine, by a cruel and lustful villain, and made bountiful use of ghosts, mysterious disappearances, and other sensational and supernatural occurrences.

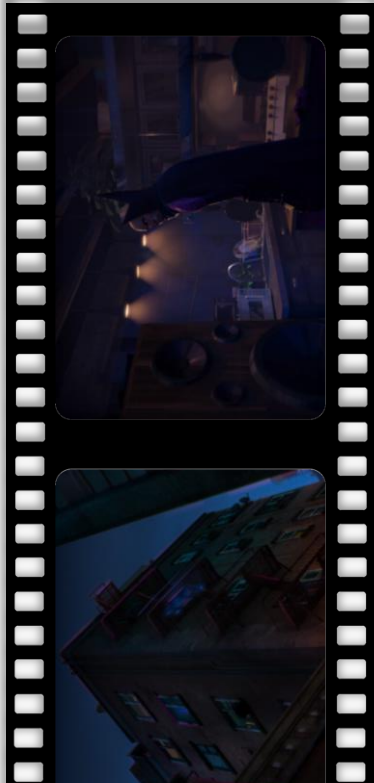
The term has also been extended to a type of fiction which lacks the exotic setting of the earlier romances but develops a brooding atmosphere of

gloom and terror, represents events that are uncanny or macabre or sensationally violent, and often deals with aberrant psychological states. In this extended sense, novels such as Mary Shelley’s remarkable and influential *Frankenstein* (1818) are also considered Gothic.

Still more loosely, Gothic has been used to describe elements of the macabre and terrifying in such later works as Charles Dickens’s *Bleak House* (1853) and the Miss Havisham episodes of *Great Expectations*.



Martita Hunt as Miss Havisham and Jean Simmons as Estella in David Lean's *Great Expectations* (1946).





CHARACTER POSTERS





Before we start watching the film, let's take a look at what we'll be doing as a concluding project when we finish. Working in groups of four, you will juxtapose two characters on a poster. The character pairings begin on page eight of your packet. Your poster should have drawings of the characters, brief descriptions of them, and quotations. The goal is to highlight significant similarities and illustrate the timelessness of Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations*.





“My clothes were rather a disappointment, of course. Probably every new and eagerly expected garment ever put on since clothes came in, fell a trifle short of the wearer’s expectation” (122).

– PIP, *GREAT EXPECTATIONS*

“Can I return it if it doesn’t fit?”

– MILES, *SPIDER-VERSE*

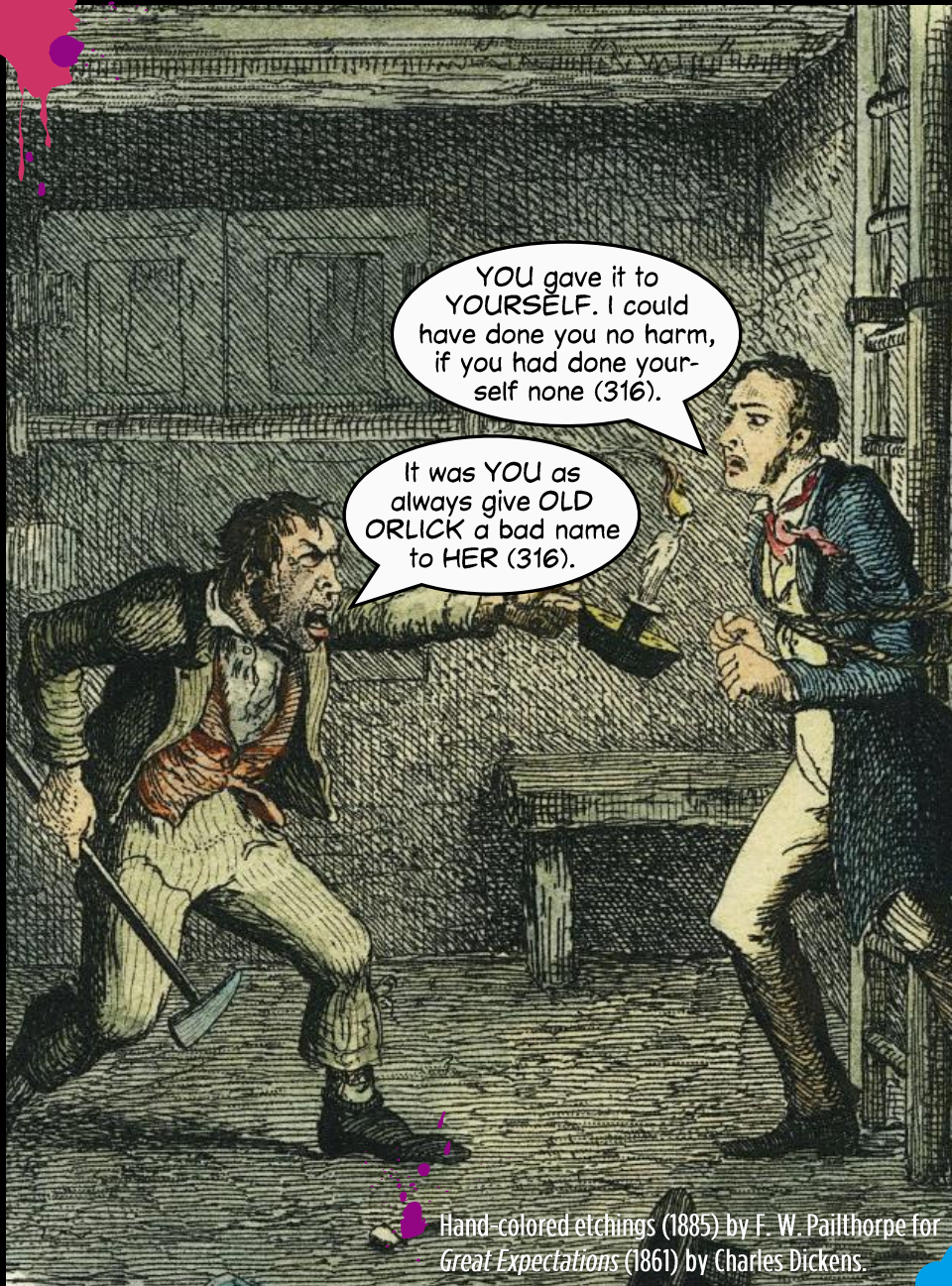
“It always fits...eventually.”

– STAN, *SPIDER-VERSE*



Concept sketch for the film *Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse* (2018) by Shiyoon Kim. Miles Morales, the hero of the movie and comic book created by Brian Michael Bendis and Sara Pichelli, is a dynamic half-black, half-Puerto Rican thirteen-year-old boy, who was reportedly inspired by then-U.S. President Barack Obama.

SUMMER READING QUIZ





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