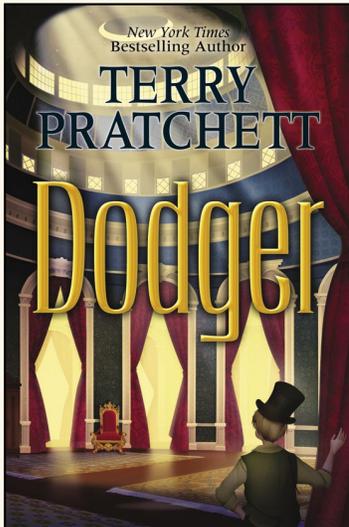


Dodger

By TERRY PRATCHETT

Discussion Guide



ABOUT THE BOOK

A young street urchin comes to the aid of a seemingly helpless young woman, beginning his meteoric ascent through London society as he rubs shoulders with the likes of Charles Dickens, Benjamin Disraeli, and Sweeney Todd. With his characteristic wit and boundless imagination, Terry Pratchett delivers a tale of London in the Victorian Age, and of a young man who must navigate its seamy underbelly—not just the ancient Roman sewers but the dangerous world of greed, crime, and politics.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Discuss a woman's place in society during the Victorian Age. Cite evidence from the text, especially as it relates to Simplicity, Angela, and the queen. How representative do you think they are of typical Victorian women?
2. In this novel, one of the world's greatest storytellers (Terry Pratchett) pays homage to another (Charles Dickens). Discuss several ways that Pratchett does this.
3. Names can reveal a lot about a character. Do you think Dodger's name suits him? What about Simplicity and Serendipity? Do these names carry any symbolism—or irony?
4. How important are class distinctions in Victorian society? Cite evidence from the text. What do you make of the fact that Dodger is able to rise from a lowly tosher to the highest ranks of society?
5. Solomon is a veritable fountain of wisdom. Consider these nuggets, all found within a page of each other (pages 205-6). "If you go around telling people that they are downtrodden, you tend to make two separate enemies. . . . Money makes people rich; it is a fallacy to think it makes them better, or even that it makes them worse. . . . Responsibilities are the anvil on which a man is forged." Can you spot others?
6. "The iron forged on the anvil cannot be blamed for the hammer," says Solomon (page 182). Do you agree? "Mister Todd killed, but he wasn't a killer. Maybe if he'd never had to go to that blessed war, he wouldn't have gone right off his head," thinks Dodger (page 281). Again, do you agree?
7. "It is wonderful, is it not, how the public perception of what is true these days seems always biased toward the macabre? It would seem that the common man likes nothing so much as an 'orrible murder,'" says Tenniel (page 196). He is speaking of Dodger's sensationalized encounter with Sweeney Todd, but he could well be talking of today's media coverage. Why do people have this tendency?

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (continued)

8. “Dodger, you fail to understand the unique arrangements between Jewish people and God,” says Solomon. Reread pages 105-6 and page 122. How would you describe Solomon’s own unique arrangement? Compare and contrast this with Dodger’s belief in the Lady of the Sewers.
9. “I would like to talk to you about *reading*. . . . A person of your caliber has no business being illiterate,” Angela tells Dodger (page 246). Now, Dodger can read better than he lets on, but how does his degree of literacy have a bearing on the story? Generally speaking, how is education related to social mobility?
10. Dodger is rather put out about the idea of plainclothes policemen. “Seeing policemen around kept you honest, didn’t it? If they were going to lurk around like ordinary people, they were basically asking you to commit crimes, weren’t they?” (pages 257-8). What do you think? Discuss the criminal justice system more broadly in terms of truth and corruption. How do the peelers differ from the Bow Street runners?
11. Discuss the important role that politics and politicians play in this story. Benjamin Disraeli and Robert Peel represent the authority of the government. How does Dodger feel about each of these men?
12. *Happy Families* was an early working title for this novel. How does it suit this story? Compare and contrast its merits with the final title, *Dodger*.

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

1. **Casting Call.** A movie version of *Dodger* is being produced and you’ve been hired as the director. Your first order of business is to cast the film. Which actors would you pick for the leads, Dodger and Simplicity? Who would you hire for the plum supporting role of Solomon Cohen? And what about all the wonderful cameos for the historical figures?
2. **Drawing Dodger.** John Tenniel is famous as an artist for *Punch* and renowned as the illustrator of Lewis Carroll’s *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass*. In this novel, Dodger sits for Tenniel after his encounter with Sweeney Todd. Draw your own portrait of Dodger. You may look up Tenniel’s work as a reference, but feel free to use your own style and medium.
3. **Nation Fascination.** *Dodger* is set in London during the industrial revolution, when urban life as we know it was beginning to take shape. Pratchett’s novel *Nation*, on the other hand, is set on a remote South Pacific island devoid of many of those urban problems. Read both novels in tandem to compare and contrast how each is able to explore a common humanity in such radically different settings.
4. **Investigating the Victorians.** The Victorian Age was named for Queen Victoria, who reigned for 64 years beginning in the middle of the nineteenth century. Pratchett has populated *Dodger* with quite a few figures from the era: Joseph Bazalgette, Angela Burdett-Coutts, Charles Dickens, Benjamin Disraeli, Henry Mayhew, Robert Peel, John Tenniel, and Sweeney Todd. Research each of these characters to find out which one is fictional.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sir Terry Pratchett, the author of over four dozen novels, is one of the world’s bestselling novelists writing in the English language. His books have sold more than 80 million copies worldwide, and he has won a Printz Honor, the *Boston Globe–Horn Book Award*, the *LA Times Book Prize* for YA Literature, and Britain’s Carnegie Medal. He lives in England. www.terrypratchettbooks.com

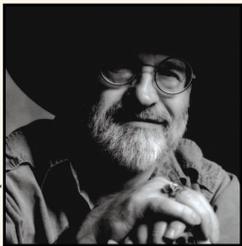


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