

“Bill Sikes’ murder of Nancy is the most horrible crime in the novel.” To what extent do you agree with this view?

- Spend 20 mins planning your response
- Consider: Your clear argument, quotes to support, writer’s methods, writer’s intention and context

# Student Response

- On the next slide is a student response. For each AO, write their strengths and next steps. An examiner's commentary is on the slide after but don't look at that until you have attempted it yourself.
- AO1- SPAG, terminology and argument
- AO2- Writer's methods
- AO3- Context
- AO4- Understanding of crime writing genre
- AO5- Sense of debate

*Oliver Twist* presents criminals as products of their society.'

To what extent do you agree with this view? Remember to include in your answer relevant detailed exploration of Dickens' authorial methods.

In some ways the criminals in the novel could be seen as products of society especially the likes of Nancy who is murdered and Fagin who is hanged. On the other hand, some people might argue that they are not products because they choose this life for themselves and many of them do really terrible things like Sikes who kills Nancy and Fagin who uses the boys. In this essay, I am going to look at both points of view.

Firstly, it could be argued that Nancy is a victim, and therefore a product of her society, as like a lot of individuals who live at the bottom rung of society, the only way in which she is able to survive is by turning to criminal or immoral activity - in her case prostitution and involvement with more hardened criminals such as Sikes and Fagin. However, even though she is a criminal, Dickens presents her in a sympathetic way. It seems that she genuinely loves Sikes and when he is ill, she nurses him showing a caring and motherly side to her character despite the way he treats her. Moreover, Dickens even calls one of the chapters 'The Time Arrives for Nancy to Redeem her Pledge to Rose Maylie' where the word 'redeem' suggests that she is a moral individual who wants to redeem herself for the wrong that she did Oliver. Nancy is the one who confesses that she took Oliver away from Mr Brownlow and the truth about Monks so that the truth about his parentage and real character can be revealed. Therefore it seems that Nancy is essentially a moral character whose social circumstances have forced her into the criminal world. She does not seem to be actively making a choice to be a criminal. Society does not offer her any alternative way to live. Also, her murder makes her seem like a victim. Dickens portrays this in a really violent way as we are told she 'staggered and fell, nearly blinded with the blood that rained on from a deep gash in her forehead'. Sikes' attack on Nancy, which is partly motivated by the way she has interfered with his plans, seems savage and terrible and therefore despite the fact she is a criminal, we see her as a product of the world she lives in and we sympathise with her.

Likewise, some people might see the boys who work for Fagin as victims of society even though they are criminals. The alternative life is one where they are starved and beaten as we see at the beginning of the novel through Dickens' presentation of Mrs Mann's baby farm and the suffering of Dick and also how society treats people in the workhouse. This is a life that even the moral Oliver cannot stand and tries to escape from. Society does not care for such impoverished and orphaned children. Their only way of surviving is therefore to steal in order to have enough food to live. Therefore the boys are products of their cruel 19th century world. Oliver is persuaded to go with Fagin at first because he offers him a bed and shelter something that society has failed to provide him with despite the fact today we would consider this a really basic thing. In fact, the life the boys have with Fagin, who is even described as a 'pleasant old gentleman' is seen as a great improvement on the conditions in the workhouse as he gives them clothes and food and does look after them in a way. He could almost be seen as an alternative mentor and father figure taking the place of a society that has failed them. He provides an alternative society though it could be said that the boys become products of that and they seem happier in that world. In films, for example, the Artful Dodger is often presented as a humorous and fun loving character who the reader really likes. Moreover, these boys are really harshly punished by society. In today's society, if you are a young boy under the age of 16 and commit some kind of crime you get sent to a detention centre or looked after in some way, but these boys are punished severely and even sent to the 'gallows' for simply stealing a handkerchief or pocket watch and no one seems to care. This makes them victims of society as well as products because they are forced into this life, punished too harshly and no one cares about them.

On the other hand, it is difficult to see characters like Bill Sikes as products or victims of society. He seems like a savage psychopath who is willing to stoop to any level for self gain. You could argue that he chooses the life of a criminal because he is greedy and even enjoys the violence of the criminal life. He has no moral conscience and even abandons Oliver our innocent main character, after the

# Examiner commentary

This is a straightforward response and the candidate makes relevant points in a clear way.

AO1 – The response is structured and ideas are sensibly ordered. The candidate uses terminology in an appropriate way. The writing is clearly expressed and mainly accurate although there are some awkward phrases and there is some imprecision.

AO2 – The candidate has some sense of the author's shaping meanings but there is more on Dickens' intentions than the methods themselves. A little is said about how Dickens presents characters but the ideas are not detailed. There is a little discussion of how Dickens structures his novel in relation to whether or not his characters are products of their society but, given the fact this is an open book, the use of evidence is rather thin.

AO3 – There is some engagement with social and legal contexts and there is valid discussion of how society treats children. There is also an awareness of how a modern society would treat young criminals as opposed to the Victorian system. However, again there is a lack of specific detail from the text.

AO4 – There is straight forward understanding of the crime writing genre with relevant comments about what makes individuals become criminal and there are some specific examples of criminal activity. The candidate also focuses on the nature of victims of crime although the ideas lack development and detailed textual reference.

AO5 – There is a relevant debate here although the latter section is less developed than the first. The response remains focused on the task though and there are straight forward points made both for and against the statement although the final argument is not really clinched.

This response seems consistent with the Band 3 descriptors.

“Suspense and mystery are key elements of crime texts”

Explore the significance of suspense and mystery as they are presented in the two crime texts you have studied.

- Spend 20 mins planning your response. Please use Oliver and one other of your crime texts
- Consider: Your clear argument, quotes to support, writer’s methods, writer’s intention and context