

Study Guide: Charles Dickens' American Notes



Study Guide for Charles Dickens's American Notes

by Course Hero

★★★★★ 5 out of 5

Language : English

File size : 848 KB

Print length : 40 pages

Lending : Enabled

Screen Reader: Supported



American Notes for General Circulation, commonly known as *American Notes*, is a non-fiction travelogue written by Charles Dickens following his five-month visit to the United States in 1842. Published in 1843, *American Notes* offers a vivid and insightful account of Dickens' experiences and impressions of the young nation.

Through his observations and interactions with Americans from all walks of life, Dickens provides a unique perspective on the social, political, and cultural landscape of the United States during a pivotal period in its history. *American Notes* has become a valuable resource for understanding the development of American society and remains an important work of literary travel writing.

Chapter Summary

American Notes is divided into 18 chapters, each covering a different aspect of Dickens' American journey. The chapters can be summarized briefly as follows:

- **Chapter 1:** Dickens arrives in Boston and is struck by its modern and bustling atmosphere.
- **Chapter 2:** Dickens travels to Lowell, Massachusetts, a center of the textile industry, and witnesses the harsh working conditions faced by factory workers.
- **Chapter 3:** Dickens visits the city of New York and is overwhelmed by its size and diversity.
- **Chapter 4:** Dickens travels south to Philadelphia and Washington, D.C., where he meets with President Martin Van Buren.
- **Chapter 5:** Dickens visits the slave market in Richmond, Virginia, and is horrified by the conditions of slavery.
- **Chapter 6:** Dickens continues south to Charleston, South Carolina, and observes the stark contrasts between the opulence of the planters and the poverty of the enslaved people.
- **Chapter 7:** Dickens travels west to St. Louis, Missouri, and is impressed by its potential for growth and development.
- **Chapter 8:** Dickens visits Cincinnati, Ohio, and learns about the city's role as a gateway to the West.
- **Chapter 9:** Dickens travels down the Ohio River to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and experiences the excitement of the steamboat era.

- **Chapter 10:** Dickens returns to New York City and prepares for his departure from the United States.
- **Chapter 11:** Dickens reflects on his time in the United States and offers his overall impressions of the country.
- **Chapter 12:** Dickens discusses the American political system and the issue of slavery.
- **Chapter 13:** Dickens provides a detailed description of the American people, their customs, and their values.
- **Chapter 14:** Dickens examines the role of education in American society.
- **Chapter 15:** Dickens discusses the future of the United States and expresses his hopes for the country.
- **Chapter 16:** Dickens returns to England and publishes *American Notes*.
- **Chapter 17:** Dickens receives criticism for his negative portrayal of America in *American Notes*.
- **Chapter 18:** Dickens defends his work and expresses his continued belief in the potential of the United States.

Character Profiles

Charles Dickens

The main character of *American Notes* is Charles Dickens himself. As a first-time visitor to the United States, Dickens provides a fresh and unbiased perspective on the country. He is a keen observer of human

nature and is able to capture the nuances of American society through his writing.

Dickens is a complex character, and his views on the United States are often contradictory. He is often critical of American society, but he also admires the country's potential for growth and development. His personal experiences in the United States have a profound impact on him, and he emerges from his travels with a greater understanding of the world and his own place in it.

Other Notable Characters

In addition to Charles Dickens, several other characters appear throughout *American Notes*. These characters provide insights into the different aspects of American society that Dickens encounters on his travels.

- **Martin Van Buren:** The President of the United States at the time of Dickens' visit. Dickens is impressed by Van Buren's intelligence and charisma, but he is also critical of his policies.
- **Frederick Douglass:** A former slave who escaped to freedom and became a leading abolitionist. Dickens meets Douglass in New York City and is inspired by his story.
- **Ralph Waldo Emerson:** A prominent American writer and philosopher. Dickens meets Emerson in Concord, Massachusetts, and is impressed by his intellect and his commitment to social reform.
- **Henry Wadsworth Longfellow:** A leading American poet. Dickens meets Longfellow in Boston and is impressed by his poetry and his warmth.

Themes

American Notes explores a number of important themes, including:

- **Social inequality:** Dickens is horrified by the conditions of slavery in the United States and is critical of the country's treatment of its poor and working class.
- **Political corruption:** Dickens is disgusted by the corruption and self-interest that he witnesses in American politics.
- **Cultural differences:** Dickens is fascinated by the cultural differences between the United States and England. He observes the American people's love of freedom and independence, but he is also critical of their materialism and their lack of refinement.
- **The future of the United States:** Dickens believes that the United States has great potential, but he is also concerned about the country's future. He warns that if the country does not address its problems of social inequality and political corruption, it will not be able to reach its full potential.

Discussion Questions

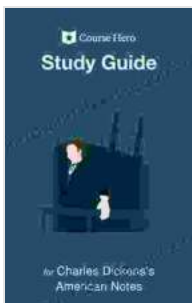
1. What are Dickens' overall impressions of the United States? How do these impressions change over the course of his journey?
2. How does Dickens' experience of slavery in the United States shape his views on the country? Do you think Dickens' portrayal of slavery is accurate and fair?
3. What are Dickens' criticisms of American society? Are these criticisms still relevant today?

4. What does Dickens admire about the United States? What does he believe are the country's strengths and weaknesses?

5. How does Dickens' view of the future of the United States compare to your own? Do you agree with his predictions? Why or why not?

American Notes is a valuable and insightful work of travel literature that provides a unique perspective on the development of American society in the 19th century. Dickens' vivid descriptions, keen observations, and thoughtful reflections offer a rich source of material for study and discussion.

Whether you are a student of American history, literature, or culture, *American Notes* is a must-read. Dickens' classic work will challenge your assumptions, expand your understanding, and inspire you to think more deeply about the United States and its place in the world.



Study Guide for Charles Dickens's American Notes

by Course Hero

★★★★★ 5 out of 5

Language : English

File size : 848 KB

Print length : 40 pages

Lending : Enabled

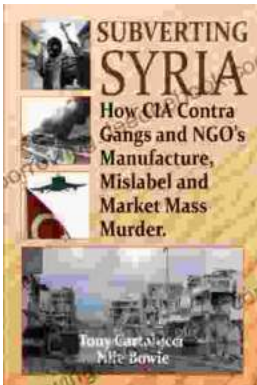
Screen Reader : Supported





The Gathering Pacific Storm: An Epic Struggle Between Japan and the United States

The Gathering Pacific Storm is a 1991 book by author Winston Churchill. The book tells the story of the lead-up to World War II in the Pacific, and...



How CIA-Contra Gangs and NGOs Manufacture, Mislabeled, and Market Mass Murder

In the annals of covert operations, the CIA's involvement with the Contra rebels in Nicaragua stands as one of the most egregious examples of state-sponsored terrorism. The...