Key Stage 3 English – Unit Intent

Year 7	**Term 1**	***Oliver Twist***	**Assessment question:** How does Dickens present the character of Bill Sikes? (extract and whole-text response)

Core knowledge: Key takeaways
(What are students exploring in terms of literature, language and human experience?)

1. *Oliver Twist* shows how difficult life was for poor children in Victorian London.
2. Bill Sikes is presented as a violent and frightening man who uses fear to control others.
3. Oliver is vulnerable because adults with power, like the Bumbles, Fagin and Sikes, treat him unfairly.
4. Dickens uses dark and dangerous settings to highlight the cruelty of the world Oliver lives in.
5. Characters like Nancy show kindness and bravery, which makes Sikes' violence seem even more shocking.
6. The moral of the story teaches us about justice, kindness and the importance of protecting vulnerable people.

Literary and disciplinary knowledge

Key vocabulary	Victorian, poverty, workhouse, orphan, context, protagonist, vulnerable, corrupt, malicious, villain, persecution, antisemitism, naïve, morality, tension, symbolism, brutal, victim, remorse, toxic masculinity, fear, intimidation
Writer's methods	1. Dickens uses a **third-person omniscient narrator** to reveal characters' private thoughts and moral qualities. 2. He creates **contrasts** between worlds: the safety of the Maylies' home vs. the danger of Fagin's den; innocence (Oliver) vs. corruption (Sikes). 3. **Characterisation of Bill Sikes**: • He is introduced through **fear**, **reputation**, and **the reactions of others**, building tension before he fully appears. • Dickens presents Sikes as both physically and morally **dangerous**, using animalistic metaphors, violent verbs, and imagery of shadow and darkness. • His dog, **Bull's-Eye**, acts as a **symbol of Sikes himself** — aggressive, untrustworthy, and ultimately doomed. 4. Dickens uses **setting** (dark alleyways, crowded slums, muddy streets) to reflect corruption and social decay. 5. **Symbolism**: • The **locket** represents Oliver's identity, hope and truth. • The **painting** symbolises connection, inheritance and the hidden past. 6. Dickens critiques Victorian society, especially the **Poor Law**, **antisemitism**, **child crime**, and the **criminal underworld**.
Analytical writing	1. A **topic sentence** introduces the main idea of each paragraph. **(7.4)** 2. You should include **evidence or relevant quotations** from a text to support topic sentences. Use 'for example' to introduce a quote or piece of evidence from a text. **(7.5)** 3. **Appositives** can be used in analysis to add commentary or interpretation about a character or idea within the same sentence. **(7.6)** 4. **Conjunctions such as 'because', 'but', 'so'** can be used to add detail when writing analytically about characters or concepts. **(7.7)** Link to full Y7 Writing Sentence Level Progression map
Spoken language	1. **Reading aloud and dramatic performance** support comprehension, especially when encountering Victorian dialect or archaic language. 2. **Expressing opinions using evidence** from the text builds confidence in literary analysis. **3. Discussion and debate:** • Should Oliver have trusted Dodger? • Is Nancy a villain, victim or both? • Does Bill Sikes deserve sympathy? 4. **Hot seating** helps students explore character motivations (e.g., Oliver, Nancy, Fagin, Sikes). 5. **Monologue performance** (e.g., from Fagin or Nancy) encourages empathy, inference and interpretation.

Key themes

Theme	In *Oliver Twist*	Transferable knowledge
Poverty and social injustice	Oliver starts life in a workhouse and is repeatedly exploited because he is poor and vulnerable. Victorian London is shown as dangerous and unequal.	Literature often exposes the impacts of social inequality and asks readers to consider fairness and justice.
Crime and corruption	Fagin's criminal network entraps children. Sikes represents extreme violence and moral decay.	Many texts explore how crime is linked to environment, desperation or moral failure (e.g., An Inspector Calls, Animal Farm, Macbeth).
Power and vulnerability	Characters abuse power over Oliver (Bumble, Sowerberrys, Fagin, Sikes). Oliver remains morally good despite hardship.	Power imbalances appear across literature; vulnerability is often used to create empathy and tension.
Violence and fear	Sikes' brutality shapes the story's darkest moments, culminating in Nancy's murder.	Writers use violent characters to explore consequences, fear, guilt and justice.
Moral choices	Nancy's moral courage contrasts with Sikes' moral collapse.	Many texts examine redemption, guilt and responsibility.
Identity and belonging	Oliver discovers his true family, symbolised through the locket and painting.	Themes of identity appear widely in literature, shaping character development and motivation.

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