

Excerpt terms and conditions



This excerpt is available to assist you in the play selection process.

You may view, print and download any of our excerpts for perusal purposes.

Excerpts are not intended for performance, classroom or other academic use. In any of these cases you will need to purchase playbooks via our website or by phone, fax or mail.

A short excerpt is not always indicative of the entire work, and we strongly suggest reading the whole play before planning a production or ordering a cast quantity.

Dramatic Publishing

Charles Dickens'

DAVID COPPERFIELD

Adapted for the stage
by
THOMAS HISCHAK



Dramatic Publishing

Woodstock, Illinois • England • Australia • New Zealand

*** NOTICE ***

The amateur and stock acting rights to this work are controlled exclusively by THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY without whose permission in writing no performance of it may be given. Royalty must be paid every time a play is performed whether or not it is presented for profit and whether or not admission is charged. A play is performed any time it is acted before an audience. Current royalty rates, applications and restrictions may be found at our Web site: www.dramaticpublishing.com, or we may be contacted by mail at: DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY, P.O. Box 129, Woodstock IL 60098.

COPYRIGHT LAW GIVES THE AUTHOR OR THE AUTHOR'S AGENT THE EXCLUSIVE RIGHT TO MAKE COPIES. This law provides authors with a fair return for their creative efforts. Authors earn their living from the royalties they receive from book sales and from the performance of their work. Conscientious observance of copyright law is not only ethical, it encourages authors to continue their creative work. This work is fully protected by copyright. No alterations, deletions or substitutions may be made in the work without the prior written consent of the publisher. No part of this work may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, videotape, film, or any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher. It may not be performed either by professionals or amateurs without payment of royalty. All rights, including, but not limited to, the professional, motion picture, radio, television, videotape, foreign language, tabloid, recitation, lecturing, publication and reading, are reserved.

For performance of any songs, music and recordings mentioned in this play which are in copyright, the permission of the copyright owners must be obtained or other songs and recordings in the public domain substituted.

©MMIV by
THOMAS HISCHAK
Adapted from the book by
CHARLES DICKENS

Printed in the United States of America
All Rights Reserved
(DAVID COPPERFIELD)

ISBN: 1-58342-252-8

IMPORTANT BILLING AND CREDIT REQUIREMENTS

All producers of the play *must* give credit to the author of the play in all programs distributed in connection with performances of the play and in all instances in which the title of the play appears for purposes of advertising, publicizing or otherwise exploiting the play and/or a production. The name of the author *must* also appear on a separate line, on which no other name appears, immediately following the title, and *must* appear in size of type not less than fifty percent the size of the title type. Biographical information on the author, if included in the playbook, may be used in all programs. *In all programs this notice must appear:*

“Produced by special arrangement with
THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY of Woodstock, Illinois”

DAVID COPPERFIELD

A Play in Two Acts
For 11 men, 13 women, 1 boy, 1 girl

CHARACTERS

DAVY David Copperfield as a boy
DAVID David Copperfield as an adult
PEGGOTTY the family servant and nurse
AUNT (BETSEY TROTWOOD) David's aunt
CLARA COPPERFIELD David's mother
MR. MURDSTONE a stern gentleman
MISS MURDSTONE his spinster sister
DAN (MR. PEGGOTTY) a middle-aged fisherman
HAM a young fisherman
LITTLE EMILY as a girl, Peggotty's niece
EMILY as an adult
MRS. GUMMIDGE a widow
JAMES STEERFORTH a school friend
TOM TRADDLES another school friend
MR. MICAWBER a philosophical man in debt
MRS. MICAWBER his persevering wife
MR. DICK Aunt Betsey's simple-minded friend
JANET Aunt Betsey's servant
MR. WICKFIELD a businessman
AGNES WICKFIELD his daughter
URIAH HEEP Wickfield's clerk
MRS. STEERFORTH James Steerforth's mother
MISS DARTLE Mrs. Steerforth's companion
MR. SPENLOW an attorney
DORA SPENLOW his daughter
MARTHA ENDWELL a homeless woman

DOUBLING

The following are some possible doubling plans to reduce the number of actors needed:

CLARA COPPERFIELD & DORA SPENLOW
LITTLE EMILY & MARTHA ENDWELL
MRS. STEERFORTH & JANET
MR. MURDSTONE & MR. WICKFIELD
HAM & MR. SPENLOW

PLACE/TIME: The action of the play takes place in various locales in England during the first half of the 19th century.

PRODUCTION NOTES

Since the scenes must move along without interruption, an open stage works best with pieces of furniture that can easily be carried on and off. It is also recommended that each character wears the same costume throughout the play, just adding a cloak or hat if the situation calls for it. Although the scenes are numbered for identification purposes, the action is continuous with one intermission between the two acts.

ACT ONE

Scene One

(As lively music plays, the entire cast gathers on the empty stage and forms a tableau. The music stops, DAVID steps forward and addresses the audience. He is a young man in his thirties dressed in a Victorian suit.)

DAVID. Whether I shall turn out to be the hero of my own life, or whether that station will be held by anybody else, this play must show. To begin my story with the beginning of my life, I must report that I was born on a Friday at twelve o'clock at night.

(PEGGOTTY takes a step forward. She is a warm, jolly woman in a servant's dress. She could be most any age.)

PEGGOTTY. That's right, Master Davy!

DAVID. I was later informed that the clock began to strike and I began to cry, simultaneously at midnight. *(One of the cast makes the sounds of a crying baby.)*

PEGGOTTY. True! I was there!

DAVID. I was a posthumous child.

PEGGOTTY. What's that you say, Davy?

DAVID. My father had died six months before. *(Baby cries continue.)*

(AUNT BETSEY steps forward. She is an elderly, commanding woman with a no-nonsense bark that cannot be ignored.)

AUNT *(sternly)*. Will someone hush that child! *(Crying stops.)* Better.

DAVID. So I never knew my father and he never knew me.

PEGGOTTY. Oh, but I knew him, Davy! He was ever so nice and gentle. And he treated your mother like she was an angel.

AUNT. My nephew David Copperfield was a fool. He had such potential. But he went and married that little wax doll of a girl and—

DAVID. That's my father's aunt. Miss Betsey Trotwood.

PEGGOTTY. Mr. Copperfield was a gentleman, good as gold!

DAVID. And that's my nurse. We call her Peggotty. They say that on the day of my birth my aunt came to our little cottage in Suffolk—

PEGGOTTY. She did! I was there!

DAVID. But she didn't stay long. Evidently there was a bit of disappointment on her part—

PEGGOTTY. Oh, Davy! Let me tell it. *(Joins him in front.)* You was so young you couldn't remember. I'll explain everything.

DAVID. But, Peggotty—

PEGGOTTY. Stand aside and let me tell this part.

DAVID. If you think it best...

(DAVID joins the others. CLARA comes forward and sits in a rocking chair. She is a small, pretty young woman with a pale complexion and a quiet, gentle voice.)

PEGGOTTY. I remember it like was it was yesterday.

There my mistress sat before the fire. She was poorly in health. Always was a delicate creature. And with the baby coming she was very low in spirits, worrying about the fatherless little stranger. Then *she* come into the house.

AUNT *(coming forward)*. Mrs. David Copperfield, I think.

CLARA. Yes.

AUNT. Miss Trotwood. You have heard of her, I daresay.

CLARA. My late husband's aunt. Yes.

AUNT. Well, now you see her. Take off your cap, child, and let me get a look at you.

CLARA. We were not expecting you... *(Removes her bonnet.)*

AUNT. Why, bless my heart! You are only a child yourself! What was my nephew thinking, marrying such a child!

CLARA. Please do not speak unkindly about Mr. Copperfield...

AUNT. What are you going to call her?

CLARA. Her?

AUNT. The baby!

CLARA. If it is a boy he shall be named David, like his father.

AUNT. Nonsense. It will be a girl and I suggest you name her Betsey Trotwood. I shall see that she grows up strong and independent. There will be no trifling of affections with this Betsey Trotwood!

CLARA. Betsey...?

AUNT. That's settled then. Ring for that woman and we shall have some tea. It will do you good. What's her name?

CLARA. Peggotty.

AUNT. Peggotty! Do you mean to say that any human being has gone into a Christian church and got herself named Peggotty?

CLARA. Her name is Clara, like mine. Clara Peggotty. Mr. Copperfield called her Peggotty so there would be no confusion. Everyone calls her Peggotty.

AUNT. Well, I won't. (*Calls.*) Girl! Fetch some tea for your mistress!

(CLARA and AUNT rejoin the others; DAVID comes forward.)

DAVID. As I said, there was some disappointment on my aunt's part when I turned out to be a boy.

PEGGOTTY. Disappointment! I should say! (*AUNT comes over to PEGGOTTY.*)

AUNT. Well? How is she doing?

PEGGOTTY. Oh, the mistress is ever so worn out. But it's all over now and the doctor says she is doing as well as can be expected.

AUNT. How is *she*? Betsey Trotwood?

PEGGOTTY. But, ma'am...it's a boy. (*A pause. AUNT puts on her bonnet and exits the stage.*)

DAVID. They say my aunt left the house without a word and my mother never saw her again

PEGGOTTY. True. She never did.

DAVID. And that is the story of my birth.

Scene Two

(Lively music. All exit except young DAVY, CLARA and PEGGOTTY. DAVY is a young boy who plays David Copperfield from about the age of ten to thirteen. He is polite and a little shy, but can blurt out what is on his mind when he wants. Adult DAVID watches from the side.)

CLARA. Come, Davy! We'll be late for church!

PEGGOTTY. Wait! You mustn't forget your cap! A gentleman cannot walk the street without his cap!

CLARA. Thank you, Peggotty.

DAVY. Thank you, Peggotty.

PEGGOTTY. How about a hug for old Peggotty before you go?

DAVY. Yes, Peggotty. *(Embraces her.)* But you are not so old, you know. I think you are a handsome woman and may get married one day. *(CLARA and PEGGOTTY laugh.)*

PEGGOTTY. Lawd, no, my dear! Why would I want to go and get married for? Not when I got you and the mistress to take care of.

DAVY. Mama is a handsome woman, don't you think?

PEGGOTTY. Certainly I do!

DAVY. But she has already been married. To my father who sleeps in the church graveyard. I can read his name. *(To CLARA.)* Can't I, Mother?

CLARA. Yes you can, Davy. After church we will stop and visit the stone again. But now we must hurry or we will be late!

PEGGOTTY. Bless you, Davy, my boy! I'll be making your favorite dessert for Sunday dinner. Apple cobbler! So don't you two be too long in coming home!

CLARA. Come along, Davy!

(CLARA and DAVY exit as DAVID joins PEGGOTTY and addresses the audience.)

DAVID. The first eight or nine years of my life were very happy. We didn't have much money, but enough. Our life was simple and we demanded little except that we be together.

PEGGOTTY. Yes, those was happy times.

DAVID. Peggotty was nurse, housemaid, and cook. But she was also family. Her own family was far away in Yarmouth by the sea and often she told me stories about the sailors and fishermen there. She even promised that someday she'd take me there.

PEGGOTTY. They're good people. You'll like them, Davy.

DAVID. I didn't go to school. My mother and Peggotty were my teachers and all the world was my classroom.

PEGGOTTY. Yes, those were the happiest days. Back before...

DAVID. Do you want to tell this part of the story, Peggotty?

PEGGOTTY. No, Master Davy. I rather not think on it, if you don't mind. *(She exits.)*

DAVID. Neither would I. But it is etched so in my memory that it cannot be forgotten. One Sunday we did not visit the graveyard after church. Instead we were accompanied home by a gentleman who was new to our con-

gregation. He struck me as a cold and unfriendly sort of person. But my mother didn't think so.

(Church bells ring and members of the congregation cross the stage in small groups. CLARA enters with MR. MURDSTONE, a severe man dressed in a dark suit. There is a coldness in his voice even when he attempts to be friendly. DAVY follows behind.)

MURDSTONE. But it is a very charming village, Mrs. Copperfield. I believe it will be quite to my liking.

CLARA. I do hope so, Mr. Murdstone. It is always so pleasant to have interesting gentlemen about. Perhaps we will see you again.

MURDSTONE. Nothing could please me more, Mrs. Copperfield. In fact, I may not even wait until next Sunday before I renew our acquaintance. May I call on you sometime soon?

CLARA. It is a very simple little cottage. But you are welcome to visit as you like.

MURDSTONE. I cannot express how happy I am to hear you say that. Good day, Mrs. Copperfield.

CLARA. Good day then. Davy, come and say goodbye to Mr. Murdstone.

MURDSTONE. Good afternoon to you, young man. *(Puts out his hand; DAVY reluctantly shakes with his left hand.)*

CLARA. Why, that's the wrong hand, Davy! *(DAVY quickly moves away and hides behind CLARA.)* Oh, you must excuse him, Mr. Murdstone. He has not known many gentlemen, and—

MURDSTONE. Think nothing of it. He will learn. In time, he will learn. (*Tips his hat.*) Good afternoon.

(*MURDSTONE exits one direction as CLARA and DAVY exit the other. PEGGOTTY enters and joins DAVID.*)

PEGGOTTY. Is he gone?

DAVID. For now. (*To audience.*) But he came back. Twice that week and many times over the next month or so. Sometimes my mother would go out walking with Mr. Murdstone and I was not invited to go along. I disliked the man and didn't want my mother to be with him without me there.

PEGGOTTY. He's after her money!

DAVID. We haven't much.

PEGGOTTY. It's the house then!

DAVID. But it's such a little cottage.

PEGGOTTY. Room enough if he kicked me out! (*Exits.*)

DAVID. But it wasn't the money and it wasn't the cottage that Mr. Murdstone wanted. It was my mother.

(*MURDSTONE and CLARA enter, walking together.*)

MURDSTONE. Clara, my dearest, you must do it. The boy has to be told.

CLARA. Of course, Edward. You are right. As always.

MURDSTONE. I will speak to him, if you wish. But I think it is your responsibility—

CLARA. Please don't be angry with me, Edward. I know I am young and rather foolish. Be patient with me.

MURDSTONE. My dearest Clara. (*Kisses her hand.*) Do not fret. You will learn. In time you will learn.

(They exit together; PEGGOTTY enters and joins DAVID.)

DAVID. As much as I distrusted Mr. Murdstone, I had no premonition of what was in store for us all. But I think Peggotty did.

PEGGOTTY. I don't know a thing about your premonitions. All I knew was those happy days with the three of us alone together was over.

DAVID. Not quite. Just before my world collapsed there were fourteen days of joy. Don't you remember?

PEGGOTTY. Yarmouth! Of course I do!

(DAVY enters and PEGGOTTY rushes over to him.)

PEGGOTTY. Master Davy, how should you like to go along with me and spend a fortnight at my brother's in Yarmouth?

DAVY. By the seaside?

PEGGOTTY. Where else! Won't that be a treat? There's the sea and all the boats and ships! And we'll go down to the beach where the fishermen gather and have ourselves a time!

DAVY. Oh, Peggotty! When do we go?

PEGGOTTY. Tomorrow early!

DAVY. Mother will love the sea, won't she, Peggotty? And the boats?

PEGGOTTY. The thing is, Davy, your mother won't be coming with us. We think it might be too tiring for her.

DAVY. But who will take care of her while we are gone? Mama can't be left alone. What if she starts to feel poorly again!

PEGGOTTY. Mrs. Grayper down the lane is going to look in on the mistress every day while we're away. So that's all right then!

DAVY. And we can tell her all about the boats and everything when we get back!

PEGGOTTY. And so we can! Come and help me pick out what things we need to pack.

DAVY. Right away, Peggotty! Hurry! (*Exits with PEGGOTTY.*)

DAVID. It saddens me now to recollect how eager I was to leave my happy home. And to think how little I suspected what I left forever.

(The sounds of the ocean and seagulls are heard. The Peggotty household enters and sets up the interior of the house: a few rustic chairs, a table, a stool or two. DAN PEGGOTTY is a middle-aged but robust fisherman—friendly, talkative. HAM is a younger more muscular fisherman, a bit coarse in speech but very polite in manner. MRS. GUMMIDGE is a widow with a constantly worried expression, yet one feels more inclined to laugh at her than cry. LITTLE EMILY is a lively, pretty girl about DAVY's age. PEGGOTTY and DAVY enter with travel bags and stand at the side of the stage.)

PEGGOTTY. There's our house, Master Davy! We've arrived at last!

DAVY. What house? I don't see it anywhere.

PEGGOTTY. Right there on the beach!

DAVY. That ship-looking thing?

PEGGOTTY. It used to be a ship. But now it's my brother's house. Come along!

(PEGGOTTY takes DAVY by the hand and they go into the house. In pantomime PEGGOTTY embraces each member of the family while DAVID addresses the audience.)

DAVID. It certainly was a ship and I couldn't have been more pleased if it was Aladdin's palace. The old fishing boat sat on the beach with a little garden before it and a long tin pipe sticking out the top for the stove. The inside was just as magical, the little round windows, the curved walls and hanging nets giving one the feeling of a warm and inviting sanctuary.

PEGGOTTY. Come and meet everyone, Davy. This here is my brother Dan.

DAN. Glad to see you, sir. *(Shakes his hand vigorously.)*
You'll find us rough, sir, but you'll find us ready. How's your ma? Did you leave her pretty jolly?

DAVY. Yes, Mr. Peggotty. Thank you, sir.

PEGGOTTY. And this is Ham. He's my brother's partner in the fishing boat.

HAM. Welcome to Yarmouth, young Master Davy! *(Vigorously shakes his hand.)* A fine place for a lad to visit, I'm sure!

DAVY. It seems a wonderful place already!

PEGGOTTY. And I want you to meet Mrs. Gummidge. She cooks for the family and has been with us for years!

GUMMIDGE. Oh, don't bother yourself over an old widow like me. But I welcome you all the same.

DAN *(aside)*. Pay no mind, Master Davy. She's been thinking of the old one and it's made her contrary-like.

PEGGOTTY. Oh, musn't forget little Emily! Here she is!

DAN. My niece Em'ly. Say hello to Master Davy.

LITTLE EMILY. Hello, Davy.

DAN. Don't be shy! Give him a kiss on the cheek and make the boy feel welcome! (*EMILY gives DAVY a quick peck on the cheek then rushes to DAN who picks her up and embraces her. Everyone laughs.*)

PEGGOTTY. There, Master Davy! Now you've met everyone!

DAVY. I'm very pleased to make your acquaintance.

DAN. And likewise, sir! Now come and sit. Mrs. Gummidge has been cooking something special in honor of your arrival!

MRS. GUMMIDGE. It's not much. A poor pathetic creature like myself can't be expected to please all the time, if at all. But that's the way things is.

DAN. Bring on the feast, Mrs. Gummidge! (*Winks; aside to DAVY.*) She's been thinking of the old one.

(DAN, HAM, GUMMIDGE and PEGGOTTY exit, taking the furniture pieces with them. DAVY and LITTLE EMILY walk together along the shore, throwing stones in the water.)

DAVID. What a delightful two weeks I had in Yarmouth. Mr. Peggotty and Ham took me out on the fishing boat a few times and Peggotty took me into town where we visited the fish market and the shops. Mrs. Gummidge, who always seems pleasantly contrary, cooked the most delicious dishes even though she apologized for them all. And I got to sleep in a hammock in the wonderful house made out of a boat! But I think my favorite part of the holiday was the time I spent with Emily. I had rarely spoken with anyone my own age before and Em-

ily seemed to have the warmth and beauty I only thought possible in an adult.

DAVY. I shall miss the sea when I have to go back home.

LITTLE EMILY. I cannot image a place where there is no water nearby. I've always lived here so it seems like the sea is part of me. I shall probably live and die by the sea. Just like my father.

DAVY. How did your father die?

LITTLE EMILY. Drowned. The same day that Ham's father drowned. They were fishing together.

DAVY. I see. But doesn't it make you sad to look at the water and think...?

LITTLE EMILY. My uncle Dan says we live off the sea. It's only natural that sometimes the sea takes a person back.

DAVY. I suppose that's true.

LITTLE EMILY. It's not worth brooding about all the time. Like Mrs. Gummidge.

DAVY. Emily, who is the old one? The one Mrs. Gummidge is always thinking of?

LITTLE EMILY. Her husband. He drowned at sea as well.

DAVY. Do you think she will ever get over it?

LITTLE EMILY. I don't think it likely. It's been over twenty years and she hasn't put it out of her head yet.

DAVY. Twenty years! He must have been much older than her.

LITTLE EMILY. No. Quite a young man when he died, I think. But as she's gotten old I guess she thinks he has too.

DAVY. You and Ham don't seem to dwell on your loss as Mrs. Gummidge does.

LITTLE EMILY. Everyone lives their life as best they see fit, I guess. Ham is very strong. He can bear anything.

DAVY. And you? I think you are very strong, Emily. I mean, you are very pretty but you do not seem weak. My mother is the prettiest woman in the world. But she is not very strong, I'm afraid. I wish she was here.

LITTLE EMILY. Then you must be strong for her. (*Points off.*) Look! The boats are heading back in. Let's go and meet Uncle Dan!

DAVY. Emily...

LITTLE EMILY. What is it, Davy?

DAVY. Can I have a kiss? Like on the day I arrived?

LITTLE EMILY. Not today. Maybe when you leave on Tuesday. Let's hurry! (*Runs off with DAVY.*)

DAVID. It didn't take two weeks to fall in love with Emily. I think it only took a day. But I suspected I was deeply in love. And when Emily kissed me just before Peggotty and I got on the coach to leave, I was convinced of it.

Scene Three