

Oliver Twist

Scene One – The Workhouse

(Narrator stands in front of the closed stage curtain, lit by a spotlight.)

Narrator: Through no fault of his own, Oliver Twist finds himself being cared for by an elderly woman three miles from where he once lived. He spends his days with 20 or 30 other children, who are lying on the floor with their stomachs rumbling. On his ninth birthday, Oliver is pale, thin, short and in need of a wash. Nevertheless, Oliver is in good spirits.

Unexpectedly, Mr Bumble – the man who had given Oliver his name – visits the workhouse. As Oliver has now turned nine years old, Mr Bumble explains to Mrs Mann that he is too old to stay in her care. He says that Oliver must return to the workhouse and takes him to begin yet another new life.

(Curtains open as Narrator exits to stage right. Five workhouse orphans, including Oliver, walk across the stage towards stage left. They are holding empty bowls in front of them. At stage left, the boys join the back of the queue that has formed in front of two women and The Master. These people wear aprons and ladle gruel into each boy's bowl.)

Boy 1: **(holding his stomach)** I'm so hungry. If I don't have an extra spoonful of gruel today, I'm scared that I might end up eating the boy who sleeps next to me!

Boy 2: **(quietly)** One of us should say something. We should ask for more food.

**Boy 3 and
Boy 4:** **(together)** Not me!

(All characters move forward one place in the queue. The children before move to sit around the table with their full bowl.)

Boy 2: What about you, Oliver?

Boy 1: Yes, Oliver, will you ask The Master for more supper?

Oliver: **(hesitant)** Well, I don't know. I guess we are hungry. Just another spoonful wouldn't hurt, would it?

(All orphans move through the queue, receive their gruel and take their seats at the table. Boy 1 sits next to Oliver. The Master and the two women remain stood at stage left. They are watching the orphans as they eat.)

Boy 2: (winks at Oliver) Now's your chance, Oliver. Ask him.

Boy 1: Go on, Oliver. Ask. (nudges Oliver with his elbow)

(Oliver stands up and walks towards The Master. He carries his bowl and spoon in front of him. He has an unsure expression on his face.)

Oliver: (quietly) Please, sir, I want some more.

The

Master: (open-mouthed, with a faint voice) What?!

Oliver: Please, sir, I want some more.

(The Master tries to hit Oliver over the head with the serving spoon but Oliver ducks just in time. The Master grabs Oliver by the arm.)

The

Master: (loudly calling to offstage right) MR BUMBLE!

(Mr Bumble and Mr Limbkins enter quickly from stage right.)

The

Master: Mr Limbkins, I beg your pardon, sir! Oliver Twist has asked for more!

(Orphans around the table gasp and look at one another with shocked faces.)

Mr

Limbkins: For more?! (turns to Mr Bumble) Mr Bumble, answer me clearly. Do I understand that Oliver asked for more after he had already eaten the supper he was allowed?

Mr

Bumble: He did, sir.

Mr

Limbkins: That boy will be hung! I know that boy will be hung!

(Lights fade. Curtains close.)

Questions

1. Why do the orphans gasp? Tick one.

- ☐ because The Master shouted loudly
- ☐ because Oliver Twist has asked for more
- ☐ because Mr Limbkins is scary
- ☐ because they are out of breath

2. Whom did Oliver live with before Mr Bumble took him to the workhouse? Tick one.

- ☐ his parents
- ☐ Mr Limbkins
- ☐ Mr Bumble
- ☐ Mrs Mann

3. Number the events 1-4 to show the order they happen in the stage directions.

- ☐ The Master loudly calls to offstage right.
- ☐ Boy 3 and Boy 4 speak at the same time.
- ☐ Boy 2 winks at Oliver.
- ☐ Mr Limbkins turns to Mr Bumble.

4. Draw **four** lines to match each character to one piece of their dialogue from the play script.

Boy 1		Nevertheless, Oliver is in good spirits.	
Oliver		Oliver Twist has asked for more!	
The Master		I'm so hungry.	
Narrator		Well, I don't know.	

5. Find and copy a phrase said by the Narrator which implies that the children living with the elderly woman are hungry.

6. **Well, I don't know. I guess we are hungry. Just another spoonful wouldn't hurt, would it?**

According to the stage directions, how should Oliver act when saying this line?

7. Why do you think that the narrator stands in front of the closed curtain at the start of the script?

8. Explain how Oliver feels about asking The Master for more supper. Give **two** points and give evidence from the text to support both.

Answers

1. Why do the orphans gasp? Tick one.

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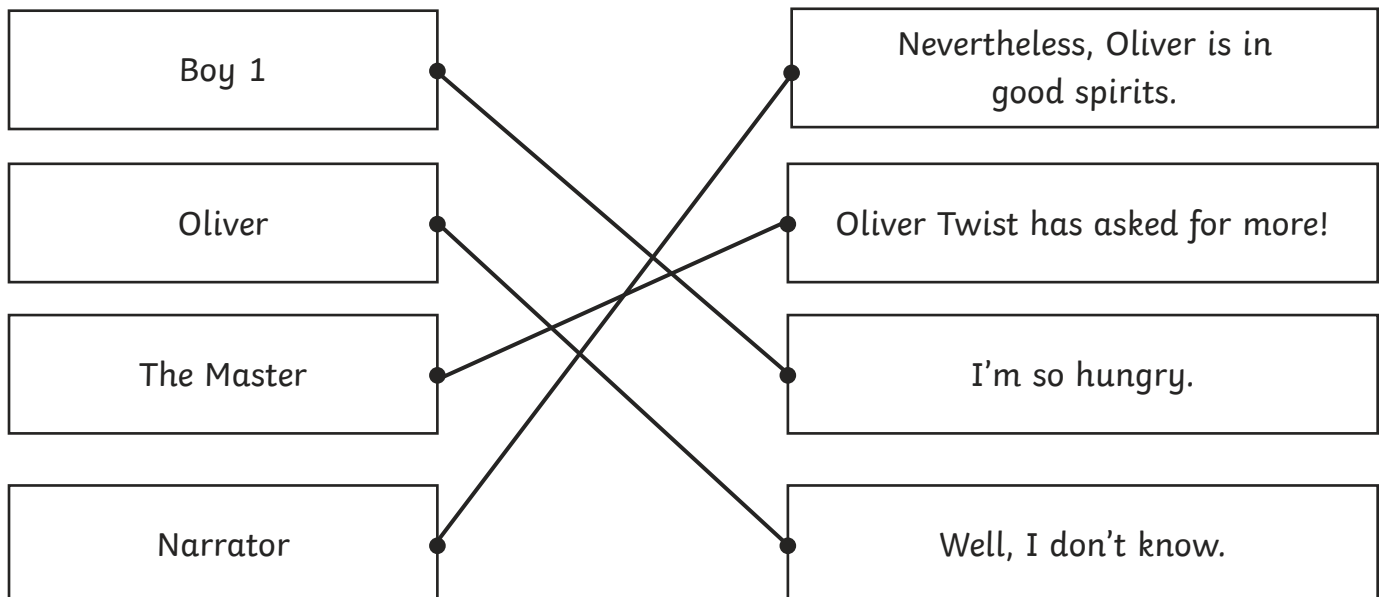
2. Whom did Oliver live with before Mr Bumble took him to the workhouse? Tick one.

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- ☐ Mr Bumble
- ☒ **Mrs Mann**

3. Number the events 1-4 to show the order they happen in the stage directions.

- 3** The Master loudly calls to offstage right.
- 1** Boy 3 and Boy 4 speak at the same time.
- 2** Boy 2 winks at Oliver.
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6. **Well, I don't know. I guess we are hungry. Just another spoonful wouldn't hurt, would it?**

According to the stage directions, how should Oliver act when saying this line?

According to the stage directions, Oliver should act scared when saying this line.

7. Why do you think that the narrator stands in front of the closed curtain at the start of the script?

Pupils' own responses, such as: I think that the narrator stands in front of the closed curtain at the start of the script because he is explaining Oliver's history and the set behind the curtain is Oliver's present. They don't want the audience to be confused and they don't want to give away what happens to Oliver before they've explained it.

8. Explain how Oliver feels about asking The Master for more supper. Give **two** points and give evidence from the text to support both.

Pupils' own responses, such as: I think that Oliver feels unsure about asking The Master for more supper because he says, 'Well, I don't know'. I also think that he feels scared to do it because he speaks quietly to him at first like he doesn't quite want him to hear.