between the lines

A lesson written for every student in the room

FREE LESSON SAMPLER

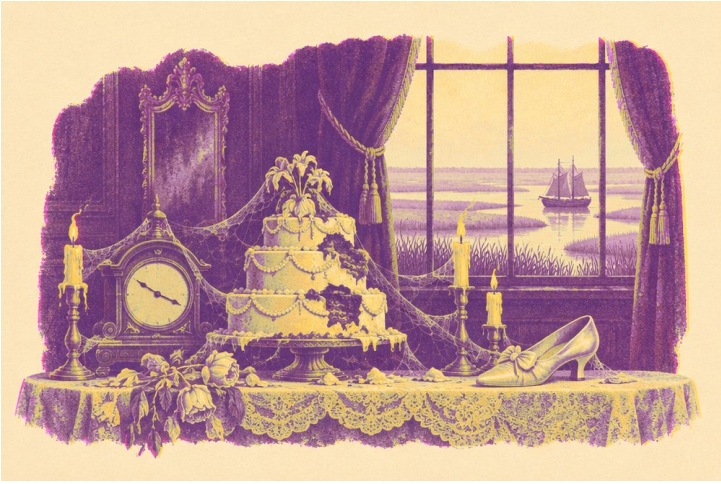
Great Expectations: The marsh country

How does Dickens use the marshes to create a frightening opening?

Lesson 3 of 34 from the scheme of learning

Teacher notes, slides and student pages at all three levels

Written for the AQA specification



© 2026 Between the Lines. This sampler is free to use and print in your school. Please share the link to our website instead of the file.

What is in this sampler

This is one complete lesson from our Great Expectations scheme for Literature Paper 1, Section B. It comes exactly as it appears in the full scheme, so you can teach it next week and see how our lessons work.

Teacher notes	Timings with slide numbers, Do Now answers, the exploded quotation, the hinge question and what each answer tells you, the task at three levels, a model and notes on misconceptions and adapting the lesson (next pages).
Slides	The editable PowerPoint deck for Lesson 3, with teacher notes on every slide (separate file).
Student pages	The lesson's pages from the student booklet: one question, with the Securing, Strengthening and Soaring support side by side (at the end of this document).

How every lesson works

Know	Do Now from memory, vocabulary, then the reading. The five Do Now questions build on what students learned in Lessons 1 and 2 of the full scheme.
Apply	Explode one quotation together; a hinge question checks understanding.
Master	One shared task, with Securing, Strengthening and Soaring support; then a model and an exit ticket. Most Master tasks are What–How–Why paragraphs, and some are creative or other forms: in this lesson, a description.

Three levels of support

Every student answers the same question in every lesson. What changes is the support on the page, so the whole class does the same lesson:

Securing	The most support: a word bank, a choice of quotations, a worked example and sentence starters. For students working towards a grade 4.
Strengthening	Prompts for What, How and Why, a paragraph planner and a checklist. For students working at grades 5 and 6.
Soaring	A debatable statement, prompts to think further and an argument planner. For students aiming at grades 7 to 9.

The names describe the support, never the student. The hinge question shows who might start where, and students move between levels from lesson to lesson.

In the full scheme

- 34 lessons like this one, with editable slides and a teacher handbook (lesson notes, unit map, assessment guide and knowledge bank)
- A student booklet with every lesson and all three levels of support, plus the same lessons as one pack per level
- Six weeks of independent practice homework at three levels

© 2026 Between the Lines · Free to use and print in your school

- Four Feedback Loop progress checks with whole-class feedback sheets and improvement tasks
- An exam-style end-of-unit essay with a teacher guide, level guidance and annotated model answers
- A Soaring stretch booklet for students aiming at the top levels
- A catch-up sheet for every lesson, for students who missed it
- An inclusion guide: pre-teaching, SEND, EAL and pupil premium notes for every lesson
- The revision workbook and the model answer pack, to print for every student
- Every licence for the scheme also includes its 30 Raising Achievement drills for intervention sessions

© 2026 Between the Lines · Free to use and print in your school

Lesson 3: The marsh country

SEQUENCE 1: CONTEXT AND CHAPTERS 1 TO 6 · 60 MINUTES

How does Dickens use the marshes to create a frightening opening?

By the end of the lesson, students can

- Explain how Dickens builds a frightening setting with one long sentence in Chapter 1
- Analyse how the retrospective narrator makes the reader pity a small boy in a vast place
- Write a description of a bleak place at dusk that uses two of Dickens's methods

Lesson at a glance

Time	Phase	What happens	Slides
0–8	Know	Do Now: five quick questions on Lessons 1 and 2 and on the opening of the novel. Students self-mark from the answer slide.	2–3
8–18	Know	Pre-teach "retrospective narrator", "bleak", "wilderness" and "savage". Read the paragraph aloud while students underline every place named in it and circle the last words of the sentence.	4–5
18–28	Apply	Sketch the scene on the board from the paragraph: a churchyard, flat marshes, a thin line of river and the sea beyond, with a tiny figure in the corner. Explode the quotation together, thinking aloud about why Pip comes last, then students annotate their copy. Before you reveal any notes, students try the four empty boxes on the first explode slide, on their own or after you model one box.	6–7
28–33	Apply	Hinge question on mini-whiteboards. Use the answers to decide who starts on which level of support.	8–9
33–53	Master	Students write a description of a bleak, open place at dusk as a frightened child sees it, using their level of support in the student booklet. Share the model description in the last five minutes.	10–11
53–60	Master	Exit ticket. Collect and sort into three piles to plan the start of the next lesson.	12

Do Now answers

1	Where was Dickens's father imprisoned for debt in 1824?	**The Marshalsea prison in London**
2	What was a hulk?	**An old warship, no longer able to sail, used as a floating prison**
3	In the churchyard, what two things does the convict order Pip to bring him?	**A file and food ("wittles")**
4	Who tells the story of Great Expectations, and from when in his life?	**Pip, as a grown man looking back on his life**
5	What do we call a novel that follows one person from childhood to adulthood?	**A Bildungsroman**

© 2026 Between the Lines · Free to use and print in your school

Vocabulary

retrospective narrator	a narrator who tells his own story looking back from later in life
bleak	bare, cold and without comfort
wilderness	wild, empty land where nobody lives
savage	fierce and wild, not tamed

Reading

Chapter 1: the marsh country

The grown Pip remembers the afternoon when he first understood where he was. He is a small boy in the churchyard where his parents are buried.

> Ours was the marsh country, down by the river, within, as the river wound, twenty miles of the sea. My first most vivid and broad impression of the identity of things seems to me to have been gained on a memorable raw afternoon towards evening. At such a time I found out for certain that this bleak place overgrown with nettles was the churchyard; and that Philip Pirrip, late of this parish, and also Georgiana wife of the above, were dead and buried; and that Alexander, Bartholomew, Abraham, Tobias, and Roger, infant children of the aforesaid, were also dead and buried; and that the dark flat wilderness beyond the churchyard, intersected with dikes and mounds and gates, with scattered cattle feeding on it, was the marshes; and that the low leaden line beyond was the river; and that the distant savage lair from which the wind was rushing was the sea; and that the small bundle of shivers growing afraid of it all and beginning to cry, was Pip.

Charles Dickens, Great Expectations (1861), Chapter 1

Word help **intersected**: crossed by · **leaden**: dull grey, like lead · **lair**: the den of a wild animal

Explode the quotation

Method
A long sentence built with “and that”. Each clause names a place, from the graves to the marshes, the river and the sea, and the last clause is the boy.

Zoom in
The concrete noun “bundle” makes Pip a small parcel, and “shivers” is all that is inside it.

“the small bundle of shivers growing afraid of it all”

Effect
After so much wide, bleak land, the reader meets a tiny, shaking child. He seems helpless against it all.

Purpose
Dickens wants us to side with Pip from the first page. The grown narrator remembers the fear so exactly that it still sounds real.

Hinge question

Dickens ends the long sentence with “the small bundle of shivers growing afraid of it all and beginning to cry, was Pip”. Why put Pip last?

A. After a list of big places, a tiny child at the end seems even smaller and more alone. (the right answer)

B. The sentence ends there because Dickens has run out of places to describe.

© 2026 Between the Lines · Free to use and print in your school

C. It shows that Pip is brave, because he stays in the churchyard on his own.

What the answers tell you

B treats the length of the sentence as an accident: ask what each “and that” adds and what changes in the last one. C has read “shivers” and “afraid” the wrong way round: ask which words in the clause show fear. These may be your students who start on Securing.

Why the answer is right

Each “and that” names something bigger than the boy, so when the sentence ends on Pip he seems tiny and alone.

Master task: description

Describe a bleak, open place at dusk as a frightened child sees it. Use two of Dickens’s methods: a long sentence built with “and that”, and a tiny figure at the end.

Securing aiming for a 4

A frame for each sentence, Dickens’s lines as models and a word bank.

“this bleak place overgrown with nettles”

“the dark flat wilderness beyond the churchyard”

“the distant savage lair from which the wind was rushing”

Strengthening aiming for grades 5 to 6

Prompts for building the description and a success checklist.

Open by placing the child: where he is, when and in what weather

Build one long sentence with “and that”, moving from the near things to the far ones

Choose precise adjectives for the sky, the land and the wind

End the sentence on the child, smaller than everything before it

Soaring aiming for grades 7 to 9

Write the description as a grown narrator looking back, as Dickens begins with “My first most vivid and broad impression”, so that the calm voice of the adult and the fear of the child are both on the page.

Model description

It was a raw evening, and the light was going. I understood then, for the first time, where I was: that the sagging fence was the edge of the village, and that the black stumps beyond it were the posts of an old landing, and that the flat grey stretch cut across with ditches was the marsh, and that the pale line at the far end of it was the water, and that the cold wind pushing at my back came from somewhere much farther away.

Nothing moved. One bird went over, low and silent.

And that thing at the bottom of the hedge, small and wet and trembling, with its hands in its sleeves and its face turned up to the sky, was me.

What makes it work

- Builds one long sentence with “and that” that moves from the near fence to the far wind, as Dickens moves from the graves to the sea
- Chooses precise adjectives for the place: raw, sagging, flat and grey
- Ends on the child, small and trembling, after the large places, and uses the older voice of a narrator who says I understood then, for the first time

Exit ticket

Dickens makes the marshes frightening by…

© 2026 Between the Lines · Free to use and print in your school