

for schools etc. here is a very short simple summary of OLIVER TWIST and then a synopsis

CATCHY PHRASE: A YOUNG BOY'S INCREDIBLE ADVENTURE THROUGH THE TERRORS OF NINETEENTH CENTURY LONDON

BASIC STORY: Oliver Twist is the story of a boy born outside of marriage, brought up in an orphan's institution that starves its children to death. Escaping from this horror to London, the boy Oliver falls in with a gang of criminal children led by a grown up, Fagin. Oliver is, at last, looked after, fed and clothed - the gang treat Oliver with some kindness where he has had only brutality from so-called "respectable society" - but the gang also leads Oliver into a life of crime and peril, and he is soon in trouble. Oliver is rescued by a wealthy victim (in fact his grandfather). But the rest of the gang are not so lucky, and Oliver sees the full force of brutality unleashed on his former criminal comrades. It is a bitter sweet lesson.

The American Drama Group Europe, in collaboration with TNT Theatre London present:

OLIVER TWIST. A synopsis

By Paul Stebbings & Phil Smith based on the novel by Charles Dickens.
Original score by Thomas Johnson.

The play opens in nineteenth century London with the preparations for the hanging of a criminal gang leader - Fagin. Fagin demands that his story be heard before he dies. He tells the story through the eyes of one of his gang's members - Oliver Twist.

We see how Oliver's mother, pregnant outside of marriage with Oliver, is thrown out by her father - Lord Brownlow - who immediately regrets his anger. Oliver's mother, dying, delivers her baby in a workhouse. There Oliver grows up, under the rule of the foolish and brutal Beadle who starves to death those in his care while making a healthy profit from making coffins. Punished for asking for more food, Oliver is locked up, but escapes with the help of the workhouse servant - Sally.

Oliver escapes along the country roads, but those he meets refuse him food or help, until he meets a young boy called the Artful Dodger who tells him of the wonders of London and persuades him to come to meet Dodger's own 'benefactor' - a man called Fagin.

When Oliver gets to London it turns out that Dodger is from a criminal gang and Fagin is its leader. But despite their criminality the boys of the gang are at least fed and clothed and housed. Oliver is welcomed into the gang, and taught - as if in a game - how to steal.

Oliver is taken out with the gang to try out his new criminal skills. Ironically, his first 'victim' turns out to be Lord Brownlow who sees Oliver trying to steal, grabs Oliver and alerts the police. Lord Brownlow, not recognising Oliver, takes pity on him (particularly in the face of the stupidity of the police) and takes him home.

Back at the criminal gang's den, Fagin and his vicious, half-crazy sidekick Bill Sikes realise they will have to get Oliver back or their hideout and their crimes will be exposed - their agent for this will be Sikes' girlfriend Nancy.

While out on an errand for Lord Brownlow, Oliver is kidnapped by Nancy and

Bill. However, when Bill violently attacks Oliver, Nancy protects Oliver. Fagin begins to suspect Nancy's loyalty to the gang and pays the Artful Dodger to follow her.

Dodger follows Nancy and sees her go to meet with Lord Brownlow - telling him that the gang have Oliver Twist. Nancy says that she will bring Oliver to Lord Brownlow. Lord Brownlow promises not to alert the police. But when Nancy returns to the gang, Brownlow breaks his promise and sends a servant to tell the police.

Dodger informs Fagin about Nancy's 'treachery' and Bill is allowed to find out. Bill murders Nancy. Fagin demands to know which crime is worse - Bill's murder of Nancy, or the poverty and ignorance that leads to so many deaths in London. He complains at the brutality of London that has made them all into monsters.

Meanwhile Lord Brownlow has realised, from Oliver's similarity to an oil painting of his daughter, that Oliver is his grandson. Oliver is rescued by the police, and returned to Lord Brownlow. Bill is shot and killed by the police. Fagin arrested.

The play ends where it begins - at Fagin's hanging. Before he dies Fagin accuses Lord Brownlow and his kind for being the real criminals and murderers. But the trap is sprung and Fagin hangs and dies.

THE END.

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