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.
Nicholas Nickleby

A Full-Length Adaptation
of the Charles Dickens’ novel

By
TIM KELLY

THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY

© The Dramatic Publishing Company, Woodstock, Illinois
*** 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 fees are given in our current catalogue and are subject to change without notice. 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 anytime it is acted before an audience. All inquiries concerning amateur and stock rights should be addressed to:

DRAMATIC PUBLISHING
P. O. Box 129, Woodstock, Illinois 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. On all programs this notice should appear:

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

©MCMLXXXI by
TIM KELLY

Printed in the United States of America
All Rights Reserved
(NICHOLAS NICKLEBY)

ISBN 0-87129-416-8

© The Dramatic Publishing Company, Woodstock, Illinois
NICHOLAS NICKLEBY
A Full-Length Play
for a flexible cast of forty-one*

CAST OF CHARACTERS
(in order of appearance)

Vincent Crummles ..................... a theatrical producer
Mrs. Crummles ........................ his wife, an actress
Miss Snevellicci ...................... another actress
Miss Petowker ........................ another
Ralph Nickleby ....................... Nicholas' uncle, a moneylender
Newman Noggs ........................ his clerk
Mrs. Nickleby ......................... Nicholas' mother
Kate Nickleby ........................ Nicholas' sister
Nicholas Nickleby . lad who comes to London to seek his fortune
Wackford Squeers ...................... a brutal and ignorant schoolmaster
Mrs. Snawley ........................ an unpleasant stepmother
William ................................. her son
Mrs. Squeers ........................ Wackford's nasty wife
Phoebe ................................. servant at Dotheboys Hall
Fanny ................................. Wackford’s daughter, a vain creature
Bolder ................................. Wackford’s pupil
Cobbey ................................. another pupil
Graymarsh ............................. yet another pupil
Smike ................................. dimwitted boy, works for Wackford
Dress Shop Model .................... at Madam Mantalini’s
Madam Mantalini ..................... runs a fashionable dress shop
Miss Knag ............................. her employee
Lady Hawk ............................. unscrupulous
Sir Frederick ......................... something of a fool, Lady Hawk’s dupe
Tim Linkinwater ...................... Cheeryble’s clerk
Charles Cheeryble ................... runs a counting house
Madelaine Bray .................. Nicholas' heart’s desire
Brooker ............................ ex-convict with a strange secret
Lady Scaley .......................... friend of Lady Hawk
First Waitress .......................... at coffee house
Second Waitress .......................... at same coffee house
Ninetta Crummles .................... an “Infant Phenomenon”
Miss Bravassa ........................ an actress
Mr. Folair ............................ an actor
Frank Cheeryble ..................... nephew of the Cheeryble brothers
Arthur Gridge ........................ a decrepit, ancient gentleman
Peg ....................................... his housekeeper
Miss La Creevy ........................ a landlady and painter of miniatures
Mr. Bray .............................. Madelaine’s ill and unpleasant father
Magistrate ......................... a judge
Policeman .............................. servant of the law
Citizens, Stagehands ................ as desired

*Fewer with doubling and tripling of cast. See Production Notes.

Time: Nineteenth Century England

Running Time: two hours.
ACT ONE

SCENE ONE

There is no curtain.

The simple setting shows us four basic playing areas. The first is the forestage, or stage apron, which represents a London street.

The second area, at L, is Ralph Nickleby’s office. It is sparsely furnished, consisting of a desk and chair and a bench, DL. Entrance into this room from some outer office is L. It is possible to leave the room and step into an alley which is R. This is Alley A. It is located between the Nickleby office and the third playing area which will represent, as required, Dotheboys Hall, Madam Mantalini’s Dress Shop, and a coffee house. A table is situated UC. In front of it are scattered some stools or a few small benches.

Between this multi-purpose C area and stage R is another avenue, Alley B.

Entrance into Alley A is from UL; entrance into Alley B is from UR.

The fourth area, at R, is the outer office of a business firm belonging to the Cheeryble brothers. There’s a small bench,
or chair, DR. A desk and stool are positioned upstage. The entrance into the main office is offstage R.

SCENE: A London street, followed by Ralph Nickleby’s office. Voices are heard offstage DR.

VINCENT (offstage). Hurry, my dear. We shall be late for the wedding.
MRS. CRUMMLES (offstage). We’re hurrying as fast as we dare, husband. I’m quite out of breath as it is.
VINCENT (offstage). Few steps more and we’re there.

(VINCENT CRUMMLES, theatrical producer and flamboyant personality, enters on the forestage, quickly followed by a colorful entourage of actors. The director can bring in as many or as few as the stage will comfortably accommodate. These are essential: MRS. CRUMMLES, MISS SNEVELLICCI and MISS PETOWKER.)

MRS. CRUMMLES. I hope Nicholas won’t think we’re intruding.
VINCENT. Intruding, wife?
MISS SNEVELLICCI. It is his sister’s wedding.
VINCENT. A fact I myself ascertained by reading the London Times.
MISS PETOWKER. Who is this Nicholas Nickleby?
VINCENT. My dear Miss Petowker, if you were not a new member of my theatrical troupe, you would know without asking.
MISS PETOWKER. Well, I don’t know, Mr. Crummles, and I am asking.
MRS. CRUMMLES. My husband found him in the street.
MISS PETOWKER. The street? Was he some kind of beggar?
VINCENT. His true gift was dramatization. Within a month, he was translating and pushing melodrama with his pen.

MISS SNEVELLICCI. Mr. Crummles was like a father to him.

VINCENT. We’ve kept in touch, Nicholas and I. He really ought to write down his experiences.

MISS PETOWKER. Were they unusual?

VINCENT. Extraordinary!

MRS. CRUMMLES. Unique!

MISS SNEVELLICCI. Nicholas Nickleby was a drama in himself.

MRS. CRUMMLES. From the day he set foot in London, adventure clung to him like jam on toast.

(As they converse, RALPH NICKLEBY, a dour man, enters UL. He walks into Alley A and then into his office as he reads a folded newspaper. He moves behind the desk, sits, puts down the paper and rings a small hand bell to signal his clerk that he has returned from some errand. His interest returns to the paper.)

VINCENT. You see, Miss Petowker, Nicholas was the sole support of his widowed mother and lovely sister, Kate. The little family came to London seeking happiness and good fortune. Alas, fate was not kind . . . (As the scene in Ralph Nickleby’s office begins, VINCENT, MRS. CRUMMLES, MISS PETOWKER, MISS SNEVELLICCI and the OTHERS back off-stage like figures in a dream.)

(NEWMAN NOGGS, Ralph Nickleby’s old clerk, enters L. He holds a black-bordered envelope.)

NOGGS. This came while you were out, Mr. Nickleby.

RALPH. Give it to me. (NOGGS hands the envelope to him.) This envelope has a black border. Someone has died. Did you
order more shares in United Metropolitan Hot Muffin and Crumpet?
NOGGS. If you'll permit, sir... I think you're over-extending your investment.
RALPH. You're a clerk here, not a financial adviser. I shall continue to invest heavily. (He looks at the envelope.) I know this handwriting. I know the postmark, too. (He tears open the envelope and takes out a death announcement.) It is as I suspected. My brother is dead.
NOGGS. She brought the announcement herself. The grieving widow.
RALPH (standing angrily). You mean she's here?
NOGGS. With her children.
RALPH. My niece and nephew! (He frowns.) Obviously, they plan to beg for money. Confound them. I shall give them good advice in two words — "Go home!"
NOGGS. What shall I tell them, sir?
RALPH. You'll tell them nothing. I'll attend to it. Admit them.
NOGGS. Right away, sir. (He exits L. RALPH paces in front of the desk, irritated by the visit.)
RALPH. They can't do better than go back to the country.
MRS. NICKLEBY (offstage L). Ralph! Dear brother-in-law Ralph.
RALPH (under his breath). Sentimental female. Bah!

(MRS. NICKLEBY, a talkative, somewhat confused woman, sweeps in. She is followed by her daughter KATE, a girl of about fifteen. MRS. NICKLEBY throws back her black veil and kisses RALPH dutifully on the cheek.)

MRS. NICKLEBY. He is gone. Your brother, my husband. RALPH. I have not seen my late brother in many, many years.
We were not on the best of terms, as you know. Nonetheless, I extend my sympathy to you and your daughter. (He looks at KATE.) This is my niece, is it not?

MRS. NICKLEBY. But, naturally, Ralph. This is Kate. (KATE curtsies.)

KATE. Uncle.

RALPH. What of the boy? My nephew, Nicholas.

NICHOLAS (offstage L). I am here, Uncle.

(NICHOLAS enters. He is a good-looking lad, about seventeen, alert and independent.)

KATE. I wonder, Uncle, might we sit? Mother is tired.

RALPH. Forgive me. (He indicates the bench. MRS. NICKLEBY and KATE sit.)

MRS. NICKLEBY. We came directly from the coach.

RALPH. Where are you staying?

MRS. NICKLEBY. We have no lodgings . . . (A meaningful pause.) As yet. (This is what RALPH feared and he grunts.)

RALPH. I shall be direct. You must bear up against sorrow, ma’am. I always do.

MRS. NICKLEBY (plucking out a handkerchief from her sleeve and dabbing her eyes). Mine was no common loss.

RALPH. It was no uncommon loss. Husbands die every day. Wives, too.

NICHOLAS (with a hint of criticism). Brothers also, sir. (RALPH gives NICHOLAS an indignant look as he didn’t care for the tone of Nicholas’ voice.)

RALPH (meaning NICHOLAS). And puppies likewise. (To MRS. NICKLEBY as he walks behind his desk.) You intend to remain in London?

NICHOLAS. It is here we plan to seek our fortune, Uncle.
RALPH. I take it you are well supplied with funds?
MRS. NICKLEBY. We are almost penniless. Some time ago, I advised my husband to “speculate.” He did and lost everything.
KATE. We sold what furnishings we possessed to pay for the coach fare.
RALPH. Still, I would advise you to return home.
MRS. NICKLEBY. Home? What home? We have no home. Since you are our only living relative, we have come to you. It was your brother’s dying wish that I should appeal to you on behalf of his children.
RALPH. I am not a man of wealth. I work for my daily bread and expect others to do the same. (NICHOLAS bristles.)
NICHOLAS. I do not expect you to support us, Uncle.
RALPH. In that case, you will not be disappointed.
KATE. I am not afraid of honest labor.
NICHOLAS. Perhaps we have made a mistake in coming here.
MRS. NICKLEBY. Nicholas, please!
RALPH. Hold your tongue, sir. Upon my word. This is a fine beginning.
KATE. My brother meant no disrespect.
MRS. NICKLEBY. Nicholas is headstrong.
RALPH. Kate appears to have a delicate nature. Perhaps dress-making. I have some influence with the shop of Madam Mantalini. It’s a fashionable establishment.
MRS. NICKLEBY. Nicholas has not long completed such education as his poor father could give him, and he was thinking of...
RALPH. Of making something of himself some day. The old story. Are you willing to work, sir?
NICHOLAS. Of course I am. (RALPH takes the folded newspaper from his desk.) This caught my eye this morning and you
may thank your stars for it. (He taps an advertisement.) Read.
(NICHOLAS takes the paper from RALPH and reads.)
NICHOLAS. “Education — At Mr. Wackford Squeer’s Academy,
Dotheboys Hall in Yorkshire. Youths are boarded, clothed,
booked, provided with all necessities, instructed in all
languages, living and dead. No extras, no vacations, and diet
unparalleled. Mr. Squeers is in town and attends daily at the
Saracen’s Head. Able assistant wanted. Annual salary — Five
Pounds. A Master of Arts preferred.”
RALPH. Let Nicholas get that situation and his fortune is made.
MRS. NICKLEBY. But he is not a Master of Arts.
RALPH. That, I think, can be gotten over.
KATE. The salary is so small and Yorkshire is such a long way
off.
MRS. NICKLEBY. Hush, Kate. Your uncle must know best.
NICHOLAS. If I am fortunate enough to be appointed to this
post, Uncle, for which I am so imperfectly qualified, what will
become of my mother and sister?
RALPH. Once you have the situation, I will undertake their
protection. I have recently foreclosed on a mortgage. The
small house is not grand, but I daresay it will do for your
mother and sister.
MRS. NICKLEBY. You are the soul of generosity.
RALPH. I trust you will never forget it, ma’am. I will have my
clerk, Noggs, show you the dwelling. As for you, Nephew, I
will escort you to the Saracen’s Head myself. (He gestures L.)
If you please. (MRS. NICKLEBY stands, then sweeps out L.
KATE follows. NICHOLAS and RALPH exchange a cold look.
They dislike one another.)
RALPH. After you, Nephew. (NICHOLAS nods, then exits. To
himself.) Penniless relatives. Another cross to bear. (He exits.)

End of Scene One