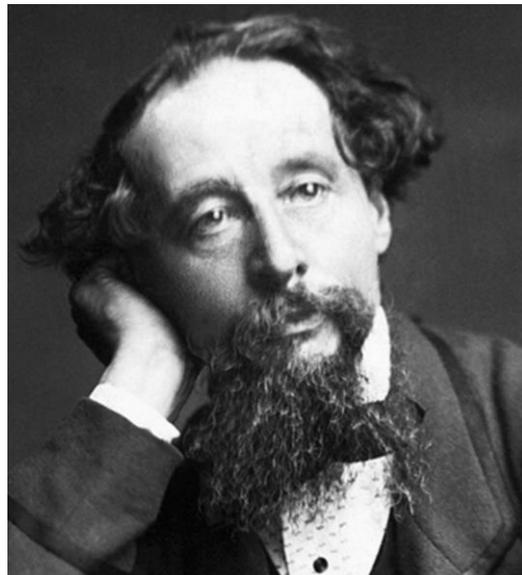


Today, I'll tell you about two people that you probably won't hear about at school, at least not yet. (And I don't think your sister will have heard of the second person I am going to tell you about, even though she is 16 years old!) The two people I am going to tell you about both lived at roughly the same time as QUEEN VICTORIA, and they were both NOVELISTS - and in fact, they can claim to be two of the greatest novel writers of all time, and the second person I am going to tell you about could claim to be the GREATEST novel writer ever, in the same way that WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE is the greatest writer of all time. But what is a novel? A novel is a long story, normally about people that the writer has made up - but the best novels tell you through their stories about made up people something true and important about the nature of the world, or what human beings are like.

The two novel writers (or novelists) I am going to tell you about are CHARLES DICKENS and FYODOR DOSTOEVSKY (pronounced 'Fie - oh - door Doss - toy - eff - ski'). Dickens was slightly older - he was born in 1812, and Dostoevsky was born in 1821, nine years later. Dickens was born in England, down in Portsmouth, on the south coast of England. Dostoevsky was born in Russia, in the Russian capital MOSCOW. Dickens died at the age of 58, in 1870; and Dostoevsky died at the age of 60, in 1881. So by our standards, they both died relatively young. In his lifetime, Dickens wrote 15 novels, and Dostoevsky wrote 12. Both left behind unfinished novels that they were working on when they died - in Dickens' case it was a murder mystery book called THE MYSTERY OF EDWIN DROOD; and in Dostoevsky's case it was a book about four brothers called THE BROTHERS KARAMAZOV. Dostoevsky's book was much closer to being finished when he died and is generally regarded as one of the greatest books ever written.

Both were very fervent CHRISTIANS. Dickens used his novels to draw people's attention to various horrible features of Victorian society. In NICHOLAS NICKLEBY he described schools where children were abused without their parents knowing anything about it. In OLIVER TWIST he described what it was like for children living homeless and on the streets. In BLEAK HOUSE he drew attention to how the law courts served no one's interests except the interests of lawyers (Dickens HATED lawyers - probably because when he was young his father was put in prison because he didn't pay his debts, and the rest of his family had to go to prison along with his father). In HARD TIMES he talked about how badly people who worked in factories were treated. A lot of Dickens' novels helped to inspire people to try to reform society and make it better.

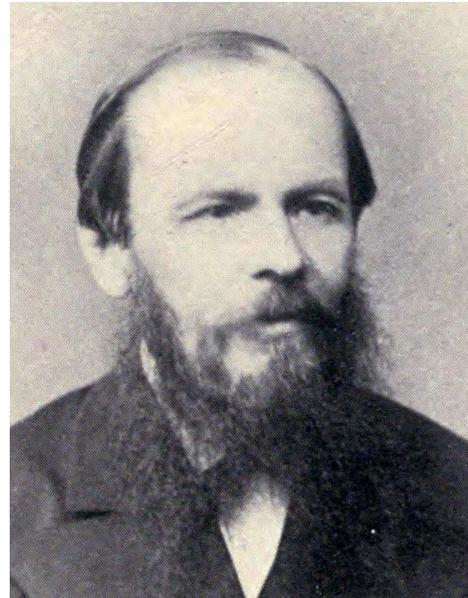


And probably his most famous (and very short) book A CHRISTMAS CAROL encouraged everyone to treat everyone else nicely at Christmas, by telling the story of a mean man called SCROOGE and how he was visited on Christmas Eve by three ghosts to show him what his life used to be like (when he was not so mean), what his life was like at the moment (because he was so mean), and what his life would be like in the future if he stayed mean (spoiler alert! - it wouldn't be very good). Scrooge wakes up and discovers that despite having spent what seemed like an age with the ghosts, it is Christmas Day, and he resolves to be really nice to everyone. A Christmas Carol helped to change Victorian attitudes towards Christmas, and

turned it into the festive holiday that we know today. Loads and loads of films have been made of A Christmas Carol, but the best stars the brilliant actor Alastair Sim, and you can watch the whole film here:

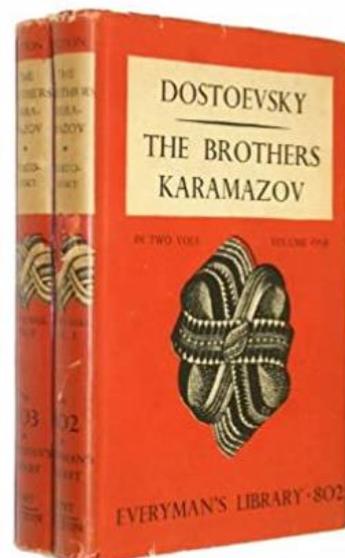
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BjvcKXdAHRy>

Dostoevsky never met Dickens, but he read his novels, and was inspired by them to write novels himself. But what makes Dostoevsky's novels different from Dickens', and what makes them so special, is that they are not so much focussed on social conditions, but on how people think and how they become good and bad - and in particular, what happens to people when they stop believing in God. Dostoevsky said, 'Without God, everything is permitted' - and he wanted to know how people would think and live if they thought they could do anything they liked. So in CRIME AND PUNISHMENT, he studies the case of a man who kills an old woman and her daughter, just to show that he could do it. And in THE POSSESSED, he studies a group of revolutionaries, who think it's okay to use violence to make the world a better place, and how they bring themselves to kill someone for their cause. But



Dostoevsky also looks at what it's like to believe in God, and do the right thing, in a society which is just interested in material things. So in THE IDIOT (yes, he wrote a novel called 'The Idiot'), he studies a 'holy fool' called PRINCE MYSHKIN and the messes he makes of his and other's lives because he is a bit too innocent in a world which is going to hell.

And in THE BROTHERS KARAMAZOV, one of the brothers - ALYOSHA (pronounced 'Al - ee - osh - a') is really spiritual, but his religious beliefs are challenged by his brother IVAN, who is very clever and too clever to believe in God. One of Dostoevsky's most famous stories is in THE BROTHERS KARAMAZOV and is told by Ivan to Alyosha to show how the church has given up on Jesus and is just focussed on material things. The story is called THE GRAND INQUISITOR, and you should definitely read it one day. But Dostoevsky's books are very grown-up - and just like BRUCKNER's symphonies (which I told you about on July 24) - it will be many years before you can read anything by Dostoevsky. (Though for your story on Sunday, I will tell you the Bible story that THE GRAND INQUISITOR story is based on.) But if I don't tell you about him now, who will? And you may miss out on reading some of the greatest books ever written, by one of the greatest men who ever lived - and that would be a real shame, particularly as the lessons that Dostoevsky has to teach us are so, so relevant in today's society, where everything is permitted, and people go mad as a result.



But you will hear lots about Charles Dickens, and probably read one or two of his books at school one day. And there's also loads of brilliant BBC adaptations of his novels that you

could watch - I would recommend BLEAK HOUSE and OUR MUTUAL FRIEND, if you were to watch any of them.

