

A Tale of Two Cities by Charles Dickens

Introduction

A Tale of Two Cities is an excellent Historical novel of Charles Dickens. It is probably the least “Dickensian” of his fourteen novels in that it has less of the grotesque, fewer characters, more big scenes, and a less complicated plot. These differences make it especially accessible for the readers. Much of the novel’s value lies in its structure, creativity, and explorations of timeless themes. As a historical novel, it serves as an excellent example of this genre. The fact that Dickens is able to weave the simple lives of ordinary people into the mosaic of a cataclysmic historical event is an indication of his genius, and another reason to read the book. The themes that are explored in the novel still have relevance today. For example, the results of what happens when revenge is allowed to dictate behaviour provides an important topic for students to explore. With the popularity of movies and television shows that glorify the actions of characters who step outside of the law to achieve revenge, classroom discussion on this topic should be lively.

The novel's descriptions of characters who put duty before desire in crisis situations also provides students with the basis for thought-provoking discussion as well as worthy role models. An important related theme is honour versus dishonour. Another important theme is the effect that corruption in the ruling class has on ordinary people. The lessons that the French Revolution gave us as an infant country are just as important today, and are worthy of young people's study in a non-threatening forum. The organization of this teacher's guide is as follows: a brief overview followed by teaching ideas to be used before, during, and after the reading of the novel. These ideas are meant to help students understand the novel and its characters, themes, and historical message, as well as explore issues dealt with in the novel that are important in students' lives today.

List of Characters

Jarvis Lorry—Banker at Tellson's Bank of London and a trusted friend of the Manettes.

Jerry Cruncher—"odd job man" for Tellson's and part-time grave robber.

Lucie Manette—Dr. Manette's daughter and Charles Darnay's wife.

Miss Pross—Lucie's servant who cared for Lucie during Dr. Manette's imprisonment.

Dr. Manette—Lucie's father who was unjustly imprisoned for eighteen years in Paris

Charles Darnay—Lucie’s husband who was sentenced to death because of the actions of his father and uncle, the Marquis St. Evermonde.

The Marquis St. Evermonde—Cruel member of the French aristocracy and Charles Darnay’s uncle.

Sydney Carton—Drunken lawyer who takes Charles Darnay’s place at the Guillotine.

Mr. Stryver—London trial lawyer who employed Sydney Carton.

Ernest Defarge—Paris wine shop owner and former servant of Dr. Manette who is also a leader of the French Revolution.

Madame Defarge—Wife of Ernest Defarge who records crimes against the people in her knitting. Her family was destroyed by the Marquis St. Evermonde.

Jacques III—Friend of the Defarges and a member of the French Revolution.

Vengeance—Female friend of Madame Defarge and a bloodthirsty member of the French Revolution.

John Barsard/Solomon Pross—Miss Pross’s long lost brother who works for Roger Cly and helps Sydney Carton change places with Charles Darnay.

Roger Cly—English spy who testified against Charles Darnay in Darnay’s London trial.

Gabelle—The caretaker of the Evermonde estate. His imprisonment brings Charles Darnay back to Paris.

Gaspard—He was hung for killing Darnay’s uncle, the Marquis.

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