

Advanced Placement in
English Literature and Composition

Individual Learning Packet

Teaching Unit

A Tale of Two Cities

by Charles Dickens

Written by Douglas Grudzina

Copyright © 2005 by Prestwick House Inc., P.O. Box 658, Clayton, DE 19938. 1-800-932-4593.
www.prestwickhouse.com Permission to copy this unit for classroom use is extended to purchaser for his or her
personal use. This material, in whole or part, may not be copied for resale.

ISBN 978-1-60389-365-7

Item No. 302299

A Tale of Two Cities

Objectives

By the end of this Unit, the student will be able to:

1. describe parallelism in Dickens' style and identify examples of it in the novel.
2. discuss the extent to which this novel meets the four criteria for an historical novel.
3. explain the use of foreshadowing to heighten suspense and create interest.
4. recognize the difference between third-person and first-person narration and indicate when the point of view changes.
5. explain the effect of point of view and the impact of changing point of view in different parts of the narrative.
6. trace the development of the major theme in this story—rebirth through sacrifice—as it applies to:
 - Dr. Manette
 - Sydney Carton
 - Charles Darnay.
7. examine the impact of serialization on the plot structure of the novel.
8. discuss the novel as a commentary on late-eighteenth-century France and also as a commentary on mid-nineteenth-century England.
9. discuss the author's use of exaggeration and caricature as a form of character development.
10. support or refute the following thesis by citing examples from the story: The reader sees that, as a force of nature, love is more powerful than hate.
11. respond to multiple choice questions similar to those that will appear on the Advanced Placement in English Literature and Composition exam.
12. respond to writing prompts similar to those that will appear on the Advanced Placement in English Literature and Composition exam.
13. offer a close reading of *A Tale of Two Cities* and support all assertions and interpretations with direct evidence from the text, from authoritative critical knowledge of the genre, or from authoritative criticism of the play.

A Tale of Two Cities

Background Information

CAUSES OF THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

The causes of the French Revolution were more complex than the oversimplified “cruelty of the aristocracy.” Poor economic policies, war, and the impossibility of social mobility all contributed to the overthrow of the royal family and the establishment of the First Republic.

- **Resentment toward absolute monarchy:**

Other nations (especially England) had already begun to limit the power of the monarchy and establish parliamentary bodies that, to varying degrees, represented the common people’s interests and rights. A rising middle class (*bourgeoisie*) found itself gaining economic power, but was heavily taxed and denied political power.

- **Resentment toward *seigneurialism* by peasants, wage-earners, and the bourgeoisie:**

Just as other nations were beginning to change the structure of their governments, so, too, were they shedding the remnants of feudal economic and political control. In France, however, the rural countryside was still divided into manors or *seigneurs* in which serfs who lived on the land owed full allegiance and obedience to the lord of the manor who owned the land. As the economy shifted from a rural, agrarian economy to an urban commercial and pre-industrial economy, those whose incomes did not depend on the land resented the fact that they remained bound to the land as serfs.

- **The rise of Enlightenment ideals:**

Europe had already produced a generation of writers and philosophers who asserted the equality of humankind and the existence of certain basic rights belonging to all humans, regardless of birth, race, or class. In France, writers like Voltaire, Denis Diderot, de Montesquieu, de Condorcet, and Jean Jacques Rousseau challenged the economic, political, and social status quo.

- **Tremendous national debt, and a grossly inequitable system of taxation:**

France’s involvement in the Seven Years’ War (a multi-nation European war that included the last of the American French and Indian Wars) caused King Louis XVI to inherit tremendous debt from his grandfather (Louis XV). While early in his reign, Louis XVI was eager to reform France’s economy and tax system, he met with very strong resistance from his advisors (members of the untaxed First and Second Estates—see below) and from his wife Marie Antoinette. Thus, France’s mounting debt, a succession of years with poor crops, and the fact that only the poorest people in the nation could legally be taxed led to a desperate economy.

A Tale of Two Cities

Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. Considering that the book was written in installments for weekly publication, discuss how Dickens used chapter titles, foreshadowing, and cliff-hanger endings to maintain interest in his story each week.
2. Write a brief character sketch of Madame Defarge. Do you think she is justified in wanting Lucie and her family executed?
3. Cite incidents in the novel to support this theme: As a force of nature, love is stronger than hate.
4. What were some of the ideals of the Enlightenment? Who were some of the Enlightenment's most prominent writers and thinkers?
5. In what ways may Darnay be said to be a man of the Enlightenment?
6. Which of the causes of the French Revolution are most explored in this novel? Why would Dickens choose to highlight these?
7. What do you infer is the author's idea of the ideal woman?
8. Discuss the characteristics of an historical novel that are prominently illustrated in *A Tale of Two Cities*.
9. Given that most of the action of the novel takes place in Paris, and most of the main characters are French, why is the novel titled *A Tale of Two Cities*?

A Tale of Two Cities

Book the First: Recalled to Life

Chapter I - The Period

1. The first sentence in this novel is one of the most famous first lines in English literature. How is it and the paragraph that follows an example of parallelism?

2. What does Dickens establish with his list of parallel contrasts?

3. What is Dickens' apparent opinion of the list of complaints that the Continental Congress of 1775 sent to Parliament?

4. What allusions does Dickens make to the approaching French Revolution?

5. What is foreshadowed in Dickens' beginning this novel with a description of the period?

Chapter V - The Wine-Shop

1. What do you think the spilled wine foreshadows in this chapter?

2. What effect does Dickens achieve with personification in this chapter?

3. What does the following passage from this chapter say about the character of Madame Defarge?

“...one might have predicated that she did not often make mistakes against herself in any of the reckonings over which she presided.”

4. What information about Lucie’s father’s state of mind is revealed to Mr. Lorry during the climb up the five flights of stairs to Dr. Manette’s room?

5. What is implied by the way the Defarges call the men “Jacques”?

Chapter IV – Congratulatory

1. Briefly describe Mr. Stryver. How does he use Mr. Carton?

2. Why is Carton so rude to Darnay?

3. What does Carton confess to himself after meeting with Darnay?

Chapter X - Two Promises

1. How does Darnay earn his living in England?

2. What are the two promises suggested by the title of this chapter?

3. What promise concerning his past does Darnay make to Dr. Manette?

4. What does Dr. Manette's reaction to Darnay's attempt to reveal his true identity suggest?

5. What further evidence is there that Dr. Manette is disturbed by the prospect of a marriage between his daughter and Charles Darnay?

Chapter XVII - One Night

1. What does Dr. Manette mean when he says that for his daughter to have no knowledge or memory of him would be worse than being dead?

2. Why do you think Lucie checks in on her father while he is sleeping the night before her wedding?

Chapter XVIII - Nine Days

1. What is the subject of Charles Darnay and Doctor Manette's private conversation on the morning of Lucie's wedding?

2. What is suggested by the fact that Dr. Manette begins to make shoes after Lucie's wedding?

3. How does Mr. Lorry decide to ease Dr. Manette out of his relapse?

Book the Third: The Track of a Storm**Chapter I - In Secret**

1. What is significant about the fact that Darnay is placed under escort as soon as he arrives in France.

2. What decree is passed by the revolutionary government of France the same day that Darnay leaves the safety of England to travel to Paris?

3. Why does Defarge refuse to help Darnay by contacting Mr. Lorry at Tellson's bank?

4. In the prison, why does Darnay compare the aristocrats jailed with him to ghosts?

5. What does it mean to be kept "In secret"?

6. How does Dickens remind the reader of Dr. Manette's imprisonment that ended at the beginning of this novel?
