

A TALE OF
TWO CITIES

A MASTERPIECE TEACHER'S GUIDE

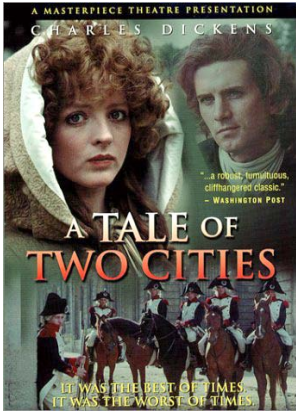


MASTERPIECE[™]
Classic



INTRODUCTION

This Teacher's Guide is a resource for educators to be used with the MASTERPIECE film, *A Tale of Two Cities*. The film, which MASTERPIECE originally aired in 1989 on PBS, is available for purchase from shopPBS.org.



Starring James Wilby, Xavier Deluc, and Serena Gordon, and directed by Philippe Monnier, the film is a detailed adaptation of Dickens's complex story of the lives of English and French characters caught up in the turmoil preceding and during the French Revolution. Written in 1859, *A Tale of Two Cities* explores issues also associated with other works of Charles Dickens: poverty, oppression, cruelty, social disruption, justice, personal redemption, and class struggle. As scenes in the story shift between the cities of Paris and London, Dickens explores these themes in both locations. The circumstances that provoked the revolution, as well as the chaotic consequences of the revolutionaries' victory, serve as a warning directed at unaddressed and unresolved social concerns in England. Everywhere, poverty and oppression stand in sharp contrast to justice and love. Through the lives of characters drawn from many class levels in both England and France, Dickens weaves his intricate plot.

A master of dramatic narrative full of vivid scenes and coincidences, Dickens is able to link the lives of diverse characters who represent the competing forces of that memorable era. To this day, Madame Defarge personifies revenge, just as the Marquis St. Evrémonte stands for corruption and cruelty. Sydney Carton represents the extremes to which one might go to salvage a wasted life. Finally, the lives of these characters offer proof that, indeed, "it was the best of times, it was the worst of times."

Using the Film

The film is as dramatically entertaining as it is instructive. You may choose to teach the film *A Tale of Two Cities* on its own, in conjunction with or as a preview to reading the novel, or as part of a larger unit on Dickens or any of its themes. The film, which can be particularly useful in helping to bring to life specific features or scenes from the text, clearly conveys the essence of Dickens's thematic concerns. Characters and settings are portrayed in a manner which respects the integrity of the novel, and for students who have difficulty mastering Dickensian prose, the film can serve as an invaluable instructional aid.

Note: The film contains several scenes of violence. Be sure to preview the entire film before using it in class.

Disc One of the 2-set DVD is approximately 104 minutes and Disc Two is about 93 minutes. You may want to divide up classroom viewing to coincide with your students' reading of the text; to prepare students before they read the book or a particular section; to continue classroom discussion after students have read the book; or simply according to the time you have per classroom session. You may also use the scene selection option to focus on a specific character or part of the plot.

Using the Teacher's Guide

A *Tale of Two Cities* not only explores the conditions in France and England in the late 18th century, but also encompasses the perspective of Dickens, living in 19th-century England. To fully understand the book and the film, you will probably want students to research the causes and effects of the French Revolution, as well as similar issues in England during the same time. You may want to divide the class into teams and assign them different topics to explore and/or create a class wiki with the information that students discover.

You may also want to consider an interdisciplinary approach to teaching the book, teaming up with a history teacher to help explore in depth the social, economic, and political implications of the story. Providing biographical details about Dickens and his time will also help students understand the lens through which Dickens wrote about events that occurred 100 years earlier.

This guide presents an integrated approach to teaching *A Tale of Two Cities*. The lessons draw parallels between social conditions of the past and present and compare the development of democracy in England, France, and the United States. The activities in the guide help to develop research, speaking, and debating skills, and promote cooperative learning.

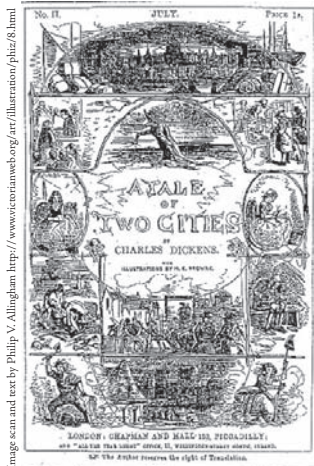
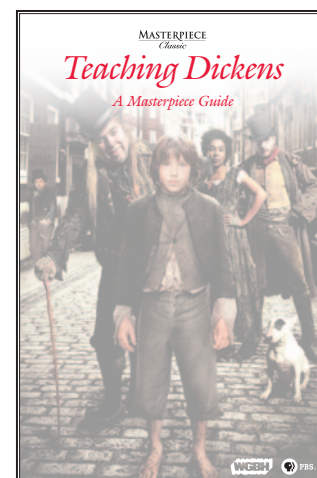
Although you may choose to show the film in a variety of ways, the Teacher's Guide divides the viewing into four "episodes." Each episode provides a plot summary, discussion questions, and activities that address a range of student capabilities and learning styles. You may wish to modify or customize the activities according to the needs and capabilities of your students. Background information on Charles Dickens, the French Revolution, and selected topics are also included.

In addition to this Teacher's Guide, there are many rich resources found on the MASTERPIECE Web site at pbs.org/masterpiece. Here are just some of the links you can check out:

Teaching Dickens: A Masterpiece Guide

http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/masterpiece/dickens/dickens_teachersguide.pdf

This online guide offers general lesson plans about Dickens and specific discussion questions and activities for *Oliver Twist*, *David Copperfield*, *Little Dorrit*, and *The Old Curiosity Shop*. "Stay Tuned: The Rise of the Killer Sequel," an essay on how Dickens transformed "serial suspense into a large-scale social event," is also included, as are recommended websites and books.



COVER OF THE ORIGINAL EDITION
BY PHIZ, 1859

Dickens Book & Film Club

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/masterpiece/bookclub/guides.html>

Aimed primarily at book and film clubs, this guide contains lively discussion questions, activities, and period recipes for the same four Dickens titles as *Teaching Dickens: A Masterpiece Guide*.

Charles Dickens Timeline

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/masterpiece/archive/programs/davidcopperfield/timeline.html>

Originally prepared for the 2000 MASTERPIECE film *David Copperfield* (starring a very young Daniel Radcliffe), this is a useful set of dates related to Dickens's life.

Down and Out in Victorian London

http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/masterpiece/olivertwist/ei_downandout.html

This essay, created for the 2000 MASTERPIECE film *Oliver Twist*, offers a look at the conditions endured by the poor in 19th-century England, as well as institutions such as child labor and workhouses.

Dickens and His Time

Charles Dickens was born on February 7, 1812, the second of eight children. Throughout most of his childhood, the family was burdened with debt. In 1823, his father, John Dickens, was arrested and sent to the Marshalsea Debtor's Prison, where he was soon to be joined by the rest of his family. At the age of 11, Dickens was forced to begin work in a blacking factory. The misery of those early years haunted him for the rest of his life.



DICKENS AT
HIS DESK, 1858

It was because of these unfortunate circumstances that Dickens developed a lifelong concern regarding abuse of the poor, particularly children. Human suffering, inequality, and injustice are pervasive themes in Dickens's work. It was through personal experience that he was able to write so convincingly about the various social evils that prevailed in 19th-century England.

An unexpected inheritance eventually relieved some of the family's burdens, and Dickens was able to continue his education. At the age of 15, he began to work for a firm of attorneys in London. Soon afterward, he became a freelance reporter in the law courts and in Parliament. By the time Dickens had turned 25, the serialization of *The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club* had made him one of England's most widely-read authors, a popularity he would enjoy for the rest of his life.

More than any of his other novels, *A Tale of Two Cities* reveals the complexity of Dickens's social ideas. By the standards of his day, he was a political radical, and many of his novels explore specific social problems in great detail. *Oliver Twist*, for instance, portrays the suffering and mistreatment of children; *Little Dorrit* describes the debtor's prison where Dickens's family had suffered; and *Hard Times* is a powerful account of the exploitation of industrial workers laboring under devastating conditions. Through his many novels, Dickens created an unforgettable cast of characters, each representing some aspect of the world in which he lived.

Dickens's work brought issues of mistreatment and hypocrisy into sharp focus. He exposed and satirized corruption, greed, and injustice, while forcefully advocating the interests of the poor and downtrodden, especially children. Though Dickens consistently combated political and social oppression, he feared the violence and upheaval inherent in revolution, as can be seen in his interpretation of the French Revolution in *A Tale of Two Cities*.

Although he was born long after the French Revolution, Dickens himself lived in politically tumultuous times. In 1830, another revolution had again overthrown the French monarchy. Similar uprisings occurred in other European countries. Although England itself avoided revolution, many people feared that if England had not passed the Parliamentary Reform Act of 1832, it too might have suffered from revolutionary violence.

In 1848, a revolt once again toppled the French monarchy and inspired another series of political upheavals throughout the continent. Once more, England was spared a revolution, but the Chartist movement, which had gained strength among the working classes during the first half of the century, had led many to fear that violence would break out there as well. In 1859, as Dickens was publishing *A Tale of Two Cities*, a series of revolutions swept through the various states of Italy. In fact, Dickens is said to have begun work on the book shortly after a bomb killed or injured 100 people in an assassination attempt against the French Emperor Napoleon III. *A Tale of Two Cities* offered a warning to the English that reform would be preferable to revolution.

Background to the French Revolution

A *Tale of Two Cities* creates the impression that before the revolution the French common people suffered from such savage oppression that eventually they rose against their masters in a frenzy of bloodlust and revenge. Other writers, however, have concluded that throughout the 18th century, France was gradually becoming more and more prosperous, and that the revolution came about when the middle classes began to claim an increased share of political power to reflect their economic importance.



EMPEROR NAPOLEON III



PRISE DE LA BASTILLE
BY JEAN-PIERRE LOUIS
LAURENT HOUËL

The origins of the revolution go back to the 1770s, when the French government took the side of the rebels in the American War of Independence. Although the French government was more interested in weakening English military power than in promoting liberty, the cause of the American Revolution was very popular in France, and many French reformers were inspired to attempt reform in their own country. The French government, however, had also incurred enormous debts as a result of aiding the colonists, and these debts only added to the burdens of a government that was becoming increasingly unable to meet its financial obligations.

The immediate cause of the French Revolution was a fiscal crisis. Unable to pay its debts, the government called for a meeting of the States-General to vote for new taxes. However, this parliamentary body soon demonstrated that it would not be content with simply voting for new taxes, and thus it called for an extensive series of reforms.

The rioting that led to the fall of the Bastille (a notorious fortress and prison) was set off in part by fears that the king planned to use the army to dismiss the States-General by force. Although the rioters liberated only a handful of prisoners, the capture of the Bastille demonstrated that the people of Paris were ready to take matters into their own hands if the royal government tried to move against the reformers.

EPISODE ONE

BOOK: *From the beginning of the novel to the end of Book the Second, Chapter 9 (“The Gorgon’s Head”)*

DVD: *From the beginning of Disc One to the end of Chapter 6 (about 54 minutes)*

Plot Summary

Dickens begins the novel with the words, “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times...” This now-famous opening underscores the fact that in any period, good and evil coexist; wondrous events are contrasted with horrible and unacceptable occurrences. The lives of the characters in the novel and the film reflect this contradiction in the range of human experiences throughout the best and worst of times.

In 1775, Doctor Manette, having lost his memory and sanity, is released after 18 years of imprisonment in the Bastille prison. Manette’s daughter, Lucie, has grown up believing her father was dead. Mr. Jarvis Lorry of Tellson’s Bank and Lucie are reunited with Manette in Paris at the wine shop of Monsieur and Madame Defarge. Lorry and Lucie take him back to England.

Five years later, in 1780, Lucie testifies at the London treason trial of Charles Darnay, a young Frenchman she had met on the boat from France to England. In Paris, the aristocratic Marquis St. Evrémonte receives a letter that outlines the evidence that will be brought against his nephew, this same Darnay, who had moved to London and renounced his French lands and title. Darnay has been falsely accused by two notorious police spies, Roger Cly and John Barsad. He is acquitted only after Sydney Carton, a dissolute young lawyer, points out the remarkable resemblance between himself and Darnay, therefore casting doubt on Barsad’s testimony.



THE WINE-SHOP BY PHIZ, 1859

With his daughter Lucie's love and total devotion, Manette has now regained his sanity and returned to practicing medicine. He remembers very little about his imprisonment or the events leading up to it. However, when Manette is faced with a stressful situation, he obsessively reverts to his prison occupation as a shoemaker.

One of the most striking images, in both the film and the novel, occurs when a great cask of wine bursts in the street outside the Defarges's wine shop. Dozens of people rush to the scene and scoop up the wine as it rushes down the gutter. Some of these people are so desperate that they get down on their hands and knees and lap up the wine like animals. One man, Gaspard, uses the spilled wine to write the word "blood" on a wall. This act clearly foreshadows the French Revolution.

The carriage of the Marquis St. Evrémonde, rushing through the streets of Paris, crushes Gaspard's little boy. The Marquis callously tosses a coin at Gaspard's feet and continues on his way. That same night, the Marquis is visited by his nephew. Darnay is disgusted with the way his family has oppressed the poor. The young man has a plan to undo some of the wrong his family has done, a plan his uncle bitterly opposes. Darnay even suspects that his uncle played a role in fabricating evidence against him at the trial in England. Darnay and his uncle quarrel. That night, the uncle is murdered by Gaspard. As he stabs the Marquis, Gaspard whispers the name "Jacques," revealing his role as a member of the "Jacquerie," a secret revolutionary society.

Discussion Questions

1. The opening lines of *A Tale of Two Cities* are some of the most famous in literature: "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times..." Yet these lines are not spoken at the beginning of the film. Instead, the film begins with Doctor Manette in the Bastille prison. After several moments, the film's titles are shown. Ask students to comment on the film's opening scenes. What does it convey about the story? How does the appearance and behavior of Manette set the scene? What draws them into the film? Why do they think the filmmakers chose to not use the famous opening lines at this point in the story?
2. As they watch the film, have students note where and how starvation, oppression, and cruelty are portrayed in the film. Students may want to keep a written or online journal as they watch the film and read the book. What techniques do Dickens and the filmmakers use in terms of imagery, descriptive language, costumes, camera angles, and so on? Have students cite specific passages from the book or scenes from the film.
3. Ask students to observe the differences in the film between how the poor in France and England are portrayed—for instance, the poor people outside the courthouse in England and the scene in Paris when the wine cask is broken. What do you think Dickens is trying to express by showing these differences?

4. What purpose does the scene of the overturned wine cask serve? How does it foreshadow the French Revolution? How does the scene with the carriage accident build upon the wine scene? Ask students to comment on how these two pivotal scenes made them feel.
5. Have a student volunteer to read aloud the first two paragraphs of Book the First, Chapter 5, which describe the breaking of the wine cask. (Begin with the sentence “A large cask of wine had been droppd and broken, in the street.” End with the sentence, “...if anyone acquainted with it could have believed in such a miraculous presence.” Have students jot down key words that Dickens uses to convey images of poverty and desperation. Could that scene occur today in this country or around the world? If so, under what circumstances?
6. Music plays a very important part in filmmaking. Have students critique the use of music in the opening scene and in the scene where the Marquis St. Evrémonde is served coffee by a long line of servants. How does the music enhance the scene? Have students listen and note other uses of music as they watch the film.



Activities

1. Distribute the Character Chart on page 24. Ask students to identify and describe each character they have met so far and their relationship with others on the list. As they view the film, have students add their observations to the chart.
2. Poverty is an issue that Dickens explores in many of his works. Have students find two articles online or in the newspaper about poverty in their neighborhood, region, or around the world. How do the issues of poverty that people struggle with today compare to what the French and English experienced in the 18th century? How has our attitude towards poverty changed or remained the same since then? What remedies, if any, are offered today?
3. Dickens is known for his keen and evocative descriptions. Have students take turns reading aloud the passage in Chapter 5 (“The Wine-Shop”) that describes the DeFarge’s neighborhood. (Begin with the line “And now that the cloud settled on Saint Antoine...” and end with “Indeed they were at sea, and the ship and crew were in peril of tempest.”) Working individually or in pairs, ask students to think about a neighborhood or area they know well and write a one-page description of it as Dickens might have described it.
4. Have students cover the scene in which Gaspard’s son is killed as a news story. Brainstorm and explore the differences among the various kinds of news stories today: a who-what-where-when-why newspaper story, an investigative report, a TV nightly news story, a blog, a 24-hour cable news network story, a radio story, and so on. Choosing one of the news styles, and working in teams, pairs, or individually, have students cover the scene in which Gaspard’s son is killed. After students deliver their reports, reflect on how various media outlets affect our perception of events.

6. Dickens's novels often include one or more courtroom scenes. In the film, the courtroom scene is crucial. It not only introduces us to Darnay and other important characters, it contains many of the issues the story explores. Why did Dickens write so much about the law? Why are legal matters often so deemed to be dramatic? Have students make a list of current films and television shows that use courtroom scenes for their dramatic core. What are some of the similarities and differences between Dickens's use of this setting and more contemporary uses?



THE LIKENESS BY PHIZ, 1859

JACQUERIE

The Defarges have a large circle of friends, most of whom are called “Jacques,” a common French first name. “Jacques” is simply a code name used to conceal their true identity from strangers and perhaps from each other. They form a secret society, at first keeping track of aristocratic crimes, and later bringing their enemies to trial and execution once the revolution has begun. In fact, it is unlikely that secret societies played an important role in the French Revolution. Most of the major revolutionary groups, such as the Jacobins and Girondins, operated quite openly. Secret revolutionary societies were actually more important in Dickens's own time. He may have drawn inspiration from such secret groups as the Carbonari, which operated in Italy.

EPISODE TWO

BOOK: *From Book the Second, Chapter 10 (“Two Promises”) through Book the Second, Chapter 21 (“Echoing Footsteps”)*

DVD: *From the beginning of Chapter 7 to the end of Disc One (about 46 minutes)*

Plot Summary

After the Marquis’s death, Darnay returns to London where he is now working as a teacher. In the summer of 1781, on a visit to Doctor Manette, Darnay announces that he wishes to marry Lucie. When Manette gives his blessing, Darnay wants to reveal his true identity. Manette stops him, saying that if Lucie accepts the proposal, Darnay can reveal his identity on the day of the wedding.

In addition to working officially as a messenger for Tellson’s Bank and as Lorry’s assistant, Jerry Cruncher robs graves to supplement his income by selling cadavers for medical research. That same summer, there is a funeral for the police spy Barsad. When Cruncher and his accomplices open the grave to steal the body, they find that the coffin is full of dirt and rocks.

In France, Gaspard, the murderer of the Marquis St. Evrémonte, is executed. The revolutionaries have sworn vengeance against all members of the St. Evrémonte family. Meanwhile, Barsad has begun working in Paris for the French government. The Defarges and their friends, however, quickly realize that he is a spy when he begins asking suspicious questions. Knowing that the Defarges had sheltered Manette after his release from prison, Barsad tells them that Lucie Manette is about to marry Charles Darnay, the nephew of the Marquis St. Evrémonte.



ILLUSTRATION BY JOHN MCLENAN, 1859

Shortly before the wedding of the two lovers in England, Sydney visits Lucie, asking her to remember that he will always be ready to give his life for her or for anyone she loves. On the day of the wedding, Darnay reveals his true name to Manette. Although he seems at first to take the news well, Manette falls into a fit of madness while Darnay and Lucie are away on their wedding journey. He soon recovers, however, and begs Lorry not to tell Lucie what has happened. At the very end of Disc One, the action skips forward eight years to show the fall of the Bastille in 1789.



THE SEA RISES BY PHIZ, 1859

Discussion Questions

1. Discuss what triggers Manette's relapses. What clues from the film hint at the reasons? Have students research the condition now known as post-traumatic stress disorder. How might Manette's flashbacks and psychological setbacks be diagnosed today? Mr. Lorry suggests that burying his shoemaking tools might help Manette put his imprisonment behind him. What might the treatment be today?
2. Although many of the French characters are working-class people, Cruncher is the only prominent English character from the working classes. Ask students to compare and contrast Cruncher to the French characters, such as the Defarges and their friends.
3. Although *A Tale of Two Cities* concentrates on the French Revolution, the treason trial of Darnay and the mob scene at Barsad's funeral take place in England. Does England appear to be almost as dangerous a place as France? Why or why not? Is England nearly as ripe for revolution as France? How do these early scenes of violence and injustice in England prepare the reader or viewer for the coming scenes of the French Revolution? What message or warning is Dickens expressing?
4. Dickens often uses the names of his characters to reveal something about those individuals. Have students refer to the list of characters they created at the beginning of the film. How do the names Jarvis Lorry, Jeremiah Cruncher, Mr. Stryver, Sydney Carton, Ernest Defarge, and Alexandre Manette reveal their character's traits?
5. Consider the very last scene of Episode Two: a young girl stares at the buckled shoes of a hanged man. What does this scene evoke? Why do you think the filmmakers chose this image?

Activities

1. The two main women characters in *A Tale of Two Cities* are Madame Defarge and Lucie Manette. What do each of them symbolize for Dickens? Consider how each woman is portrayed in the film. How do the filmmakers convey the women's personalities? Ask students to re-cast the film using today's actors. Working in pairs, have one student pretend to be an agent and another to be a studio executive. Have the agent present his or her "pitch" as to why his or her client would be perfect for the role. Have the studio executive respond, explaining whether or not the actor would be able to embody the character.
2. When Darnay wants to reveal his true identity to Doctor Manette, the doctor stops him. He tells Darnay, "Tell me when I ask you, not now. If your suit should prosper, if Lucie should love you, you shall tell me on your marriage morning." Working in small groups, have students develop three possible reasons to explain Doctor Manette's response to Darnay. Have each group present their explanations to the class, and then take a class vote to see which reason the class finds most plausible.
3. Give students the following assignment: Imagine that you are an American visitor to Paris during the storming of the Bastille. Write to a friend in the United States and describe what you observed during the course of that fateful night, either according to the film or based on your own research of historical accounts.



RESURRECTION MEN

In the 18th and early 19th centuries, there was a severe shortage of cadavers for the training of students in medical schools and hospitals. "Resurrection men" like Cruncher carried on an illicit trade in corpses, which they often obtained by robbing new graves.

In real life, the two most notorious resurrection men were two Scotsmen named Burke and Hare, who began, like Cruncher, by robbing graves. Burke and Hare, however, couldn't dig up corpses as fast as they could sell them. They decided to speed up the process by murdering people and selling bodies to doctors in Edinburgh. It is not known how many people they may have murdered before they were caught. Their scheme finally came apart when a medical student recognized the body of a murdered prostitute he had known. These crimes took place when Dickens was young. People who read Dickens's books when they were first published would have remembered the real-life resurrection men.

EPISODE THREE

BOOK: *From Book the Second, Chapter 22 (“The Sea Still Rises”) to Book the Third, Chapter 10 (“The Substance of the Shadow”)*

DVD: *From the beginning of Disc Two to the end of Chapter Seven (about 54 minutes)*

Plot Summary

On July 14, 1789, rioters seize the Bastille prison in Paris. Defarge forces one of the jailers to take him to Manette’s old cell, 105 North Tower. Defarge completes a thorough search of the cell.

Three years later, in the autumn of 1792, the crowd at Tellson’s Bank in London is talking about the events of the Revolution. Many French aristocrats have taken shelter in England. Some English firms, such as Tellson’s Bank, still do business in France. Lorry is sent to Paris to look after the interests of the bank.

Back in England, Darnay learns that Gabelle, an old family servant, has been charged with treason. Telling only Manette, Darnay leaves for France to help Gabelle. Unknown to Darnay, Gabelle’s letter was sent in order to lure him back to France to face trial as a member of the French aristocracy. After being recognized as a former aristocrat, Darnay is arrested almost immediately in Paris and sent to La Force prison, where he is held in secret.

Lucie and her father follow Darnay to Paris. Since Manette was a prisoner in the Bastille, he has become a hero to the Paris mob and is able to use his prestige to protect Darnay. Madame Defarge visits Lucie and her child. When Lucie asks for help in obtaining permission to visit Darnay, Madame Defarge replies, “Your husband is not my business here. You are my business here.”



THE KNOCK AT THE
DOOR BY PHIZ, 1859

Carton also comes to Paris and soon recognizes Barsad, the police spy. Carton confronts Barsad, who is now working for the French revolutionary government, and tells him that he will soon demand a favor. Barsad is vulnerable to blackmail because of his former work as a spy for both the French aristocracy and the British government.

Finally, Darnay comes to trial and is acquitted, largely because Manette speaks in his defense. That evening, Darnay is arrested again. He is told that he has been denounced by the Defarges and by a third person, whose name he will learn at the trial. At Darnay's second trial, it turns out that his third accuser is Manette himself.

During the storming of the Bastille, Monsieur Defarge had found a document that Manette had written while in prison. The document reveals that in 1757 two French aristocrats, the father and uncle (the Marquis St. Evrémonde) of Darnay, had taken Manette to the bedside of a young woman who was driven insane and was now dying in agony. In an adjoining room lay the young woman's brother, dying of a sword wound. The brother died that night, while his sister lingered for a few more days before her death. Manette learned that one of the St. Evrémonde brothers had wanted the woman for his lover. He had her husband worked to death, and then he carried her away. When the young woman's father learned of what had happened, he died of grief. The young woman's brother challenged the nobleman, but was fatally wounded in a swordfight. Before he died, he also revealed that he had another sister, who had gone into hiding. She would grow up to become Madame Defarge.

Manette reported the crimes of the St. Evrémondes to the authorities. As a result of the aristocrats' corrupt influence, Manette was secretly imprisoned. In the last words of the document, he indicts the St. Evrémondes: "I denounce them and their descendants to the last of their race." Darnay is now condemned to death for the crimes of his father and uncle. Manette begins to lose his sanity once again, as a result of Darnay's death sentence.

Discussion Questions

1. What does the fact that Darnay is so willing to return to France reveal about his character? Who is the hero so far of *A Tale of Two Cities*—Darnay or Carton? Take a class poll and post the results on the board, on chart paper, or the class website.
2. Throughout *A Tale of Two Cities*, Madame Defarge has been the most merciless enemy of the aristocrats. Not until Manette reads his letter (Book the Third, Chapter 10) do we fully understand the reasons for Madame Defarge's hatred. Discuss the letter's contents. Does what happened to her and her family justify Madame Defarge's actions?

3. In Chapter Two of Disc Two, well into the middle of the film, Sydney Carton speaks the now-famous line that begins the novel: “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times...” Ask students why they think the filmmakers chose to have Carton deliver those lines in that particular scene. What has been gained or lost by moving it from the beginning of the story and by having Carton say it? Could those words apply to the time we live in now? Why or why not?
4. As the camera pans from the crowd in the opening scenes of Disc Two, we see the cobblestones and then the infamous guillotine for the first time. Discuss the way in which the filmmakers use camera angles in this scene. Why do you think the filmmakers chose not to show more gory details about the guillotine? Does this make the scene more or less effective?

Activities

1. Consider these changes in Episode Three: mob rule, demise of the aristocracy, Manette’s status, and status of the Defarges. Where are these changes evident in the film? Assign each of these changes to a classroom group and have students discuss their observations of each of these changes. Have a spokesperson from each group report back to the class and then have a whole-class discussion about the significance of the changes and how they are portrayed in the film.
2. “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times...” How has this message or theme revealed itself at this point in the lives of these characters: Lucie, Manette, Darnay, Madame Defarge, Monsieur Defarge, Lorry, and Carton? Have students choose a character. In a blog, diary entry, or dramatization, have students explain, in character, how this quotation may or may not apply to his or her character.
3. The refrain of “Liberty, Equality, Fraternity, or Death” is repeated by the revolutionaries throughout the novel. Have students research the origins of the phrase and its meaning, as well as conditions in France after the aristocracy lost power. What contradictions are evident in the use of this revolutionary slogan?
4. What motivates Carton to travel to Paris, blackmail Barsad, and attempt to assist Darnay? The events have been foreshadowed by Carton’s own words to Lucie: “I told you once, for you I would do anything.” Have students imagine they are Carton writing a letter of explanation to Lorry. Ask them to explain the motive for Carton’s actions and the sudden shift in character.

THE GUILLOTINE

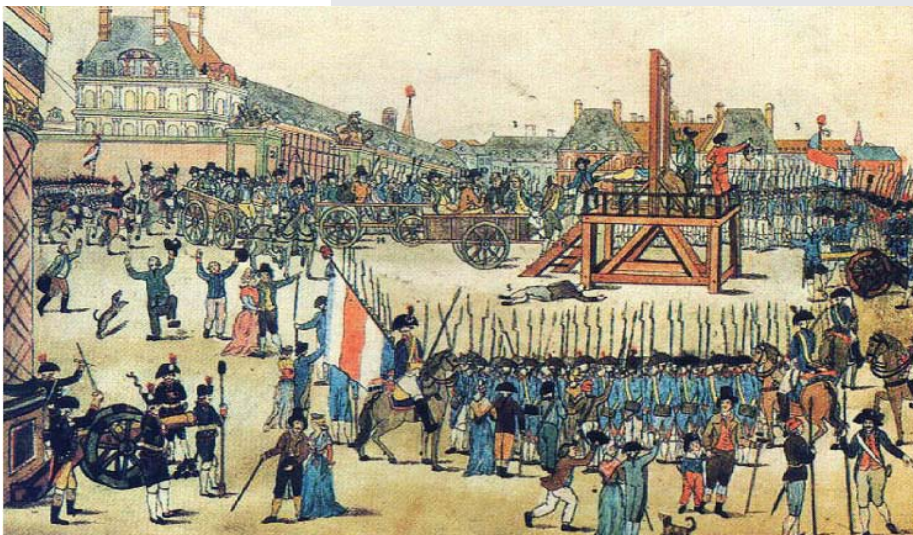
In December 1789, Joseph-Ignace Guillotin, a deputy in the French National Assembly, proposed reforms in capital punishment.

Hanging, which was probably the most common form of execution in both France and England, was slow and inefficient. Instead of using the sort of gallows with a drop-trap that appears in so many western movies, the executioner would sling the rope from a beam or a branch of a tree. The condemned person, with a rope around the neck, would stand on a cart, or sometimes sit on a horse. When the cart or horse was pulled away, the body was left to fall under its own weight. Very often the force of the fall was not great enough to break the neck, so that death actually came from slow strangulation. Sometimes friends or family paid the executioner to let them all tug on the condemned person's legs so that death would come more quickly.

Beheading, with an axe or a sword, was even more grisly. Cutting through a human neck with one blow is not easy. Unless the executioner was skillful, he might bungle the job, so that instead of killing with one fell stroke, he would leave the victim horribly mangled.

Because of his proposed reforms in capital punishment, the guillotine became associated with Joseph-Ignace Guillotin's name. Guillotin himself, however, did not invent the guillotine—similar devices had existed since the 16th century—and he always resented its association with his name.

Ironically, there were a number of deputies in the Constituent Assembly who wanted to abolish capital punishment altogether (except for treason and regicide). One of these deputies was Robespierre, who later became one of the most important leaders during the worst phase of the Reign of Terror.



The guillotine had been initially introduced as a means to eliminate unnecessary suffering. During the Terror, however, the guillotine revealed another virtue. It was very efficient. A skilled team of executioners could kill at the rate of one person every two or three minutes.

THE EXECUTION OF ROBESPIERRE AND HIS SUPPORTERS ON JULY 28, 1794

EPISODE FOUR

BOOK: *From Book the Third, Chapter 11 (“Dusk”) to end*

DVD: *From the beginning of Chapter Eight to end (about 34 minutes)*

Plot Summary

Carton, while visiting the wine shop, overhears an argument between the Defarges. He learns that Madame Defarge, not satisfied with the verdict against Darnay, now wants to destroy Lucie and her child. Madame Defarge makes public her relationship with those whom the St. Evrémondés destroyed. Her motivation is to avenge the deaths of her family members. Carton then arranges with Lorry to have the whole family leave Paris. Through his arrangements with Barsad, Carton visits Darnay in his cell. First, he persuades Darnay to change clothes with him, then he overpowers Darnay and renders him unconscious with a drug.

Barsad then carries the unconscious Darnay out of the prison. Since Carton and Darnay look so much alike, nobody but Barsad knows what has happened. The unconscious Darnay is delivered to Lucie and her family, and they escape to England. Madame Defarge goes to Manette’s home in search of Lucie and the child, and she becomes suspicious when she finds no one there but Miss Pross. Miss Pross, knowing that Lucie and her family need every extra minute to escape, delays Madame Defarge as long as possible. The two women struggle, and Madame Defarge is killed by her own pistol.

Carton continues to pose as Darnay, all the way to the guillotine. No one recognizes this deception except for a young seamstress, also awaiting execution, who had known Darnay in prison. Carton comforts her in their last moments. He goes to the guillotine, saying that he is going to a “far, far better rest” than he has ever known.



ILLUSTRATION BY JOHN MCLENAN, 1859

Discussion Questions

1. In the opening scene of Chapter Eight on the DVD, Carton tells Lorry that it is still worth trying to reverse the Court's decision: "...one day it will console Lucy. She mustn't be left to think that his life was wantonly thrown away." Could one make the case that Carton's life has been "thrown away"? Why or why not?
2. Throughout the film, Barsad has been a villain, and yet in the final episode he helps Darnay escape. He could have waited for Carton's execution and then have arranged to have Darnay and his family arrested before they were able to escape from France. Discuss with the class why, at the most crucial moment in the story, he has become almost heroic.
3. Compare the characters of Monsieur Defarge and Madame Defarge. What motivates them? How are they alike? How are they different? Is a desire for revenge, such as that of Madame Defarge's, ever justified?
4. Shortly before the execution, Carton meets a young seamstress, whom Darnay had known in La Force prison. She quickly realizes that the man before her is an imposter who has somehow helped the real Darnay escape. Ask students to consider what purpose this scene serves. How would the novel and film be different if Carton had never encountered anyone who realized what he had done? What is further revealed about Carton's character in this scene?
5. "If there were a popularity contest for Dickens novels," claims Norrie Epstein in *The Friendly Dickens* (Viking 1988), "*A Tale of Two Cities* would probably win." It is one of the most frequently-taught novels in high school; in 2010 Oprah chose it (and *Great Expectations*) for her final book club. Yet some critics consider *A Tale of Two Cities* not to be Dickens's best work, lacking in humor and multi-faceted characters, and too dependent on coincidence. Ask students why they think the novel has maintained its status and appeal. Why is it still so widely read and appreciated?

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Charles Dickens". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, decorative initial 'C'. Below the name are several horizontal, wavy lines that serve as a flourish or underline.

SIGNATURE OF CHARLES DICKENS

Activities

1. Divide the class into two competing teams: “Revolutionaries” and “Aristocrats.” Each team will choose a spokesperson. Call out names and details from *A Tale of Two Cities* (see list below). Teams will alternate in providing questions for which the items are answers. Correct questions are given one point; no points are given for incorrect questions.

ITEMS

- | | | |
|------------------------|-------------------|--|
| 1. 18 years | 19. Stryver | 37. seamstress |
| 2. knitting | 20. vengeance | 38. Marriage |
| 3. Jarvis | 21. Darnay | 39. Bastille |
| 4. “blood” | 22. St. Evrémone | 40. La Force |
| 5. Cruncher | 23. Old Bailey | 41. London and Paris |
| 6. Jacques | 24. Lucie | 42. wood sawyer |
| 7. shoes | 25. Gaspard | 43. The National Razor |
| 8. strong resemblance | 26. chemist | 44. sister, brother, and father’s death |
| 9. wine shop | 27. Saint Antoine | 45. “... a far, far better thing..” |
| 10. “Recalled to Life” | 28. Pross | 46. 1789 |
| 11. Carton | 29. gold coin | 47. three denouncers |
| 12. Barsad | 30. Marquis | 48. switch |
| 13. 105 North Tower | 31. little Lucie | 49. pistol shot |
| 14. cask | 32. Gabelle | 50. deafness |
| 15. Dover | 33. road mender | |
| 16. Madame Defarge | 34. knife | |
| 17. grave robber | 35. chateau | |
| 18. Tellson’s | 36. peasant girl | |

2. Divide the class into two groups. Assign one of these positions to each group: Carton’s last act was a supreme sacrifice only for the good of others, or Carton’s last act was that of a lonely, desperate, and selfish man making a final attempt to create some purpose in his wasted life. Ask the two groups to debate their differing viewpoints. During the debate, be sure students comment on Carton’s famous last words: “It is a far, far better thing that I do, than I have ever done; it is a far, far better rest that I go to than I have ever known.”
3. Compare writing a book review with writing a film review. What are the similarities? What are the differences? What information is required for each? Students may choose to critique either the film or book of *A Tale of Two Cities*. Publish the finished reviews online or in a class book. How have students rated the work?

4. Using the Character Chart students filled out throughout their viewing of the film, have students create a social networking page for one of the characters, listing likes and dislikes, friends, relatives, and so on. Working in pairs, have students imagine two of the characters messaging, texting, or tweeting each other, and then write a page of those exchanges. Have the class compare notes on the various ways students represented their character and his or her relationships.
5. With the class, brainstorm a list of themes explored in *A Tale of Two Cities*, such as injustice, love, sacrifice, human nature, cruelty, revolution, and social change. Have students choose one of the themes. Offer students a variety of methods—written or visual essay, newspaper editorial, blog entry, poetry, poster, book cover, song lyrics, slide show, video and so on. Ask students to choose one of the methods to explore and express the theme and its meaning in the book and the film. Have students present the work to the class, explaining why they chose the theme as well as the medium they used. You may wish to gather the class work together to display in class and/or online.

*“It is a far, far better thing that
I do, than I have ever done;
it is a far, far better rest that I go
to, than I have ever known.”*

– SYDNEY CARTON'S LAST WORDS FROM A TALE OF TWO CITIES

RESOURCES

Websites

The Charles Dickens Museum

dickensmuseum.com/

This museum, the only surviving London home of Dickens, opened in 1925. It houses a large collection of Dickens-related items.

David Perdue's Charles Dickens Page

charlesdickenspage.com

Compiled by a Dickens enthusiast, this site includes illustrations, maps, a timeline, extensive Web links, and information about Dickens's work and his travels to America.

Dickens

pbs.org/wnet/dickens/

This PBS site is a companion to a three-part documentary series about the life and career of Charles Dickens. It provides scholarly essays about the celebrated author, lets you test your knowledge of Dickens, explore his city, and find links and bibliographic information.

The Dickens Fellowship

dickensfellowship.org

The Dickens Fellowship is a worldwide association of people with an interest in the life and works of Dickens. The website offers information on local chapters, its annual conference, and the journal, *The Dickensian*.

The Dickens Project

dickens.ucsc.edu

The Dickens Project of University of California sponsors an annual conference for university-level scholars of Dickens and features a student essay contest for high school students.

Dickens 2012 Bicennary

dickens2012.org/learn

This Website, dedicated to the celebration of Dickens's 200th birthday in 2012, has a variety of resources, including a section for teachers and students.

Discovering Dickens: A Community Reading Project (*A Tale of Two Cities*)

dickens.stanford.edu/dickens/archive/tale/two_cities.html

This Stanford University-sponsored site has a special online edition of *A Tale of Two Cities*, along with extensive maps, illustrations, and glossary information.

Project Gutenberg

gutenberg.org/wiki/Main_Page

This site includes online texts of many of Dickens's works.

The Victorian Web

victorianweb.org

The Victorian Web contains a Dickens page that offers essays and commentary about diverse topics related to Dickens's work, such as gender, economic contexts, science, imagery, themes, and characterization.

Books

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CHARACTER CHART

MASTERPIECE™

| Name | Physical Background | Character Traits | Social Status/ Background | Unanswered Questions | Final Judgement |
|------|---------------------|------------------|------------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------|
|------|---------------------|------------------|------------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------|

Jarvis Lorry

Lucie Manette

Dr. Manette

Monsieur Defarge

Madame Defarge

Charles Darnay

Sydney Carton

Jerry Cruncher

Miss Pross

Mr. Stryver

Marquis St. Evrémonde

Gaspard

Barsad

CREDITS

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