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Sample

Prestwick House
Literature
Teaching Unit

Chapter-by-Chapter Study Guide



Les Misérables

by Victor Hugo

- Learning objectives
- Study Guide with short-answer questions
- Background information
- Vocabulary in context
- Multiple-choice test
- Essay questions
- Literary terms



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Les Misérables

Objectives

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

1. define realism and cite three examples from the novel.
2. define idealism and explain how Marius represents this concept.
3. define symbol and discuss the significance of Madame Magloire's candlesticks.
4. identify which characters are compared to beasts and discuss the implications of these comparisons.
5. discuss the reasons why certain characters, particularly children, are compared to angels and/or birds, citing specific references from the novel.
6. create a timeline matriculating the multiple storylines of the novel.
7. identify the moment of Jean Valjean's enlightenment and discuss the significance of the bishop's mission throughout the novel.
8. cite two examples of man-versus-self conflict within the novel and discuss these conflicts' effects on the formation of the plot.
9. define the role of women in nineteenth century France.
10. demonstrate how the novel portrays "...the inhumane treatment of convicts and ex-convicts."
11. cite three examples of the humiliation and shame caused by poverty.
12. explicate one female character's demise through poverty and hunger.
13. explicate one character who is robbed of innocence through poverty and need.
14. discuss Victor Hugo's social commentary as illustrated by the novel.
15. discuss the importance of light and darkness as a theme in the novel.
16. explain why Cosette maintains her childlike innocence and naiveté.
17. discuss which characters display integrity and explain choices using examples from the novel.

Les Misérables

Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. Describe Jean Valjean after he is released from the galleys and explain the inhumane treatment that he endures in the town of D—— because he is an ex-convict.
2. Explain the role of the church throughout the novel.
3. What effect does the bishop have on Jean Valjean, both physically and spiritually?
4. Delineate the presence of the bishop throughout Jean Valjean's life.
5. Given the circumstances, do you think Jean Valjean's initial crime, theft of a loaf of bread, is truly a criminal act? Support your answer with details from the novel.
6. Explain why Jean Valjean spends nineteen years in prison. Describe the effect that those nineteen years have on Jean Valjean.
7. Why does the bishop tell the police that he gave Jean Valjean the silver?
8. How do the following words, spoken by the bishop, affect Jean Valjean's life? "Forget not, never forget that you have promised me to use this silver to become an honest man."
9. What crime does Jean Valjean commit against Petit Gervais? How does Jean Valjean attempt to make amends for this act throughout his life?
10. Discuss light as a symbol of life, hope, and love throughout the novel. How do the bishop's silver candlesticks contribute to this theme?
11. Describe Cosette's life with the Thénardiens. What causes the Thénardiens to treat her as they do?
12. Poverty and need are influences in Cosette's life throughout the novel. Compare and contrast those influences as they affect Cosette's life with the Thénardiens to the manner in which they affect her life with Jean Valjean.
13. Which characters does Victor Hugo compare to birds? How does this comparison exalt these characters above the setting and above the other characters?
14. Compare and contrast Jean Valjean as a convict with Jean Valjean as Father Madeleine.
15. Jean Valjean earns a fortune as Father Madeleine. Just as he benefits from his invention, so do many others. Describe how his manufacturing invention benefits others' lives.

Les Misérables

Introduction

1. James K. Robinson refers to Les Misérables as a “humanitarian novel.” How does Victor Hugo make it thus?

2. Victor Hugo wrote this novel to expose the tumult that was post-Napoleonic France. What does James K. Robinson suggest the novel reflects?

3. After which real people did Victor Hugo model the bishop of D——, the Baron Pontmercy, and Marius Pontmercy?

4. Describe the novel’s success and criticism upon publication.

Author’s Preface

1. According to Victor Hugo, this novel remains timeless as long as which three problems exist?

TRANQUILITY

- 1. What warning does Jean Valjean issue to the bishop as they walk to their rooms?

JEAN VALJEAN

Vocabulary

keel – a portion of the underside of the hull of a ship
ill-recompensed – poorly paid
moroseness – cheerlessness
pruner – a tree trimmer
sullen – angry
tribunals – judges

- 1. Recount Jean Valjean’s life, from childhood to his conviction.

- 2. How many years did Jean Valjean spend in prison, and why was his sentence lengthened?

- 3. What effect did the galleys have on Jean Valjean?

The Champmathieu Affair

A TEMPEST IN A BRAIN

Vocabulary

edifice – a large, complex system of organization; in this case, Jean Valjean’s complex persona

1. Since leaving the bishop, to what has Jean Valjean dedicated his life?

2. Explain the meaning of the following metaphor.

“...all that he had done up to this day was only a hole that he was digging in which to bury his name.”

3. Monsieur Madeleine experiences a strong internal conflict after his meeting with Javert. He ponders, “To remain in paradise and there become a demon! To re-enter into hell and there become an angel!” What is the meaning of this quote, and what does Monsieur Madeleine decide?

ADMISSION BY FAVOR

Vocabulary

assizes – periodic trials held by a high court

1. What are the charges made against Jean Valjean?

A Dark Chase Needs a Silent Hound

GROPING FOR ESCAPE

Vocabulary

espalier – a trellis

porte-cochère – a covered entrance, an extended roof designed to offer vehicles and their passengers protection from the weather upon entering or exiting

1. Why does Jean Valjean leave the Gorbeau house?

2. How does Victor Hugo create suspense when Jean Valjean reaches the secluded corner?

3. Who is the silent hound, and why is he called thus?

WHICH WOULD BE IMPOSSIBLE WERE THE STREET LIGHTS LIGHTED WITH GAS

1. Why does Valjean feel that the galleys would now be "...a life in death"?

2. How does Jean Valjean escape?
