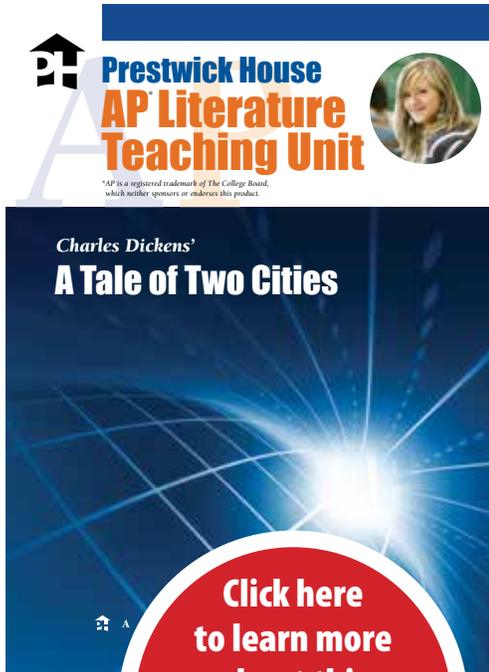




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Teaching Unit

# A Tale of Two Cities

by Charles Dickens

written by Douglas Grudzina



# Prestwick House

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.

## **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.

### 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?

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

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

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

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

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**Chapter III - A Disappointment**

1. Briefly outline the charges the Attorney General presents against Mr. Darnay.

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2. How does Mr. Solicitor-General try to discredit John Barsad's testimony?

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3. How does Mr. Solicitor-General try to discredit Roger Cly's testimony?

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4. In what ways is Miss Manette's testimony against Mr. Darnay both helpful and damaging to his case?

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**Chapter VIII - Monseigneur in the Country**

1. Why is the Marquis annoyed with the Mender of roads?

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2. How did the poor woman's husband die? What does she want from the Marquis?

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3. What family connection is suggested at the end of this chapter?

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**Chapter XVI - Still Knitting**

- 1. Why does Madame Defarge register John Barsad as one of the men who is marked for death in her knitted registry of names?

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- 2. What does Madame Defarge do to alert the other customers that a spy has entered the wine shop? What does the spy say that upsets Monsieur Defarge?

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- 3. What is the “structure yet unbuilt” mentioned in the following passage? Why do you think Dickens makes reference to it at the end of this chapter?

“So much was closing in about the women who sat knitting, knitting, that they their very selves were closing in around a structure yet unbuilt, where they were to sit knitting, knitting, counting dropping heads.”

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- 4. How does the description of the wine shop emphasize the poverty of the residents of Saint Antoine?

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### Chapter III - The Shadow

1. What is “The Shadow” referred to in this chapter title? How is it an example of foreshadowing?

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2. What evidence is there that Mr. Defarge does not want to mark Lucie and her family for death but is doing it because of his wife?

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3. What compliment does Lucie unwittingly pay Madame Defarge?

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4. Why do you think Dickens repeats the message of the shadow’s sinister nature two more times, once from Lucie and again from Mr. Lorry at the end of the chapter?

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5. What does Madame Defarge mean when she says, “It is the daughter of your father who is my business here.”

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6. What is the significance of Madame Defarge identifying Little Lucie as “his daughter”?

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