

# English 12 Honors Summer Reading Assignment

You will need to read *A Tale of Two Cities* by Charles Dickens.

This assignment will take around 13 hours to complete. You should answer the reading questions as you read to make efficient use of your time. There will be a reading test the second week of school over this novel. Spark Notes will not help you pass the test so be sure to read the book and pay attention to the reading questions. The introduction below is designed to help you understand the novel more easily.

The standards addressed by this assignment include the following:

**11-12.RL.KID.1** Analyze what a text says explicitly and draw inferences; support an interpretation of a text by citing and synthesizing relevant textual evidence from multiple sources

**11-12.RL.KID.2** Determine multiple themes or central ideas of a text or texts and analyze their development; provide a critical summary.

**11-12.RL.KID.3** Analyze how an author's choices regarding the development and interaction of characters, events, and ideas over the course of a text impact meaning.

**11-12.RL.CS.5** Analyze how an author's choices concerning the structure of specific parts of a text contribute to its overall structure, meaning, and aesthetic impact.

**12.RL.RRTC.10** Read and comprehend a variety of literature at the high end of the grades 11-12 text complexity band independently and proficiently.

**11-12.W.TTP.2** Write informative/explanatory texts to analyze, synthesize, and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection and organization of content.

## An Introduction to *A Tale of Two Cities*.

When speaking of *A Tale of Two Cities*, Charles Dickens once said, "I set myself the little task of making a picturesque story, rising in every chapter with characters true to nature, but whom the story itself should express, more than they should express themselves, by dialogue." Indeed, the characters we encounter in *A Tale of Two Cities* are subordinated within a plot whose primary (if not sole) purpose is to evoke in our minds a vivid picture of the French Revolution, one of the bloodiest human enterprises in history.

Dickens makes it quite clear that the Revolution was a necessary cure for a corrupt social order. France in the late eighteenth century was ruled by an inept monarchy, at the mercy of a decadent and materialistic aristocracy. The majority of the French people were taxed far beyond their resources, then left to starve. Both justice and mercy were nonexistent. Throughout the first third of *A Tale of Two Cities*, Dickens employs a series of brilliant images (the cask of red wine flowing like blood in the streets and the ragged bundle of a child killed an indifferent nobleman's carriage, to name two) which evoke our compassion for the oppressed French people. However, following the outbreak of the Revolution and the subsequent "Reign of Terror," Dickens does not hesitate to point out (again with brilliant images) the brutality,

injustice, and bloodthirstiness of these same people, who merely replace one depraved social order with another.

The novel is a “tale of two cities” in that Dickens not only examines the internal discord of France, but in addition reveals England’s erroneous belief that the French Revolution was a distant, insignificant social struggle in which England was in no way involved. It is not until her economic interests are endangered that England (personified in Jarvis Lorry) begins to realize that the turmoil in France is a threat to her own social order. It is interesting to note that a similar naivete prevailed with regard to her colonies in America until just before Lexington and Concord.

It is also quite possible that Dickens has his own contemporary England in mind when he wrote A Tale of Two Cities, for the grievance of the French people in 1775-1789 were strikingly similar to those discussed by Dickens in his other novels where he comments on mid-nineteenth-century England. For example, consider his attacks on corrupt courts and/or prisons in The Pickwick Papers, Nicholas Nickleby, David Copperfield, Barnaby Rudge, and Bleak House. Much of what Dickens tells us of late eighteenth century France can be applied as well to the England of his own time. Thus, the “tale of two cities” might also be considered a tale of two historical periods which have, according to Dickens at least, a great deal in common.

The structure of A Tale of Two Cities consists of three separate but related books: “Recalled to Life,” “The Golden Thread,” and “The Track of the Storm.” The first traces the regeneration and restoration of Dr. Manette while simultaneously offering some justification for the revolution which is to occur later. The second book examines the “golden thread” which, if interpreted to be love, binds the central characters, Dr. Manette, Lucie Manette, Darnay, Charles Darnay, and Sydney Carton – together. It is also possible to interpret this “golden thread” to be Jacques’s dedication to the ideals of the Revolution. Quite obviously, “The Track of the Storm” traces the progress of the Revolution itself; also, this third book dramatizes the struggle by Charles Darnay’s family and friends to spare him from the “National Razor.”

A Tale of Two Cities is a historical novel in that its subject – the French Revolution – is factual while its characters are fictional. Dickens fuses several elements (history, social commentary, adventure, heroism, and villainy) in a “picturesque,” episodic plot as he documents the progress of the Revolution and its impact on those connected with it. As Dickens concludes his novel, we are forced to conclude that the “People’s Republic” is hardly much of an improvement on the aristocracy it replaced. Were it not for the martyrdom of Sydney Carton and the promise of a new life for the Darnay family, the novel would end on a tragic note indeed.

Answer the following questions ON YOUR OWN PAPER. Please do not answer on this document. DO clearly label each section and number each question.

**There are three tasks for this assignment:**

1. Keep a record of the page numbers where you encounter references to shadows.
2. Answer the following questions in complete sentences.
3. Choose one of the writing prompts on page 5 and compose a one-page response.

## Before you read:

Answer the following question about themes found within the novel based on your own opinions.

1. The power of love can heal and redeem.
  - a. Do you believe that emotion affects wellness or recovery? Explain
  - b. Think of an example of love and encouragement causing a dramatic change in behavior. Describe.
2. Oppression often leads to revolution, which itself often leads to injustice and abuse.
  - a. What kinds of oppression can you think of?
  - b. What feelings do you think oppressed people have?
3. Individuals' lives are often shaped by events over which they have no control.
  - a. What uncontrollable circumstance of event has affected your life or that of someone in your family?
  - b. Do you believe more in fate or individual determination? Explain.
4. Love is a stronger force than hate.
  - a. What example can you cite of love overcoming hate?
  - b. How can you explain love's dominance, even when both emotions are intense?

Mark the location of Dover, England on the map below



## Reading Questions

### Book I and II Chapters 1-6

1. Describe the conditions of the French peasants.
2. What evidence is there of the precarious state of Dr. Manette's health?

3. Name the first two witnesses to testify against the prisoner in "A Disappointment." Why are the Manettes testifying at the trial? How does Miss Manette feel about testifying? Describe how Dr. Manette appears.
4. What feelings does Carton express toward Darnay in "Congratulatory"? Describe Carton's condition. Why does Carton say he hates Darnay?
5. What is unusual about the acoustics of the Manette's home? As the storm approaches in "Hundreds of People," what does everyone hear? How has Lucie interpreted the sounds she has heard?
6. Why do you suppose the three men in Defarge's wine-shop are all named Jacques? Why does Madame Defarge cough and raise her eyebrows?

### **Book II Chapters 7 – 24**

1. What does Chapter 7 contribute to the reader's understanding of conditions in France?
2. Who is the expected visitor of the Marquis in Chapter 9? What is the condition of the Marquis at the end of the chapter?
3. In "A Companion Picture," whom does Stryver tell Carton he intends to marry? What does Stryver advise Carton to do?
4. What is the significance of the register referred to in chapter 15? Whose names are included in "the chateau and all the race"?
5. Who is the spy who visits the wine-shop in "Still Knitting"? What news about Lucie does he share?
6. At the time of the events of Chapter 21, who makes up Lucie's immediate family? What is Carton's relationship with the family?
7. In Chapter 24, how does Mr. Lorry inadvertently prompt Charles Darnay's trip to France?
8. What is the "loadstone rock" in Chapter 24? How does it affect Charles Darnay?
9. What is the meaning of the note attached to the knife that killed the Marquis?

### **Book III**

10. In "A Hand at Cards" what does the reader learn has happened to Roger Cly, and how does Jerry know? Who is John Barsad in reality?
11. In "The Game Made" what does Carton say that Barsad has agreed to? Where does Carton go after talking with Mr. Lorry, and what does he buy?
12. In Darnay's second appearance before the Tribunal, who is the third denouncer of Charles? What evidence is produced? How is Charles implicated by that evidence?
13. How do the revelations of Dr. Manette's prison letter explain his earlier reluctance to learn Darnay's real name and his subsequent request that Darnay not reveal his real identity to anyone else?
14. What accounts for the different attitudes of Monsieur and Madame Defarge toward Lucie?
15. The motto of the French Republic was "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity." What does it mean? When Dickens uses the motto, he adds the phrase "or Death." What sense does

that add? How does the amended motto help to develop the idea that oppression leads to revolution, which in turn leads to injustice and abuse?

16. How does Dickens develop the theme that the power of love can heal and redeem? The theme that love is stronger than hate?
17. How does Dickens use contrast to hold together the three separate plot lines (Manettes, Evremondes, and revolutionists)? What is the overall effect of contrast?

## Writing Prompts

**Choose one of the writing prompts that follow.** Write on full page about the one you choose. Be sure to place your prompt at the top of the page.

1. Compare Charles's trial in England and his two trials in France, assessing the truthfulness of the witnesses, the quality of the evidence, the fairness of the verdict, and the behavior and influence of the spectators.
2. Shadows are a major symbol in the novel. Explain what a shadow is and what it comes to symbolize. Select two examples of shadows from the book and explain what each means literally and symbolically.
3. Go back to the prereading section of this document. Choose one of the theme statements and explain how reading A Tale of Two Cities either reinforced or changed your reaction to the particular statement.