

## A Tale of Two Cities – Study Guide

Background – adapted from GradeSaver.com

Charles Dickens first published A Tale of Two Cities in 1859. To make the book as historically accurate as possible, he studied his friend Thomas Carlyle’s history of the French Revolution. A Tale of Two Cities differs somewhat from most of Dickens’ other works in that it is a historical novel (set during the French Revolution) and lacks the humor of many of his other works.

The French Revolution lasted from 1789 – 1793, and was essentially an overthrow of the ruling aristocrats by the lower classes. The overthrow was followed by a period known as “The Reign of Terror,” in which a large amount of people, aristocrats and peasants, were beheaded by the guillotine. When the Revolution first started, it gained the interest and support of some radicals in England who also wished to overthrow their monarchy, but as the French Revolution became more and more bloody, support in England eroded.

When Dickens wrote the novel, the French Revolution was still the major historical event that was fresh in people’s minds. Dickens was sympathetic to the plight of poor people and wanted a more equal society, so writing about the French Revolution was a tool for stating his views. In the novel, he gives vivid life to the suffering of the poor and the brutality of the ruling aristocracy, portrayed in the novel by the Evremonde (ev-ray-MODE) family. In fact, he seems to justify the violent actions of the poor. Yet, in fairness, he also illustrates their brutality after seizing power from the aristocracy.

### The French Revolution

Because the novel is historical, and because Dickens assumes his audience has a certain amount of knowledge about the revolution, you need to understand the historical background in which the book takes place. Otherwise, you will be needlessly confused. If your book has footnotes, you are urged to look at those because they will provide you with context that will help the book make more sense.

For a brief summary of the events of the French Revolution, go to:

<http://www.gradesaver.com/tale-of-two-cities/study-guide/section10/>

Vocabulary – for help with vocabulary in the novel, look over the study guide at

[http://www.glencoe.com/sec/literature/litlibrary/pdf/tale\\_of\\_two\\_cities.pdf](http://www.glencoe.com/sec/literature/litlibrary/pdf/tale_of_two_cities.pdf)

You do not need to read the entire guide (you may if you find it helpful), but there are vocabulary words on pp. 12, 16, 20, 24, and 28.

## Unfamiliar Terms

There are many French words and other terms that may be unfamiliar to you in this book. For help with these terms, go to <http://www.gradesaver.com/tale-of-two-cities/study-guide/glossary-of-terms/>

## Characters

For a summary of major characters, go to <http://www.sparknotes.com/lit/twocities/characters.html>

You have been provided with links to various online study guides to help prepare you for this novel, which is a challenging read for 9<sup>th</sup> grade. Please be aware of the fact that all of the sites provided have additional information about the novel, so you have a great deal of help at your disposal. If you have any questions, you may contact me by email at [matthewvarvel@yahoo.com](mailto:matthewvarvel@yahoo.com) or [mvarvel@trinityschooloftexas.com](mailto:mvarvel@trinityschooloftexas.com). Before you contact me, however, please make sure you have searched for the answer to your question in these materials first.

I will warn you that the book starts off a bit slowly, but after awhile the action really picks up and it becomes an entertaining read. If you put some work into it, I think you will enjoy the read, and you will learn something about the French Revolution, a fascinating historical era.