


AUDIENCE **GUIDE**

A NOISE WITHIN PRESENTS  
CHARLES DICKENS'

# A Tale of Two Cities

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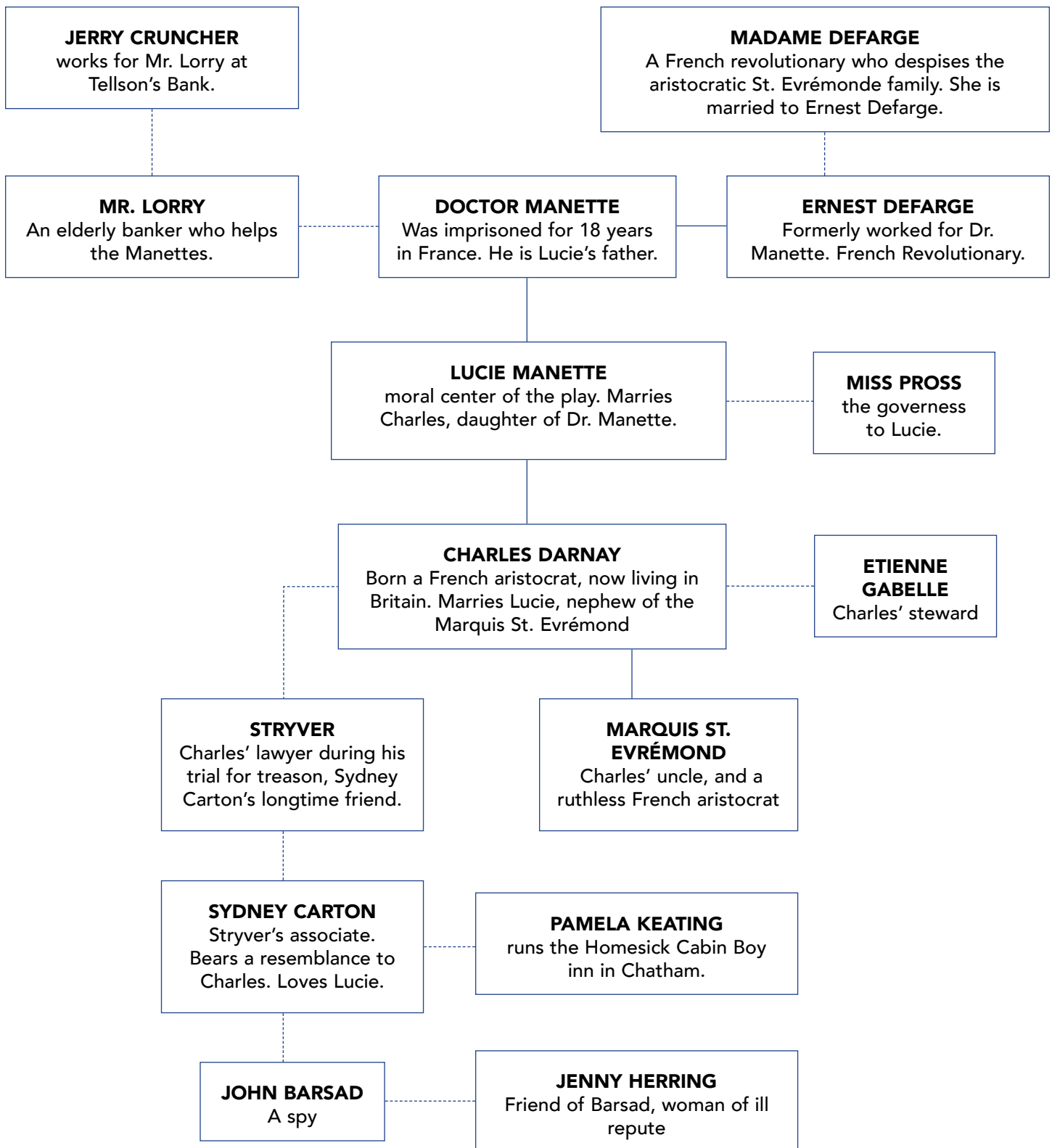
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We are grateful for the additional sponsorship of all student matinees for *Tale of Two Cities* by Anni Low Frandsen, Ph.D.

# CHARACTER MAP



## SYNOPSIS

The play begins in 1780 in The Old Bailey, the Central Criminal Court, in London, England as Charles Darnay stands accused of treason against the English Crown. A bombastic lawyer named Stryver pleads Darnay's case, but it is not until Stryver's drunk, good-for-nothing colleague, Sydney Carton, assists Stryver that the court acquits Darnay. Carton clinches his argument in defense of Darnay in what is famously known as a "Dickensian Coincidence": Sidney Carton and Charles Darnay look remarkably alike, and by pointing this out, Carton successfully undermines the prosecution's case.

Five years earlier, Lucie Manette discovered that her father, whom she had presumed dead, had been imprisoned for eighteen years in the Bastille prison in Paris. On the ship back to London from France with her father, Lucie met Charles Darnay, a French ex-patriot, and the two fell in love. Both Lucie and her father are in court to witness Charles' trial. After Darnay is found not guilty, Sidney Carton escorts Darnay to a tavern and asks how it feels to receive the sympathy of a woman like Lucie—Carton despises and resents Darnay because Darnay reminds him of all that he himself has given up and might have been.

Back in France, the cruel Marquis St. Evrémonte runs down a child with his carriage. Instead of showing any regret after the incident, the Marquis curses the peasant class and hurries home to his chateau, where he awaits the arrival of his nephew, Darnay, from England. Charles Darnay arrives later that night, and curses his uncle as well as the French aristocracy for its abominable treatment of the lower classes. Darnay renounces his identity as a St. Evrémonte and announces his intention to return to England. That night, the Marquis is murdered; the murderer has left a note signed "Jacques," an anonymous nickname adopted by the French revolutionaries.

A year passes, and Darnay asks Lucie's father, Dr. Manette, for permission to marry Lucie. Darnay says that, if Lucie accepts his proposal, he will reveal his true identity—Charles St. Evrémonte—to Manette. Carton, meanwhile, also pledges his love to Lucie, admitting that, though his life is worthless, she has helped him dream of a better, more valuable existence. Lucie decides to marry Charles Darnay. On the morning of the wedding, Darnay keeps his promise to Manette: he reveals his true identity.

The year is now 1789. The peasants in Paris storm the Bastille and the French Revolution begins. The revolutionaries murder aristocrats in the streets, and Gabelle, the man charged with the maintenance of the St. Evrémonte estate, is imprisoned. Gabelle writes to

Darnay, asking to be rescued. Despite the threat of great danger to his person as a St. Evrémonte, Darnay agrees to help Gabelle and departs immediately for France.

As soon as Darnay arrives in Paris, the French revolutionaries arrest him as an immigrant. Lucie, her daughter, and Manette make their way to Paris in hopes of saving him. Darnay remains in prison for a year and three months before receiving a trial. In order to help free Darnay, Manette uses his considerable influence with the revolutionaries, who sympathize with him for having served time in the Bastille. Darnay eventually receives an acquittal, but the same night he is released, he is arrested again. We learn that Madame Defarge, a French revolutionary, is behind the arrest as she seeks revenge against all of the St. Evrémontes. Sydney Carton travels to France to see how he might, once again, save the life of Charles Darnay because he will do anything for Lucie.

At Darnay's trial, Ernest Defarge—Madame Defarge's husband—produces a letter that he discovered in Manette's old jail cell in the Bastille. The letter explains the sordid details of Manette's imprisonment. Carton overhears Madame Defarge plotting to have Lucie and her daughter executed as well as Darnay; Madame Defarge, it turns out, is the surviving sibling of the man and woman killed by the Evrémontes. Carton arranges for the Manettes' immediate departure from France. He then visits Darnay in prison, tricks him into changing clothes with him, and, after dictating a letter of explanation, drugs Darnay unconscious, and arranges for Darnay to be removed from the prison. Carton remains in prison, disguised as Darnay, and awaits execution. As Darnay, Lucie, their child, and Dr. Manette speed away from Paris, Madame Defarge arrives at Lucie's apartment, hoping to arrest her. There, she finds the supremely protective Miss Pross, a friend of Lucie Manette. A scuffle ensues, and Madame Defarge dies. Sydney Carton, still disguised as Charles Darnay, meets his death at the guillotine with the knowledge that he has finally done something of selfless and extreme value. ■

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR: **CHARLES DICKENS**

**Charles Dickens** (Charles John Huffam Dickens) was born in Landport, Portsmouth, England on February 7, 1812. Charles was the second of eight children to John Dickens—a clerk in the Navy Pay Office—and his wife Elizabeth Dickens. The Dickens family moved to London in 1814, and two years later to Chatham, Kent, where Charles spent early years of his childhood. However, due to the financial difficulties, they moved back to London in 1822, where they settled in Camden Town, a poor neighborhood of London.

The defining moment of Dickens's life occurred when he was 12 years old. His father, who had a difficult time managing money and was constantly in debt, was imprisoned in the Marshalsea debtor's prison in 1824. Because of this, Charles was withdrawn from school and forced to work in a warehouse that handled "blacking"—or shoe polish—to help support the family. This experience had profound psychological and sociological effects on Charles: it gave him a firsthand experience with poverty and made him the most vigorous and influential voice of the working classes in his age.

After a few months, Dickens's father was released from prison and Charles could go back to school. At fifteen, his formal education ended and he found employment as an office boy for an attorney while he studied shorthand at night. From 1830, he worked as a shorthand reporter in the courts and later as a parliamentary and newspaper reporter.

In 1833 Dickens began to contribute short stories and essays to periodicals—newspaper and magazine-like publications. "A Dinner at Popular Walk" was Dickens's first published story. It appeared in the *Monthly Magazine* in December 1833. In 1834, he adopted the soon-to-be famous pseudonym "Boz," under which he released his first book, a collection of stories titled *Sketches by Boz*, in 1836. In the same year, he married Catherine Hogarth, daughter of the editor of the *Evening Chronicle* newspaper. Together they had 10 children before they separated in 1858.

Although Dickens's main profession was as a novelist, he continued his journalistic work until the end of his life, and his connections to various magazines and newspapers gave him the opportunity to begin publishing his fiction at the beginning of his career.

In 1842, Dickens traveled with his wife, Catherine, to the United States and Canada, which led to his controversial "American Notes" (1842) and was also the basis of



some of the episodes in *Martin Chuzzlewit*. Dickens's series of five Christmas Books followed soon after, the most famous being *A Christmas Carol* (1843). Dickens continued his success with the largely autobiographical *David Copperfield* (1849-50) as well as *Bleak House* (1852-53), *Hard Times* (1854), *Little Dorrit* (1857), *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859), and *Great Expectations* (1861).

In the closing years of his life, Dickens worsened his already declining health by giving numerous readings of his work. During a reading in 1869, he collapsed, showing symptoms of a mild stroke. He retreated to his estate at Gad's Hill and began to work on *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, which was never completed.

Charles Dickens died at home on June 9, 1870 after suffering a stroke. Contrary to his wish to be buried in Rochester Cathedral, he was buried in the Poets' Corner of Westminster Abbey with the likes of the Brontë sisters and Lord Byron. The inscription on his tomb reads: "He was a sympathizer to the poor, the suffering, and the oppressed; and by his death, one of England's greatest writers is lost to the world." ■

Charles Dickens Biography." Charles Dickens Online. Web.

## TIMELINE OF **CHARLES DICKENS'** LIFE

**1812**—Born on February 7 to John and Elizabeth Dickens.

**1824**—John Dickens is arrested and sent to the Marshal Sea prison. Charles begins working at the Warren's Blacking Factory to help support the family for several months before returning to school.

**1827**—Rejoins the workforce as the clerk of an attorney.

**1834**—Began using the pseudonym "Boz". Meets his future wife, Catherine Hogarth.

**1835**—Becomes engaged to Catherine.

**1836**—The first chapters of *The Pickwick Papers* are published. Marries Catherine Hogarth.

**1837**—The first of his 10 children, Charles Culliford Boz Dickens, is born. *Oliver Twist* is published.

**1838**—*Nicholas Nickleby* is published.

**1840**—*The Old Curiosity Shop* is published.

**1841**—*Barnaby Rudge* is published.

**1843**—*A Christmas Carol* is published.

**1848**—Dickens' sister, Fanny, dies. *The Haunted Man*, his last Christmas book, is published.

**1849**—*David Copperfield* is published.

**1852**—*Bleak House* is published.

**1853**—Dickens gives his first public reading of one of his works.

**1854**—*Hard Times* is published.

**1858**—Dickens separates from his wife, Catherine.

**1859**— *A Tale of Two Cities* is published.

**1860**—*Great Expectations* is published.

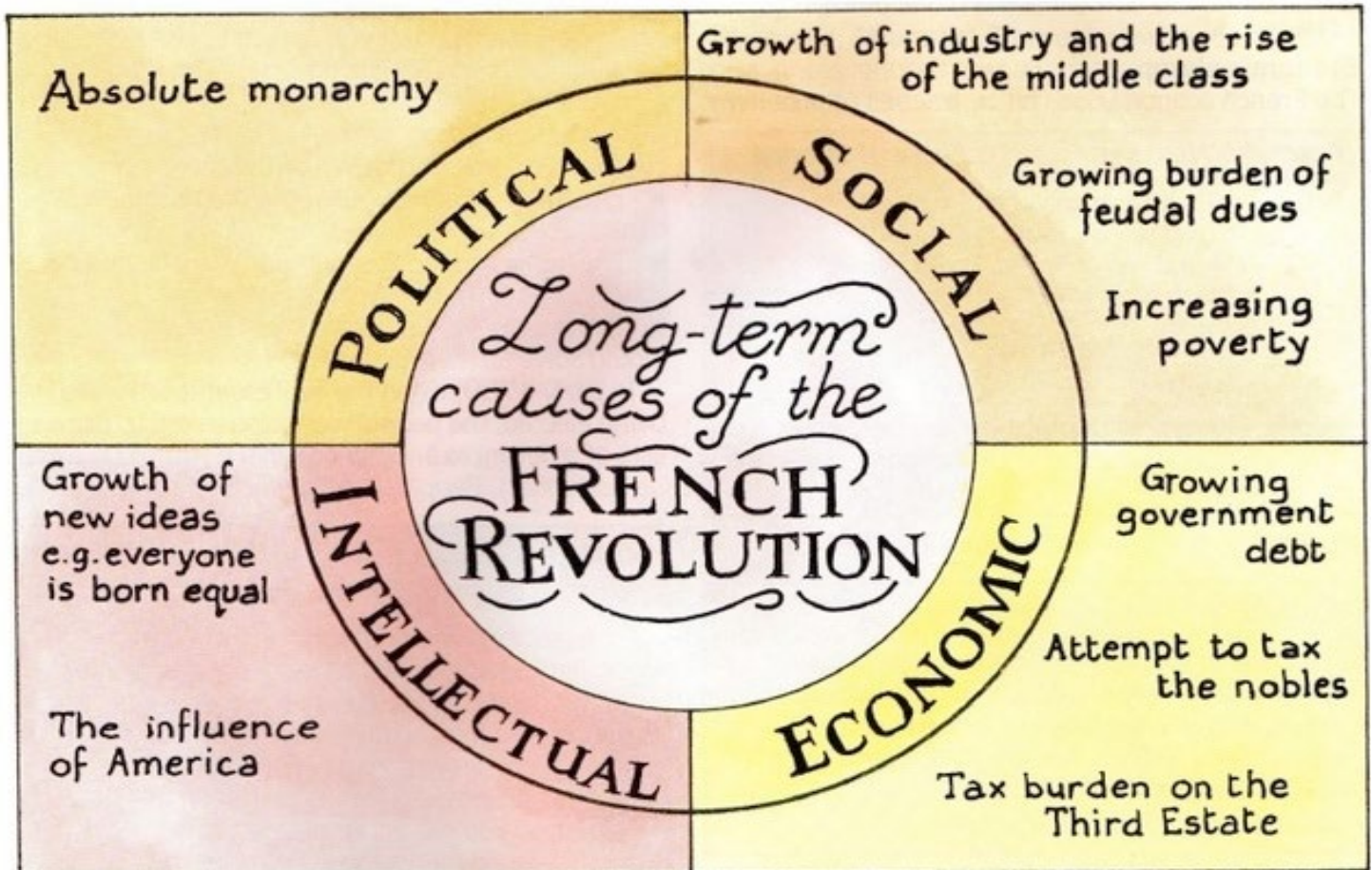
**1863**—Dickens' mother, Elizabeth, dies. Dickens begins work on *Our Mutual Friend*.

**1869**—Dickens begins writing *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*.

**1870**—Charles Dickens dies at Gad's Hill Place on June 9.

Timeline of the Life of Charles Dickens." Charles Dickens Info. Web.

## THE FRENCH REVOLUTION



A key event in modern European history, the French Revolution began in 1789 and ended in the late 1790s with Napoleon Bonaparte's rise to power. During this period, French citizens razed and redesigned their country's political landscape, uprooting centuries-old institutions such as absolute monarchy and the feudal system. Like the American Revolution before it, the French Revolution was influenced by Enlightenment ideals, particularly the concepts of popular sovereignty

and inalienable rights. Although it failed to achieve all its goals and at times degenerated into a chaotic bloodbath, the movement played a critical role in shaping modern nations by showing the world how a government can change by the will of the people ■

Staff, History.com. "French Revolution." History.com. 2009. Web.

## KEY TERMS FROM THE **FRENCH REVOLUTION**

**Bastille:** The political prison and armory that was stormed on July 14, 1789 by Parisians who were shocked and frightened by the king's concentration of troops at Versailles

**Bourgeoisie:** The educated, middle class of French society. They provided the primary force behind the Revolution.

**Committee of Public Safety:** A governing agency led by Maximilien Robespierre that was formed during the French Revolution. This 12-member group had almost absolute power during the revolution.

**Coup d'Etat:** A sudden seizure of a political power in a nation.

**Exile:** Expulsion from a country.

**Feudal System:** A social and political system that dominated the Middle Ages and continued to influence European government systems for centuries after its decline based upon the exchange of labor for land.

**Guillotine:** An instrument of execution that consists of a weighted blade between two vertical poles.

**Inalienable Rights:** Basic human rights that cannot be taken away. In the United States' *Declaration of Independence*, life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness are listed as inalienable rights.

**Jacobin:** The term for members of the radical group that held power during the "Reign of Terror" period of the French Revolution.

**Popular Sovereignty:** The principle that a government is subject to the will of the people.

**Reign of Terror:** The name for the period in France when Robespierre held power as the head of the Committee of Public Safety and used terror to rule—this was a period of mass execution in France.

**Tennis Court Oath:** A pledge made by the members of France's National Assembly in 1789, in which they vowed to continue meeting until they had drawn up a new constitution as France began the transition away from a constitutional monarchy form of government.

**Three Estates:** Before the Revolution, French society was divided into 3 classes: clergy, nobles, and everyone else.

**Versailles:** A summer palace built in the 17th century for Louis XIV southwest of Paris. ■



## KEY FIGURES IN THE **FRENCH REVOLUTION**

### **KING LOUIS XVI**

The King of France from 1774 until 1792. During his reign, France suffered from a severe financial crisis—the French aid to the American forces during the American Revolution caused the French economy to suffer. Because of this, the French people became upset and disillusioned with Louis XVI and revolted against him and the French aristocracy. Louis XVI and his wife, Marie Antoinette, were executed in 1793.

### **MARIE ANTOINETTE**

Queen of France, married to Louis XVI. She was born in Austria, and married Louis XVI when she was just 15 years old. In France, she led a lavish lifestyle and was deeply despised by the people for her frivolity. She was executed shortly after her husband in 1793.

### **ROBESPIERRE**

Head of the Committee of Public Safety for the French government the revolutionary forces. During a period known as “The Reign of Terror,” Robespierre called for the execution of over 40,000 people whom he assumed did not agree with the Revolution’s cause. As he reshaped French society, Robespierre called for a new form of government: The Republic of Virtue—a democratic republic composed of good citizens. He was eventually executed for treason in 1794.

### **NAPOLEON BONAPARTE**

The emperor of France from 1804 through 1814/1815 when he was exiled first to Elba and then to St. Helena Island. A politician and a soldier, Bonaparte rose quickly through the ranks of French army and government during and after the French Revolution, and eventually crowned himself Emperor in 1804. Napoleon thrived for a time but lost much of his army in a disastrous invasion of Russia, and subsequently lost support from the French people.

## WHY DID **THE FRENCH REVOLUTION** HAPPEN?

### Origin of the French Revolution

By 1787, the feudal regime—which had been the dominant social and political system during the Middle Ages in Europe—had been weakened step-by-step, and had disappeared in parts of Europe. The increasingly populous and prosperous class of wealthy commoners—merchants, manufacturers, and professionals, often called the bourgeoisie—aspired to political power in those countries where the feudal system was on the decline. Peasants, many of whom owned land, had attained an improved standard of living and education and wanted to get rid of the last vestiges of feudalism so as to acquire the full rights of landowners and to be free to increase their property holdings. Furthermore, from about 1730, higher standards of living had reduced the mortality rate among adults considerably. This, among other factors, had contributed to an unprecedented increase in Europe's population: it doubled between 1715 and 1800. France, with 26 million inhabitants in 1789, was the most populated country in Europe. Because France was so populated, social and political tensions were more acute there than in other European countries.

It is uncertain, however, whether revolution would have come without the added presence of a financial crisis. Faced with the heavy expenditure that various conflicts in the 18<sup>th</sup> century entailed, the rulers of European nations sought to raise national money by taxing the nobles and clergy, who, in most countries, had hitherto been exempt from taxes. This provoked outrage among the nobility and clergy throughout. In North America, backlash against raised taxes caused the American Revolution: American colonists refused to pay taxes to England. Monarchs tried to quell this type of reaction.

Although scholarly debate continues about the exact causes of the French Revolution, the following reasons are commonly cited:

1. The bourgeoisie resented their exclusion from political power and positions of honor.
2. The peasants were acutely aware of their situation and were less and less willing to support the burdensome feudal system.
3. The Enlightenment thinkers had been read more widely in France than anywhere else.
4. French participation in the American Revolution had driven the government to the brink of bankruptcy.
5. France was the most populous country in Europe, and crop failures in much of the country in 1788, as well as a long period of economic difficulties, compounded existing restlessness.
6. The French monarchy, no longer seen as divinely ordained, was unable to adapt to the political and societal pressures that were being exerted on it. ■

The Editors of Encyclopædia Britannica. "The French Revolution." *Encyclopædia Britannica*. Encyclopædia Britannica, inc., 7 May 2017. Web.

## KEY EVENTS DURING THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

### MONARCHY IN CRISIS



As the 18th century ended, France's costly involvement in the American Revolution coupled with Louis XVI's extravagant spending had left the country on the brink of bankruptcy. Not only were the royal funds depleted, but two decades of poor harvests, drought, cattle disease, and skyrocketing bread prices had kindled unrest among the lower and middle classes. Many expressed their desperation and resentment toward a regime that imposed heavy taxes by rioting, looting, and striking.

In the fall of 1786, Louis XVI's financial advisor, Charles Alexandre de Calonne, proposed a financial reform package that included a universal land tax from which the privileged classes would no longer be exempt. To garner support for these measures and to forestall a growing aristocratic revolt, Louis XVI summoned the Estates-General ("les états généraux")—an assembly with representatives from France's clergy, nobility, and middle class—for the first time since 1614. The meeting was scheduled for May 5, 1789. In the meantime, delegates of the three estates (the nobility, the clergy, and the people) from each locality compiled lists of grievances ("cahiers de doléances") to present to the king. ■



Staff, History.com. "French Revolution." *History.com*. 2009. Web.

## RISE OF THE **THIRD ESTATE**

France's population had changed considerably since 1614. The non-aristocratic members of the Third Estate now represented 98 percent of the people, but could still be outvoted by the other two bodies—the nobility and the clergy. In the lead-up to the meeting on May 5, 1789, the Third Estate began to mobilize support for equal representation and the abolishment of the noble veto—in other words, they wanted voting to be conducted by head and not by status. While all the estates shared a common desire for fiscal and judicial reform as well as a more representative form of government, the nobles were loath to give up the privileges they enjoyed under the traditional system.

By the time the Estates-General convened at Versailles, the highly public debate over its voting process had erupted into hostility between the three estates, eclipsing the original purpose of the meeting. On June 17, with talks over procedure stalled, the Third Estate met alone and formally adopted the title of the National Assembly. Three days later, they met in a nearby indoor tennis court and took the so-called Tennis Court Oath (“serment du jeu de paume”), vowing not to disperse



until constitutional reform had been achieved. Within a week, most of the clerical deputies and 47 liberal nobles had joined them, and on June 27 Louis XVI grudgingly absorbed all three orders into the new assembly. ■

Rise of the Third Estate." *Rise of the Third Estate*.Web.

## THE BASTILLE AND THE GREAT FEAR

On June 12, 1789, as the National Assembly continued to meet at Versailles, fear and violence consumed the capital. Though enthusiastic about the recent breakdown of royal power, Parisians grew panicked as rumors of an impending military coup began to circulate. A popular insurgency culminated on July 14 when rioters stormed the Bastille fortress to secure gunpowder and weapons; many consider this event, which is now commemorated in France as a national holiday, as the start of the French Revolution.

The wave of revolutionary fervor and widespread hysteria quickly swept the countryside. Revolting against years of exploitation, peasants looted and burned the homes of tax collectors, landlords, and the noble elite. In what is known as the Great Fear (“la Grande peur”), the agrarian insurrection hastened the growing exodus of nobles from the country and inspired the National Assembly to abolish feudalism on August 4, 1789, signing what the historian Georges Lefebvre later called the “death certificate of the old order.” ■

French Revolution." *History.com*. 2009. Web.



## TERROR AND REVOLT

In April 1792, the newly elected Legislative Assembly in France declared war on Austria and Prussia, where it believed that French émigrés were building counterrevolutionary alliances; it also hoped to spread its revolutionary ideals across Europe through warfare. Meanwhile, on the domestic front, the political crisis took a radical turn when a group of insurgents led by extremist Jacobins attacked the royal residence in Paris and arrested Louis XVI on August 10, 1792.

The following month, amid a wave of violence in which Parisian insurrectionists massacred hundreds of accused counterrevolutionaries, the Legislative Assembly was replaced by the National Convention, which proclaimed the abolition of the monarchy and the establishment of the French republic. On January 21, 1793, King Louis XVI, condemned to death for high treason and crimes against the state, was sent to the guillotine; his wife Marie Antoinette suffered the same fate nine months later.

Following Louis XVI's execution, war with various European powers and intense divisions within the National Convention ushered the French Revolution into its most violent and turbulent phase. In June 1793, when the Jacobins seized control of the National Convention from the more moderate Girondins, they instituted a series of radical measures, including the eradication of Christianity. They also unleashed the Reign of Terror ("la Terreur"), a 10-month period in which suspected enemies of the Revolution were guillotined by the thousands.



Many of the killings were carried out under orders from Robespierre, who dominated the Committee of Public Safety until his own execution on July 28, 1794. His death marked the beginning of the Thermidorian Reaction, a moderate phase in which the French people revolted against the Reign of Terror's excesses. ■

Staff, History.com. "French Revolution." *History.com*. 2009. Web.

## RISE OF **NAPOLEON**



On August 22, 1795, the National Convention, composed largely of Girondins who had survived the Reign of Terror, approved a new constitution that created France's first two-branch legislature. Executive power would lie in the hands of a five-member Directory ("Directoire") appointed by parliament. Royalists and Jacobins protested the new regime but were swiftly silenced by the French army, which was now led by a young and successful general named Napoleon Bonaparte (1769-1821).

The Directory's four years in power were riddled with financial crises, popular discontent, inefficiency, and above all, political corruption. By the late 1790s, the directors relied almost entirely on the military to maintain their authority and had ceded much of their own power to the generals in the field. On November 9, 1799, as frustration with their leadership reached a fever pitch, Bonaparte staged a coup d'état, abolishing the Directory and appointing himself France's "first consul." The event marked the end of the French Revolution and the beginning of the Napoleonic era, in which France would come to dominate much of continental Europe. ■

Staff, History.com. "French Revolution." *History.com*. 2009. Web.

"Napoleon's Portrait" taken from: <http://www.frenchfries.myewebsite.com/photos/napoleon-bonaparte/napoleon-2.html>

## THEMES IN **A TALE OF TWO CITIES**

### THE POSITIVE OR NEGATIVE NATURE OF REVENGE

Any military strategist or soldier will tell you that “war is not personal,” but for the French peasants—who are represented by Madame Defarge—the purpose of the revolution was based on revenge. Late in the story, under the auspices of a “Dickensian Coincidence,” it is revealed that Madame Defarge’s sister was raped and left for dead by the Evrémonde brothers—Charles Darnay’s father and uncle. Madame Defarge will not rest until everyone related to these aristocratic brothers pays for her loss with their lives. This extends to Darnay, Lucie, and their daughter. Evidence of this is particularly clear in the two court room scenes in France, in which Madame Defarge manipulates the testimony to ensure that Darnay is ultimately sentenced to death

### HOW AN INDIVIDUAL’S CHARACTER IS DEVELOPED OR DESTROYED IN A CRISIS

**“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

*A Tale of Two Cities* is a story fraught with tragedy and loss. We first meet Dr. Manette after his wrongful eighteen-year imprisonment in the Bastille. Darnay is viciously accused of treason, and of guilt by association for the heinous deeds of his father and uncle. Madame Defarge is crazed in her desire to destroy the French aristocracy. The lives of all the characters—both in France and England—are so intertwined, and each one faces a moral dilemma as to how he or she will love, forgive, or destroy one another and, ultimately, themselves. Dickens puts forgiveness and sacrifice up against hate and destruction. Each character has a foil—a character that contrasts with him or her. Dickens employs foil characters to highlight the different actions individuals take in times of crisis.

### DUTY VERSUS DESIRE

**“If you could say, with truth, to your own solitary heart, to-night, ‘I have secured to myself the love and attachment, the gratitude or respect, of no human creature; I have won myself a tender place in no regard; I have done nothing good or serviceable to be remembered by!’ your seventy-eight years would be seventy-eight heavy curses; would they not?”** —Sydney Carton

Both England and France in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century were ruled by a strict social hierarchy and class system, in which each individual knew his or her rightful place within society. The aristocracy was to be revered while the working class struggled to survive. Each character in *A Tale of Two Cities* struggles with balancing the duties of the social classes to which they belong and their personal desires. For example, the selfless devotion Miss Pross has for Lucie and her daughter is the epitome of loving duty; she puts herself in great danger to ensure the safety of her charges. Similarly, Jarvis Lorry—the banker—goes beyond the call of duty in rescuing Manette. Charles Darnay demonstrates his desire to assist his former servant, Gabelle, and returns to France during the height of the revolution to bear witness at Gabelle’s trial. Lucy dedicates herself to her father’s recovery.

### CORRUPTION IN THE RULING CLASS

**“The peasants, Your Majesty, are starving. They have no bread.” “Then let them eat cake.”**

Although its authenticity is questioned by historians, Marie Antoinette’s now famous dismissive remark sets the tone of the aristocracy’s attitude toward the poor of France. While King Louis XVI and all at court in Versailles wined and dined in the most garish manner, the poor people of France were lapping up spilled kegs of wine off the streets like starving dogs. The aristocracy had no regard for the people of France, which ultimately led to the revolution and to their deaths. In *A Tale of Two Cities*, we see the aristocracy’s disregard for the lower classes in Marquis St. Evrémonde’s reaction when his carriage runs down a child. Conversely, we also see resentment the lower class has for the aristocracy in Madame Defarge’s attitude toward the St. Evrémonde family.

## HONOR VERSUS DISHONOR

**“Charles Darnay seemed to stand in a company of the dead. Ghosts all! The ghost of beauty, the ghost of stateliness, the ghost of elegance, the ghost of pride, the ghost of frivolity, the ghost of wit, the ghost of youth, the ghost of age, all waiting their dismissal from the desolate shore, all turning on him eyes that were changed by the death they had died in coming there.”** —*Charles Dickens*

Aristotle defined “character” as the “habitual action of a person.” All themes of *A Tale of Two Cities* can be synthesized in examining the words and actions of each of the major characters. Tests of honor include the honesty, fairness, or integrity of one’s actions. It is also defined by questioning to what degree one’s actions serve the greater good in contrast to one’s self-interests. For example, the French Revolutionaries may be honorable in their quest for democracy, but is executing the aristocracy honorable? On the other hand, Charles Darnay returns to France to help his servant, Gabelle, but he puts himself and his family in danger; is this honorable?

Situational ethics must be considered when judging a character’s honorable or dishonorable actions.

## THE POWER OF LOVE

**“You might, from your appearance, be the wife of Lucifer. Nevertheless, you shall not get the better of me. I am an Englishwoman.”**

—*Miss Pross*

Throughout *A Tale of Two Cities*, many characters put their love for one another above their own safety and well-being. Sydney Carton’s love for Lucie drives his decision to switch places with Darnay and make the ultimate sacrifice. While romantic love plays an important role in the story, we also see different types of love and sacrifice throughout the play. The many levels of love in *A Tale of Two Cities* include the love between parent and child, the love between husband and wife, love of service, and love of country.

**“You anticipate what I would say, though you cannot know how earnestly I say it, how earnestly I feel it, without knowing my heart, and the hopes and fears and anxieties with which it has long been laden. Dear Doctor Manette, I love your daughter fondly, dearly, disinterestedly, devotedly. If ever there were love in the world, I love her.”** —*Charles Darnay*



## FROM PAGE TO STAGE

Dickens considered his novel, *A Tale of Two Cities* “the best story [he had] ever written.” Interweaving one family’s intensely personal drama with the terror and chaos of the French Revolution, it is an epic story of love, sacrifice and redemption amidst horrific violence and world changing events.

In an age when governments across the world seem overwhelmed in the face of increasing unrest, this bold new dramatic adaptation by Mike Poulton seems more relevant than ever.

Mike Poulton started writing for theatre in 1995 and his work includes stage adaptations of Schiller’s *Don Carlos*, as well as Hilary Mantel’s Booker Mann Prize-winning novels, *Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up The Bodies*, with his attention turning to Dickens’ *A Tale of Two Cities* following James Dacre’s appointment as Artistic Director at Royal & Derngate, Northampton, England. Poulton discusses how he always wanted to adapt *A Tale of Two Cities* because it’s such a powerful story and has a very famous theatrical history. He’s hoping his production will make grown men weep and come out of the theatre feeling incredibly moved by the experience. ■

## INTERVIEW: MIKE POULTON ON ADAPTING A TALE OF TWO CITIES

### From Theatre Cloud

**Poulton:** “With all adaptations, you can’t simply put a novel on its feet. You have to find the play within the novel. Working with Charles Dickens, he doesn’t have an input, so I had a completely free hand with the text and I was able to find a line through the novel that I thought would make a very powerful play. I always like to have people on the edge of their seats and Dickens is a brilliant writer; he had this ability to take whole chunks of society and make them real and accessible. I think the reason that he thought *Tale of Two Cities* was his best is the same reason that I think *Tale of Two Cities* is his best in that it’s so dramatic.”

**Theatre Cloud:** How did you decide what to keep and what to cut?

**Poulton:** “It’s always tough; you always end up reading the novel and you think “that’s a wonderful bit” but you know it won’t be part of the play because it doesn’t contribute to the dramatic structure. There is SO much there that is play-like, dramatic. Charles Dickens was a great man of the theater so he thinks in scenes; he thinks visually.”

**Theatre Cloud:** How relevant is the story today?

**Poulton:** “If a novel is a classic as this is, and has survived, it’s always relevant because you’re dealing with true characters and they are as much a part of ourselves as we are today. We all know a Sydney Carton, we all know a Charles Darnay, we all know a Lucie.”

**Theatre Cloud:** What do you see as key themes?

**Poulton:** “Carton is a brilliant man but he sees himself as

a failure, and he sees his ideal reflected in Darnay who is the perfect nobleman, the perfect man really, and of course he wins the girl. So, it’s a love story really, it’s a man [Carton] that feels that he is completely beyond redemption. All the way through the novel we feel that it’s going to end badly, he constantly tells people that it’s going to end badly, but at the end he becomes the hero.”

**Theatre Cloud:** What key skills does an adapter need?

**Poulton:** “You’ve got to go to the theater all the time, and not watch the play but watch the audience, because we do these plays for audiences, and you have to study an audience and know how its going to react so you get to the point where whatever line you write, you know what the reaction is going to be from the audience. And it’s terribly satisfying when that happens.”

**Theatre Cloud:** What should people take away from seeing this play?

**Poulton:** “All good stories are about ‘what are we doing on Earth?’ and so they all ask the question ‘why are we here, why are we here?’ and the answer to that question is: you can never know. And that prompts the next question, ‘so what do you do about it?’ and the answer is: you endure it and you get on and do your best. All good plays have got that ‘thing’ you know, whether its *King Lear* or a Chekhov play, its all about questioning our existence and seeing how we can best contribute to making society a better place and that sounds cliché but its cliché, because it’s true.” ■

Interview: Mike Poulton on adapting *A Tale of Two Cities*. *Theatre Cloud*. 12 July 2016. Web.

## NOTES FROM THE ACTORS AS THEY START THE REHEARSAL PROCESS



### Abby Craden Madame Defarge/ Mrs. Keaton

I feel that Madame Defarge is a fascinating character to work on as she represents a part of humanity that is so present in the pain and troubles in our world today. Single

minded vengeance comes from her pain and feeling of powerlessness. I must approach her with compassion and empathy to embody her. I know I need to honor her hate and the evil deeds that arise from it. But she truly feels justified in her actions, and I believe that she is trying to find relief from her inner turmoil. She acts in an almost animalistic fashion in her fight for survival—it's kill or be killed for her.

Mrs. Keating is interesting to work on as I ponder how she feels being brought into this courtroom as a witness—frightened, excited, flattered? Her sense of herself in this atmosphere affects everything and every way she expresses herself. There is a funny comment about her by another character that she is drunk and half blind and that definitely offers clues on where to go with her. How much is that exaggeration and how much truth will be fun to explore.



### Jeremy Rabb Mr. Stryver

So far, I've been struck by not only the story's deep power, but also its relevance to what's going on around us today. One line of mine in particular has resonated: "You love your country, do you?

As much as you love the truth?" Through Dickens's penetrating understanding of the French Revolution, I'm finding insight into how to make sense of the immense turmoil in our own political climate. In addition, his carefully carved characterizations have brought some clarity about the roots of self-doubt that exist within each of us and the prime importance of courage.



### Trisha Miller Miss Pross/Jenny Herring

We're so lucky in this production to have a rich source text—Dickens' novel—chock full of details to help flesh out these characters and this world. Some of us have

been listening to the audiobook on the drive to and from rehearsals. Hearing the dialects and immersing myself in the specifics of the book help illuminate and fill out the characters—even the ones seen briefly in the play.

This is a true ensemble piece and most of us are playing multiple characters, so a lot of the early work is finding how they are different—the voices, appearance, movement, posture, gesture, behavior, etc. But you can't really choose who you are until you're in the rehearsal room and working with the other actors. That's when the scene comes alive and real relationships form. A shorthand develops with those you've worked with before too, so even in the first week great strides can be made while joking about the band being back together! I'm already having way too much fun.

## COSTUME RENDERINGS | DESIGNED BY JENNY FOLDENAUER

In the beginning of designing this play, I left myself open to the storytelling to find the overall mood as well as to develop my first impressions of the characters involved. Whenever I begin designing I am also influenced by what is happening around me in my personal world and within the outer world. There have been many political changes in our country that have affected all of us in some way as of late, and regardless of where one stands on these matters there has been a new awakening of perspective that reflects much of what the English and French people were beginning to awaken to from all social levels due to the French Revolution.

Within *A Tale of Two Cities*, there are a variety of perspectives that aid in shaping this story and giving insight into history through the Charles Dickens lens. There is a common thread of shape shifting throughout—some characters change their political inclinations and citizenship at the snap of a finger. Not everyone is as they appear. For example, the character Barsad, a spy, changes his allegiance to his country in the play—his only goal is looking out for himself and his profits.

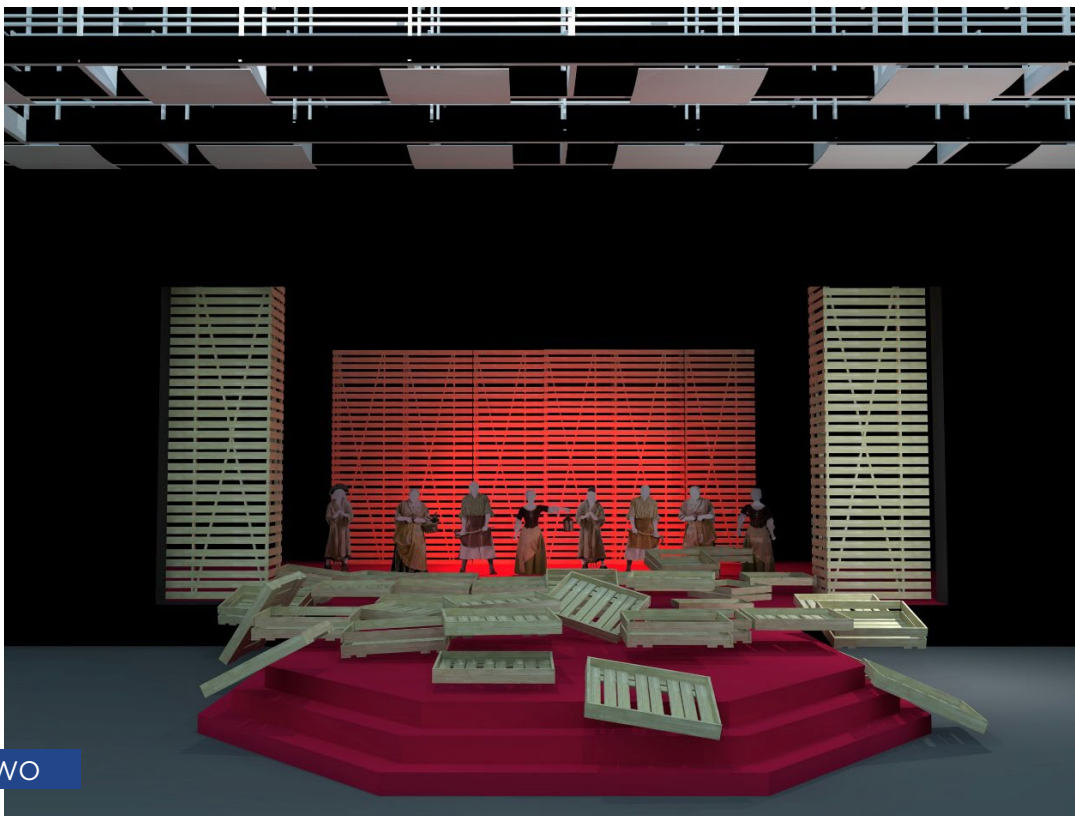
Finally, to visually establish the two cities in this play, I have set two different color schemes. Grays, blues, black, and faded greens make up the color scheme for the more conservative England, while muted browns, dark tans, golden browns, and burnt oranges are for France with red, white, and blue accessories later to add a visual pop during the revolution. ■



# SCENIC DESIGN | DESIGNED BY FRED KINNEY



PART ONE



PART TWO

## **A TALE OF TWO CITIES** GLOSSARY

**Imputation:** An attribution, typically a negative or undesirable attribution

**Unimpeachable:** Above suspicion; impossible to discredit; impeccable

**Scoundrel:** An unprincipled, dishonorable person; villain

**Incriminating:** Accusing someone or presenting proof of a crime or fault

**Perjury:** The willful giving of false testimony under oath

**Infamous:** Having an extremely bad reputation

**Accustomed:** Customary; usual; habitual

**Treason:** The offense of acting to overthrow one's government

**Precedence:** The condition of being considered more important or higher in rank than someone or something else

**Impertinence:** Unmannerly intrusion or presumption; insolence

**Exertion:** Vigorous effort or action

**Effeminate:** Having traits, tastes, or habits traditionally considered feminine

**Vengeance:** Infliction of injury or harm; revenge

**Relinquish:** To surrender; to give up

**Aristocratic:** Belonging to a high social class in a society organized by a class system

**Informant:** A person who informs against another, especially for money or reward

**Remembrances:** Something that serves to bring to mind or keep in mind; a memento

**Denounce:** To make a formal accusation against, as to the police or in a court

**Forfeit:** To lose the right to something, as for commission of a crime or misdeed, neglect of duty or violation of a contract

## SOME CHARLES DICKENS TRIVIA

### LIFE UPON THE WICKED STAGE

Before becoming the most famous English novelist of his time, Dickens considered a stage career. A natural performer, he would impersonate his characters in front of a mirror before capturing them with his pen. He also occasionally accepted roles in amateur productions

and penned a handful of plays. Later in life, Dickens embarked on a public reading circuit, acting out popular passages from his books in packed theaters in both Britain and the United States. He kept up a grueling tour schedule until a year before his death on June 9, 1870.

### ANOTHER TALE AS OLD AS TIME: MODERN ADAPTATIONS

*A Tale of Two Cities* has been adapted into several films across the Western world. Some of the notable film productions which featured Dickens' infamous tale include:

- Three silent films titled ***A Tale of Two Cities* (1911, 1917 and 1922)**
- ***The Only Way* (1927)** A British production
- ***A Tale of Two Cities* (1935)** A silver screen MGM production featuring Ronald Colman which was nominated for an Academy Award
- ***A Tale of Two Cities* (1958)**

It was also adapted into radio shows in 1938, 1945, 1950 and 1989 which included broadcasts by the British Broadcasting Corporation. The BBC also produced a miniseries in 1957 which was based on the three main characters.

The story was also re-embodied in four stage musicals and one opera in 1968, 1984 and in the 2000s.

Susanne Alley, an American author, wrote the novel *A Far Better Rest*; which was based on *A Tale of Two Cities* from Sydney Carton's perspective and was published in 2000.

Edited from: [www.history.com/news/7-things-you-didnt-know-about-charles-dickens](http://www.history.com/news/7-things-you-didnt-know-about-charles-dickens)



## ADDITIONAL **RESOURCES**

### Web resources:

Integrating Literature and History - <http://www.victorianweb.org/authors/dickens/2cities/pva212.html>  
The Life of Charles Dickens - <https://www.biography.com/people/charles-dickens-9274087>  
The French Revolution - <http://www.history.com/topics/french-revolution>

### Films:

*A Tale of Two Cities* (1917) Directed by Frank Lloyd, Fox Film Corporation  
*A Tale of Two Cities* (1922) Directed by Walter Courtney Rowden, Master Films production  
*A Tale of Two Cities* (1935) Directed by Jack Conway, Metro-Goldwyn-Meyer (MGM) production  
*A Tale of Two Cities* (1958) Directed by Ralph Thomas, Rank Organisation production

### Novels:

*A Far Better Rest* by Susanne Alleyn, published 2010, Bella Rosa Books

## ABOUT **A NOISE WITHIN**

**A NOISE WITHIN** produces classic theatre as an essential means to enrich our community by embracing universal human experiences, expanding personal awareness, and challenging individual perspectives. Our company of resident and guest artists performing in rotating repertory immerses student and general audiences in timeless, epic stories in an intimate setting.

Our most successful art asks our community to question beliefs, focus on relationships, and develop self-awareness. Southern California audiences of all ages and backgrounds build community together while engaging with this most visceral and primal of storytelling techniques. ANW's production of classic theatre includes all plays we believe will be part of our cultural legacy. We interpret these stories through the work of a professional resident company—a group of artists whose work is critical to their community—based on the belief that trust among artists and between artists and audience can only be built through an honest and continuing dialogue. Our plays will be performed in rotating repertory, sometimes simultaneously in multiple spaces, and buttressed by meaningful supporting programs to create a symphonic theatrical experience for artists and audience.

In its 25 year history, A Noise Within has garnered over 500 awards and commendations, including the Los Angeles Drama Critics' Circle's revered Polly Warfield Award for Excellence and the coveted Margaret Hartford Award for Sustained Excellence.

More than 40,000 individuals attend productions at a Noise Within annually. In addition, the theatre draws over 15,000 student participants to its arts education program, *Classics Live!* Students benefit from in-classroom workshops, conservatory training, subsidized tickets to matinee and evening performances, post-performance discussions with artists, and free standards-based study guides. ■

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