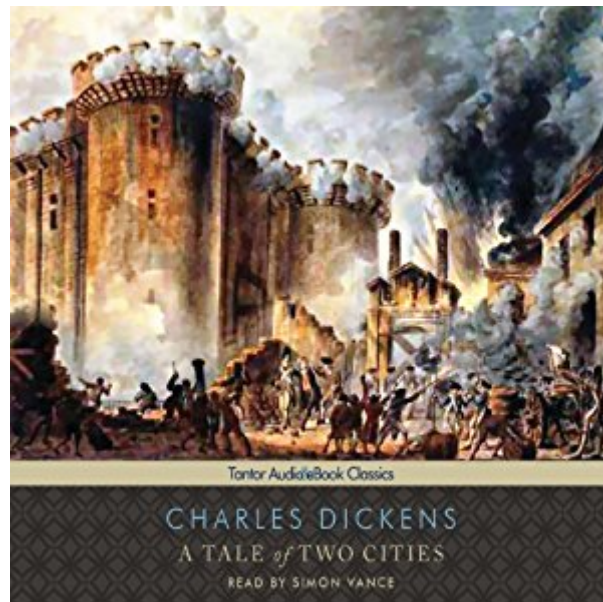


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A Tale Of Two Cities [Tantor]



Synopsis

The story of Lucie Manette - the daughter of an English doctor, the mystifying Charles Darnay - the nephew of a marquis and the unfathomable Sydney Carton - Darnay's lawyer, *A Tale of Two Cities* works its way through London and Paris and brings before the reader the most remarkable saga of love, chaos, duality and uprising, all in the backdrop of the French Revolution. --This text refers to the Paperback edition.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This book is incredible. I read it last year (in eighth grade), and I love it. I love Charles Dickens' language and style. Whoever is reading this may have little or no respect for my opinions, thinking that I am too young to comprehend the greatness of the plot and language, and I admit that I probably do not completely appreciate this classic piece of literature. I do read above a 12th grade level, although that doesn't count for a whole lot. It took me a while to get into this book. In fact, I dreaded reading it for a long time. But nearer to the end, I was drawn in by the poignant figure of a jackal, Sydney Carton. In his story I became enthralled with this book, especially his pitiful life. After I read and cried at Carton's transformation from an ignoble jackal to the noblest of persons, I was able to look back over the parts of the book that I had not appreciated, and realize how truly awesome they are. I learned to appreciate all of the characters, from Lucy Manette to Madame Defarge. I also was affected by all of the symbolism involved with both the French Revolution, and the nature of sinful man, no matter what the time or place. My pitiful review could never do justice to

this great book, please don't be discouraged by my inability.

I was first introduced to this book when I was 14 years old in my 8th grade English class. I found it utterly overwhelming; in its cast, its plotlines, its settings, its themes and most of all, in the intricate web the various relationships create. I only understood three things about this book. First, the two cities are London and Paris. Second, France was convulsing itself with the French Revolution while England was undergoing changes that would prepare it to enter the Industrial Revolution. Third, English in Dickens' time did not resemble English at the end of the 20th century, but somehow seemed similar to the English used in Hollywood epic movies from the 1950s and 1960s like *Spartacus*, *Ben-hur*, *the Ten Commandments*, *Cleopatra*, etc... Years later, I picked up this book and reread it. I considered this a labor, not of love, but of duty. This book is so famous and used so often in English literature classes that I felt I had to read it again for a deeper understanding. What I got from this book a 2nd time around is a profoundly subtle yet accurate sociological and psychological study of what happens to a society and a community that is built on shaky foundations. Specifically, France was an aristocracy where a tiny minority owned all the land. The rest of society was organized into tiers that varied in their opportunities of becoming landowners. Because of this pyramid structure, most of the people hewed to the social order knowing that yes they get crapped on by those above them, but there's always somebody below them to take advantage of. Eventually this social Ponzi scheme comes to a screeching halt with the French Revolution. Enough people have had enough that they decide to start over. In the process a lot of people get killed and a lot of property changes hands. So woven into this story of a society's collapse are individual tales of woe, revenge, sacrifice, retribution, love and lust. Some are wrongly imprisoned or executed, while others willingly trade places to free those who have been marked for punishment. Families are torn asunder, and friendships are made and betrayed. Overall, this book is a classic; though not appropriate for anyone not in their mid-teens yet. Its careful depiction of a society warrants its reading for those interested in 18th century Western history. But it should be read with notes and study guides for its depth and complexity can easily lose the interest and focus of many readers.

The more Dickens I read, the more impressed I become at his skill as a writer. No matter the form, be it short, long, or a monolith like some of his best works, Dickens excels at changing his style of characterization and plot to fit whatever mode he writes in. "A Tale of Two Cities" is one of his shorter novels, and he manages to make the most of out of the allotted space. The compression of the narrative sacrifices Dickens's accustomed character development for plot and overall effect, but

what we get is still phenomenal. "A Tale of Two Cities" begins in 1775, with Mr. Lorry, a respectable London banker, meeting Lucie Manette in Paris, where they recover Lucie's father, a doctor, and mentally enfeebled by an unjust and prolonged imprisonment in the Bastille. This assemblage, on their journey back to England, meets Charles Darnay, an immigrant to England from France who makes frequent trips between London and Paris. Upon their return to England, Darnay finds himself on trial for spying for France and in league with American revolutionaries. His attorney, Stryver, and Stryver's obviously intelligent, if morally corrupt and debauched, assistant, Sydney Carton, manage to get Darnay exonerated of the charges against him. Darnay, a self-exiled former French aristocrat, finds himself compelled to return to France in the wake of the French Revolution, drawing all those around him into a dangerous scene. Dickens portrays the French Revolution simplistically, but powerfully, as a case of downtrodden peasants exacting a harsh revenge against an uncaring aristocratic, even feudal, system. The Defarge's, a wine merchant and his wife, represent the interests of the lower classes, clouded by hatred after generations of misuse. Darnay, affiliated by birth with the French aristocracy, is torn between sympathy for his native country in its suffering, and his desire to be free of his past. "A Tale of Two Cities" is a novel driven by historical circumstance and plot, much like the works of Sir Walter Scott, wherein the characters themselves assert less agency, finding themselves forced to deal with the tide of epic events. Richard Maxwell's introduction to this newest Penguin edition does a good job outlining the themes of doubling and literary influence that Dickens works with. One specific influence I discerned in reading "A Tale" that Maxwell doesn't mention is Edmund Burke's "Reflections on the Revolution in France," which if nothing else, gives the feeling that the rampant violence of the early revolution and the later Reign of Terror has brought about an irreversible change in human nature. While Dickens remains cautiously optimistic throughout the novel that France can recover, the tone of the novel speaks to the regression of humanity into a more feral, primal state, rather than advertise any real hope for its enlightened progress. Despite the supposed dichotomy between England and France in the novel, Dickens seems to suggest throughout that there are no real differences, due to the way that human nature is consistently portrayed. With England in between two revolutions, American and French, Lucie's sensitivity early in the novel to hearing the "echoing" footsteps of unseen multitudes indicates a palpable fear that the "idyllic" or "pastoral" England he tries to portray is not exempt from the social discontent of America or France. In this light, stolid English characters like Miss Pross, Jerry Cruncher, and Jarvis Lorry appear to almost overcompensate in their loyalty to British royalty. In a novel that deals with death, religion, mental illness, I could go on and on for a week, but I won't. One of those novels whose famous first and last lines are fixed in the minds of people who've never

even read it, "A Tale of Two Cities" demands to be read and admired.

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