Introduction to the novel: *A Tale of Two Cities*, by Charles Dickens, creates an environment of intrigue and suspense as the reader follows the lives of the Mannettes, Darnays, and Defarges in the time of the French Revolution. While Book I is a bit difficult to understand upon first read, the novel becomes simpler with Book II. Be sure to allot yourself plenty of time to reread chapters that you find confusing.

Reading Guide Questions

Review the following questions as you read the novel. Printing and answering on paper is not required, though doing so may assist your understanding of the novel.

In order to understand the author, students should read a couple of online biographies of the author before beginning to read the novel.

When school begins, the teacher will distribute questions for students to complete.

**Book I**

**Chapter 1: "The Period"

1. Dickens describes England and France in 1775. How does he compare them?
2. Both kings are described as having large jaws; what is Dickens telling us about them?
3. How does Dickens indicate the severity of social conditions in both France and England?
4. How does Dickens satirize the superstitious nature of the English?
5. How in this chapter does Dickens reveal his advocating social reforms, as well as his hatred of social injustice?

**Chapter 2: "The Mail"

1. On what precise date does Chapter Two open?
2. Why are the Dover mail drivers and passengers so apprehensive of each other?
3. How does Dickens contrast the characters of Mr. Jarvis Lorry and Jerry Cruncher, both employees of Tellson's Bank?
4. What is the message that Jerry Cruncher has brought?
5. What is the rider's reaction to Mr. Lorry's reply "recalled to life"?
6. What imagery in this chapter suggests death?

**Chapter 3: "The Night Shadows"

1. How does Dickens describe human beings?
2. What particulars are given about Jerry's appearance?
3. What is Mr. Lorry's connection with Tellson's Bank?
4. Why has Lorry undertaken such a journey in such inclement weather?

**Chapter 4: "The Preparation"

1. Identify Jarvis Lorry.
2. Why does Lucie faint upon hearing Mr. Lorry's story?
3. How do Mr. Lorry's dress and age suggest that he is, like the bank, which he represents, the very essence of respectability, stability, and tradition?
4. Why does the brawny, red-haired woman get so angry at Mr. Lorry?
5. Why had Mrs. Manette maintained the fiction for Lucy that her father was dead?
6. How does this chapter elucidate Lorry's enigmatic message to Jerry: “recalled to life.”

Chapter 5: "The Wine-Shop"

1. Why does the wine-seller, Ernest Defarge, admonish Gaspard by placing his hand on the prankster's heart?
2. How are the inhabitants of St. Antoine both literally and figuratively "gaunt scare crows"?
3. How are Ernest and Madame Therese Defarge different from the frenzied rabble in their street?
4. What is the significance of Madame Defarge's knitting?
5. Who are seen peeping through a hole in the wall at Dr. Manette?
6. Why has Defarge allowed them to look in?
7. What is Dr. Manette doing when Mr. Lorry and Lucie first see him?
8. Why do Defarge and his friends call each other "Jacques" when his Christian name is "Ernest"?
9. The French King, Louis XVI, though honest and well-meaning, had neither the ability for nor an interest in politics and lost himself in an obsession for locksmithing, a hobby far below his social station. What is comparable in the wasted Dr. Manette?

Chapter 6: "The Shoemaker"

1. Describe Madame Defarge.
2. How do we know that nothing really misses the eyes and ears of Madame Defarge?
3. What is Dr. Manette's mental state?
4. Identify One Hundred and Five, North Tower.
5. Why did Dr. Manette give his name as "One Hundred and Five, North Tower"?
6. How does Lucie react to Dr. Manette?
7. Why is Manette's voice "pitiable and dreadful"?
8. Where apparently does Manette believe himself to be?
9. What connection between Lucy and his own past does Dr. Manette make?
10. How does Defarge's part in getting Mr. Lorry and the Manettes out of Paris indicate his knowledge of the workings of the acienne regime?
11. How is the conclusion of the first book both pathetic and comic?

Book II

Chapter 1: "Five Years Later"

1. What does Jerry Cruncher object to his wife doing?
2. How do Jerry's hands and boots constitute a mystery?

Chapter 2: "A Sight"

1. Identify Charles Darnay.
2. How is Dickens critical of both the Old Bailey and Bedlam?
3. Why are the Manettes in court?
4. What punishment is meant by "quartering"?
5. For what crime is the punishment reserved?
6. What precisely is the charge levelled at Darnay?
7. What changed impression do we get of Dr. Manette?
Chapter 3: "A Disappointment"
1. Identify Mr. Stryver.
2. Identify Sidney Carton.
3. How does Stryver discredit the prosecution's first witness, John Barsad?
4. What are the incriminating circumstances under which Darnay had travelled back and forth from England to France?
5. What is suspicious about the Crown's (prosecution's) evidence?
6. How does Roger Cly's testimony seem more conclusive?
7. However, what inconvenient facts discredits Cly?
8. Lorry's testimony establishes that Darnay was on the Dover-Calais packet; what damage does Lucy's do?
9. How does Stryver confuse the witness who testifies to Darnay's being "in that garrison-and-dockyard town"?
10. Why is Darnay acquitted?

Chapter 4: "Congratulatory"
1. How does Mr. Carton feel about himself?
2. What negative impressions does the reader get of Carton?
3. What suggestion does Dickens implant in the reader's mind by the closing line of this chapter?

Chapter 5: "The Jackal"
1. What name does Stryver call Carton?
2. What words does Dickens use to describe Stryver and Carton?
3. What does Carton actually do for Stryver?

Chapter 6: "Hundreds of People"
1. How does Dickens describe the Manettes' home?
2. Why is Miss Pross jealous of Darnay and Carton?
3. What do the echoing footsteps foreshadow?

Chapter 7: "Monseigneur in Town"
1. Why does Dickens heap verbally ironic sarcasm (e.g., "his sanctuary of sanctuaries") on Monseigneur?
2. Why had Monseigneur taken his sister from a convent and married her off (below her social station) to a very rich Farmer-General?
3. What is the moral climate created by Monseigneur's guests?
4. What feelings does Monsieur the Marquis have toward the child his carriage has run down?
5. How does the Marquis rationalize the accident?
6. In classical myth the three Fates spun, wove, and cut the thread of a person's life — how does Dickens connect Madame Defarge with these supernatural beings from the accident scene to the end of the chapter?
7. How does Dickens describe the privileged class in France?

Chapter 8: "Monseigneur in the Country"
1. What is the countryside of France like?
2. The setting sun's blush on the Marquis' face suggests what fate awaits him?
3. What accounts for the apathetic conditions of the crops, the village, and its people?
4. In the last chapter the Marquis thought of the peasants as rats and dogs, and here he addresses the roadmender as "pig" why is his rudeness ironic here?
5. How does this chapter confirm a connection between Charles and the Marquis?

**Chapter 9: "The Gorgon's Head"**
1. According to mythology, what is a Gorgon? (Research online.)
2. How does the chapter title seem appropriate?
3. Charles visits his uncle the Marquis and informs him that he renounces his name and property. Why does Charles Darnay do this?
4. In the conversation between the Marquis and Charles, Dickens gives a hint that at one time the Marquis was able to have someone imprisoned. Who?
5. What intentions does the Marquis imply he has towards Dr. Manette and to his nephew?
6. How does the note around the murder weapon explain why the Marquis was killed?
7. Why is the Marquis, uncle to Charles Darnay, actually his enemy?

**Chapter 10: "Two Promises"**
1. Why does Dr. Manette not want Charles to reveal his true name?
2. How does Darnay earn his living?
3. Why is it ironic that Dr. Manette refuses to listen when Charles tries to tell him his real name?
4. Why does the Doctor suffer a relapse and return to his cobbler's bench?
5. What is particularly noble about Charles' profession of love for Lucie, made to her father?

**Chapter 11: "A Companion Picture"**
1. How does Stryver view his possible marriage to Lucie?
2. Describe Carton's responses to Stryver's self-flattery.
3. Why does Stryver continually criticize and belittle Sydney Carton for his social lapses?
4. Why does Carton endure such abuse?
5. In what sense is this chapter's title ironic?
6. How does Dickens suggest the cause of Carton's alcoholism?

**Chapter 12: "The Fellow of Delicacy"**
1. Why does Dickens have Mr. Lorry rather than Lucie herself reject Stryver's repulsive, egotistical absurd proposal?
2. Why did Stryver go to Mr. Lorry before actually proposing?
3. How does Stryver react to the certainty that his suit will fail?

**Chapter 13: "The Fellow of No Delicacy"**
1. Why does Dickens call Carton ironically "the fellow of no delicacy"?
2. How is Sydney Carton's love for Lucie somewhat akin to Charles Darnay's?
3. What promise does Sydney Carton make to Lucie?

**Chapter 14: "The Honest Tradesman"**
1. From whose point of view is the narrative of this chapter given?
2. How is this chapter's title ironic?
3. For what reason does Jerry hush up his son?
4. Why is the crowd following the funeral procession incensed?
5. Although this mob is genial, its feelings against the establishment run as deep as those of the denizens of St. Antoine, how is the senseless violence of the Revolution foreshadowed here?
6. How does Jerry apparently dispose of his windfall income?
7. Before we actually see Jerry in his true professional capacity, what clues does Dickens provide to add suspense?
8. Although we do not see the conclusion of the fishing expedition, how do we know something has gone wrong?
9. What purpose to the main plot of the book does this chapter serve?
10. What "fish" does Cruncher go fishing after?
11. Why are Cruncher’s fingers always rusty?

Chapter 15: "Knitting"
1. What two mysteries are resolved in this chapter?
2. Why are the Defarges cheered by the opulence of the Versailles court?
3. Who are Jacques Four and Five?
4. How does the road-mender characterize the grandees of the court?
5. Who was the doomed man the road-mender told the Jacques about?
6. What register does Madame Defarge keep?

Chapter 16: "Still Knitting"
1. The success of the Revolution seems assured because Jacques are in the strategic government offices — give an example.
2. Why does Defarge not answer to the name "Jacques" when greeted by the stranger in the wineshop?
3. What information given by Barsad strongly affects the Defarges, but differently?
4. Why does Madame Defarge wear a rose in her hair?
5. Why is it ironic that John Barsad should come that particular day?
6. Who else’s name is Madame Defarge knitting?

Chapter 17: "One Night"
1. How will the new domestic arrangement for the Manettes resolve the problem of Charles' love for Lucie separating her from her father?

Chapter 18: "Nine Days"
1. Who is to look after Dr. Manette while the young couple is away on their honeymoon?
2. Why does the Doctor emerge from his conference with the bridegroom deathly pale?
3. Why does Dr. Manette cobble for nine days after Lucie and Charles are married?
4. How does Dickens employ Dr. Manette's relapse to generate suspense?

Chapter 19: "An Opinion"
1. What request of Dr. Manette, now recovered, does Mr. Lorry make and why?
2. Once again Dickens employs Lorry to relate a difficult truth: what was the first occasion? How does Lorry handle it each time?
3. What does Dr. Manette allow Lorry and Miss Pross to do?

Chapter 20: "A Plea"
1. How does Dickens characterize the Charles/Lucie relationship?
2. Why, surprisingly, does Sydney Carton apologize to Charles and offer his friendship?
3. Why does Lucie ask her husband to speak kindly toward Carton?

Chapter 21: "Echoing Footsteps"
1. What is the date in this chapter?
2. What is Carton's relationship with the Darnay family?
3. How does Mr. Lorry's news indicate the revolution is beginning?
4. How do we finally get to see Dr. Manette's place of confinement in the Bastille?
5. How does Dickens intensify our repulsion for Madame Defarge?
6. Lucie's fanciful thought years ago of the echoes of a multitude of footsteps becomes a reality in France. What has occurred?
7. What metaphor does Dickens use to describe the mob?
8. Who is The Vengeance?

Chapter 22: "The Sea Still Rises"
1. What is the date now?
2. Why does Defarge hate Foulon?
3. Why is grass put in Foulon's mouth?
4. How is Foulon's punishment yet another example of poetic justice?
5. When Defarge says to his wife "At last it has come," why does she not totally agree?

Chapter 23: "Fire Rises"
1. What is the significance of the blaze the stranger made in his pipe?
2. Whom do the four fierce figures come to represent in this chapter?

Chapter 24: "Drawn to the Loadstone Rock"
1. Why is Lorry going to Paris?
2. Why does Charles offer to go in his place?
3. How does Dickens use the letter to the Marquis de Evremonde to generate suspense?
4. Why does Gabelle request Charles to return to France?
5. The Loadstone Rock was a mythical rock that magnetically drew ships to it so that they would crash — what for Charles is the Loadstone Rock?
6. Why was Tellson’s Bank, London, the natural gathering place of the emigres?
7. Should Darnay have kept his real name and identity secret from his wife, and not told her of his trip?
8. Why is it ironic that Gabelle is being held in the Abbaye?
9. Why does Darnay unwisely feel that it is safe for him to return to assist Gabelle?
10. Why does he feel he must help him?

Book III

Chapter 1: "In Secret"
1. Why is Charles imprisoned?
2. How does Charles come to realize the extreme danger he has placed himself by returning to France at this time?
3. What is the full significance of the chapter's title?
4. Of what is Charles reminded as he paces to and fro in his cell in La Force?
5. Under what charges has Charles been imprisoned?
6. How does our attitude towards Ernest Defarge change in this chapter?

Chapter 2: "The Grindstone"
1. Why does the crowd at the grindstone take up Dr. Manette's cause to free Charles?
2. How is Lorry's exclamation, "Thank God that no one near and dear to me is in this dreadful town tonight" ironic?
3. How does the scene with the grindstone considerably heighten the suspense?
4. Why do the savagely anti-aristocratic patriots agree to help Dr. Manette?

Chapter 3: "The Shadow"
1. Why does Lorry find the situation doubly distressing?
2. Why does Madame Defarge wish to see Lucie and the younger Lucie?
3. Why does Madame Defarge coldly scrutinize Charles' family?

Chapter 4: "Calm in Storm"
1. What change has occurred within Dr. Manette?
2. How many months are covered in this chapter?
3. Why do all the atrocities he witnesses not drive Dr. Manette into another relapse?

Chapter 5: "The Wood-Sawyer"
1. What is coincidental about the wood-sawyer who lives in the vicinity of La Force?
2. What is the Carmagnole?
3. Who is in secret conference with Mr. Lorry?
4. What is ominous in the wood-sawyer's personifying himself as "the Samson of the firewood guillotine"?
5. How do we become aware acutely that this novel was originally serialized when we get to the end of this chapter?

Chapter 6: "Triumph"
1. Why does the attitude of the crowd of the courtroom to Charles dramatically change?
2. Who are Charles' principal witnesses?
3. What does their testimony substantiate?
4. What causes the jury to acquit Charles?
5. As a discerning reader, why do you find Charles' exoneration unsatisfying?

Chapter 7: "A Knock at the Door"
1. How must Miss Pross and Jerry Cruncher perform the household shopping? Why?
2. Upon what grounds is Charles again arrested on the afternoon of his release?
3. What foreshadowing of Charles' arrest does Dickens initially provide?
4. How did Miss Pross always get bargains when shopping despite her total lack of French? What is her attitude towards the French language?

Chapter 8: "A Hand at Cards"
1. Where does Miss Pross find her brother?
2. Who identifies Solomon Pross as John Barsad?
3. Why has Sydney Carton come to Paris?
4. What does Carton want from Solomon Pross (Barsad)?
5. What damaging evidence does Carton hold against Barsad?
6. What evidence does Carton not possess which would be even more damning against Barsad?

Chapter 9: "The Game Made"
1. How does the identity of Charles' third accuser come as a less-than-total surprise?
2. How does Jerry use his insights into society's double standards to defend himself from Lorry's anger?
3. What details concerning Sydney Carton's thoughts and activities build suspense?
4. How does Carton's touching conversation with Lorry give the impression that Carton has had a premonition of death? Note the significance of Carton's speaking French like a native.
5. What arrangement has Carton made with Barsad?
6. Mr. Manette worked to free Darnay during the first imprisonment. Who appears to be quietly working now?
7. Who is the other person that the court claims has denounced Darnay?

**Chapter 10: "The Substance of the Shadow"**
1. Who is Madame Defarge in Dr. Manette's letter?
2. Where and how was the letter written?
3. Since Charles had nothing to do with this double crime, why is Madame Defarge bent on his destruction?
4. Even though his letter ends with a repeat of the curse on the Evremonde family, how does it also explain Charles' very different nature?
5. What atrocities, typical of the more decadent land-owners, do the Evremondes commit in this chapter?
6. Why is Charles condemned to die?

**Chapter 11: "Dusk"**
1. How has Carton changed since he landed in France?
2. To whom may Carton be referring in the closing lines of the chapter?

**Chapter 12: "Darkness"**
1. Where does Madame Defarge plan to end her vengeance?
2. What were Carton's intentions in going to Defarge's wineshop?
3. What suspicion does Madame Defarge, in conversation with the Vengeance and Jacques Three, confirm for us?
4. Why has Dr. Manette experienced a profound relapse?
5. What were the two certificates which Carton left in Larry's care?
6. Why is Madame Defarge bent on denouncing even little Lucie?

**Chapter 13: "Fifty-two"**
1. Why does Carton have Darnay write the letter?
2. Although his three letters indicate the people most on his mind as he awaits execution, whom ironically does he not even recall?
3. Who assists Carton to enter Charles' cell?
4. Charles is reluctant to escape at the cost of Sydney's life: how does Carton force his compliance?
5. What is the significance of the chapter's title?
6. Why does Dickens abruptly shift to the first person plural at the end of this chapter?
7. In the range of prisoners, Dickens gives one whose death at the hands of the revolutionary patriots is merely nemesis, and another whose death is totally undeserved, showing how unjust the Revolution has become. Who are these two?

**Chapter 14: "The Knitting Done"**
1. Why has Madame Defarge deliberately excluded her husband from her conference with the Vengeance and Jacques Three?
2. Why had Miss Pross and Jerry Cruncher been left behind?
3. What extra dimension does the destined confrontation between Miss Pross and Madame Defarge gain by their failing to understand each other by virtue of their ignorance of the other's language?

4. Why is Madame Defarge's going to Lucie prior to denouncing her for "plotting" not wholly credible?

5. In what ways does the reader sense that the revolutionary zealots are going too far in redressing the injustices of the old regime?

6. How does Cruncher change?

7. Why is Miss Pross in a "queer condition"?

Chapter 15: "The Footsteps Die Out for Ever"

1. How is Madame Defarge cheated?

2. What words about the future are attributed to Carton at the end of the novel?

3. After the montage of Madame Defarge's approaching Miss Pross, the climatic meeting, and the unexpected consequences of the struggle, the little scene between Miss Pross and Jerry has provided some comic relief. Does this chapter contain the novel's climax, or merely its denouement? Explain.

4. Who follows the scene of Carton's being driven off to execution with nearly as much apprehension as the reader's?

5. What do Miss Pross and Sydney Carton now clearly have in common?

6. How does the word "wine" in this chapter's second line operate on the reader at a number of levels?

7. What warning does Dickens once again issue to humanity in general, and English society in particular, about the atrocities of the French Revolution?

8. Sydney Carton said he would die young because of a dissipated and wasted life. How was he both right and wrong?