

Charles Dickens's  
*A Tale of Two Cities:*

Questions for Socratic Discussion  
by Missy Andrews





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# QUICK CARD



Reference	<i>A Tale of Two Cities</i> . Charles Dickens. 1859. ISBN: 0-812-50506-9	
Plot	Exiled aristocrat, Charles Darnay, returns to France during the Reign of Terror; without the aid of family friend Sydney Carton, he will be executed, leaving his family desolate. Carton's love for Darnay's wife, Lucie, ennobles him in his quest to save Darnay.	
Setting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The French Revolution (1789-1799)</li> <li>• The Reign of Terror</li> <li>• From London to Paris</li> <li>• Approaching Enlightenment (age of reason and scientific discovery)</li> </ul>	
Characters	Lucie Manette Dr. Manette Charles Darnay Jarvis Lorry Miss Pross Sydney Carton	Mr. Stryver Jerry Cruncher John Barsad Roger Cly M./Mme. Defarge
Conflict	Man vs. Man Man vs. Society	Man vs. Fate Man vs. Himself
Theme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Redemption</li> <li>• Self-Sacrifice</li> <li>• The Nature of Love</li> <li>• Loyalty</li> <li>• The dehumanizing effects of bitterness</li> <li>• Ideas have consequences. (The effects of oppression on society.)</li> <li>• The value of faith</li> <li>• Retributive Justice (Justice vs. Mercy)</li> </ul>	
Literary Devices	Imagery Irony Metaphor Allusion Foreshadowing	

# QUESTIONS ABOUT STRUCTURE: SETTING



## Where does this story happen? (1)

Dickens's story takes place in Europe in a period that spans the French Revolution. The action ranges from London, England, to the bitter heart of Paris, France. Because of the volatile nature of this period, the atmosphere in the story is brooding and portentous, as though some cancer growing in secret must soon burst forth to consume the lives of both the people of France and the story's innocent protagonists. These historic ramifications create a compelling yet hostile world. Consider the following passages:

*“France, less favoured on the whole as to matters spiritual than her sister of the shield and trident, rolled with exceeding smoothness down hill, making paper money and spending it. Under the guidance of her Christian pastors, she entertained herself, besides, with such humane achievements as sentencing a youth to have his hands cut off, his tongue torn out with pincers, and his body burned alive, because he had not kneeled down in the rain to do honour to a dirty procession of monks which passed within his view, at a distance of some fifty or sixty yards. It is likely enough that, rooted in the woods of France and Norway, there were growing trees, when that sufferer was put to death, already marked by the Woodman, Fate, to come down and be sawn into boards, to make a certain movable framework with a sack and a knife in it, terrible in history. It is likely enough that in the rough outhouses of some tillers of the heavy lands adjacent to Paris, there were sheltered from the weather that very day, rude carts, bespattered with rustic mire, snuffed about by pigs, and roosted in by poultry, which the Farmer, Death, had already set apart to be his tumbrils of the Revolution. But that Woodman and that Farmer, though they work unceasingly,*

*work silently, and no one heard them as they went about with muffled tread: the rather, forasmuch as to entertain any suspicion that they were awake, was to be atheistical and traitorous” (4).*

In this passage, Dickens alludes both to the conditions of the poor in France and to their growing bitterness. He sees the coming revolution and its death machine reside in the pre-Revolutionary French landscape. In lines that follow these, he suggests that human life was undervalued, both in France and in England. The severity of the law of the land was a precursor of the severe lawlessness that was soon to be returned in kind.

Later, the image of a wine cask, broken and spilling its contents over the streets of Paris alludes metaphorically to the blood that will soon run through its streets:

*“The wine was red wine, and had stained the ground of the narrow street in the suburb of Saint Antoine, in Paris, where it was spilled. It had stained many hands, too, and many faces, and many naked feet, and many wooden shoes. The hands of the man who sawed the wood, left red marks on the billets; and the forehead of the woman who nursed her baby, was stained with the stain of the old rag she wound about her head again. Those who had been greedy with the staves of the cask, had acquired a tigerish smear about the mouth; and one tall joker so besmirched, his head more out of a long squalid bag of a nightcap than in it, scrawled upon a wall with his finger dipped in muddy wine-lees--BLOOD.*

*The time was to come, when that wine too would be spilled on the street-stones, and when the stain of it would be red upon many there” (28).*

Dickens’s reference to the stained hands of the peasants and their smeared mouths suggests both the animal cruelty that would possess them and their subsequent guilt.

Because of the nature of the period, the setting of the story provides immediate conflict even before its main characters are introduced. Therefore, some knowledge of the period will aid readers’ appreciation. Dickens’s skillfully employs allusions and sensory language to create a back story that gives the reader sympathy for those whose actions will render them repugnant in subsequent pages.

### When does this story happen? (2)

The story covers a period of years in the life of the Manette family. In the opening pages of the story, the year is 1770 and Lucie Manette, the heroine of the story, is a mere 17 years old. Past events going back to 1757 are referred to as the story unfolds.

By the story's end in 1794, Lucie is married and the mother of one child. The intervening years show her passage from fresh youth to mature adulthood. The youthful naiveté of her character works in favor of hope in the story, yet also creates a kind of pathos as she encounters suffering and cruelty. An older Lucie might not have been so ardent, so devoted, so believing.

### Does the story happen in a particular year, era or age of the world? (2d)

Dickens sets his story during the French Revolution (1789-1799), a period in which French peasants, long mistreated by their nobles, clergy, and monarchs, rose up *en masse* against them. Having suffered political oppressions, dire want, heavy taxation, and often personal abuses, their long-suffering expired. With the rallying cry of "*Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité*," the peasants stormed the ancient prison of state, the Bastille, freeing captives and seizing control of the fortress. Here, the aristocracy had confined many whose crimes had been no more serious than offending a noble or failing to pay steep taxes. Having accomplished this, the patriots overthrew the monarchy, imprisoning and executing the king, Louis XVI, and his young wife, Marie Antoinette. Having abolished the monarchy, the peasants began terrorizing the nobles. They erected huge barricades at every entrance to the city of Paris, effectively barring the escape of many gentry. These were arrested and beheaded, compliments of Madame Guillotine, whose bloody rule provoked the term that would characterize the era, the **Reign of Terror**.

England and neighboring European monarchies, however, opposed this uprising. They feared the French Revolution would foment rebellion in their own lands. Yet the revolutionaries would hear no reason. In their own nation, any who opposed their tactics were silenced with the guillotine. Consequently, chaos and lawlessness reigned.

Although the French had hoped the fledgling American nation would aid them in their revolution, they were disappointed. Americans were dismayed by this lawless approach to establishing a new government. American leaders denied aid, stating that, unlike the American break with England, a decision based upon the law and higher Laws, the French Revolution was based upon overthrowing law and disdaining its source in the Divine. Even the clergy of France were not safe from arrest and execution.

During the Reign of Terror, historians estimate over 18,000 people were beheaded. When Robespierre, head of the Revolutionaries, was himself arrested and beheaded for treason, Madame Guillotine was appeased, and this turbulent period drew to a close.





# QUESTIONS ABOUT STRUCTURE: CHARACTERS



## Who is the story about? – Main Characters (3)

Characters in this story include the following:

- |                    |   |
|--------------------|---|
| Miss Lucie Manette | Protagonist. Heroine of the story, daughter of Dr. Manette, and wife of Charles Darnay.   |
| Dr. Manette        | Protagonist. Father of Lucie, newly restored to her after long years of wrongful imprisonment in the Bastille.  |
| Charles Darnay     | Son of a noble French family, who has renounced his heritage due to his family's abusive behaviors to the peasants. Although he marries Lucie, he conceals his real name, Evrémonde, from her at the request of her father.   |
| Mr. Jarvis Lorry   | Employee of Tellson's, and custodian of Lucie until her father is "restored to life."   |
| Miss Pross         | Fiercely loyal companion of Lucie, who cares for her with motherly devotion.  |
| Sydney Carton      | Anti-hero. An aide (jackal) to lawyer Stryver. Although a dissolute character, his admiration of Lucie affects in him an unexpected devotion and reformation of character.  |
| Mr. Stryver        | A one time school fellow of Carton, Stryver has made good by using the expertise and talent of his dissolute schoolfellow. Although he pays Carton, Stryver keeps him impoverished by feeding the sins that beset him so that he himself can profit from Carton's misery. |
| Jerry Cruncher     | Common runner for Tellson's, he assists Lorry in his business. He participates in what he calls "agricultural trades" after hours, exhuming bodies for profit.  |
| John Barsad        | Antagonist. Scoundrel brother of Miss Pross. Completely undeserving of her good will and blind devotion to him. Witness against Darnay in his English trial. Cruncher's intelligence against him proves useful to the Manette family.                                     |
| Roger Cly          | Antagonist. Accomplice to Barsad.   |

M./Mme. Defarge      Antagonists. Citizens of the Republic, these two embittered French workers secretly work for the undoing of Darnay and other nobles. Mme. Defarge, who knits the names of all the nobles consigned to the guillotine into a kind of shroud, is reminiscent of the Three Fates of Greek mythology. Her husband is guided by her, indeed she seems more man than he. She is the sister of both the young girl and boy Dr. Manette attended to, and whose death he witnesses at the hands of Evrémonde, the knowledge of which results in his wrongful imprisonment. As a result of this injury, she is ruthless and unfeeling, malevolent and unforgiving. Her femininity has been disfigured not by her suffering, however, but by her bitter response to it. These two are initially responsible for Dr. Manette's care following his release from the Bastille. However, when Lucie marries an Evrémonde, they become silent antagonists, terrorizing his happiness and the security of his loved ones with their threatening presence.

### **Who is the story about? – Dr. Manette (3)**

One time prisoner of the Bastille, this character is “recalled to life” in his late middle age. Manette is in his mid forties when released from his long imprisonment. By the story's end, he is 62 years of age. Robbed of his sanity by so many years of wasting, he is left to the care of his adult daughter, Lucie, who had thought him dead. The task of drawing him out of the torments of his mind and back into society and reason fall to her, and she eagerly embraces the work. Under her kind care, Manette's reason is, for the most part, restored. He resumes his practice of medicine from a home office and regains a degree of normalcy and health. Yet he is always overshadowed by his past sufferings, and an unnamed but ever present fear. This fear grows over the course of the story, and occasionally causes Manette to relapse into his prior horrors. These relapses seem to be occasioned by recollections of the nefarious powers that robbed him of his freedom so many years prior. During these relapses, Manette forgets his present identity and resumes the mundane occupation of shoemaking in which he employed himself as prisoner of the Bastille. This question of mental health becomes a driving conflict in the story. Will Manette be successfully “recalled to life?”

As a result of Manette's unjust and prolonged imprisonment by members of the French aristocracy, he finds himself above the scrutiny of the French Revolutionaries. Since the story, in large part, hinges on the well-being of this man and pivots on the secret issues of his past, it could well be argued that he is the protagonist of the story.

**Make a list of adjectives that describe the character. (3f)**

<i>kind</i>	<i>intelligent</i>	<i>compassionate</i>	<i>just</i>
<i>fearful</i>	<i>tormented</i>	<i>logical</i>	<i>loving</i>
<i>careful</i>	<i>quiet</i>	<i>educated</i>	<i>feeble</i>

**Of what nationality is the character? What does the character do for a living? Is the character educated? (3g-i)**

Although he makes his home in England, Manette is French. A doctor by profession, he is comfortable enough financially. He is well educated and intelligent.

**What do other characters think or say about him? (3k)**

Most of the characters in the story speak in tones of respect, compassion, and pity for Manette. He is honored as a victim of unjust government and oppression. For this, the French revolutionaries favor him.

**What does the character think is the most important thing in life? (3m)**

Manette thinks Lucie and her happiness are the most important things in life. However, he is plagued by his knowledge of the past and the manner in which it has intersected his present. He longs for justice. That Lucie is foremost in his heart is evident in his secrecy concerning his suspicions about Charles Darnay's family and his willingness to embrace this man as his own son, despite his ancestry.

**Do the character's priorities change over the course of the story? (3n)**

The character's priorities do, in a sense, change over the course of the story. In his early life, while imprisoned in the Bastille without having been accused of any crime, he longs for justice. In anguish at the loss of his freedom and family, he pens a denunciation of the Evrémonde family in his own hand and stashes it in a secret recess of his cell. Once recalled to life, his daughter wed to an Evrémonde, he finds reason to forgive and soften his original lust for justice with mercy. Indeed, he speaks on behalf of Darnay before the sham "people's" court, earnestly imploring clemency for his son-in-law for his own name's sake.

**Is the character a type or archetype? Are his struggles symbolic of human life generally in some way? (3p)**

He is symbolic of the helpless, victimized man. As such, he is at the mercy of Fate, embodied in the Defarges.

**Is the character a “sympathetic character?” (3q)**

Although weak, he is not despicable. He is sympathetic, and readers cheer when he improves and worry when he fails. His triumph is the triumph of the human spirit against forces of evil.

**Who is the story about? – Lucie Manette (3)**

Lucie Manette is often called “The Golden Thread” in *A Tale of Two Cities*. It is she who draws together the three main male characters of the story. Likewise, it is her nature that motivates their actions. Her innocent faith and abiding love for each engenders their loyalty, admiration, and protection. For Dr. Manette, this entails shrouding the details of his embittered past and bearing their implications alone. For Darnay, it means wooing and marrying her, then striving to be worthy of her goodness by means of his own character growth. For the wasted Carton, it means personal redemption and self-sacrifice. The virtues of this character evoke all the goodness of femininity and make her an archetype of true, noble womanhood. As such, she presents an effective foil for the evil Mme. Defarge. However, her character is one dimensional. She is too perfect, lacking the complexity of a real woman. Even so, many consider Lucie the story’s main character, for it is her happiness that all the men in the story seek to protect.

**Who is the story about? – Sydney Carton (3)**

Carton is portrayed as a man just past his prime – intelligent, witty and talented, yet wasted by years of profligate living. It is no accident that Dickens describes him as Darnay’s twin. Carton, at meeting Darnay, despises him as a mirror that shows him all he might (even should) have been. In this way, the two act as foils, one for another. Captivated by Lucie’s goodness, Carton desires to be worthy of her love. Yet he knows his own moral degeneracy too well to recommend himself to a woman of such integrity. He stands in the warmth of her light, but as one despairing of his own character. He considers his own life valueless, but seeing the great value of Lucie’s, pledges to defend it should need arise. Since Carton’s character development echoes the story’s recurrent theme of resurrection and self-sacrifice, and because of the crucial role he plays in the plot, Carton, too, may be argued the main character of the story. He is the story’s anti-hero.

**What does the character look like? Make a list of adjectives that describe him. (3d, f)**

By a twist of fate, Sydney Carton looks enough like Charles Darnay to be his twin. Long dark hair, dark eyes, good-looking – if dissolute. The text describes him as “careless and slovenly” (72), with “something...reckless in his demeanor” (74), “a disappointed drudge... [who cares] for no man on earth, and [for whom] no man on earth cares...” (82).

In light of his service to the lawyer, Stryver, he is termed a “jackal” (83). Stryver says of him, “your way is, and always was, a lame way. You summon no energy and purpose” (86). He is a wasted man with wasted abilities and wasted capacity for love and life. He is described as a “...man of good abilities and good emotions, incapable of their directed exercise, incapable of his own help and his own happiness, sensible of the blight on him, and resigning himself to let it eat him away”(88).

**Of what nationality is the character? (3g)**

Sydney Carton is English.

**What does the character say about himself to other people? (3j)**

In an interview with Lucie, Carton confides, “...the life I lead is not conducive to health. What is to be expected of, or by, such profligates.” And again “I shall never be better than I am. I shall sink lower, and be worse” (144). It is clear from these passages that he finds himself beyond reform. Yet he blames none but himself for his state, calling himself, “...self flung away, wasted, drunken, poor creature of misuse as you know him to be...” and later, “heap of ashes that I am” (145-46).

**What does the character think is the most important thing in life? (3m)**

Keeping Lucie happy and well is the most important thing in life to Carton. He says so himself. “For you, and for any dear to you, I would do anything...I would embrace any sacrifice for you and for those dear to you...there is a man who would give his life, to keep a life you love beside you” (148). Carton’s actions at the story’s dramatic conclusion bear this out.

**Is the character a “sympathetic character?” (3q)**

The character is a sympathetic one. He seems to be a victim of his own weak nature and the debilitating oppression of Stryver.

**Who else is the story about? – M. & Mme. Defarge (4)**

M. and Mme. Defarge represent the malevolent force of the Revolutionaries in Paris. Leaders of the revolt they embody, they are simultaneously sympathetic and grotesque. Violent and inhuman, they present a chilling picture of the fruits of bitterness and hatred, a justice without mercy. This picture is most dramatic in the character of Mme. Defarge. Her character is most revolting because it is antithetical to the nature of femininity. She is brutal, unfeeling and intensely masculine both in her leadership during the storming of the Bastille and her dogged pursuit of Darnay as the story progresses.

Even her feminine qualities are perverted. For example, she is most frequently portrayed knitting, a pursuit associated with homemaking. Yet she knits a shroud – one that contains the names of all who will fall victim to her exacting quest for vengeance. She is, in this capacity, somewhat reminiscent of the Three Fates of Greek myth, spinning out the lives of men, and cutting them short. In this, she makes a compelling foil for the

characters of both Lucie and Miss Pross. Her vindictive quest for justice threatens the safety and happiness of Lucie, which makes her an antagonist in the story.

**Does the author believe this character to be responsible for his own sinfulness, or does he believe him a product of a “negative environment?” (4l)**

Dickens, although he makes Defarge repugnant, also makes her sympathetic since it is the many abuses that she has endured and witnessed that have dehumanized her and created such violence. Would Dickens say she was perverted by her own sin (bitterness and unforgiveness) or by the actions of other offenders? His detailed accounts of the maltreatment of the populace by the court and nobility seem to justify her to some extent. Earlier statements in chapter one also indicate Dickens’ leanings and sympathies with the French peasants.

**Is the antagonist truly evil, by definition, or is he merely antagonistic to the protagonist by virtue of his vocation or duty? (4m)**

Perhaps she merely represents justice without mercy.

**Who else is the story about ? – Miss Pross (4)**

Miss Pross is another character caught in the golden thread of Lucie Manette. Devoted nurse to Lucie, her fierce loyalty persists beyond the boundaries of simple service. Although of a social class akin to Mme. Defarge, she does not consider her role as servant with disdain, but rather as a noble trust. While not physically beautiful, her good character, maternal nature, and believing heart stand starkly against the backdrop of Mme. Defarge. Her role in the action of the story also underscores the theme of self-sacrifice and love.

**Who else is the story about? – Mr. Jarvis Lorry (4)**

Another faithful friend of the Manettes, this associate of Tellson’s has rendered service in the interest of the family for years. Though he is not the narrator, we identify with his perspective: a disinterested yet compassionate third party whose upright conduct and business sense lend credibility to the characters around him. The verification code for this resource is 369027. Enter this code in the submission form at [www.centerforlitschools.com/dashboard](http://www.centerforlitschools.com/dashboard) to receive one professional development credit. He seems the picture of British integrity, strength and leadership, a stoic softened with warmth.

**Who else is the story about? – Jerry Cruncher (4)**

This messenger of Tellson’s and “midnight archeologist” provides much needed comic relief to an otherwise tragic tale. From the exaggerated descriptions of his physical features to the humorous recounting of his familial relationships, Cruncher remains the story’s only clown. He not only uses, but also embodies the concept of hyperbole and lives in the reader’s imagination as a sort of cartoon.

**Who else is the story about? – John Barsad and Roger Cly (4)**

These scoundrels stand initially as accusers of Darnay in the service of his wicked uncle Evrémonde. Throughout the story, they remain wandering ne'er do wells who exploit the misfortunes of others for personal gain. These are antagonists in the story. However, familiar with the underbelly of society and its ways, Sydney Carton exploits Barsad, exacting the duty of an ally from him in his scheme to rescue Darnay from death.

**Is there a single character (or group of characters) that opposes the protagonist in the story? In other words, is there an antagonist? (4a)**

To clearly define an antagonist, one must single out a protagonist. Herein lies the genius of Dickens's story. For if Dr. Manette is the protagonist, Darnay necessarily becomes an antagonist, and vice-versa. Similarly, if Lucie is the protagonist, then both her husband and her father become antagonists throughout the course of the story, creating great tension for the reader. If Sydney Carton is named the main character, then not only Stryver, but also Darnay and the Revolutionaries become antagonists in the story. It is because of all these relationships that the story's conflict is so complex and driving.

Undoubtedly, the greatest conflict occurs as the revolutionaries exact justice from the aristocracy of France. Thus, the Defarges represent the antagonists as they strive against Darnay and his extended family and friends.

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# QUESTIONS ABOUT STRUCTURE: CONFLICT AND PLOT



## **What does the protagonist want, and why can't he have it? (5,6)**

To do the story justice, one must consider its central conflicts from the perspectives of three different protagonists: Lucie Manette, Dr. Manette and Sydney Carton.

### **Lucie Manette**

Lucie wants peace and happiness and the security of her family. Obstacles to her happiness include the following:

- Her father's past, his fears, his need for justice (Man vs. Man)
- Her husband's heritage, his family's part in her father's sufferings, and his own secrecy (Man vs. Man)
- The "footsteps" of many - the vindictive desires of the revolutionaries, especially the Defarges (Man vs. Society and Man vs. Man)

**An example of a story chart based on this conflict is provided on the following page.**

### **Note on story charts:**

In each of the following analyses of the story, the pivotal moment or climax remains the same: Carton's great exchange. Consequently, each story line points to the same basic themes.

### **NOTES:**

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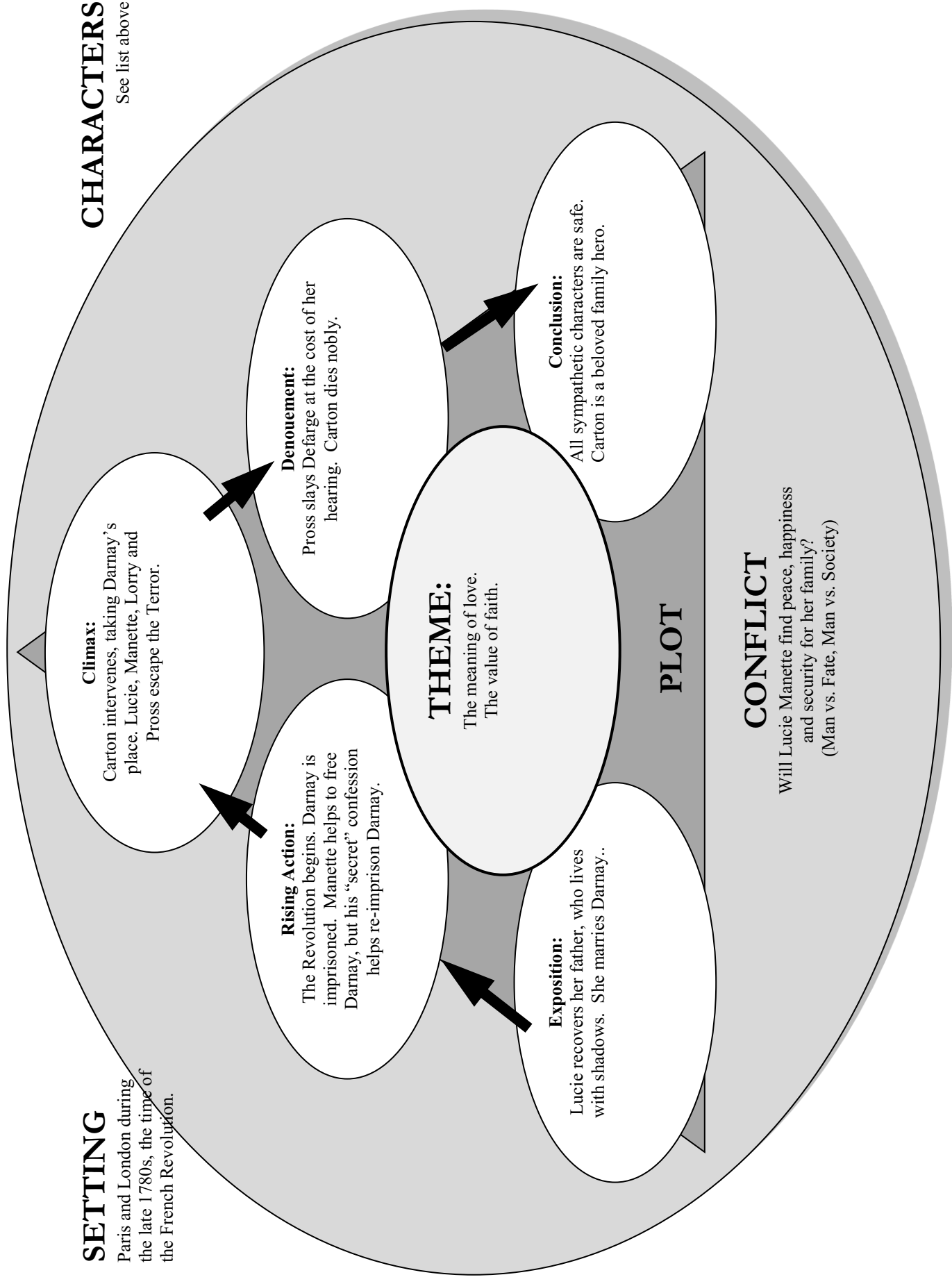
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# *A Tale of Two Cities* by Charles Dickens: Story Chart



**Dr. Manette**

Manette wants peace, the security of his family, and justice for his stolen years. He wishes for the triumph of the truth and freedom from the shadows that haunt him. Obstacles to the fulfillment of these desires include the following:

- His mental stability (Man vs. Self)
- His own fears (Man vs. Self)
- Charles Darnay’s family connections (Man vs. Man)
- The Defarges and revolutionaries (Man vs. Man and Man vs. Society)
- His own desire for vengeance (Man vs. Self)

**An example of a story chart based on this conflict is provided on the following page.**

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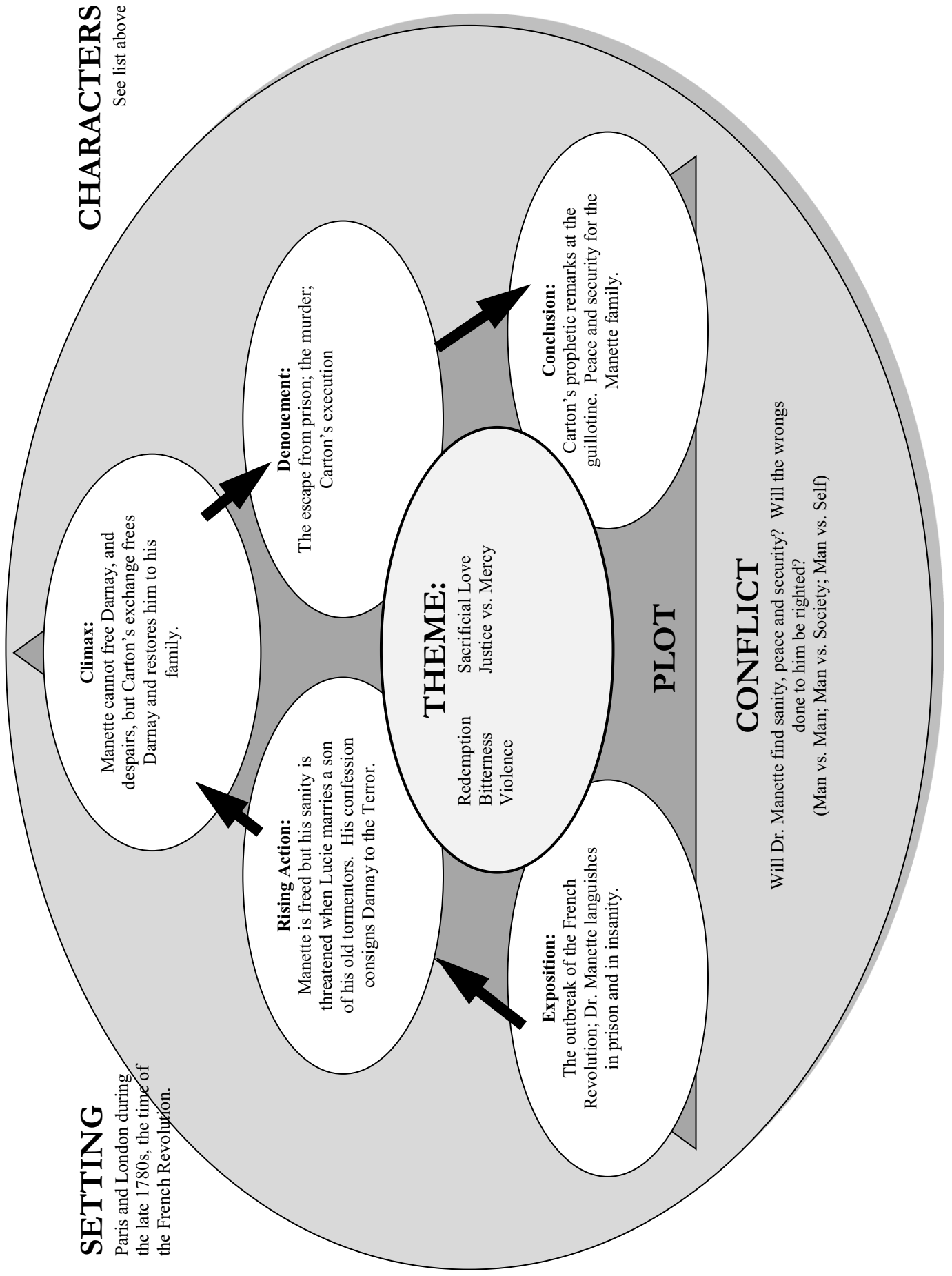
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# A Tale of Two Cities by Charles Dickens: Story Chart



**Sydney Carton**

Carton wants to protect the goodness and innocence of Lucie, to guard her happiness by protecting her loved ones, and to become a better man. Obstacles to the fulfillment of these desires include the following:

- The “footsteps” of the Revolutionaries (Man vs. Society)
- Darnay himself – his stubbornness (Man vs. Man)
- Carton’s own depraved character and the despair that accompanies it. (Man vs. Self)

**An example of a story chart based on this conflict is provided on the following page.**

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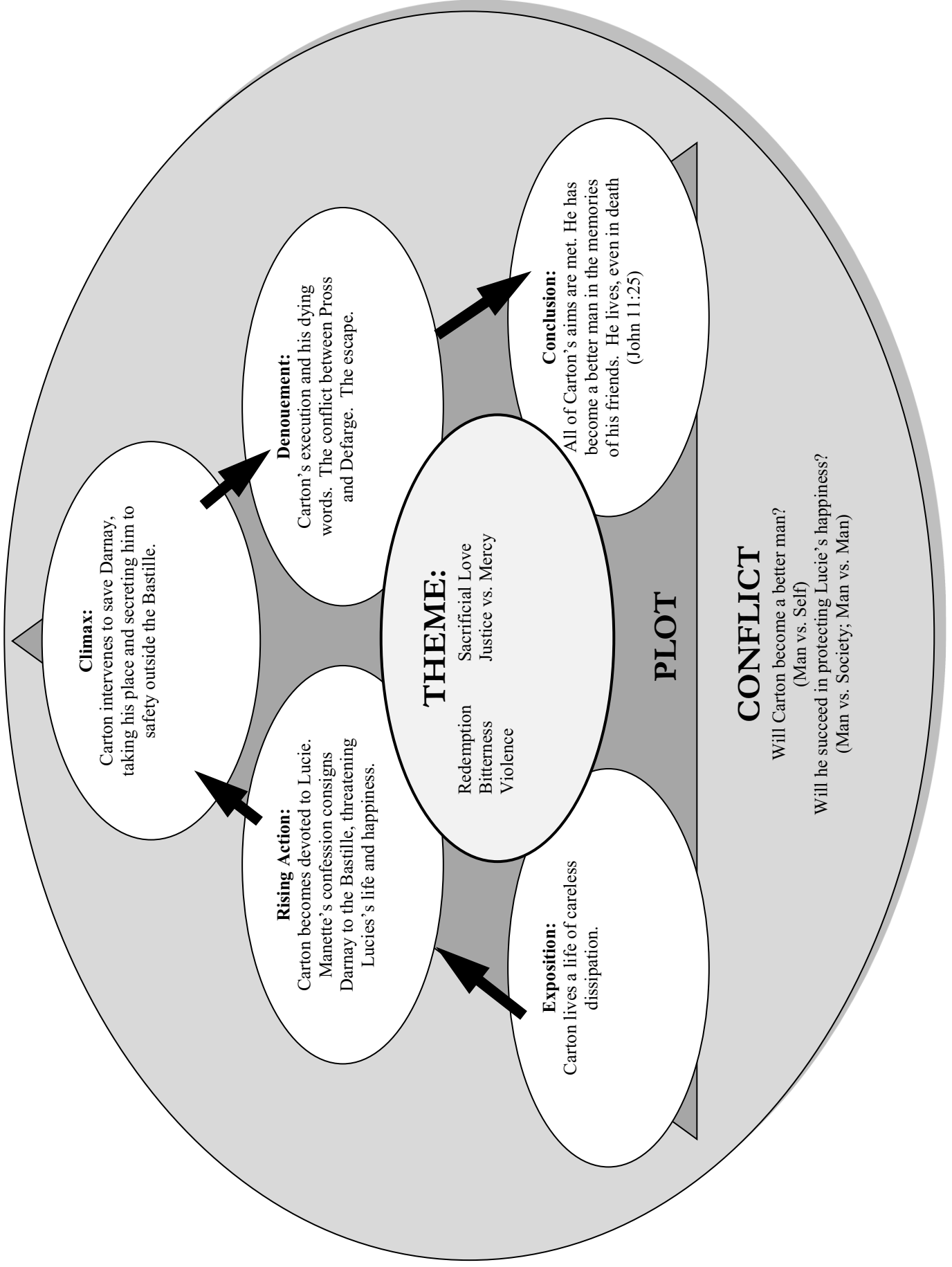
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# *A Tale of Two Cities* by Charles Dickens: Story Chart



**What happens in the story? (8)**

Major events in the story include the following:

- Darnay's English trial, and the acquaintance he makes with Carton there.
- Darnay's marriage to Lucie, and her father's knowledge of his heritage, which causes Manette to relapse into his mental anguish.
- Darnay's summons to France to aid the overseer of his uncle's estate.
- Darnay's imprisonment.
- Dr. Manette's successful plea for his son-in-law's clemency.
- Darnay's second arrest and interment in the Bastille.
- Darnay's sham trial, and the revelation of his family's part in Dr. Manette's past suffering. Dr. Manette's ancient, written denunciation of the Evrémonde family.

**How is the main problem solved? How are the protagonist's obstacles finally overcome? (9b)**

- Carton's resolution
- His interview with Barsad
- His meeting with Darnay in the Bastille

**What events form the highest point or climax of the story's tension? (9d)**

- The exchange
- Pross's encounter with Mme. Defarge; the murder
- The Darnay family's flight with Dr. Manette and Lorry
- Carton's redemption and execution

Should Carton be considered a protagonist, his dilemmas are solved simultaneously. In giving his life for Darnay's he both protects the happiness of Lucie and experiences the redemption of character and life for which he has so desperately longed.

**How does the story end? (10)**

Lucie, Charles, their daughter, and Lorry all escape. Miss Pross follows with Jerry Cruncher. Although she has lost her hearing in the affair, she has saved Lucie's life. Carton meets his end at the guillotine, but in doing so he preserves the happiness of the Darnay family and wins for himself the noble reputation he always wished to have with Lucie.

**Does the ending or resolution of the story make any kind of judgments? (10e)**

This ending suggests that character and self-sacrificial love are more important than life itself.

**What does the protagonist learn? Is he sacrificed in some way? (11d)**

Carton learns that in losing his life, he gains it. As a result of his self-sacrifice, he not only demonstrates redemptive love, but also comes to know its source in the person of Jesus Christ. His own act of self-denial leads him to an understanding of the gospel: “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me, though he may die, yet will he live....” (363, see also John 11:25)

**What do the other characters learn? (12)**

In truth, Carton’s actions improve the lives of all the characters. Not only does his death secure their peaceful lives, but it also earns their undying esteem. This beautifully illustrates that a person is more than what he seems. Characters by this learn to consider a man for his soul, rather than his appearance.

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# QUESTIONS ABOUT STRUCTURE: THEME



## **What do the main characters learn? (11)**

- No one is beyond redemption.
- Man is a mystery and requires compassion.
- Oppression breeds counter-revolution.
- Sacrificial love brings redemption for both the beloved and the lover. The lover is ennobled by the sacrifice.
- Personal bitterness affects more than self and enemy. It grows to consume and defile many.

## **What is the main idea of the story? (13)**

- Redemption
- Self-Sacrifice
- The Nature of Love
- Loyalty
- The dehumanizing effects of bitterness
- Cause and Effect – Ideas have consequences. (The effects of oppression on society.)
- The value of faith
- Retributive Justice (Justice vs. Mercy)

## **What answer does the story suggest for the question, “What is a good life?” (13d)**

Regardless of the protagonist examined, the themes of self-sacrificial love, loyalty, faith, and redemption result. Lucie cares selflessly for those around her, and thereby secures both their safety as well as her own. She affects even Carton in this way, elevating his sinful conduct to noble behavior and inspiring him to true faith. Although he meets his physical death, the author implies his reformed character and his eternal happiness, as well as the good reputation his substitutionary death earns. In addition, Carton’s act of selflessness in taking Darnay’s place exemplifies his own self-sacrificial love. In this, Carton is a sort of a Christ-figure. Likewise, Dr. Manette denies himself the natural feelings of revulsion surrounding the discovery of Darnay’s heritage. He thereby secures his daughter’s peace and prosperity. In turn, Miss Pross is fiercely loyal, the picture of a devoted servant. She defends Lucie with her own life, losing her hearing in



the process. Time and again, the story's major relationships and events underscore the nature of redemptive love, suggesting that a good life is a life characterized by sacrifice for loved ones.

**What aspect of the human condition is brought to light and wondered at in this story? (13e)**

From Manette's forgiveness for Darnay's shocking revelation of his heritage to the Defarge's merciless brutality, this story demonstrates the extremes of the human condition. Where injustice and want produce monstrous vengefulness in one, another responds with brokenness and charity. With his characters Manette and Carton, Dickens highlights the nature of forgiveness and love's startling, redemptive power.

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# QUESTIONS ABOUT STYLE: LITERARY DEVICES



**Does the author use descriptions and comparisons to create pictures in the reader's mind?  
(16)**

## **Imagery**

The broken wine cask spilling wine and the tigerish smears of the citizens drinking from puddles in the street depict a barbaric populace who would similarly imbibe of the spilled blood of their aristocratic countrymen.

## **Irony**

The circumstances brought to bear upon Manette in the second courtroom scene when his ancient letter is read, denouncing his son-in-law, is an example of circumstantial irony. It is with his own words that the Defarges bring judgment and a second ruin upon his family.

## **Metaphor**

Mme. Defarge's knitting is a shroud.

**Does the author use events in the story to communicate a theme that goes beyond them in some way? (17)**

## **Allusion**

Dickens makes use of a plethora of allusions in chapter one of his story. By this, he demonstrates the similarities between both the class system and the courts of England and France. In this manner he warns his own countrymen against the disasters visited upon the French aristocrats during the Revolution, disasters brought upon them by their own corrupt use of power and force.

## **Foreshadowing**

Several instances of foreshadowing exist within the story. Some of the strongest include Dickens's first descriptions of the French countryside and its inhabitants, incubating revolution. The image of the farmer's cart put to a malevolent use, the towering figure of Madame Guillotine, and the image of poor countrymen, faces smeared tigerishly with wine spilled upon the city streets all bespeak of the violence revolution will bring.

Another example occurs when Carton, Darnay, and Lorry are enjoying an evening with the Manettes. Lucie draws attention to a multitude of footsteps echoing in the courtyard outside their residence, fancifully suggesting them to be those of unknown masses of people that will come into their lives in the future. Carton replies that he takes

them to himself, thereupon a violent rainstorm follows. Again, Carton’s footsteps beat out “I am the resurrection and the life...” as he walks resolutely through the streets of Paris on his final evening, suggesting both the sacrifice he intends and his own likely profit.

Dickens employs foreshadowing abundantly – it would be virtually impossible to list each instance. His placement of this device underscores his themes and informs the development of both his plot and characters.

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# QUESTIONS ABOUT CONTEXT: AUTHOR



**Who is the author? (18)**

Charles Dickens was born in 1812 and lived until 1870. An Englishman, he grew up in the Victorian era. Common issues in that period include child labor, urbanization, industrialization, and the conditions of the middle class man. His own father’s imprisonment for unpaid debts led to his forced labor in a blacking factory when he was only 12. The plight of innocent children in the city was subsequently a common theme in many of his novels. His novels *Oliver Twist*, *David Copperfield*, and *Great Expectations* are some of these. Other great novels by Dickens include *The Pickwick Papers*, *Nicholas Nickleby*, *A Christmas Carol*, *Bleak House*, and *Hard Times*. These he published in installments in monthly magazines.

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# SUGGESTIONS FOR WRITING ASSIGNMENTS



1. Compare and contrast Sydney Carton and Charles Darnay.
2. Compare and contrast Miss Pross and Madame Defarge.
3. Describe the nature and ramifications of bitterness as presented in this story. Consider Madame Defarge and Dr. Manette as examples. What does Dickens suggest about the possible results of bitterness?
4. Since ancient times, writers have explored the idea of the “life well lived.” The Greeks of Homer’s day equated this idea with *kleos*, or glory. How does Dickens portray the life well lived?
5. Dickens begins his novel with an extended comparison of the two cities in question. Compare and contrast Dickens’ descriptions of London and Paris on the eve of the French Revolution. What does Dickens mean by the famous phrase, “it was the best of times, it was the worst of times?”
6. One of Dickens’ themes is the idea that it is impossible to really know any person. He holds that each man is full of secrets. (11) How does the novel bear this idea out?
7. Compare and contrast the women in *A Tale of Two Cities*. What does Dickens conceive their natural role to be? What does Dickens revere as the best qualities of womanhood? How do the female characters in his story represent or pervert this idea?
8. Discuss the theme of resurrection in this story. What characters are “recalled to life?” How?
9. Discuss Dickens’ views of the French Revolution as expressed in his novel. Does he suggest that it was avoidable or inevitable? Why? How does he portray peasants, revolutionaries and aristocrats in this novel? What does his story say about that famous revolutionary concept, the “rights of man?”

*A Tale of Two Cities* by Charles Dickens: Story Chart

