

Alliance Theatre

Institute

Study Guide

A Tale of Two Cities

Created as part of the Alliance Theatre's Dramaturgy by Students Program

By: Pope High School Students

with Lamar Alonzo Hardy, Teaching Artist

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By Charles Dickens

Adapted By Brendan Pelsue

Directed By Leroa Morris

Alliance Theatre Coca-Cola Stage

February 21- March 17, 2024

Best enjoyed by audiences 13+

World Premiere

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Georgia Standards of Excellence

English Language Arts (Grades 9-12)

- ELAGSE9-10RL3** Analyze how complex characters (e.g., those with multiple or conflicting motivations) develop over the course of a text, interact with other characters, advance the plot and develop the theme.
- ELAGSE9-10RL9** Analyze how an author draws on source material in a specific work (e.g., how Shakespeare treats a theme or topic from Ovid or the Bible or how a later author draws on a play by Shakespeare).
- ELAGSE11-12RL7** Analyze multiple interpretations of a story, drama, or poem (e.g., recorded or live production of a play or recorded novel or poetry), evaluate how each version interprets the source text. (Include at least one play by Shakespeare as well as one play by an American dramatist.)
- ELAGSE11-12RL9** Demonstrate knowledge of eighteenth-, nineteenth- and early twentieth-century foundational works (of American Literature, British Literature, World Literature, or Multicultural Literature), including how two or more texts from the same period treat similar themes or topics.

Social Studies

SSWH14 Analyze the Age of Revolutions.

- Examine absolutism through a comparison of the reigns of Louis XIV and Tsar Peter the Great.
- Identify the causes and results of the revolutions in England (1689), United States (1776), France (1789), Haiti (1791), and Latin America (1808-1825).
- Explain Napoleon's rise to power, the role of geography in his defeat, and the consequences of France's defeat for Europe.

Theater

TAHSA.RE.1 Engage actively and appropriately as an audience member.

- Examine and reflect on the relationship between actor and live audience in historical and contemporary performances.

TAHSA.CN.2 Examine the role of theatre in a societal, cultural, and historical context.

- Examine and apply theatrical theories, performances, and conventions from a variety of theatrical literature, historical periods, and cultures.

Dramatic Writing

TAHSTL.RE.1 Evaluate various aspects of dramatic arts literature using appropriate supporting evidence.

- Compare and summarize theatre literature from various historical periods, cultures, and styles.
- Analyze how an author's choices concerning how to structure a text, order events within it (e.g., parallel plots), and manipulate time (e.g., pacing, flashbacks) create such effects as mystery, tension, or surprise.
- Analyze a particular point of view or cultural experience reflected in a work of literature from outside the United States, drawing on a wide reading of world literature.
- Analyze how an author draws on and transforms source material in a specific work (e.g., how Shakespeare treats a theme or topic from Ovid or the Bible or how a later author draws on a play by Shakespeare)

About the Director & Playwright:



Leora Morris



Brendan Pelsue

Leora Morris is honored to be back at the Alliance after previously directing *A Christmas Carol*, *A Christmas Carol: A Live Radio Play*, *Naked Mole Rat Gets Dressed*, *Ride the Cyclone*, *Winnie-the-Pooh*, *Crossing Delancey*, *The Dancing Granny*, and *Hey Willy, See the Pyramids*. Other directing credits include *The Sound Inside*, *Knives in Hens*, *Orphans* (Coal Mine Theatre, Toronto); *The Philosopher's Wife* (Toronto); *Labour of Love* (Olney Theatre Center); *Spring Awakening* (Connecticut College); *The Wolves* (University of British Columbia), *He Left Quietly* (2014 SummerWorks Best Production Award, Toronto); *Amy and the Orphans*, *Women Beware Women*, *King John* (Yale School of Drama); *The Bitter Tears of Petra von Kant*, *love holds a lamp in this little room* (Yale Cabaret). Awards/Fellowships: Toronto's Ken MacDougall Award, Yale Julian Milton Kaufman Prize in Directing, O'Neill/NNPN National Directing Fellow. Leora was shortlisted for the international 2020 Rolex Mentor and Protégé Prize, and is currently a Public Humanities Scholar at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, Canada, where she is an assistant professor in Directing and Acting. MFA Directing, Yale School of Drama. www.leoramorris.com

Brendan Pelsue is a playwright, librettist, and translator. His play *Wellesley Girl* premiered at the Humana Festival of New American Plays. *Hagoromo*, a dance-opera piece for which he wrote the libretto, appeared at the Brooklyn Academy of Music. Recent projects include a new translation and adaptation of Molière's *Don Juan* at Westport Country Playhouse, and *Read to Me* at Portland Stage, where he won the Clauder Prize. Commissions include South Coast Repertory, American Opera Projects, Westport Country Playhouse, the Alliance Theatre, and the Actors Theatre of Louisville. Brendan was a 2023 MacDowell Fellow and a 2017 artist-in-residence at Chateau de la Napoule, France. He will be a resident artist at Green College, University of British Columbia, in Spring 2024. Originally from Newburyport, MA, he received his MFA from Yale School of Drama and his BA from Brown University. He teaches at Rutgers University. www.brendanpelsue.com

Creation

Who is Charles Dickens?



Charles John Huffman Dickens was born February 7th, 18th in Landport, Portsmouth, United Kingdom, and was the eldest brother to nine other children. Charles grew up in a somewhat poor household. Charles had to withdraw from school and work at a factory when he was 12 years old as his father was sent to prison for debt. After his father's release from prison, Charles would return back to school. His schooling would not be long as Charles became a clerk in a solicitors office at the age of 15. Charles would gain knowledge of the legal world that he would often use in his novels. He would later be a reporter and part of a newspaper company as a journalist as well, the *Morning Chronicle*. Charles was drawn to theater and nearly became a professional actor in 1832. In 1833, Charles began writing descriptive essays to magazines and newspapers. This caught the attention of a few publishers and was reprinted as *Sketches by Boz* in Feb 1836. Charles continued to write for numerous magazine companies such as *The Pickwick Papers*, *Oliver Twist*, *The Nicholas Nickelby*, *The Old Curiosity*, and *Barnaby Rudge*. By 1850, Charles had written nine novels such as *Nicholas Nickleby* and *David Copperfield*. Many of his stories were from his experiences in real life. Like Mr. Micawber, a character from *David Copperfield*, was an adaptation of his father. Some Charles Dickens notable books are the following: *Bleak House*, *Hard Times*, *A Christmas Carol*, and *A Tale of Two Cities*.

Why was *A Tale of Two Cities* created ?

A Tale of Two Cities was created during the Victorian Era. The Victorian Era was known for the British Empire becoming the first global industrial power, producing much of the world's coal, iron, steel and textiles. During this Era, there were revolutionary breakthroughs with arts and sciences as well. Charles Dickens was influenced by Thomas Carlyle's *French Revolution*, and Wilkie Collins' *The Frozen Deep* when writing *A Tale of Two Cities*. Charles explained that he wanted to explain the social welfare and the fear of French people revolt. This was an experiment for Charles Dickens to write as his previous novels rely upon dialogue rather relying on the plot this time. By this, the characters are defined by their actions and the place they are in the story.

There are two main focuses in *A Tale of Two Cities*. The two focuses are the following.

1. French Revolution was inevitable because the aristocracy exploited and plundered the poor, driving them to revolt. From this oppression on a large scale results in anarchy, and anarchy produces a police state.
2. English people might erupt at any moment into a mass of bloody revolutionists.

Synopsis

It's the best of times and the worst of times. The rich are getting richer, and the poor are getting poorer. The oppressed call for revolution. Despots threaten global war. Sound familiar? It's Paris and London, 1787, a powder keg of spies, lovers, madmen, and unexpected look-alikes. This radical reimagining of Charles Dickens's classic tale of the French Revolution forces us to ask:

Am I who I am because of my actions or the circumstances of my birth?

Do I control my destiny?

And where do we begin if we want to right the wrongs of history?

Why A Tale of Two Cities?

A Tale of Two Cities has two main ideas that move the story forward. The two main ideas are the following: the interaction between individuals, and the interaction between society. The play and book both highlight how both cities, London and Paris, have their problems but are similar. London, England is presented as old-fashioned and conservative. Rather, Paris, France, is shown as a place of high tension and on the edge of violence. Dickens wanted to show that the French Revolution was inevitable and how social lives evolved around that time.

Characters

Charles Darnay was a French nobleman from the Evremonde family. He is introduced for being a spy on the behalf of the French. Sydney Carton, a drunk lawyer, gets Charles off of trial by showing the courtroom how Carton and Charles' identity could be mistaken. Charles soon falls in love with Lucie Manette and they have children together. He is later accused again but is said to be my Carton who traded places for Charles' execution.

Sydney Carton, for a lack of terms, is a drunk. He is a lawyer that describes himself as someone who is wasting his life. During Carton's conversation with Charles in Act 1, Page 30 of the script, Carton says : *“The fact that you were born French is meaningless. The fact that I was born in English is also meaningless. Right and wrong, even. Practice law for long enough, and it's all without meaning.”* Carton reminds himself about how he does not like that man that he has become throughout the story. Carton also falls in love with Lucie but she is not interested in him and decides to be with Charles. Carton decides that the only way to redeem his life is to give his place for Charles at the end of the story before Charles' execution.

Lucie Manette is described as being physically and spiritually beautiful. She is the daughter of Doctor Manette. Lucie is the love interest between Charles and Sydney. She is not only pretty but also wise as well. Lucie attracts all the attention from me around here. Lucie and Charles would later get married and have a child.

Doctor Manette is the father of Lucy Manette. Doctor Manette is shown in the play and book to be locked away in Bastille for many years imprisoned. Lucy and Manette are first introduced to one another in play and Manette mistakes Lucy as his wife and kisses her. (I know it's nasty). Lucy explains to her that she is his daughter before his release from prison. Later on in the story, Charles asks Manette for his approval to marry Lucy and that he is in love with her.. Like Carton, Manette is changed over the course of the novel and play. He is first shown in the play and novel as a prisoner who mindlessly cobbles shoes into a man of class and distinction.

Costumes

What was the clothing during the 1770s in France?



In the late 17th century, King Louis XVI believed that all classes of people should look fashionable at all times. King Louis XVI felt that people's fashion should represent their personal expression and individuality. When King Louis XVI made France the focus for fashion, France became known as a fashion industry during the textile trade (mostly centered around fashion and technical textile).

Women typically wore a combination of elegant silk dresses and simple cotton dresses and men typically wore coats, waistcoats and breeches. It also included a pair of slick stockings and a linen cotton shirt with decorative cuffs and a neck cloth.



*What was worn by the French **after** French Revolution?*



After the French Revolution, most people wore wool and cotton over silk. There were more somber colors preferred over powdered blues, pinks, and green. Tail coats would become more of a fashion for men's uniforms heading toward the 19th century. Fashion changed because the Jacobins and radicals became more powerful and there was a disgust with high fashion because of how extravagant it was, and most times associated with royalty. It was replaced with "anti-fashion" for men and women and now was simple and modest.

Themes and Contemporary Relevance to Georgia

Main Theme in A Tale Of Two Cities : Sacrifice

Toward the end of the play, Sydney Carton decides to take Darnay's place in prison before his execution even though Sydney will be killed for doing this.

During the conversation between Darnay and Carton, Carton says:

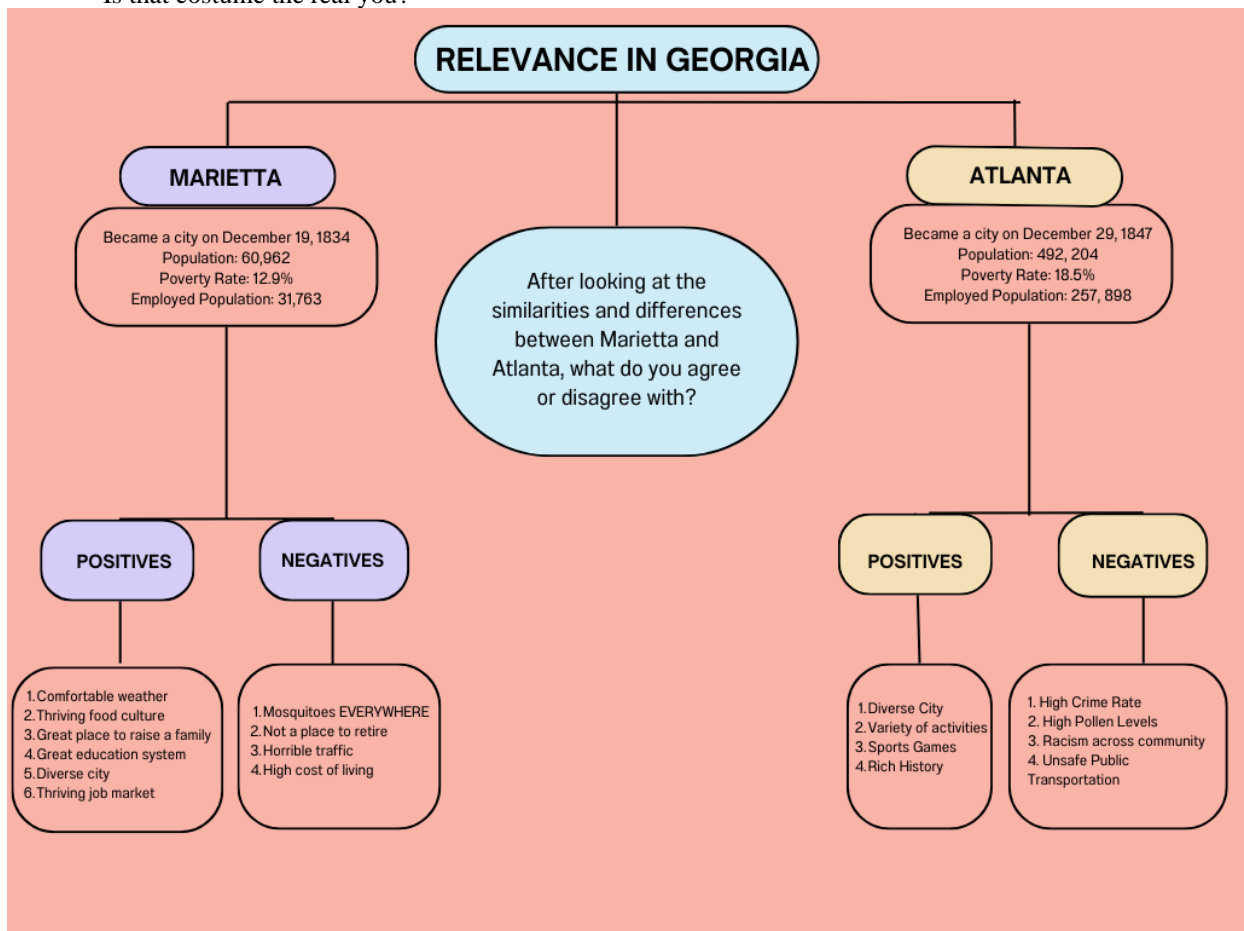
*“...If I put on your tie and jacket, I will look like Charles Darnay. Or the Marquis Saint-Evremonde. And they will love or hate me because they will assume that I am the man behind the costume. This is really complicated, because according to you, you really are Charles Darnay, and according to other people, you are the Marquis Saint-Evermonde. You want to wear one costume and the world demands you wear another...so you start to wonder...What if we all undressed ourselves? Can we all undress ourselves? Though even if I wear your tie, I am not sure your wife would love me. Sometimes we dress ourselves. Sometimes the world dresses us. But who decides who **loves** us?..”* (108)

Student Prompts Surrounding Carton’s Sacrifice:

Why does Carton say this?

Do you all feel that society dresses you up or that you dress yourselves?

Is that costume the real you?



London, England's Significance to the French Revolution

Why did the French Revolution Happen?

The upheaval was caused by disgust with the French aristocracy and the economic policies of King Louis XVI, who met his death by guillotine, as did his wife Marie Antoinette. France's costly involvement in the American Revolution and Louis' costly expectations for his people, left France in the brink of bankruptcy. Several years of poor harvests, drought, cattle disease and skyrocketing bread prices had kindled unrest among peasants and the urban poor. The most notable confrontation was the Reign of Terror. The Reign of Terror was created off impulse and the paranoia that saw enemies everywhere. The terror started in September 1793 and ended in July 1794. During this year, over 30,000-50,000 people were killed in public executions and mass killings.

What the Dickens' was going on in England during the 1770s-1790s?

A Tale of Two Cities takes place in London, England and Paris, France from 1775-1790. During this time, London is portrayed as a safe heaven compared to Paris. King George III was in charge of Great Britain from October 1760 until his death in 1820. During his time, Great Britain defeated France in the Seven Years War over France. They became the most dominant European power in North America and India. The Seven Years War lasted from 1756- 1763. The conflict started with Great Britain and France fighting over land in North America land regions around Pittsburg, Pennsylvania. France's allies during this war were Austria, Saxony, Sweden and Russia. Great Britain Allies during this time were Prussia, and Hanover. Great Britain would when the war gained major territory gains from North American such as: Mississippi river, and Florida. The Treaty of Paris of 1763 ended the war where France gave up territories in the mainland in North America, and ended any foreign threat to Britain colonies.

What in the Dickens happened after the Seven Years of War?

After Great Britain won the Seven Years of War, the Britain colonies were doubled tax to pay off the debt from the war. Because of this , and other wrong doings the colonists felt King George was doing, the colonists decided to revolt against Great Britain. The colonists felt that they had no rights to govern themselves and they were paying taxes to a government they had no representation from. The War of Independence happened from 1775-1783. The colonists won the war and then created the United States.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

BEFORE THE PLAY

- Are you familiar with the plot of the story A Tale of Two Cities?
- What do you think is going to happen in this play?
- Does money influence your happiness? In what way?
- What do you think might have influenced Charles Dickens to write this story?

DURING THE PLAY

- Notice the costumes worn by the different characters. How do the costumes help us understand the personalities, backgrounds, and motivations of the characters?
- As you watch the play, notice how the lighting of the setting changes the mood from scene to scene.
- What phrases resonate with you that you think make an impact on the story?
- How does the set represent and reflect the time period and setting?
- As you watch the play, what do you notice about the differences in the way things were done during the 1700s versus now? Do you notice different social behaviors and etiquette?

AFTER THE PLAY

Engage in a discussion as a class or use these questions as journal prompts.

- Do you think if this play were to be placed in modern times it would have the same impact?
- What aspects of the setting were important to the story? How did the setting contribute?
- What pieces of literature, movies, and other arts did you draw inspiration from?
- How did the set and costumes somewhat modernize the script and story?

Q & A with the Playwright and Director

Provided from Pope High School 5th & 7th Period Theatre Classes in conversation with the Playwright & Director

What was the most difficult thing about directing this show?

“I’m sort of halfway done directing with casting and designing. We start rehearsing on Tuesday. 4 weeks, tech and previews are coming up. Do we make a theater look like a theatre? Do we allow the actors to look like a stage? Our scenic design is a collection of stairs that are all blue. How do we in a theatre, with 8 people, describe a revolution. Figuring out how to kill people on stage and represented on stage. It was also hard to find actors to do all the roles in one track”. -Leroa, Director

What pieces of literature, movies, and other arts did you draw inspiration from?

“..Other literature , Six characters in search of an author. And ancient Greek play Orastie. How do we leave the violence in the world?”-Brendan, Playwright.

We went far away from history and tragedy. Looking at runway clothes and different styles. Thinking about sketch comedy, stand up, or memes to lean into the comedy. Like the world of cartoons. We did not want the characters to be stiff. Greek tragedy vs cartoons . “ - Leroa, Director.

What inspired the breaking of the fourth wall when asking the audience to participate?

“ I thought about the story as a mob. And big crowds are getting out of control. It’s hard to achieve with 8 actors. You needed it to feel bigger than three people. I thought about the terrifying feeling of living through history. I am a passenger on a plane that I am not flying. What it means to live in a world that we are not in now”. -Brendan, Playwright.

How did you interpret and somewhat modernize the script and story?

I did not think about modernizing people to relate today. But I did try to see how the dialogue then can be for today. If I focus on that, then it will be relatable. I tried not to relate the story to Atlanta. Both Brendan and I are tourists to the city like Dickens was to his novel. I am interested in those who do not relate and see another perspective. Or it could be a-lot like their experience”. -Brendan, Playwright.

Did you take part in the casting, if so, how long did that take?

Yes, it was challenging . These actors have to make specific choices . It takes a relationship in performance to be in that weird space. How do we find a single individual to play these characters? What if we have a same gender dynamic? We really needed good actors. Finding 8 actors that are challenging and fine. Brendan did participate in casting as well”. - Leroa, Director

Vocabulary

Word (part of speech)	Definition	Context
Army Commander (n.)	Any person in arms service who holds authority or command.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The army commander for the French Revolution was Emmanuel Macron. The army commander for the American Revolution was George Washington who later became the first President of the United States of America.
Captitulate (v.)	Cease to resist an opponent or an unwelcome demand; surrender.	
Customs Agent (n.)	A person or company makes sure all taxes are paid and rules are followed so all goods can be transported properly.	
Dismal (adj.)	Feeling depressed or dreary	
Estate General (n.)	The representative assembly of the three “estates”: the clergy, nobility, and the majority of the people	Represented the French estates and summoned by King Louis XVI.
Evanescence (n.)	The quality of being fleeting or vanishing quickly; impermanence	
Fetter (v.)	To restrain with chains, typically around the ankles	
Finance Minister (n.)	Maintain the budget policies and review government programs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Jacques Necker was finance minister in France from 1771-1789 under King Louis XVI. George Grenville was finance minister in England from 1763-1765 before becoming the prime minister.
Inscrutable (adj.)	Impossible to understand or interpret.	
Marchioness (n.)	A wife of a Marquis.	
Marquis (n.)	A nobleman ranking above the court but below a duke and trusted to defend against any hostile neighbors.	
Member of Roads (n.)	A fickle mob who craves spectacle more than anything else.	

Muse (n.)	A person or personified force who is the source of inspiration for a creative artist.	
National Assembly (n.)	An elected legislature.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Existed from June 17th, 1789 to July 9th, 1789 in France. • It was made so that the people were seen as first and demand the king make economic reforms so the people could eat food.
National Convention (n.)	A convention of a major political party, especially on that nominates a candidate for presidency.	Governed France from September 20th, 1792 until October 26th, 1795. They sought out to get rid of the monarchy in France.
Repose (v.)	To be lying, situated, or kept in a particular place.	
Revolutionary Tribunal (n.)	A court created by the National Convention during the French Revolution for trial political offenders. The point of the court is to try all crimes established against the state.	Fouquier Tinville was head of the group and he was appointed by the National Convention because of its security committees.
Sagacity (n.)	Foresight or keen perception; the ability to make good judgments.	
Sublime (adj.)	Of excellence, grandeur, or beauty as to inspire great admiration or awe.	
Tribunal (n.)	A court of justice.	

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