SYNOPSIS
In mid-1700's France, the people starve and the aristocracy treats the masses like dogs, doing whatever they like to whomever they like. The Marquis St. Evremonde and his brother show no concern when Dr. Manette cannot save a girl, and her brother, from deaths they inflicted upon the poor innocent creatures. And when Dr. Manette refuses recompense for his help in the endeavor, he is held prisoner in the Bastille for 18 years, finally released into the care of his long-time servant, Monsieur Defarge and his wife, Madame Defarge. Hearing of her father's freedom, Lucie Manette travels from London with family friend, Jarvis Lorry, to retrieve her father. Though he suffers from such a long and unjust isolation, Dr. Manette's healing can begin now that he is reunited with his family.

1780, 5 years after the Manettes returned to London, Frenchman Charles Darnay is on trial for treason. Luckily, Sydney Carton, in the employ of barrister Mr. Stryver, bears an uncanny resemblance to Darnay, making the eyewitness account seem shaky at best. Darnay, Carton, and Miss Manette strike up an unlikely friendship, with both men growing ever fonder of the lady. Soon, Lucie and Charles fall in love, much to the dismay of poor Sydney, but he vows to love and protect all that is dear to Lucie for the sake of their friendship.

Back in France, the people tire of the continued poor treatment from the nobility. Their lives expendable and dismal, their anger grows and festers, seeking an outlet. When it comes, it comes with a vengeance. The Bastille is stormed and the nobility falls. The people turn to the guillotine to mete out justice for them, at last.

Before embarking on their honeymoon in 1792, Charles is given a letter from France. His uncle, the Marquis St. Evremonde has been murdered and all those who had been in the employ of the aristocracy are being tried and killed. A servant begs Charles to come and speak on his behalf. Charles, having renounced his name and titles due to the cruelties his family continually inflicted on the masses, sees no other choice but to return to his homeland to save the man. Of course, this is exactly what the murderous Madame Defarge is hoping for — now her chance for revenge, in the guise of justice, is at hand.

Hearing of her husband’s imprisonment in Paris, Lucie, along with her father and Miss Pross, heads for France. Knowing what dangers may await his friends, Carton makes for Paris at once. Upon arrival, it is clear that Lucie is with child. This further enrages Madame Defarge, whose thirst for blood will not be quenched until every Evremonde, even the innocent child, is killed. After a perfunctory trial, Charles is sentenced to death. The next morning he is to be taken to the guillotine. Carton remains a man of his word and manages to switch places with Charles, going to death in his stead, remarking at the last, "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."
THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

Life in pre-Revolution France was one of great class divide. While the peasants dealt with famine brought on by bad agricultural standards and rural overpopulation, the aristocracy demanded more taxes, tithes, and their feudal dues. There was no understanding or mercy, and the patience of the people grew ever more strained.

There were three castes, or estates, in French society: the clergy, the nobility, and the commons. France was ruled by the first two, but 97% of the population belonged in the common class, and their resentment toward those in power was reaching a critical point. When King Louis XVI called the Estates-General (a body with proportional representation of each of the three classes) to convene in Versailles in 1789, he thought they would devise a plan to end the heavy debt France was in; the Estates-General had another plan. Though Louis tried to thwart them, the members were determined to pass a constitution. This self-named group, the National Assembly, began to debate and draft the new French Constitution. Fearing the commoners would wrest power from the crown, Louis had troops dispersed throughout the capital.

The people saw this as an overtly hostile act against the National Assembly; and in an attempt to arm themselves, they stormed the Bastille prison, where munitions were held. From there, the rioters established a new rebel government in Paris. This was the instigating incident the people needed. Violence and upheaval spread throughout the country. Nobles were killed and their lands looted. Still, the clergy and nobility held on to their old beliefs that only they should have power and position. Finally, the “great fear” (as this wave of non-ending violence is known) forced them to acquiesce, and on August 4 the Assembly began passing reforms, soon turning their attention to a national bill of rights (much of this Declaration of Rights remains in France’s Constitution today).

The King refused to acknowledge these reforms, at first, but finally had no choice. In June 1791, the King and his family tried to flee the country but were stopped before they could escape. They were then kept as prisoners in their palace in Paris, until 1792 when the monarchy was abolished, the King found guilty of acting against the liberty of France, and was finally beheaded, in 1793. Such an act caused ripples of terror throughout the crowned heads of Europe; perhaps such horrors could happen to them. Many of the sitting royalty banded together and sent troops to fight the revolutionaries in France. The turmoil this caused in the new French regime gave rise to a tight-fisted group, the Jacobins, who were determined to crush any resistance with their “reign of terror.” From July 1793 to July 1794 over 17,000 people were executed. After this reign ended, the Jacobins lost their power, and things slowly started to revert back to the old ways: heavy taxes on the poor, no voting rights for those who couldn’t afford to pay for them, wealth and prosperity for the rich. Soon, one man began to come forward to lead France into the next phase of its history—General Napoleon Bonaparte.

VOCAULARY

Subject - [suhr-joh-get] - verb
1. to bring under complete control or subjection; conquer; master.
2. to make submissive or subservient; enslave.

Liberty - [lib-er-tee] - noun
1. freedom from arbitrary or despotic government or control.

Justice - [juh-tis] - noun
1. the quality of being just; righteousness, equitableness, or moral rightness: to uphold the justice of a cause.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

The people of the French Revolution strove to gain freedom and liberty. Do you think the methods they used were just?

There are countries around the world today whose people are subjugated. If you lived in one such place, what would you do to gain liberty?
ITS ABOUT TIME

On this side we see a little of what was happening in France during the Revolution.

1789 - French peasants were mad because of an unfair tax system and a poor harvest in 1788.

May 5, 1789 - Louis XVI called Estates-General to a meeting in Versailles to approve a tax plan.

June 17, 1789 - The Third Estate declared themselves the National Assembly and made the Tennis Court Oath.

July 14, 1789 - The people of Paris stormed the Bastille.

August 4, 1789 - The National Assembly announced the end of feudalism and serfdom in France.

August 27, 1789 - The National Assembly issued the Declaration of the Rights of Man.

October 5, 1789 - Paris women invaded Versailles.

1791 - The Constitution of 1791 was adopted.

June 20, 1791 - Louis XVI and his family tried to flee France but were arrested.

April 20, 1792 - France declared war on Austria.

September 1792 - The National Convention held their first meeting.

January 21, 1793 - Louis XVI sentenced to the guillotine.

August 1793 - A national draft called for all able-bodied men to join the army.

September 1793 to July 1794 - The Reign of Terror sentenced over 17,000 to death.

July 27, 1794 - Robespierre was arrested.

July 28, 1794 - Robespierre was beheaded.

1795 - A new Constitution was adopted.

1799 - The French Revolution ended and Napoleon was appointed First Consul.

1802 - Peace with England was established.

1775 - American War of Independence began when colonists fought British troops at Lexington.

1776 - On 4th July, the American Congress passed their Declaration of Independence from Britain. Edward Gibbons' published his “Decline and Fall” and Adam Smith, his “Wealth of Nations.”

1788 - George III suffers his first attack of ‘madness’ (caused by porphyria).

1789 - Outbreak of the French Revolution.

And on this side, we see some of what the English were experiencing at the same time.

Can you see similarities and differences that may have led one nation to revolt but not the other?

1790 - Edmund Burke published his “Reflections on the Revolution in France.”

1791 - James Boswell published his “Life of Johnson” and Thomas Paine, his “Rights of Man.”

1792 - Coal gas was used for lighting for the first time. Mary Wollstonecraft published her “Vindication of the Rights of Women”

1793 - Outbreak of War between Britain and France.

1799 - Napoleon was appointed First Consul in France

1802 - Peace with France was established.
"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair ...

THE GUILLOTINE

A device synonymous with terror and gruesome death, the guillotine was first devised as a humanitarian solution to capitol punishment by Dr. Antoine Louis. In 1789, Dr. Joseph Guillotin famously spoke to the French Assembly purporting that this mechanism would make a more humane means of execution than the standard hanging (for commoners) or beheading by sword (for nobility). The speed and accuracy of the blade made for a far less painful death. In 1791, the French government did adopt the guillotine as their preferred method of execution. It was first used in 1792 to execute highwayman Pelletier. At first, the machine was given its creator’s name, called a *louisette* or *louison* but after Guillotin’s impassioned speech, the device was forever associated with Guillotin, though his family tried to change its name (they did, eventually, manage to change their family name if not that of the machine). An estimated 40,000 people travelled on the tumbrils through Paris to die under Madame Guillotine.

**FACTS AND FIGURES**
- Total weight of a guillotine was about 1278 lbs.
- The blade weighed over 88.2 lbs.
- Height of side posts was just over 14 ft.
- The blade drop was 88 inches
- Power at impact was 888 lbs. per square inch

**VOCAULARY**

*Tumbril*
[tuhm-bruhl] -noun
open cart which tilts backwards to empty its load.
Used to carry prisoners to the guillotine during the French Revolution.

*Compassion*
[kuh m-pash-uh n] -noun
a feeling of deep sympathy and sorrow for another who is stricken by misfortune, accompanied by a strong desire to alleviate the suffering.

**DISCUSSION QUESTION**

Dr.'s Louis and Guillotin were men of compassion. Who are other famous people who live compassionate lives? Do you think it is always easy to be compassionate toward others? What can you do to live a more compassionate life, at home and at school?
A Tale of Two Cities was written specifically for Dickens' weekly magazine All The Year Round, where it appeared without illustrations. It was also published concurrently in monthly installments with Illustrations by Hablot Browne, as seen here.

VOCABULARY

Honor
[on-er] - noun
1. honesty, fairness, or integrity in one's beliefs and actions: a man of honor.

Vengeance
[ven-juh nis] - noun
1. infliction of injury, harm, humiliation, or the like, on a person by another who has been harmed by that person; violent revenge.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

The 1790s were a difficult time in France. People were hungry, angry, and searching for a way to make a better life. They believed the pride of the aristocracy was keeping the common person down. The people revolted with violence.

Is there ever a time when vengeance is justified? What is the difference between vengeance and justice?

Can someone seek revenge and still maintain their honor? What is something you've done that you felt showed you are an honorable person? Did anyone know what you did?

WHAT WOULD YOU DO?

In the 1790s, people needed to do many of the same things we do now; communicate with each other, travel from one place to another, and provide food and shelter for themselves and their families. Today, it's easy to find what you need to do those things with Google or Facebook, for instance. Of course, there weren't any computers, telephones, or electricity in the 1790s. Given these limitations, what would you do to achieve the following objectives?

Find someone - If you send a letter, keep in mind that many people could not read or write.

Build a house - Metal was extremely expensive. You had wood or bricks. If you had any means, you might have a horse to carry the heavy stuff.

Find a new job - During these times, your place in society was determined by your parents. If your dad was a blacksmith, you would be a blacksmith. If your mom was a dressmaker, you would be a dressmaker. If you wanted to do something different with your life, what would you do?

Move to a new city - Transportation was accomplished mainly on foot or horseback. If you saved up enough money, you could take a huge sailboat across the ocean to new lands. A journey of 10 miles (from Seattle to Tukwila) could take all day.
Carton, Sydney: Lawyer who is able to get a charge of treason reversed for Charles Darnay due to a strong physical resemblance. He later takes Darnay's place at the guillotine.

Defarge, Ernest: Husband of Madame Defarge and keeper of a wine shop in Paris. He is a leader among the revolutionaries.

Defarge, Madame: Wife of wine shop keeper, Ernest Defarge, and a leader among the revolutionaries. She harbors an intense hatred of Charles Darnay for atrocities committed against her family by the Evremonde family. Madame Defarge is killed in a struggle with Miss Pross in Paris.

Darnay, Charles: Nephew of Marquis de St. Evremonde. He is tried for treason in London and is acquitted due to his resemblance to Sydney Carton. He marries Lucie Manette, daughter of Dr. Manette. He returns to Paris to help a friend imprisoned there and is arrested by the revolutionaries. His life is saved when look-alike Carton takes his place on the guillotine.

Gabelle, Theophile: Former servant of Charles Darnay who finds himself imprisoned by the revolutionaries in Paris. Gabelle writes to Darnay who comes to Paris to aid him. Darnay is then put in prison for his trouble.

Gaspard: Parisian peasant whose child is killed when hit by the carriage of the Marquis de St Evremonde. The grief-stricken Gaspard follows the Marquis to his country home and kills him in his bed.

Lorry, Jarvis: A clerk in Tellson's bank who is instrumental in bringing Dr. Manette, who is imprisoned in Paris, back to England. He returns to Paris to look after the bank's interest after the Revolution starts and while there helps Lucie and Charles Darnay, bringing them back to England after Sydney Carton sacrifices his life to save Darnay.

Manette, Dr. Alexandre: A prisoner in the Bastille in Paris for eighteen years. He is released and accompanies his daughter, Lucie, and Jarvis Lorry to England. He returns to Paris after the outbreak of the revolution and, as a former prisoner, is able to secure Darnay's release from the revolutionaries. However, a statement written during Manette's long incarceration in the Bastille is later discovered and incriminates Darnay's family. Darnay is again imprisoned and later escapes when Sydney Carton takes his place.

Manette, Lucie: Daughter of Dr. Manette. She is taken to Paris by Jarvis Lorry when her father is released from prison. She marries Charles Darnay but is adored from afar by Sydney Carton, who feels unworthy of her. When Darnay is imprisoned in Paris by the revolutionaries, Carton helps him escape, taking Darnay's place due to their resemblance. As Darnay and Lucie escape to England, Carton makes the supreme sacrifice.

Miss Pross: Lucie Manette's loyal maid. In Paris, she struggles with Madame Defarge, who is killed in the scuffle.

Stryver: Barrister who defends Charles Darnay in his trial for treason with assistance from his friend, Sydney Carton.

Marquis de St Evremonde: Uncle of Charles Darnay. He shows disdain when his carriage runs over and kills the child of the Parisian peasant Gaspard. Gaspard follows the Marquis to his country home and kills him in his bed.
The Man Himself—Charles Dickens

Born in 1812 to Elizabeth Barrow and John Dickens, Charles was one of many children. The Dickens’ were plagued by bad luck and financial troubles. In his early childhood, his father was arrested for failure to pay debts, and Charles was sent to a workhouse to earn a living. Even after his father was released, Charles’ mother insisted young Charles continue working. Certainly, this early exposure to the harsh realities of working children and poverty influenced Dickens’ later works. Luckily, his father arranged for his boy to attend school at the same time, sadly due to the continued financial hardships his family faced, Charles had to leave school and become a law clerk. His first book was published in 1836, the same year he married his first wife, with whom he had 10 children. Most of Dickens’ published works were serialized, as was common at that time. He also became deeply involved in amateur theatre—writing, directing, and acting. He even fell in love with a costar, leaving his first wife for her. Dickens enjoyed great success with his writing career during his lifetime, traveling extensively to give readings. He died in 1870 and is buried in Poet’s Corner of Westminster Abbey, London.

From the Pen of the Playwright: Dwayne Hartford

I first read A Tale of Two Cities during my sophomore year in high school. Perhaps it was the action-filled plot, or maybe the setting in the fascinating era of the French Revolution, or it might have been the wonderful Dickensian characters, but for whatever reason, this book has stuck with me and haunted me ever since. As the disparity between the rich and the poor, the haves and the have-nots grows larger and larger in our modern world, the lessons of A Tale of Two Cities become more important and urgent. When asked to adapt a classic for a playwriting workshop at Childsplay in Tempe, Arizona, Dickens’ novel was an obvious choice for me. After presenting a draft of the first act, Childsplay commissioned me to write the full play.

I came late to playwriting, spending the first twenty years of my career as an actor and director. As a longtime Associate Artist with Childsplay, and a firsthand witness to the power of theatre for young audiences, writing for young people intrigued me. It turned out to be a natural fit.

My first play, Eric and Elliot, was developed at Childsplay’s Whiteman New Plays Program, as have all of my subsequent plays, including A Tale of Two Cities. Published by Dramatic Publishing, Eric and Elliot won the 2005 Distinguished Play award from the American Alliance for Theatre & Education.

I am originally from Maine and received my BFA from Boston Conservatory. I live in Phoenix, Arizona.
BOOKLIST

Prepared by librarians from
King County Library System

FOR CHILDREN

Fiction

The Lacemaker and the Princess
Kimberly Brubaker Bradley

A Proud Taste of Scarlet and Miniver
E. L. Konigsburg

The Doll with Yellow Star
Yona Zeldis McDonough

The Invention of Hugo Cabret
Brian Selznick

Nonfiction

Louis XVI, Marie-Antoinette, and the French Revolution
Nancy Plain

The French Revolution
Sean Connolly

Spotlight

Daily Life in Ancient and Modern Paris
Sarah Hoban

Explore daily life in Paris, from the time of its early settlement in the seventh century B.C.E. through the Middle Ages up to two world wars and after. The city and its citizens have seen enormous changes, including destruction and violence, yet it has always remained one of the most important cities in the world. Learn why.

FOR ADULTS

The Lost King of France: A True Story of Revolution,
Revenge, and DNA
Deborah Cadbury

Spotlight

Abundance: A Novel of Marie Antoinette
Sena Jeter Naslund

Marie Antoinette was Queen and consort to Louis XVI, and she embodied the demeanor of the aristocracy with her attitude towards the starving poor. Her life was glamorous, hectic, and short lived.