A Tale of Two Cities Annotation Guide

Refer to your Summer Reading Assignment Sheet for my note regarding annotation. While it will not be graded directly, annotating your summer novels is strongly recommended and will be essential to your success with the first assignments of the school year.

As you read and annotate the novel, be mindful of the following:

• Context
  - As you read and study your Victorian novel, it is important for you to consider the context in which it was written. Visit the following websites for a brief overview of the Victorian age. While reading, take note of social, political, and cultural issues explored in the text. FYI, A Tale of Two Cities was serially published in 1859. *See setting for further notes.*
    - https://faculty.unlv.edu/kirschen/handouts/victorian.html

• Characterization
  - Sidney Carton
    - In what ways is the theme “recalled to life” illustrated through the development of Carton’s character? Specifically take note of his words about himself at the beginning of the book, his words to Lucie in book 2, and then of course at the end.
  - Lucie Manette
    - While Lucie is not necessarily fully developed, she does play an important role in the story. Consider how she serves as a “golden thread” to those around her, especially Dr. Manette and Sidney Carton
  - Note how the following characters serve to illuminate major themes in the novel:
    - Dr. Manette, Charles Darnay, Monsieur and Madame Defarge, Marquis de Evremonde, Miss Pross and Jerry Cruncher

• Symbolism
  - Wine, blood
  - The Golden Thread
  - The Bastille and La Force

• Genre: Historical fiction
  - Look up historical fiction if you are unfamiliar with the term and consider how A Tale of Two Cities fits into that genre.
  - While this story does include fictional accounts, how does Dickens focus on the emotional impact rather than the historical impact of the events?

• Setting
  - While the novel was written during the Victorian Period, it takes place during the French Revolution of the 1700s. With this in mind, we must consider Dickens’s purpose in setting his novel 100 years earlier than the time in which his audience lived and read. What message might he be sending to his current audience? In what ways is this story a cautionary tale to the England of the late 19th century?
  - Notice the title: this is a tale of two cities. How are both London and Paris depicted in the story?

• Themes
  - “Recalled to life” (and all possible implications of this phrase)
  - Issues of class and society; social injustice
  - Power as a corrupting influence
  - Guilt by association
  - Redemption through self-sacrifice

• The Ending
  - What do you make of it?
  - The last lines are some of the most famous in all literature. Why do you think that is?
- How does the closing scene help to illuminate themes in the novel?

- Serial Publication (see below)
  - The novel was published “serially” which means it came out in installments similar to the way we have to wait each week for a new episode of a television show. See if you can spot where he may have divided the installments. How can you tell?