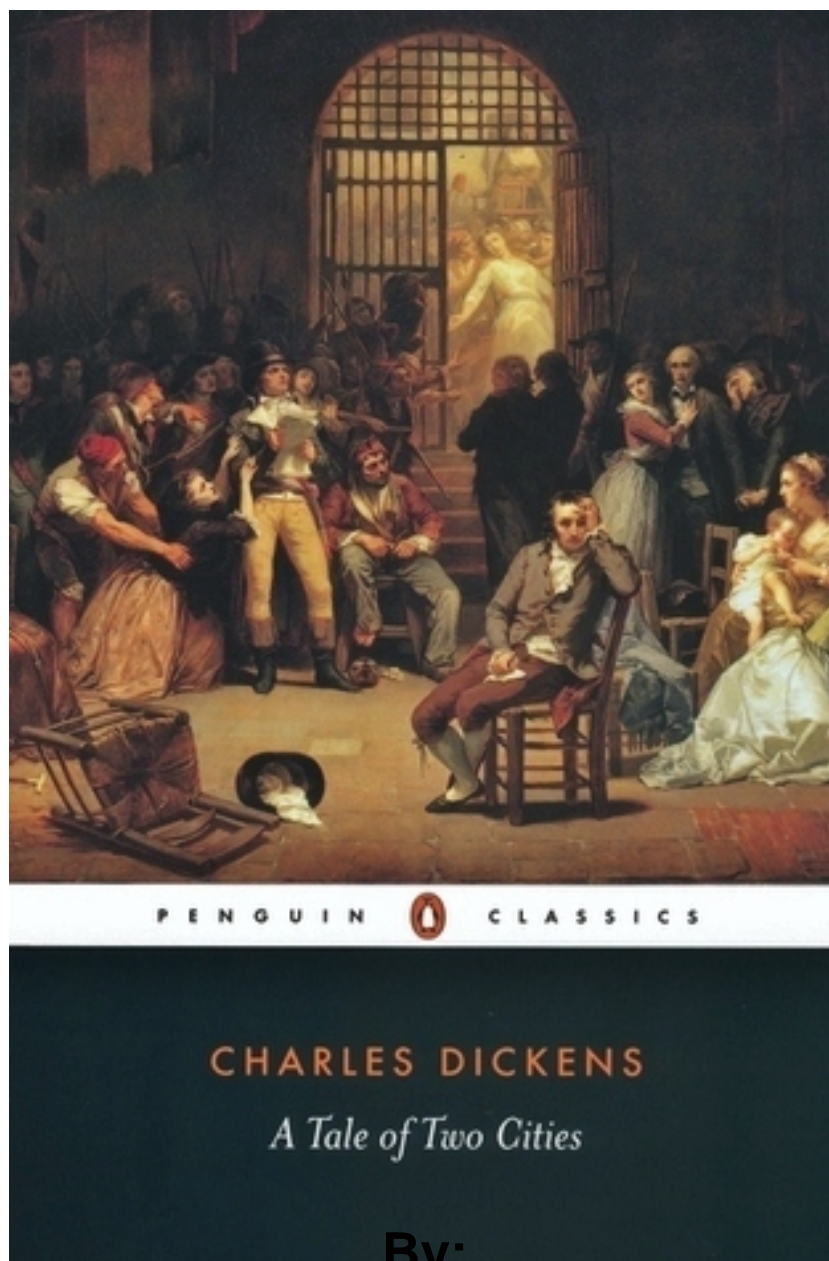

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What people Say:

Melissa Rudder

My primary goal when I'm teaching

to my sophomores is to make them realize that Charles Dickens didn't write creaky, dusty long novels that teachers embraced as a twisted rite of passage for teenagers. Instead, I want them to understand why Dickens was

the most popular writer

in England and America during his time. I want them to see the book as the suspenseful, comedic, and sentimental piece of entertainment that it is. Because, while

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is masterfully written with sly humor, densely meaningful descriptions, a cast of quirky characters only Dickens could create, an endless series of telling binaries and foils, and relevant social commentary about the French Revolution as well as Dickens' time, it is also simply a damn good story. By a damn good storyteller.

Emma

Christ on a bike - I'd forgotten how much concentration Dickens demands. Â

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Reading the first few chapters of this book was, frankly, a chore. I could not be less bothered about

The Mail and the more Dickens banged on about that never ending carriage journey the more I daydreamed about the next book I was going to read once this torture was over. I'm glad I didn't give up though because as soon as we hit France and the wine shop I was hooked, the pace started to pick up and there were mysteries a

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There is so much in this book. Â It would take me a month to provide anything other than a quick and dirty overview - which I can't really do either. Just think London/revolutionary France 1775, unrequited love, revenge, a doppelgänger and la guillotine.

Â

I loved the gothic feel to the book, Jerry Crunchers body snatching, the remote settings, the macabre events, the parts of the book that gave me an uneasy feeling. Â Right up my street.

Leslie

Most satisfying ending in the English language.

Yes, the last line is a classic ("It is a far, far better thing ..."), concluding, in astonishingly concise language (for Dickens), the peace and redemption of the story's most poignant romantic hero. But this novel delivers such a gratifying experience because there are, in fact, many characters who cover significant emotional ground in their journey to love one woman as best they can.

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cover significant emotional ground in their journey to love one woman as best they can.

Lucie's father battles his way back from madness under the gentle protection of his daughter. Lucie's childhood nursemaid evolves from a comical stereotype to an embattled force to be reckoned with. Lucie's husband's well-meaning (if bland)

culminates in -- not his hoped-for heroic moment, but a moment of quiet dignity that is most moving for its humility. Even Lucie's

reaches dizzying heights of heroic accomplishment when Dickens appoints the quiet businessman the vehicle for an entire family's escape from the guillotine.

It is true that Lucie herself engages the reader less than her brutal counterpart -- the broken but terrifying Madame Defarge -- is able to, as modern readers are less moved by the swooning heroines who populate the period's "literature of sensibility." But we can certainly respond to Dickens' powerful and vivid claim: love is not only what makes us human, it is what allows us to be, at times, superhuman.

And when Sydney Carton, in equal parts love and despair, tells Lucie that "there is a man who would give his life to keep a life you love beside you" ... ?

Lyn

Hundreds, thousands of stories long to have a quotable verse, just one.

Tale of Two Cities, Dickens masterpiece as far as I'm concerned, is bookended by two of the most recognizable quotes in all of English language.

This is also the darkest story I have read of his, and no doubt, it's about the bloody French Revolution and Dickens spares none of his acerbic wit to demonize what was rightly demonic. Yet, to his credit and genius, neither does he sugar coat the great social injustices that led ir

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Lacking his usual humor, again understandable, this nonetheless again displays his mastery of characterization. No character is as complete and now archetypal as Madame Defarge. I thought that Bill Sykes was his greatest villain, but Citizeness Defarge was simply a portrait of evil.

So many stories hope for a memorable scene and this has many, highly influential since, I thought of several works that had borrowed heavily from TOTC themes (especially

, many allusions to TOTC, and that also made me wonder was TOTC the first dystopian novel?) The scene between Madame Defarge and Ms Pross was stunning, and made me think of the riveting scene between Porfiry and Raskolnikov in Dostoyevsky's

Laura

Years of teaching this novel to teenagers never dimmed my thrill in reading it – if anything, I grew to love it more every time I watched kids gasp aloud at the revelations! Critics are divided on its place in the Dickens canon, but the ones who think it an inferior work are simply deranged. It has everything: dark deeds, revolution, madness, love, thwarted love, forgiveness, revenge, and a stunning act of self-sacrifice. And melodrama! Oh, how Dickens loved melodrama, but in

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it reaches truly grand proportions.

It's the ultimate mystery novel: characters act strangely, but always for a reason. Miscellaneous people drift in and out, but they're not truly miscellaneous – you just have to wait to see how they're connected. And like any good mystery, the payoff at the end is worth the time it takes to get there...and what a payoff! Dickens is a master of the type of narration that simultaneously moves forward and back in time. In other words, strategically placed revelations from the past inform the present and shape the future. The brilliant timing both of his hints and of the actual revelations is a bonus field of study. Merely the drama of the dark past and its impact on the – here and now – story is thrilling enough. Plus,

is a profoundly moral story, with themes of vengeance versus forgiveness, sins of the fathers being visited on the children, resurrection and rebirth, and the possibility of redemption.