

A Tale of Two Cities

Sample Analytical Paper Topics

The following paper topics are based on the entire book. Following each topic is a thesis and sample outline. Use these as a starting point for your paper.

TOPIC #1

Write an analytical essay that examines how *A Tale of Two Cities* views different forms of government. Compare the English system with the pre- and post-Revolutionary systems in France. How are these systems alike? How are they different? What do these similarities and differences reveal about Dickens' opinions regarding governments?

Outline

I. Thesis Statement: *Throughout the novel, Dickens draws comparisons between the governments of England and France which reveal his opinions regarding governments.*

II. England

A. Charles Darnay's trial for treason

1. The prosecution's argument
2. The defense's argument

B. The verdict

1. Darnay is acquitted
2. The crowd is unhappy

C. Roger Cly's "funeral"

1. His conviction as a spy
2. The mob's idea of justice

III. Pre-Revolutionary France

A. Monsieur the Marquis

1. His mistreatment of the peasants
2. His argument with Charles Darnay about class
 - a. Darnay's opinion
 - b. The Marquis' opinion

B. Dr. Manette's imprisonment

1. Reason he was imprisoned
2. Length of his incarceration

IV. Post-Revolutionary France

A. Charles Darnay's arrest and imprisonment

1. Reason for arrest
2. Conditions in prison
- B. Darnay's first trial
 1. Argument of prosecution
 2. Argument in Darnay's defense
 3. Result of trial
- C. Darnay's second trial
 1. Reason for arrest
 2. Argument of prosecution
 3. Argument in defense
 4. Result of trial
- D. Punishment in Post-Revolutionary France
 1. Prison sentences
 2. Beheadings

TOPIC #2

Write an essay that examines the roles that women play in the novel. Compare and contrast Lucie Manette and Therese Defarge. What do their respective behaviors reveal about Victorian ideals?

Outline

I. Thesis Statement: *The two significant women characters in the novel, Lucie Manette and Therese Defarge, represent contrasting ideas about the role of women in Victorian society.*

II. Lucie Manette

- A. Relations to men
 1. Her father
 2. Jarvis Lorry
 3. Charles Darnay
- B. Moral behavior
 1. Displays of compassion
 2. Examples of selfless behavior
- C. Role in the Revolution
 1. Concern for the individual
 2. Ability to think of the Revolution in an impersonal manner

III. Therese Defarge

- A. Relations to men
 1. Ernest Defarge
 2. Charles Darnay
 3. The "Jacques"
- B. Immoral behavior
 1. Denunciation of Darnay
 2. Murder of Foulon
 3. Leader of Revolution

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- C. Role in Revolution
 - 1. Knitting death register
 - 2. Leading women in riots
 - 3. Organizing resistance to government

IV. Manner of presentation of women

- A. Defined through men
 - 1. Lucie defined through Darnay
 - 2. Lucie defined through her father
 - 3. Therese Defarge in opposition to her husband
- B. Victorian ideals as displayed by Lucie
 - 1. Passivity
 - 2. Reliance on men
- C. The antithesis of Victorian ideals as manifested in Therese Defarge
 - 1. Violence
 - 2. Independence
 - 3. Madness/passion

TOPIC #3

Write an analytical essay that explores the role of crowds in *A Tale of Two Cities*. Why are mobs violent by definition? Do crowds serve any “good” purpose in the novel? Examine both the actions of mobs and the narrator’s comments about mob mentality.

Outline

I. **Thesis Statement:** *The nature of crowds and mobs is a significant theme throughout A Tale of Two Cities.*

II. Mobs at trials

- A. Darnay’s trial in England
 - 1. Comments crowd makes
 - 2. Narrator’s comment regarding crowd
- B. Darnay’s trials in France
 - 1. Fickleness of crowd at Darnay’s first trial
 - a. Hope that Darnay will be hanged
 - b. Cheers at his acquittal
 - 2. Ruthlessness of crowd at second trial
 - a. Elation at Darnay’s death-sentence
 - b. Paradox of letting Darnay hug his wife

III. Mobs in the Revolution

- A. The storming of the Bastille
 - 1. Peasants gain power through sheer numbers
 - 2. Manipulation of mobs by the Defarges
- B. The crowd gathered at the grindstone

- 1. Description of crowd
- 2. Lorry's refusal to let the Manettes look out the window
- C. Vastness of crowds at public executions
 - 1. Entertainment value of the guillotine
 - 2. Blood-lust satisfied