

Read Like This—A Strategy for Close Reading of Literature

Tale of Two Cities Graphic Organizer Sample Responses

Directions:

For the Conquer It activity, students complete the Tale of Two Cities Graphic Organizer. Compare students' answers to the sample responses below.

What it says:

- What is the first thing you notice about the passage?
- What does the 1st paragraph say? What is repeated? What do the contradictions seem to be saying?
- What mood does the passage create? What is the evidence?
- What is the setting of the opening chapter? What clues enable us to determine information about "The Period"?

Sample Response:

The first thing you notice about the passage is the repetition of "it was" in repeated clauses. Each "it was" seems to introduce opposites or contradictions. The first one—"it was the best of times, it was the worst of times"—implies that the setting and events that the novel will explore can be interpreted in more than one way. It opens up a lot of ambiguity about the events surrounding the French Revolution. The mood of the paragraph seems disjointed and out of sorts because of the contrasts detailed: best/worst; wisdom/foolishness; belief/incredulity; hope/despair; good/evil. It was a time of great change. The chapter briefly establishes the era, which the novel is built around.

How the passage says it:

- How was the passage organized?
- What literary device was used and how effective was it?
- Is there any repetition in the passage? What is its effect?
- How are the two cities contrasted?
- Is the parallelism in this first chapter effective? Why?
- How does this chapter evoke the novel's title?

Sample Response:

The passage is organized around a series of statements and clauses that are polar opposites. It provides the reader with contrasts and paradoxes that the reader can relate to. The reader realizes that each historical era provides the people with their own unique set of benefits and problems. This particular passage is set around a time of upheaval and hope for the masses. The phrases begin with "it was," providing an easily remembered and almost lyrical effect on the reader. The repetition lets the reader know that the contrasts between rich and poor, among others, will be quite evident throughout the novel. Dickens uses parallelism to describe the times and the cities of Paris and London. This hints to the reader that the outcomes for the two cities will be closely interwoven. It appears that the plot of the story may be full of parallels.

What is Dickens' point?

- What does Dickens mean by beginning his novel with a series of contrasts in its opening sentence?
- What is Dickens telling us about the time and setting of the novel that may be important later?
- How does the passage make us think or react to events within the narrative?
- What do the narrator's comments on the two important places in the novel, France and England, tell us about the situation in both places in 1775? Are the people complacent?
- What does Dickens say about the poor social conditions in both countries at the time?
- How does Dickens subtly reveal a need for social reforms to occur, as well as a hatred of the social injustice of the time period?
- How does this chapter evoke the novel's title?

Sample Response:

The use of sweeping contrasts sets the time and place of the novel, but also provides us with a way to relate to that time by realizing that each era in history can probably be described in exactly the same way.

The lines encompass much about life and its ups and downs. This personalizes the struggle and rewards we face, and provides us with a way to connect to the experiences he will be describing in his story. He provides us with a definition of life that speaks to each generation and sets the tone for the changes, chaos, disaster and reward that awaits us as we experience life. We know what we are in for as we continue to read in a beautifully worded sentence. Dickens lets us know that the time was ripe for revolution—aristocrats are out of control, peasants are starving, England is full of crime, and France is full of poverty. Dickens mentions the corruption, the injustice endured by the people who lived in less than equitable circumstances and social conditions to advocate for better treatments of the poor. These initial descriptions provide a canvas into which he will place his characters.