

Name:

Les Miserables by Victor Hugo

Date:

Mrs. Seemayer



Unit Objectives

Know

- Students will know the definitions of allusion, parallel, symbolism, author's purpose, characterization, theme and mood.
- Students will know the components of a critical lens essay.

Understand

- Students will understand how the themes in *Les Miserables* impact people today.
- Students will understand how the Bible impacts literature.
- Students will understand how themes and characters develop throughout a story.

Do

- Students will be able to write a critical lens essay.
- Students will be able to write a literary analysis essay.
- Students will be able to analyze a quotation.
- Students will be able to draw out meaningful quotations from a text.
- Students will be able to conduct a close reading of a text.

Historical Background

When Victor Hugo's novel *Les Misérables* first came out in 1862, people in Paris and elsewhere lined up to buy it. Although critics were less receptive, the novel was an instant popular success. The French word "misérables" means both poor wretches and scoundrels or villains. The novel offers a huge cast that includes both kinds of "misérables." A product of France's most prominent Romantic writer, *Les Misérables* ranges far and wide. It paints a vivid picture of Paris's seamier side, discusses the causes and results of revolution, and includes discourses on topics ranging from the Battle of Waterloo to Parisian street slang. But the two central themes that dominate the novel are the moral redemption of its main character, Jean Valjean, an ex-convict, and the moral redemption of a nation through revolution. Victor Hugo said: "I condemn slavery, I banish poverty, I teach ignorance, I treat disease, I lighten the night, and I hate hatred. That is what I am, and that is why I have written *Les Misérables*." The novel is a critical statement against human suffering, poverty, and ignorance. Its purpose is as much political as it is artistic.

Victor Hugo arranged the events of *Les Misérables* in and around Paris between 1796 and 1833. This was a tumultuous revolutionary era in France's history and was a particularly dismal period for the poor. To understand the plights of the characters in this novel, one must understand the historical struggles to which these characters react.

France endured an extended era of revolution spanning from 1789 to 1852. With Paris as the center of discontent, this period witnessed numerous rulers, from kings, to dictators, to presidents. France had long adhered to a rigid class system, and the only people with any power or influence were the wealthy. In response to poverty, inflation, and food shortages, peasant uprisings began. King Louis XVI and Queen Marie Antoinette were executed by a new liberal revolutionary order, hence began the Terror in 1792. During this time, anti-revolutionaries were mercilessly executed, and the anti-church sentiment resulted in the destruction of numerous churches. By 1796, the power had shifted, and the Directory of conservative bourgeois ruled France by intimidation, enlisting the army to squelch any anti-government riots. This period birthed serious economic problems in an already troubled economy, and in 1799, a brigadier named Napoleon overthrew the Directory.

Napoleon appealed to France and awarded peasants what they had won in the revolution, restored the church, and wrote a code of laws. Of course, he established himself as a dictator/emperor and focused his time and France's money on foreign conquest. By 1811, a

serious economic crisis in France and Napoleon's loss of military might have led to Napoleon's surrender. In 1814, Napoleon was exiled to Elba, and Louis XVIII, the Bourbon monarch, was welcomed to the throne in hopes that he would repair France's economy and social system. In 1815, Napoleon returned to France, resumed power, gathered an army, and continued his quest for a European empire. He was defeated at Waterloo, and the Restoration ensued.

According to the Restoration, Europe was restored to its pre-1789 structure. Since this required France to lose territory, those soldiers who helped conquer those territories were treated as though those battles never occurred. This meant that France denied Napoleon's soldiers their earned ranks and awards of valor. France assigned these soldiers ranks and pensions in accordance with the ranks they would have achieved under the old order. Despite this setback to the military, Louis XVIII returned to the throne from 1815 to 1824 and helped an exhausted France recover peacefully.

France entered a recession and experienced the beginning of the industrial revolution. Charles X, another Bourbon monarch who ruled from 1824 – 1830, accepted the throne after Louis XVIII. Charles X demonstrated his allegiance to the old order by restoring the old church and the aristocratic control of power. This again instigated social, political, and intellectual upheaval, and the revolution reignited. In 1830, a bad harvest, an economic crisis, and a strong anti-Bourbon sentiment led to insurgence and barricades in the streets. Charles abdicated the throne.

Meaningful Quotations

- have meaning that can be applied outside of the text.
- make the reader think to grasp the meaning
- have a deep impact on the development of the story or characters
- contain examples of figurative language
- can be shared and discussed because of their deep impact

Ways to Mark Quotations in a Text

underline

{ place brackets
around
the section }

Mark it
with a
sticky
note!

Meaningful, or not?

Directions: Read the following quotations from The Hunger Games. Decide which quotation in each line is the meaningful quotation (circle) and then explain why it is meaningful.

Quotation 1	Quotation 2	Explanation
“District 12: Where you can starve to death in safety.”	“No. Now, shut up and eat your pears.”	
“You’ve got about as much charm as a dead slug.”	“You don’t forget the face of the person who was your last hope.”	
“Oh, and I suppose the apples ate the cheese.”	“For there to be betrayal, there would have to have been trust first.”	
“I am not pretty. I am not beautiful. I am as radiant as the sun.”	“All right,” he whispers.”	

Biblical Allusions

Allusion-

Symbolism-

Parallel-

Biblical
Allusions,
Symbolism,
and Parallels

Analyzing a Quotation

-The Context (Who? Where? When?):

-The Gist (What?):

-The Purpose(Why?):

-The Application (Give the quotation a greater context):

Guided Quotation:

“Jean Valjean, my brother; you belong no longer to evil, but to good. It is your soul that I am buying for you. I withdraw it from dark thoughts and from the spirit of perdition, and I give it to God!” pg. 33

-The Context (Who? Where? When?):

-The Gist (What?):

-The Purpose(Why?):

-The Application (Give the quotation a greater context):

Pair Quotation:

“A person seated instead of standing; fate hangs on such a thread as that.” Pg. 42

-The Context (Who? Where? When?):

-The Gist (What?):

-The Purpose(Why?):

-The Application (Give the quotation a greater context):

Independent Quotation:

“To be wicked does not insure prosperity” pg. 46

-The Context (Who? Where? When?):

-The Gist (What?):

-The Purpose(Why?):

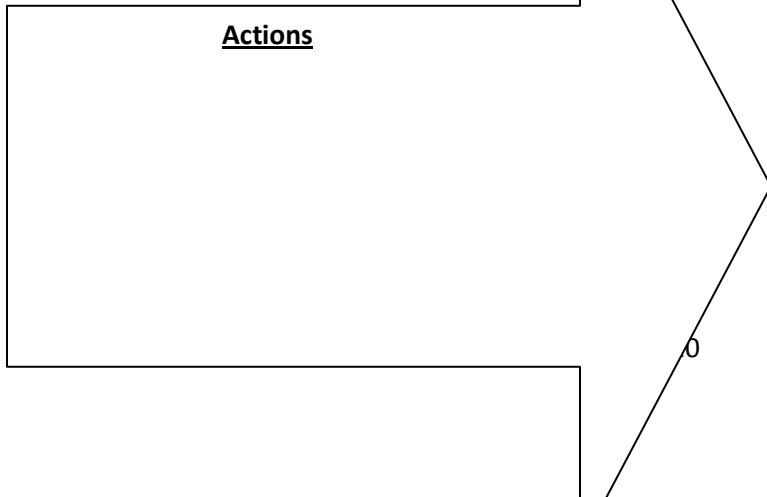
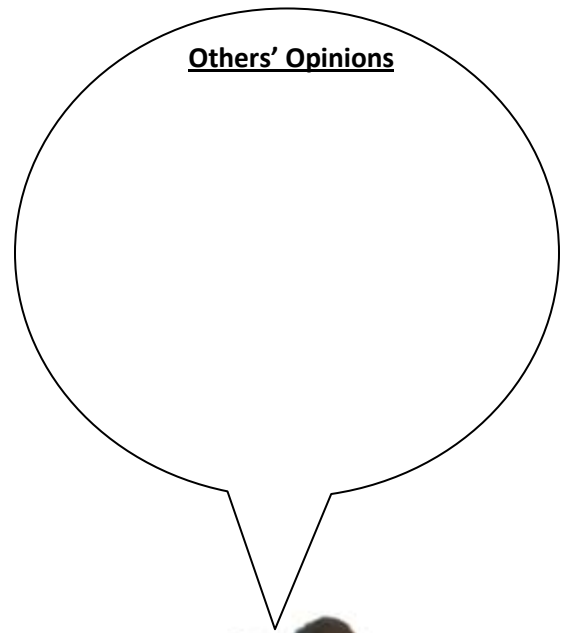
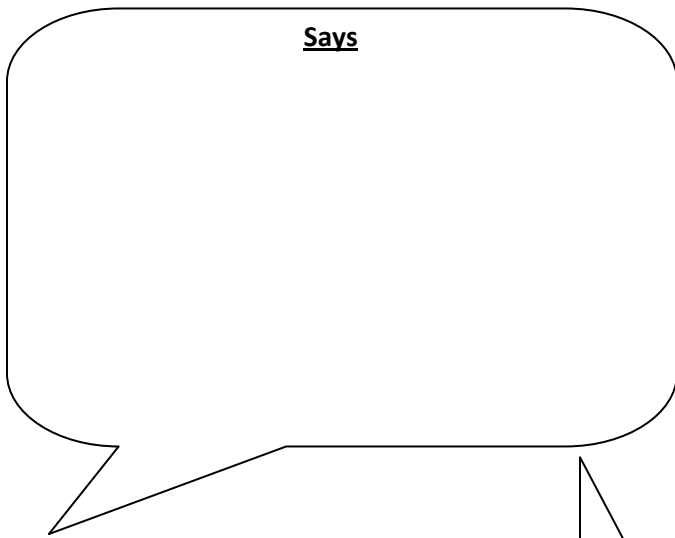
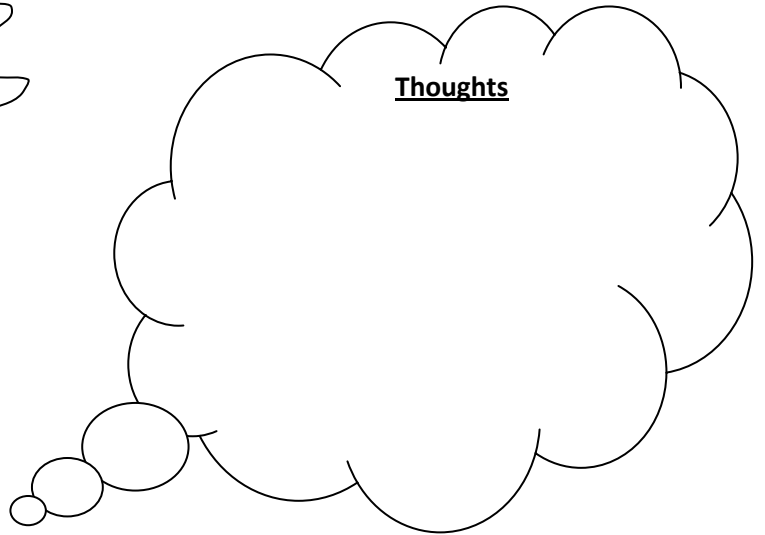
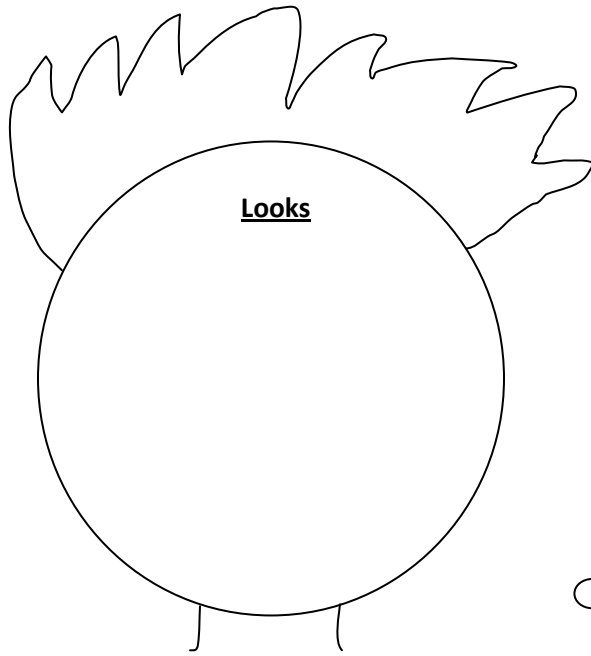
-The Application (Give the quotation a greater context):

Characterization Frayer Model

Information	Memory Strategy
Definition	Examples

Characterization

How do I know what the character is like?



The Character of Valjean and Marius

Valjean		Marius	
Character Trait	Text Evidence and page	Character Trait	Text Evidence and page

Lessons in Poverty

When poverty kills the dream

One example of *Les Miserables*' commentary on poverty is found in the character Fantine. The musical versions of the story exemplify her oppression through songs like "I Dreamed a Dream." Fantine has reached a point of extreme depression—her child is living with corrupt people who keep demanding money of her; she is unemployed and forced to sell her teeth, hair and eventually her body; her lover has abandoned her; and she almost goes to jail for prostitution.

In this despair, she sings:

*I had a dream my life would be
So different from this hell I'm living
So different now from what it seemed
Now life has killed the dream I dreamed.*

Through Fantine's song and story, *Les Miserables* reminds us that life, which can look so hopeful and beautiful under the right circumstances, can look absolutely devastating after a turn of events or change of perspective. This artful rendition of the misery and longing for glory and grace in life is a tool for living more aware of the drowning hopelessness of millions of people on earth, people who have found themselves in circumstances not much different than that of Fantine.

Fantine the slave, Fantine the friend

While the lyrics from the musical adaptation are profound, the words penned by Hugo in the novel demonstrate an immense understanding of the real-life circumstances portrayed by his characters. It seems as if he has a deeper relationship with his characters than some of our real life relationships.

With this in mind, sit in the timeless truth of Hugo's understanding of Fantine's situation. The compassion this passage instills can help all of us to be more open to relationships with the Fantine figures we encounter in our own lives.

*What is this history of Fantine? It is society purchasing a slave.
From whom? From misery.
From hunger, cold, isolation, destitution. A dolorous bargain. A soul for a morsel of bread.
Misery offers; society accepts.
The sacred law of Jesus Christ governs our civilization, but it does not, as yet, permeate it; it is said that slavery has disappeared from European civilization. This is a mistake. It still exists; but it weighs only upon the woman, and it is called prostitution.
It weighs upon the woman, that is to say, upon grace, weakness, beauty, maternity. This is not one of the least of man's disgraces.
At the point in this melancholy drama which we have now reached, nothing is left to Fantine of that which she had formerly been.*

<http://www.live58.org/What-Les-Mis-Can-Teach-Us-About-Poverty-Part-2>

Short Answer Question: How does Fantine's plight cause you to reflect on a real-world issue?

Close Reading: Marius' Depression

That voice which through the twilight had called Marius to the barricade of the Rue de la Chanvrerie, sounded to him like the voice of destiny. He wished to die, the opportunity presented itself; he was knocking at the door of the tomb, a hand in the shadow held out the key. Marius pushed aside the bar which had let him pass so many times, came out of the garden, and said: "Let us go!"

Marius willed with the will of a man who no longer hopes. He had been called, he must go. He found means to pass through the multitude, and to pass through the bivouac of the troops, he avoided the patrols, evaded the sentinels. He made the detour, reached the Rue de Bethisy, and made his way towards the markets. At the corner of the Rue des Bourdonnais the lamps ended.

After having crossed the belt of the multitude and passed the fringe of troops, he found himself in the midst of something terrible. Not a passer more, not a soldier, not a light; nobody. Solitude, silence, night; a mysterious chill which seized upon him. To enter a street was to enter a cellar.

He continued to advance.

Close Reading: Gavroche

The sight was appalling and fascinating. Gavroche, fired at, mocked the firing. He appeared to be very much amused. They aimed at him incessantly, they always missed him. The National Guards and the soldiers laughed as they aimed at him. He lay down, then rose up, hid himself in a doorway, then sprang out, disappeared, reappeared, escaped, returned, retorted upon the volleys by wry faces, and meanwhile pillaged cartridges, emptied cartridge boxes, and filled his basket. The insurgents, breathless with anxiety, followed him with their eyes. The barricade was trembling; he was singing. It was not a child; it was not a man; it was a strange fairy *gamin*. One would have said the invulnerable dwarf of the melee. The bullets ran after him, he was more nimble than they.

One bullet, however, better aimed or more treacherous than the others, reached the Will-o'-wisp child. They saw Gavroche totter, then he fell.

The New Testament parable that is *Les Miserables*

[Marta Layton](#) 01/16/13

Les Miserables, which won the Golden Globe for Best Musical or Comedy earlier this week, is easily the most explicitly religious movie I've seen in a long time. Characters speak of Lucifer's fall, the never-ending road to Calvary, beggars at the feast and many other Biblical references. More generally, the conflict between the two main characters - Jean Valjean and Javert - resembles a problem central to Christian morality: the tension between mercy and the law.

The movie begins with the parole of Jean Valjean (Hugh Jackman), a laborer who once stole a loaf of bread to feed his sister's starving children. Even after serving 19 years, Valjean is informed by police inspector Javert (Russell Crowe) that he is not really free. He is branded a thief and an ex-convict, preventing him from finding honest work. He eventually steals silver from a church and is caught with it, but the bishop lies, saying that he gave the silver to Valjean, effectively saving him from another long prison term.

This moment of mercy by the bishop galvanizes Valjean: it reminds him that he is not just a thief, but a man with a soul, and so he takes the silver to become an honest businessman. He also tears up the identity papers labeling him as a convict and breaks parole. Javert sees this deception as a criminal act and commits himself to putting Valjean in prison again.

Javert does not hate Valjean or even particularly dislike him, but he cannot forgive him. He is the law, and that makes mercy impossible. As Javert [sings](#):

*And if you fall as Lucifer fell, you fall in flame.
And so it has been, and so it is written on the doorway to paradise,
that those who falter and those who fall must pay the price.*

According to Javert, we are all capable of following the law, and when we don't, punishment follows. There is nothing unfair in this. When Valjean complains that he only stole a loaf of bread, Javert shares a surprising part of his own history: that he was born inside a jail but lived a good life according to the law and became an honored policeman. If he can do it, Javert reasons, anyone can – and they deserve punishment when they can't meet that standard.

Jesus, however, paints a very different picture. In the [parable](#) of the unforgiving servant, He tells of a man who had a large debt forgiven, but then refused to forget a small debt another man owed him. Jesus uses this story to show why we must forgive those who sin against us: because God has forgiven us our own sins, we should be gracious when people sin against us, and forgive them. The fact that we once needed mercy compels us to act mercifully to others.

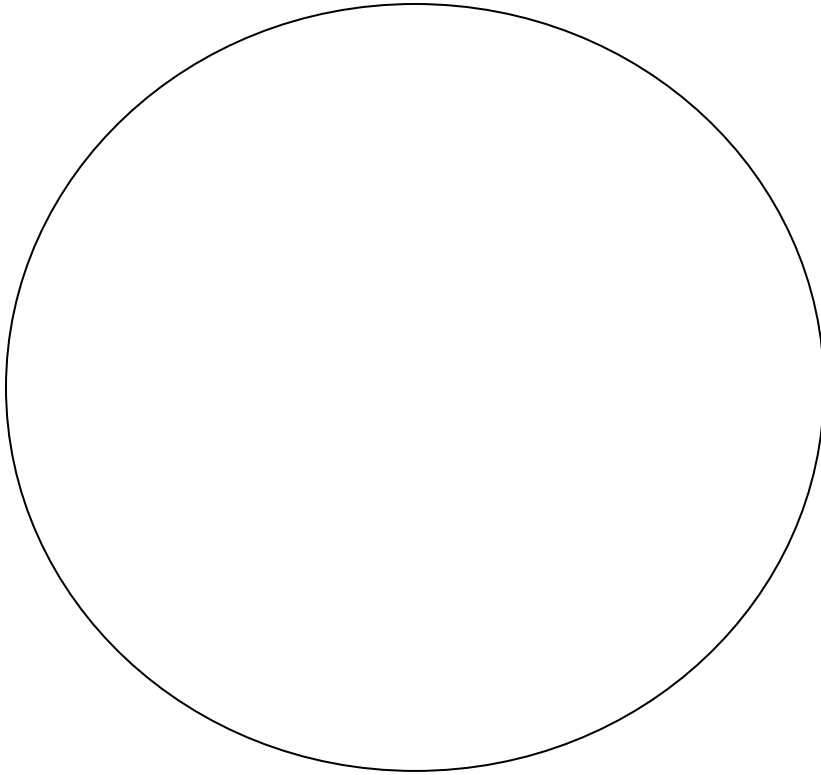
This grace, of course, does not give Valjean the freedom to "[go on sinning so that grace may increase.](#)" Even while Javert's law held authority over him, Valjean found other duties that he could fulfill: his promise to the bishop to become an honest man and his promise to the dying Fantine (Anne Hathaway) to raise her child well. Valjean needs liberation from Javert's exacting justice, but he also must do what he can to live a good life judged by a better law.

<http://thinkchristian.net/the-new-testament-parable-that-is-les-miserables>

Directions: Reflect back on the struggles the characters faced throughout Les Miserables. (government, society, culture. Etc.) Record the struggles in the chart below and for each issue you identify, come up with a Biblical and fair solution.

Issue Presented in the Book	How Late 18 th /Early 19 th Century France handled the problem:	How should the problem have been handled?

Author's Purpose



Short Answer: What is the author's purpose for writing *Les Miserables*?

Les Misérables Literary Analysis Essay

Due Date: _____

Step One: Choose one of the following topics to write about:

- A. Discuss why *Les Misérables* is one of the most widely read novels of all time.
- B. Discuss the social and/or political goals of Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables*.
- C. Discuss Hugo's view of human nature and original sin.
- D. Discuss the ways in which Jean Valjean finds redemption in the course of the novel.
- E. Discuss an important theme that emerges in *Les Misérables*.

**Be sure to include biblical principals in your analysis.

Step Two: Use page 1 in your Literary Analysis Graphic Organizer to plan for your essay.

Step Three: Fill out pages 2-6 as thoroughly as possible, using the plan from page 1.

Step Four: Using a computer, type the information from pages 2-6 of your graphic organizer in essay form.

- 12 point, Times New Roman font
- Double Spaced

Step Five: Revise and edit your work.

-Check for:

-Conventions spelling, punctuation, capitalization, grammar/usage, and paragraphing

-Organization Are your ideas grouped together in a way that makes sense?

-Word Choice use of rich, colorful, precise language that communicates in an advanced manner

-Ideas Do all of your ideas focus on your claim? Did you make deep connections? Are biblical principals incorporated into your analysis?

-Sentence Fluency Are your quotations properly framed? Does your grammar usage create a smooth flow of information to the reader?

Step Six: Submit your paper by placing it in the shared file on dropbox.com or by emailing it to Lindsey.Seemayer@DestinySchool.com

Nightly Homework

Directions: Each time reading is assigned you must write down 5 important events that took place and 3 important quotations (lines from the text that have a lot of meaning). Be prepared to use these notes for studying and participation in class discussions.

Important events from this section: (Pages -)	
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3.	
4.	
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Important Quotations from this section:	
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