

A Tale of Two Cities

Charles Dickens

Why does Dickens describe one historical moment as two opposite things at once?

TOTAL TIME

PASSAGE

30 minutes	The age described in opposites
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FIND THE ANCHOR TEXT

Use the Anchor Text Table of Contents in the Enhanced Reader to open the START anchor. Then use the dropdown to select the END anchor.

SECTION / LOCATION	Book I, Chapter I · The Period
START	It was the best of times, it was the worst of times
END	roads that lay before them.
PASSAGE ID	sec-ttc-01

THE MOVE

Read parallel structure as an argument

WHY THIS PASSAGE

Dickens opens by pairing certainty with contradiction: wisdom and foolishness, belief and incredulity, light and darkness. The parallel structure does not cancel meaning; it argues that the period can only be understood by holding opposing truths together.

MARK

Draw brackets around each paired opposite. In the margin, label what kind of contrast it creates—knowledge, belief, hope, morality, or direction. Star the pair that most clearly turns contradiction into a claim about the whole age.

NOTICE

- Do the opposites describe different groups of people, or the same historical moment?
- How does the repeated sentence structure make contradiction feel deliberate rather than confused?
- What would be lost if Dickens chose only one side of each pair?

THINK

Answer provisionally: Why does Dickens describe one historical moment as two opposite things at once? Choose the strongest interpretation you can defend from this passage alone.

WRITE

Write a short evidence-based response to: Why does Dickens describe one historical moment as two opposite things at once? Use at least two details from the assigned passage and explain how they support your interpretation.

CLOSE

Name the single detail that most changed or sharpened your interpretation, and explain why.

STRONG ANSWER	Dickens uses opposites to argue that the age contains contradictory truths at the same time. The repeated parallel structure makes certainty itself unstable: wisdom and foolishness, belief and incredulity, light and darkness all coexist rather than cancel one another.
EVIDENCE	Use at least two paired opposites and explain how their identical sentence structure forces the reader to hold both sides together. Strong answers connect the pattern to the claim about the historical moment, not just to style.
WATCH FOR	Do not answer that Dickens is simply being confusing or dramatic. The oppositions are the argument: the age cannot be reduced to one simple description.
SOLO	Read the exact passage independently.
SUPPORTED	Use narration and sentence highlighting while reading the same passage.
LISTENING	Listen to the exact passage; visual following is optional. Same question and evidence demand.

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OPEN THE MARKED PASSAGE IN TUMBLELIT

SOLO: read independently. SUPPORTED: use narration + highlighting. LISTENING: listen to the exact passage. The question and evidence task stay the same.

1. MARK - Draw brackets around each paired opposite. In the margin, label what kind of contrast it creates—knowledge, belief, hope, morality, or direction. Star the pair that most clearly turns contradiction into a claim about the whole age.
2. NOTICE - Do the opposites describe different groups of people, or the same historical moment? How does the repeated sentence structure make contradiction feel deliberate rather than confused? What would be lost if Dickens chose only one side of each pair?
3. THINK - Answer provisionally: Why does Dickens describe one historical moment as two opposite things at once?
4. WRITE - Write a short response using at least two pieces of evidence from this passage.

Use evidence from the assigned passage. Show what you noticed and how the text supports your interpretation.