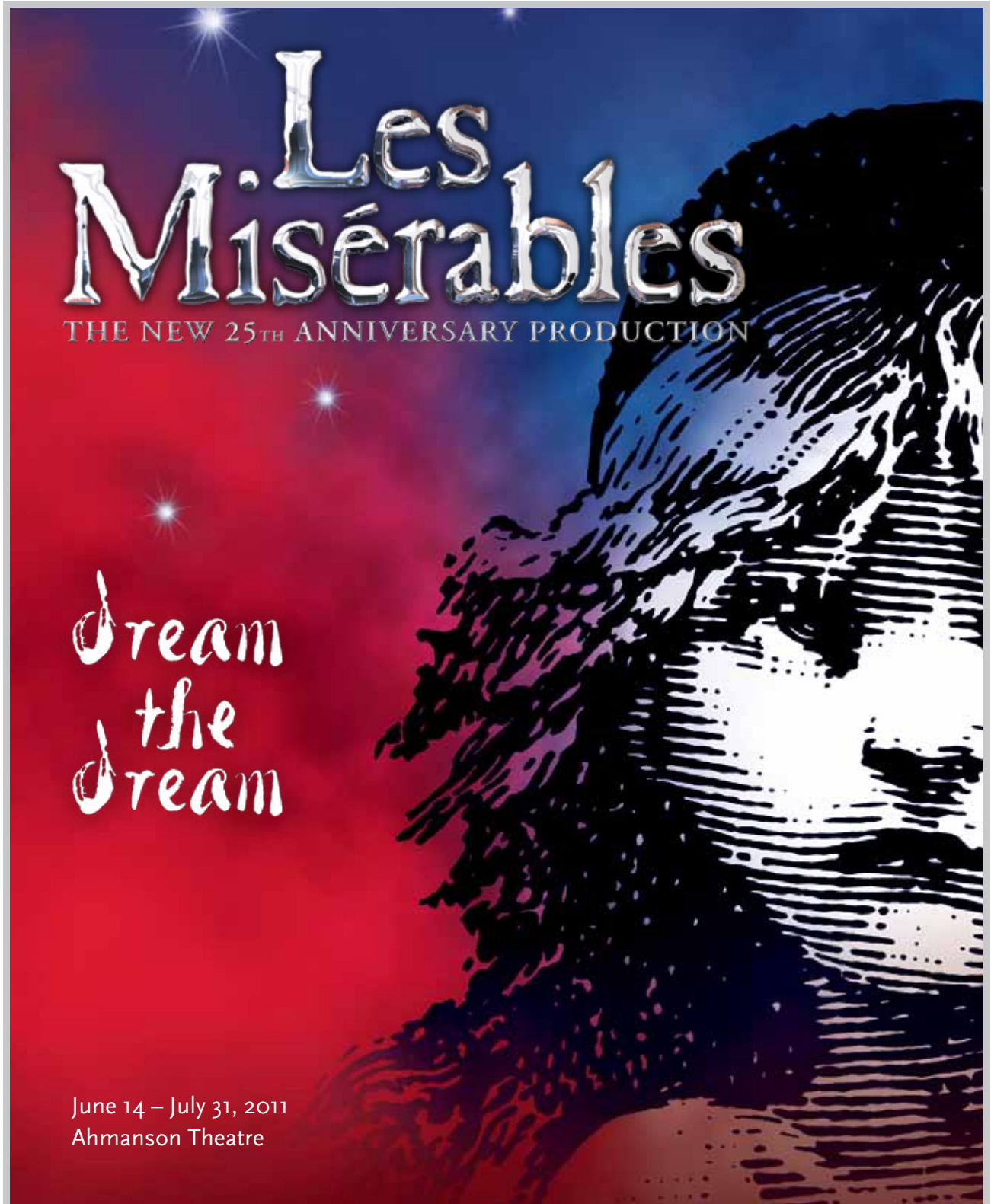




# Educator Resources



# Welcome

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Educator Resources  
*Les Misérables*

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Center Theatre Group is excited to have you and your students join us for the new 25th Anniversary production of *Les Misérables*.

A great play raises questions about the human condition and a great educational experience allows students an opportunity to reflect upon those questions and begin to discover their own answers. To that end the material in Center Theatre Group's student Discovery Guide and Educator Resources raise questions about law and mercy, about revolution and responsibility and questions about the power of compassion in the midst of injustice and inequality. Our goal is to provide you with a variety of entry points into *Les Misérables* so that you can choose what best suits you and your students.

The Educator Resources and student Discovery Guide are companion pieces, designed to help you prepare your students to see the play and to follow-up the performance with options for discussion, reflection and creativity.

We have organized the Educator Resources into the following sections:

## Student Discovery Guide

The student Discovery Guide provides students with background information about the play and the subject matter, as well as questions for individual reflection. Written to be student-driven, the Discovery Guide helps prepare your students for the performance.

## About This Play

This section includes a synopsis of the play.



L.A.'s Theatre Company

Ahmanson Theatre  
Mark Taper Forum  
Kirk Douglas Theatre

601 West Temple Street  
Los Angeles, CA 90012

## Comprehension

This section includes background information about the subject matter of the play. We have selected the information that most directly connects to or informs what happens in the play. This section furthers and deepens the background information provided in the student Discovery Guide. This section can be shared before the play and/or discussed after the performance. It can also be used to provide research topics for your classroom.

## Connection

This section provides ways to explore connections between the ideas presented in the play, the students' lives and the world we live in. Structured thematically, each section contains questions and exercises that may be used for reflection, discussion and/or writing prompts, both before and after the performance.

## Creativity

This section provides opportunities for your students to use theatre to explore and express. Theatre activities are included that examine both specific artistic aspects of the production, as well as delve deeper into the ideas and questions raised by *Les Misérables*. The activities and information in this section can be used both before and after the performance.

We know the hard work and dedication that it takes to bring students to see theatre. These materials are designed to support you in making the most of that experience. We applaud your passion for sharing theatre with your students and thank you for sharing your students with all of us at Center Theatre Group. We look forward to seeing you at *Les Misérables*!

# About

## *Les Misérables*

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### Scene by Scene Synopsis:

#### ACT ONE

##### 1. “Prologue”

It is 1815 in Digne, France and a slave ship, rowed by prisoners, enters the stage to the sound of waves crashing. The stone-faced Inspector Javert announces that prisoner “24601,” Jean Valjean, is being released on parole. After 19 years in jail for stealing a loaf of bread and trying to escape, Valjean is finally a free man. But as Valjean prepares to leave with his yellow parole papers in hand, Javert casts a shadow on his newfound freedom. A criminal, he warns, can never escape his past — and Valjean is no exception.

It is not long before Valjean discovers the truth of Javert’s warning. His valiant efforts to make a fresh start leave him dejected, as he struggles to find work and doors are slammed shut in his face. The ex-convict despairs that he is society’s scum, nothing more than the “dirt beneath their feet.” Finally, the local Bishop agrees to take him in for the night. Yet even this act of kindness cannot soften Valjean’s embittered heart — during the night, he hastily steals the Bishop’s silver, only to be caught by the police. When the authorities press the Bishop to accuse Valjean, he claims to have given him the silver. The Bishop urges Valjean to take the gift and use it to pursue an honest life. Deeply moved by this act of compassion and armed with a newfound faith, Valjean swears to uphold the Bishop’s wishes.

##### 2. “At the End of the Day”

It is eight years later, in 1832, and the action has moved to the seaside town of Montreuil-sur-Mer and a group of dejected factory workers. Among the workers is Fantine, a young woman who also carries the burden of a shameful past. She is unable to care for her illegitimate daughter Cosette, and pays the local innkeepers, the Thénardiens, to look after her. As she reads a letter from the Thénardiens demanding more money, the other women tease her. When the owner of the factory comes to break up the fight, we see Valjean has started his life over as a successful businessman and mayor of the town. Meanwhile, the foreman, who has been privy to the women’s talk, fires Fantine for supposedly causing trouble.

##### 3. “I Dreamed a Dream”

Overcome with despair, Fantine is alone on stage and sings about her love affair and subsequent abandonment by Cosette’s father. She is devastated and hopeless about her future.



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4. “Lovely Ladies”

Fantine goes to the town’s docks to sell whatever she can to support her daughter, and finds herself amongst the local whores and sailors. The sailors use suggestive language as they interact with the prostitutes. In desperation, Fantine sells her necklace, then her hair, and then her body. When one customer is particularly aggressive, she lashes out at him. The local police chief appears, and it turns out to be Javert — he wants to arrest Fantine. Valjean intervenes, saving Fantine from arrest and insisting that she go to the local hospital. Javert fails to recognize Valjean, knowing him only as the trusted mayor of the town.

5. “The Runaway Cart”

Suddenly, a runaway cart full of goods pins a man to the ground. As the townspeople and Javert look on, Valjean single-handedly lifts the cart off the man. When he sees this display of strength, Javert is reminded of prisoner 24601. But he wonders how this could be — prisoner 24601 has just been arrested and is facing trial that very day.

6. “Who Am I?”

The crowd clears and Valjean is alone on stage. He has overheard that another man was taken into custody as prisoner 24601. Valjean is deeply conflicted — can he let another man go to prison for a crime he committed? Overcome with guilt, Valjean reveals his identity to Javert. He tells Javert he is going to see Fantine at the hospital, and flees.

7. “Fantine’s Death/The Confrontation”

Valjean rushes to Fantine’s side, and promises the ailing mother that he will look after Cosette. Fantine dies peacefully. Javert and Valjean then have a violent confrontation. Valjean insists he needs a few days to make sure Cosette’s affairs are in order, but Javert refuses. Valjean flees again.

8. “Castle on a Cloud”

The young Cosette, frail and clearly worked to the bone, sweeps the floor of the Thénardiens’ inn, where she

lives with the couple and their daughter Éponine. She wistfully dreams of a childhood filled with laughter and joy. The brash Mme. Thénardier enters, and promptly orders Cosette to fetch water from the woods.

9. “Master of the House”

The Thénardiens’ inn erupts with energy as alcohol flows freely. M. Thénardier sings proudly about how he dupes his unsuspecting customers. The scene transforms into the woods, where Valjean meets the young Cosette and returns with her to the inn.

10. “The Bargain/Waltz of Treachery”

At the inn, Valjean shares Fantine’s dying wish with the Thénardiens. The couple feels no sadness about giving up Cosette, and their only thought is how to extort money for her release. Valjean is willing to pay whatever it takes, and leaves with the young girl.

11. “Look Down” and “The Robbery”

In the city of Paris, ten years later, the streets heave with people and filth. Gavroche, a mischievous street orphan, introduces the scene. While the poor fight for scraps to survive, the more well-to-do students, led by the charismatic Enjolras, contemplate how to overthrow the oppressive government.

The Thénardiens have moved to the city with their daughter Éponine, and have ingrained themselves in the criminal underworld. Valjean and Cosette, too, have started a new life in Paris. The Thénardiens and their band of misfits plan to rob the wealthy man and his daughter. At the critical moment, they recognize the pair from ten years earlier. Meanwhile, the young student Marius catches sight of Cosette — it is love at first sight. In the middle of the scuffle, Éponine cries out that the police chief Javert is arriving. Valjean, fearing discovery, vanishes with Cosette.

12. “Stars”

Javert is left alone on stage, standing on a bridge over a river, and contemplates his life’s duty to preserve justice in the world.

13. "Éponine's Errand"

Back in the slums of the city, Marius appears and asks Éponine to track down Cosette for him.

14. and 15. "Red and Black" and "Do You Hear the People Sing"

At the local café, the revolutionary students contemplate their next move. Upon hearing about the death of General Lamarque, their only government supporter, they decide to take arms against the government.

16. "In My Life"

Cosette sits in the garden of Valjean's house, contemplating her love for Marius.

17. "A Heart Full of Love"

Éponine brings Marius to Valjean's house to meet Cosette. Marius and Cosette express their feelings of love, while Éponine looks on in jealousy and sadness.

18. "The Attack on Rue Plumet"

The Thénadiers' gang arrives at Valjean's house, planning to rob Valjean as payback for taking Cosette. Éponine screams out a warning and the gang flees. Valjean, hearing the commotion, thinks Javert has come to arrest him. He plans to flee with Cosette.

19. "One Day More"

All the characters gather on stage, and their stories converge. Enjolras and the students rally together in preparation for the revolt, while Javert makes plans to crush them. Marius and Cosette exchange feelings of affection, and the poor Éponine laments her unrequited love for Marius. Valjean plans his escape with Cosette, and the Thénadiers plot how they can profit from the imminent chaos of revolution.

ACT TWO

20. "At the Barricades"

Enjolras has gathered the revolutionaries together as they prepare to revolt. Javert is among them, disguised as a rebel, as is Éponine, disguised as a boy. Marius asks Éponine to take a letter to Cosette. She brings it instead to Valjean, who reads that Cosette's true love may die at the barricades. Valjean's primary concern is Cosette's happiness, and he heads to the barricades to save Marius.

21. "On My Own"

Éponine walks alone through the streets, despairing that Marius will never love her and that she will always be alone.

22. "Building the Barricade/Javert's Arrival"

The students build a barricade of doorways, ladders, crates, and beams to keep away government forces. Javert arrives, still disguised as a rebel, and tells the revolutionaries about a false "enemy plan."

23. "Little People"

Gavroche recognizes Javert and reveals the inspector's identity to the student revolutionaries. The angered students tie Javert up.

24. "A Little Fall of Rain"

A figure is seen climbing the barricades towards the students and is shot down by the government forces. It is Éponine, who has come to join Marius. She dies in his arms. The students are enraged by this death and vow to seek vengeance.

25. "Night of Anguish/First Attack"

Valjean arrives at the barricades in search of Marius, offering to fight with the revolutionaries. The students are suspicious of him, having already been duped by Javert. There is gunfire onstage as the government soldiers attack, and Valjean surprises the students by

shooting down a sniper. As a reward, he asks to kill the prisoner Javert. But out of the students' sight, Valjean frees the inspector. He respects Javert's commitment to his duty, and cannot kill him. Valjean gives Javert his address — if they both survive the revolt, Javert can find him there.

26. "Drink With Me"

The students relax for the evening and celebrate their friendship. Valjean overhears Marius speaking about Cosette, and recognizes him as his daughter's love.

27. "Bring Him Home"

As the revolutionaries turn in for the night, Valjean prays to God that Marius will survive the revolution.

28. "Second Attack"

It is the following morning — again there is gunfire onstage as the soldiers attack the revolutionaries. As Gavroche climbs the barricade to gather bullets from the dead, he is shot three times and killed.

29. "Final Battle"

During this violent final battle, each student is killed. During an orchestral interlude, many bodies are seen strewn on stage, rebel and soldier alike.

Marius has survived, but barely. Valjean carries him away from the rubble into the city's sewers. Javert arrives looking for Valjean, and realizes he has escaped into the sewers.

30. "Dog Eat Dog"

In the sewers, Thénardier is taking gold and valuables off the bodies of the dead while Valjean carries Marius on his back. They cross paths with Javert, but in surprising move, Javert lets Valjean go so that Marius may be saved.

31. "Javert's Suicide"

Javert returns to the bridge where he earlier contemplated his life's purpose. He cannot understand why Valjean chose to save his life, nor why he himself chose to let Valjean go. He cannot keep on living in a world that has been turned upside-down and jumps into the river, taking his own life.

32. "Turning"

The next morning, the women friends of the revolutionaries lament the young students' senseless deaths.

33. "Empty Chairs at Empty Tables"

Time has passed, and Marius has recovered from his injuries. He remains deeply remorseful about the death of his friends, and Cosette comforts him.

34. "Valjean's Confession"

Marius and Cosette plan to marry, and Valjean feels compelled to tell Marius about his criminal past. Fearing he will bring shame on the young couple, he flees.

35. "Wedding Chorale/Beggars at the Feast"

There is a grand wedding for Marius and Cosette. The Thénardiers show up to tell Marius the "secret" of Valjean identity. In doing so, they reveal that Valjean is the one who saved Marius at the barricades. Marius and Cosette rush to find him.

36. "Epilogue"

Valjean is frail and dying. Alone, he prays for Cosette and Marius' happiness and for his own death. Fantine appears to gently welcome him to the afterlife. But the young couple enters and rushes to his side, begging him to stay and live his life with them. Valjean gives Cosette a letter which reveals all of his past. As he joins Fantine and Éponine in heaven, the entire company reprises "Do You Hear the People Sing."

# Comprehension

Comprehension | Connections | Creativity

This section includes background information about the setting and subject matter of the play.

We have selected the information that most directly connects to or informs what happens in the play. This section furthers and deepens the background information provided in the student Discovery Guide. This section can be shared before the play and/or discussed after the performance. It can also be used to provide research topics for your classroom.



## Victor Hugo and the World Around Him

*[Hugo's] career reflects France's desperate search for political equilibrium. Throughout the nineteenth century... the government cycled twice from a divine-right monarchy to a constitutional monarchy, to a republic, and then to a despotic empire. (Lawrence M. Porter, Victor Hugo)*

### French Revolution 1789

Born in 1802, Hugo grew up in a France attempting to re-define itself. The French Revolution of 1789 had toppled centuries of royal rule and created France's First Republic, with hopes of increased freedoms and social advances for the poor. But years of chaos followed (including the "Reign of Terror" when close to 40,000 people were beheaded) as moderate and radical activists battled each other for power.

### Napoleon (1799–1815)

Following a decade of shaky attempts at building a French republic, in 1799 the government was overthrown by General **Napoleon Bonaparte**. By 1805, Napoleon had declared himself Emperor of France, and would spend the next decade seeking to build an empire, waging numerous wars outside the country's borders. Young Hugo's parents reflected the political divisions of France at the time: his mother, a Catholic royalist; his father, a high-ranking officer in the Napoleonic army, whose military exploits took the Hugo family to Italy and Spain. Napoleon's downfall came in 1815, after a last grasp at power (returning from exile for a "hundred-day" rule of the country) and a humiliating defeat at the Battle of Waterloo.

### Louis XVIII (1815–1824)

Aristocratic forces within France and Europe restored the country to the rule of a king, Louis XVIII, who ruled with a constitutional charter that checked his power. Hugo at the time was emerging as a young writer of great promise, and published lyrical poetry that conveyed nationalist zeal and admiration for the king. Along with many others, Hugo hoped that the restored monarchy would help France recover from the chaos of the revolution and return the country to its previous standing as a great European power.

### Charles X (1824–1830)

During the very conservative rule of the monarch **Charles X**, Hugo began to question whether royalist rule was best for the country. A younger brother of Louis XVIII, Charles was a reactionary who wanted to return the country to a divine-right monarchy. He decreased voting rights, restricted freedom of speech, and censored the press. Hugo's allegiance to the monarchy shifted as he saw the government tighten its hold on the people. Among Hugo's poems and highly successful plays were works that criticized the monarchy, and some of his writings were censored by the government.

### Louis-Philippe (1830–1848)

The middle classes were increasingly unhappy with Charles X's reactionary rule, and in 1830 a three-day insurrection in Paris drove the king out of the country. His cousin **Louis-Philippe** was placed on the throne. More moderate than his predecessor, Louis-Philippe re-established the constitutional charter. Yet, government was still dominated by the special interests of the wealthy elite. The king's call to the bourgeoisie to "enrichissez-vous" (*get rich*) did little to raise the hopes of the poorer classes.

Hugo enjoyed a prolific period during this time, publishing three more compilations of poems, numerous plays (one of which was banned for disrespect to the monarchy) and one of his most famous works, *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*. While Hugo continued to criticize the government, he became an increasingly public figure. In 1841, he was elected to the Académie Française, cementing his reputation as a leader within the Romantic movement. In 1845, he became a peer (equivalent to a member of the British House of Lords).

### Revolution of 1848

By the late 1840s, the situation in France was economically and politically desperate, with a lack of social legislation causing increased poverty and unemployment in the cities. A popular revolt in 1848 overthrew the king and established France's Second Republic. While certain rights were decreed — universal suffrage, the freeing of all slaves in the French colonies, abolition of the death penalty, a ten-hour workday for Paris — political divisions between the moderate Republicans and radical Parisian working classes caused great unrest. That June, a class war led to the failure of the coalition, and the more moderate Republicans prevailed. In place of a democratic republic, a Constituent Assembly created a constitution with a strong executive. Hugo took on a political role as an elected member of the Assembly.

### Napoleon III (1848 – 1871)

Louis Napoleon, nephew of Napoleon Bonaparte, won a landslide victory in the Assembly in December, 1848. With the hope of a free France again dashed, Hugo's republican fervor increased. When Napoleon was elected emperor in 1851, making him **Emperor Napoleon III** and further extending his powers, Hugo's discontent reached a breaking point. He fled into voluntary exile, where he would remain for 19 years. Within two days of his arrival on the Channel Island of

Jersey, Hugo had already written a satirist tract against Napoleon III, and would later write an entire collection of poems ("Les Chatiments") against the emperor. It was also during this prolific time that he wrote his masterpiece, *Les Misérables*.

### The Third Republic

Though Napoleon III led successful advances in France — including extensive railroad construction, the rebuilding of Paris and universal male suffrage — he faced harsh criticism from middle-class liberals who saw his rule as a denial of the country's republican tradition. In the late 1860s, Napoleon III sought to appease the opposition by giving the Assembly greater powers and giving opposition candidates greater freedom. In 1871, a humiliating defeat and Napoleon's capture in the Franco-Prussian War brought an end to the empire. The day after France's **Third Republic** was proclaimed, Hugo returned to his beloved country. He was welcomed back as a national hero, and was elected to the National Assembly and the Senate.

Upon Hugo's death in 1885, the city of Paris hosted an epic display of mourning, with over two million people (more than the city's population) joining the funeral procession from the Arc de Triomphe to the Panthéon.

### 19th Century Revolutions in Technology, Thought, Culture, and Politics

The Industrial Revolution, with its breakthroughs in technology and large-scale manufacturing, massively impacted the workforce and how people lived their daily lives in the 19th century. Among the changes, the invention of the railroad transformed the speed at which people and information could travel within and between countries. This rapid growth of industry coincided with mushrooming populations in the cities. The Paris that is depicted so vividly in *Les Misérables* reflects many European cities of the time — filthy and overcrowded. As urban centers faced increasing blight, governments embraced advances in urban planning, mass transit, and public health to make them far more livable places.

Revolutions of thought were also sweeping across Europe, with philosophers such as Karl Marx introducing new ideological concepts that emphasized the individual's role in determining her own rights and freedoms. Culturally, artists were also breaking away from classical structures to look deeply into the human condition. The Romantic movement, characterized by artists such as Beethoven, William Wordsworth, J.M.W. Turner, and Victor Hugo, examined the depth of human emotion and celebrated the natural world.

These revolutions in economy, thought and culture had political reverberations throughout the continent, as old ruling and class structures were shaken up. The year 1848 saw the largest wave of revolutions in the history of the world (in countries including Austria, France, Italy, Germany, Spain, Prussia, and Denmark). In nearly all the countries new governments were established. In a matter of years many countries had returned to their previous governments, however, the revolutions had given hope to people outside the ruling classes that change was possible, and put in motion waves of progress. By the 1870s, many European countries had established new constitutions and increased voting rights.

### Additional Victor Hugo Facts

- Hugo's brother Eugene was in love with Hugo's wife, Adele. At Hugo and Adele's wedding, Eugene went insane and was never the same again. He died years later in an asylum.
- Hugo was caught in a compromising situation with one of his mistresses. She was sent to prison. He was immune to prosecution due to his status as a peer (like a member of the British House of Lords).
- His oldest daughter Léopoldine drowned in a sailing accident along with her unborn child and her husband. Hugo's collection of poems, "Contemplations," includes some heartbreaking reflections on grief.
- During his time in exile, Hugo and his family conducted séances and contacted people living and dead (including Shakespeare, whom he revered, and Emperor Napoleon III, whom he hated).
- The year *Les Misérables* was published, Hugo started offering a Tuesday dinner to as many as 50 poor children a week.
- Hugo's funeral in Paris was an impressive display of national mourning. It was claimed that 2 million people attended, larger than the population of Paris at the time.
- Hugo held back a quarter of his work from publication, to be released every few years for decades following his death.
- There is a Vietnamese cult that venerates Hugo as a saint. Some of its priests are believed to be reincarnations of Hugo and some of his sons. It has a thousand shrines and between 2 and 3 million followers dedicated to his memory.

## Victor Hugo Quotes

### On Revolution and the Republic

What makes a riot? Nothing and everything. Electricity released a little at a time, a flame suddenly shooting out, a roving force, a momentary breath of wind. This breath of wind meets beings that think, brains that dream, souls that suffer, passions that burn, howling torments, and carries them away.

For a long time, I thought the Republic was only a political vehicle... I didn't realize that it partook of that essential, absolute truth of which all principles are composed. The Republic is a principle. The Republic is a right. The Republic is the very embodiment of progress.

When dictatorship is a fact, revolution becomes a right.

### On *Les Misérables*:

You are right, Sir, when you say *Les Misérables* is written for a universal audience. I do not know whether it will be read by everyone but it is meant for everyone... Social problems go beyond frontiers. Humankind's wounds, those huge sores that litter the world, do not stop at the blue and red lines drawn on maps. Wherever men go in ignorance or despair, wherever women sell themselves for bread, wherever children lack a book to learn from or a warm hearth, *Les Misérables* knocks at the door and says: "open up, I am here for you."

—Victor Hugo, in a letter to a publisher

### On Jean Valjean:

What are the convulsions of a city compared with the riots of the soul? Man is deeper still than the people. Jean Valjean, at that very moment, was a prey to a frightful uprising. Every abyss or rage and despair was gaping once again within him. He also, like Paris, was shuddering on the threshold of a formidable and dark revolution... Of him also, as of Paris, we might say: the two principles are face to face. The angel of light and the angel of darkness are to wrestle on the bridge of the abyss. Which of the two shall hurl down the other? Which shall triumph?

### On Paris:

The author doesn't need to say he loves Paris; Paris is the birthplace of his intellect. Today demolitions and reconstructions have made the Paris of his youth, that Paris he religiously bore away in his memory, a Paris of former times. But let him speak of that Paris as if it still existed. He doesn't know the new Paris, and he is writing with the former Paris before his eyes, an illusion that is precious to him.

### On Prison:

Formerly those harsh places where prison discipline isolates an inmate were composed of four stone walls, a stone ceiling, a strong floor, a folding bed, a barred skylight, a door reinforced with iron, and were called dungeons; but the dungeon came to be discovered too horrible; now it's made of an iron door, a barred skylight, a folding bed, a stone floor, a stone ceiling, and four stone walls, and it's called a punitive detention cell.

He who opens a school door, closes a prison.

**Additional Quotes:**

Great perils have this beauty, that they bring to light the fraternity of strangers.

Music expresses that which cannot be said and on which it is impossible to be silent.

Nothing else in the world... not all the armies... is so powerful as an idea whose time has come. One can resist the invasion of an army but one cannot resist the invasion of ideas.

The greatest happiness of life is the conviction that we are loved; loved for ourselves, or rather, loved in spite of ourselves.

A great artist is a great man in a great child.

A library implies an act of faith.

If any writer wrote merely for his time, I would have to break my pen and throw it away.

Civil war? What does that mean? Is there any foreign war? Isn't every war fought between men, between brothers?

Curiosity is one of the forms of feminine bravery.

Evil. Mistrust those who rejoice at it even more than those who do it.

Freedom in art, freedom in society, this is the double goal towards which all consistent and logical minds must strive.

I love all men who think, even those who think otherwise than myself.

There is nothing like a dream to create the future.

# Connections

Comprehension | Connections | Creativity

This section provides ways to explore connections between the ideas presented in the play, the students' lives and the world we live in. Structured thematically, each section contains questions and exercises that may be used for reflection, discussion and/or writing prompts both before and after the performance.

## Epic and Personal

*Les Misérables* puts a personal face on epic issues. Valjean, Fantine, Cosette and many other characters represent ideas or situations in French society that Victor Hugo exposed through his art.

- **Justice, compassion, poverty and sacrifice** are just some of the epic themes that run throughout *Les Misérables*.
- Ask your students to sit quietly, perhaps closing their eyes. Have each student privately select one of these four words.
- Ask them to think about this word and mention that huge, epic ideas are sometimes hard to grasp.
- Ask the students to try and find a personal connection in their life to that word/idea. Ask them to make the word personal.
- Now have them expand the word out to Los Angeles. How does that word relate to our city?
- Ask them to return to their personal connection to the word.
- Now have them expand the word out to encompass the United States. Where and how does that word relate or connect to our nation? Where doesn't it? Where does it need to?

- Ask them to return to their personal connection to the word. Now have them expand the word out to our world. Where and how does that word relate or connect to our planet? Where doesn't it? Where does it need to?
- Ask them to return to their personal connection to the word. Bring the reflection to a close. Discuss or write about the word if it seems necessary or appropriate.

## Compassion

**“To love another person is to see the face of God.”**

—Valjean, *Les Misérables*

**“Why did I allow this man to touch my soul and teach me love?”**

—Valjean, *Les Misérables*

Near the beginning of *Les Misérables*, the main character, Jean Valjean, is released from prison and offered temporary shelter by the Bishop of Digne. However, Valjean's desperate situation, one that includes lack of food and resources, motivates him to steal silver from the Bishop's home. When the local authorities catch Valjean, something unexpected happens. The Bishop goes above and beyond what most human beings would do. He covers for Valjean and does not allow him to be taken to jail.

- Valjean is deeply moved by the Bishop's action on his behalf. He does not take this moment for granted and “pays it forward” throughout his life, aligning his own choices with what was modeled for him in that fortunate moment. Has anyone ever shown you unexpected kindness? If so, describe what happened.
- Have you ever performed a selfless act like the one experienced by Valjean? Is committing an act of compassion easy or difficult? Why?
- Why might we resist being affected deeply by acts of compassion?
- Why are humans so hesitant to treat each other in this loving way on a regular basis? Or, does it happen often and is just not given proper attention?

- What role does fear play in our choices?
- Why would one be afraid to act with compassion? What is there to be afraid of? Do you think offering kindness is an act of strength or an act of weakness? Why?
- Do you think it is possible, or realistic, to approach life in this way? Why?

## Justice

The Bishop's actions in *Les Misérables* demonstrate a deep understanding of Jean Valjean's situation. It seems that he considers everything about Valjean's predicament: his time spent in jail atoning for a past crime; his access to money, food and shelter; the consequences of sending Valjean back to jail at that particular moment. The Bishop comes to Valjean's rescue based on what seems fair and humane to him.

On the opposite end of the spectrum is the character of Javert, the inspector. Throughout the story he is on a mission to pursue, capture and imprison Valjean. Javert cannot bring himself to show Valjean any kind of mercy, even when Valjean saves his life. In contrast to the Bishop, Javert's form of justice is blind to unique circumstances. He does not allow any rule to be bent or broken. Eventually, he realizes that this approach has its limits. The consequences of his rigidity become apparent to him, and this revelation is too much for him to bear.

- Has anyone ever taken action on your behalf that went above and beyond what a person is expected to do? How did this affect you?
- Why do you think the Bishop helped Jean Valjean, even after he stole the silver? What would have happened to Jean Valjean if the Bishop did not show him mercy?
- Would you be able to forgive someone of a petty crime? A serious crime?
- Would you expect to be forgiven for stealing something? Why or why not?
- Do you know of a situation where a crime was committed, but the punishment did not fit the situation?



- How can we ensure that the punishment fits the crime?
- How do you/we decide what is fair and equitable?
- How do we decide what is just?
  - in school
  - at home
  - in our city
  - in our country
  - in our world
- Name some rules or laws in the above-mentioned locales.
- What role do rules play in our choices? Do you feel the need to follow them, rebel against them, or to look at the unique aspects of each situation before making a decision based on them?

## Sacrifice

**“Let him be, let him live.  
If I die, let me die,  
let him live, bring him home.”**

—Valjean singing over a sleeping Marius in *Les Misérables*

The lyrics quoted above are from a tender ballad that captures the depth of emotion an adult can have for a child. In the song, “Bring Him Home,” Jean Valjean is saying to God it would be preferable for him to die and to allow young Marius to live.

**“The little people must be sacred to the big ones, and it is from the rights of the weak that the duty of the strong is comprised.”**

—Victor Hugo

Time and again, Valjean finds himself in the position of coming to the aid of a young person at great cost to his own safety. Whether he is rushing to the side of Fantine’s daughter, Cosette, or saving the life of Marius, a young revolutionary who is like a son to him, Valjean makes continuous sacrifices to protect these young people.

- What does the word “sacrifice” mean to you?
- Why does one make sacrifices?
- What would be difficult for you to give up? Easy to give up? Impossible to give up?
- What happens when one is not willing to make sacrifices?
- One often hears of parents and guardians making sacrifices for their children. These offerings come in the form of time, energy and even their lives. Is this easy or difficult for you to imagine doing that? Why?
- What would you sacrifice for your child?
- What has been sacrificed for you?
- Is there a cause, or a person, that you would sacrifice your life for?

## You Say You Want a Revolution

### **REVOLUTION:**

— an overthrow or repudiation and the thorough replacement of an established

government or political system by the people governed.

— a sudden, complete or marked change in something.

— a procedure or course, as if in a circuit, back to a starting point.

— a turning round or rotating, as on an axis.

— a round or cycle of events in time or a recurring period of time.

(Source: *dictionary.com*)

*Les Misérables* occurs after the French Revolution, but before France had completed its transformation into a republic. The setting is a failed student uprising in 1832.

- As we speak, revolutions, and attempts at revolution, are occurring around the globe. Where are they happening? Find the locations on a map. Why do you believe these revolutions are happening? Who is fighting? What are they fighting for?

- Would you consider the election of President Obama revolutionary? Why or why not?
- Is nonviolent revolution possible? Why or why not?
- Revolution can mean a huge change. Revolution can mean a return to the beginning. Revolution can mean the completion of a cycle. What does the word “revolution” mean to you?
- Where would you like to see revolution take place? Globally? Locally? Internally?

# Creativity

Comprehension | Connections | Creativity

This section provides opportunities for your students to use theatre to explore and express.

Theatre activities are included that examine specific artistic aspects of the production and delve deeper into the ideas and questions raised. The activities and information in this section can be used both before and after the performance.

## Cultural Mapping

### Objectives

- Students will gain knowledge of similarities and differences in their classmates.
- Students will be introduced to *Les Misérables* and begin to reflect on the play.

### Exercise

Ask the students to move the desks to the side and stand in a circle. Describe the room as a map of the world. Identify Los Angeles in the space. Have students who were born in Los Angeles gather in that place. Have the other students group themselves according to their birthplace (north, east, south or west of Los Angeles). Each group must determine two additional things that they have in common. Report back to the whole class. (Example: The members of the “north” group all like pizza and are the oldest in their families.)

Repeat activity using other divisions:

Oldest, middle, youngest, only child.

Speak one language, two languages etc.

Ask each student to stand by the quote that most intrigues them.

Discuss in the group why they chose that quote. What intrigues them about it?

The Man of Mercy Comes Again and Talks of Justice.

Who will join in our crusade?

Who will be strong and stand with me?

The city goes to bed and I can live inside my head.

DO YOU HEAR THE PEOPLE SING.....?

SOMEWHERE BEYOND THE BARRICADE

IS THERE A WORLD YOU LONG TO SEE?

## Tableau/Frozen Picture

### Objectives

- Students will practice using their bodies to communicate an idea or theme.
- Students will reflect on the varied interpretations of the theme.
- Students will reflect on *Les Misérables* through a physical exploration of its themes.

### Exercise

Divide students into pairs. Student A is the artist. Student B is the sculpture. Have student A create a statue out of B on the theme of the “future.”

Examples: Flying cars, world peace, destroying the environment, graduating from college. Statues can be realistic or symbolic, personal or global.

Have each student title their statue and present to the class.

Repeat exercise with B as the artist and A as the sculpture.

**Repeat with the themes of Law, Mercy, Sacrifice, Revolution, Justice, Poverty, Redemption.** Have each student sculpt an image that represents one of these themes.

Discuss what these ideas mean to your students and what these ideas meant to the characters in *Les Misérables*. Are they similar or different?

## What do you see?

### Objectives

- Students will explore the stories in a picture
- Students will explore the difference between one answer and different possibilities.
- Students will connect these ideas to themes in *Les Misérables*

### Round One: What is THE story in the picture?

A student strikes a frozen pose. Ask the student to have a specific idea that they want to convey to the class and make a shape with his/her body to tell this specific story (ex. Surfing, eating ice-cream, dancing). Have the rest of the class tell the story in the frozen picture. When someone gets the correct answer have them switch places with the original artist.

### Round Two : How MANY stories are in the picture?

A student strikes a frozen pose. Stress that the student should just make a shape with his/her body and not try to tell a specific story. The rest of the class must see how many stories or interpretations they can see in the frozen picture. (ex. a student striking a running pose could also be singing into a microphone, passing the baton, running for a bus, posing for a fashion shoot.)

Discuss the two rounds. Which one did students enjoy the most? Was one round easier than the other?

Discuss Javert's absolute approach to the law in *Les Misérables*. Discuss the many possible interpretations or "shades of grey" that are also explored in *Les Misérables* and where these ideas are present in the student's lives.

Write about an initial impression you have had of a group or individual. What did you see and what did you assume? Did this initial impression change when you got to know the person or the group?

## Pictures to Life

Show photos from Discovery Guide. What do you see in these pictures?

Get volunteers to physically create the different pictures. You can build the picture sections at a time or create the entire image.

Ask the rest of class (the audience) what they see? What are the stories, emotions and images in the picture?

Ask each "actor" to share one word that their character might be thinking or feeling at this moment.

Have the group bring small sections of the picture to life. What are the characters doing, saying, what is their relationship to one another?

Create beginning, middle and end pictures. Decide which this image is and then create the other two pictures. For example, if this is the ending picture, create two additional tableaux that happen prior to this scene. If this picture is the starting image, decide what will happen next and create the next two tableaux.

Add language, music, props as desired. Share and discuss.

If you do this activity before the performance, ask the class to discuss what these pictures make you think about the play you are about to see?

## Dis-moi vite sur la révolution! *Tell me quickly about the revolution!*

An activity using the short Japanese form of poetry called Haiku. A haiku is a Japanese poem of seventeen syllables, in three lines of five, seven and five.

### **PART 1**

#### **Materials:**

**CTG Discovery Guide for *Les Misérables*.**

#### **Q: What does “revolution” mean?**

**A:** The word comes from Old French, or from late Latin *revolutio(n)-*, from *revolvere* ‘roll back.’

noun

**1** a forcible overthrow of a government or social order in favor of a new system. See note at uprising.

- a dramatic and wide-reaching change in the way something works or is organized or in people’s ideas about it: *marketing underwent a revolution.*

**2** an instance of revolving: *one revolution a second.*

- motion in orbit or a circular course or around an axis or center.
- the single completion of an orbit or rotation.

In *Les Misérables*, we meet people living many years after the beginning of the French Revolution in 1789. The students tried to have their own revolution against the monarchy in 1832. Here in America, our Revolution happened in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. We rejected English rule on July 4, 1776 when Congress issued the U.S. Declaration of Independence.

**Q: What other revolutions can you name?**

**A:** Some examples could be the recent uprising in Egypt, Mexican Independence Day on September 16<sup>th</sup> or even a revolution in Los Angeles or a neighborhood.

#### **PART 2**

In *Les Misérables*, there was great unrest in Paris in the 1830's, when the story takes place. The poor people struggle to survive and many die from an outbreak of cholera. The students of Paris stage riots and demand change. They build barricades in the center of town and fight the military.

**Q: Can you tell this story in 17 syllables? No more, no less.**

**A:** Yes!

The format

5 syllable line

7 syllable line

5 syllable line

That's it! It's called a Haiku poem. Here's an example of a Haiku about the American Revolution:

FREEDOM WE WANTED  
INDEPENDENCE FROM ENGLAND  
A NEW COUNTRY BORN

#### **EXERCISE:**

Read and review the words and pictures in the CTG Discovery Guide for *Les Misérables*. Jot down any words or images that come to mind. Once you are done, use those words to help you build your own Haiku poem about the student uprising and revolution of 1832 in *Les Misérables*.



**ADVANCED OPTIONAL EXERCISE:**

A French Sonnet is comprised of 14 lines that rhyme. There are 10 syllables in each line. If you liked writing a Haiku poem about the student revolution, try writing a French Sonnet.

## Pay It Forward

Throughout *Les Misérables*, Jean Valjean is confronted with extremely challenging life choices. After much soul searching, he consistently chooses to take the high road.

Students will conduct an exploration of the consequences of choice.

In this storytelling exercise, students are to create a situation where a character must make one of two choices. The students will explore the consequences of both choices by creating two different stories. This exercise mirrors challenges experienced by Valjean throughout *Les Misérables*.

One version will result from the loving or compassionate choice.

One version will result from the less compassionate choice, whether it is based in fear, selfishness, anger, hurt, detachment, etc.

Instructions:

Students are divided into small groups of 3-5.

Each group is to create a situation where a character has to make one of two choices. Students thoroughly discuss the ramifications of each decision.

Eventually, two different stories will emerge from this situation, one based on a loving choice, the other based on a less compassionate choice.

Ideas for the stories may come from *Les Misérables*. For example, students may dramatize one of Valjean's situations. One story is created from the choice he makes in the play to take care of Fantine's daughter. An alternative story is created from choosing not to take care of her.

An English class might choose to dramatize a choice made in a novel they are studying. For example, in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Atticus Finch makes the unpopular decision to defend Tom Robinson. How might the story have unfolded if Atticus had refused to defend him?

The students can invent a situation, perhaps based on real life experiences.

A friend is being bullied at school. What are the consequences of becoming involved in the situation? What are the consequences of walking away? The stories are to be communicated in tableau (frozen picture) form.

Each story is made up of three tableaux: beginning, middle and end.

Each group will present all six tableaux/two stories.

Class discussion takes place regarding the tableaux:

Do you think one version is more realistic than the other? Why?

Was one choice easier to make than the other? Why?

Which story did you enjoy the most? Why?

Did you feel compelled to create a negative story about the positive choice? Or vice versa?

Were any sacrifices made in making either one of the choices? What were they?

## Protecting the Children

“Let him be, let him live.  
If I die, let me die,  
let him live, bring him home.”  
—Valjean singing over a sleeping Marius in *Les Misérables*

The lyrics quoted above are from a tender ballad that captures the depth of emotion an adult can have for a child. In the song, “Bring Him Home,” Jean Valjean is saying to God it would be preferable for him to die and to allow young Marius to live.

“The little people must be sacred to the big ones, and it is from the rights of the weak that the duty of the strong is comprised.”  
—Victor Hugo

Time and again, Valjean finds himself in the position of coming to the aid of a young person. Whether he is rushing to the side of Fantine’s daughter, Cosette, or saving the life of Marius, a young revolutionary who is like a son to him, Valjean makes continuous sacrifices to protect these young people.

**Step 1: Writing prompt**

Describe a time you have made a sacrifice for another, or a time when another has made a sacrifice for you. Who was involved? What were the circumstances? What was sacrificed? When did this occur? What were the outcomes?

**Step 2: Statues**

Students find a partner.

The partners share their writing prompts with each other.

Each student sculpts a human “statue” based on his/her prompt.

Each statue is given a title by its creator.

Statues are shared and discussed in class.

## You Say You Want a Revolution. We All Want To Change The World.

Many of the songs in *Les Misérables* are about revolution.  
And they are Big. Loud. Passionate.

The Beatles wrote a song called *Revolution*.

It is also big, loud and passionate. Do you know the lyrics?  
What were they singing about?

Other songs of revolution you may be familiar with:

“Get Up, Stand Up” by Bob Marley and the Wailers

“The Revolution Will Not Be Televised” by Gil Scott-Heron

“Talkin Bout a Revolution” by Tracy Chapman

“She’s a Rebel” by Green Day

What are the songs of revolution from *your* life?

Writing prompt:

What is a song of revolution in your life? What is it about? What does it make you feel? What does it make you think? What are some of the lyrics?

Activity:

Students form groups of five.

Each group member shares his or her writing prompt.

The group chooses one song to dramatize.

All group members research and discuss the song's origin and meaning.

Make a choice about how to present the song:

Stage the song as if it were a huge show stopping number. Everyone learns the song: lyrics, melody and harmony. Add blocking and choreography. Make it dramatic, like the songs from *Les Misérables*.

Treat the song like a monologue or a dramatic scene and speak the lyrics. Work on subtext. Add emotion. Create the details of a story behind the song. If desired, create a scene to be inserted before, during, and/or after the song. Get specific with setting and characters.

Perform the songs for your fellow classmates:

Time permitting, have groups rehearse and *perform* their number *and* a piece from *Les Misérables*. Have students compare and contrast the two songs and make connections between their songs of revolution and the music from *Les Misérables*.

**Paris à pied: Paris by foot!**  
*Explore the areas of France and the Paris neighborhoods where the story takes place.*

**PART 1**

**Students will track the settings using antique maps and modern online maps.**

**Materials:**

**A globe.**

**Printouts of 1834 maps from the Harvard digital map archive and Google maps.**  
**A projector to show the maps on screen.**

[http://www.davidrumsey.com/luna/servlet/detail/RUMSEY~8~1~21029~540006:The-environs-of-Paris--J--&-C--Walk?sort=Pub\\_Date,Pub\\_List\\_No\\_InitialSort&qvq=q:+List\\_No='0890.196''+;sort:Pub\\_Date,Pub\\_List\\_No\\_InitialSort;lc:RUMSEY~8~1&mi=0&trs=1](http://www.davidrumsey.com/luna/servlet/detail/RUMSEY~8~1~21029~540006:The-environs-of-Paris--J--&-C--Walk?sort=Pub_Date,Pub_List_No_InitialSort&qvq=q:+List_No='0890.196''+;sort:Pub_Date,Pub_List_No_InitialSort;lc:RUMSEY~8~1&mi=0&trs=1)

In *Les Misérables*, the story unfolds in the country of France. It starts in the town of Toulon in 1815, where the main character, Jean Valjean, is in prison for stealing a loaf of bread.

After Valjean is released from prison in the south of France, he has a lifetime of experiences all before reaching Paris. Still on parole, he travels the countryside looking for work but no one hires him. Broke and hungry, he makes his way to the town of Digne les Bains. He tries to steal from the bishop but the bishop forgives him. Valjean pledges to become a new man. Breaking parole, he makes his way to the northern coast of France where he becomes “an honest man” by changing his name and identity so he can have a fresh start. He even becomes the mayor of a town where he also runs a factory.

A woman, Fantine, works at his factory. She is fired for getting in a fight with a coworker. With no other options, she becomes a prostitute. Upon her deathbed, Valjean promises to take care of her daughter, Cosette, who lives with an innkeeper and his wife outside Paris. He goes to get her and they move to Paris together. But before he finds Cosette at the Inn, he must make a stop in the town of Arras where he must reveal that he violated his parole and has been hiding his identity. If he doesn't, a man named Champmathieu will be falsely condemned for Valjean's crime.

**Students work with a partner to trace his path on the map printout. The locations from Scene 1 to Scene 7 are below. You can use an atlas, a globe or Google Maps to help look up the locations. (Note: In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, people traveled mainly by foot, horse, coach or boat. The first French railway trains were built in the 1830's.)**

Scene 1—Toulon, 1815 and Digne les Bains.

Scene 2—Montreuil-sur-Mer, 1823, where Valjean runs a factory and is the town's mayor.

Scene 3—The docks of Montreuil-sur-Mer, where Fantine becomes a prostitute after Valjean's foreman fires her from the factory.

Scene 4—The trial at Arras, where Valjean reveals his identity to save a prisoner mistaken for him. Valjean

Scene 5—The hospital at Montreuil, where Fantine dies.

Scene 6—The Thénardier’s inn at Montfermeil, where Valjean finds little Cosette wandering in the woods.

Scene 7—Paris, 1832.

## PART 2

**Students will track, compare and contrast the Paris settings of by using antique maps and modern online maps.**

### Materials:

**Printouts of 1834 maps from the Harvard digital map archive and Google maps. A projector to show the maps on screen.**

[http://www.davidrumsey.com/luna/servlet/detail/RUMSEY~8~1~21029~540006:The-environs-of-Paris--J--&-C--Walk?sort=Pub\\_Date,Pub\\_List\\_No\\_InitialSort&qvq=q:+List\\_No='0890.196''+;sort:Pub\\_Date,Pub\\_List\\_No\\_InitialSort;lc:RUMSEY~8~1&mi=o&trs=1](http://www.davidrumsey.com/luna/servlet/detail/RUMSEY~8~1~21029~540006:The-environs-of-Paris--J--&-C--Walk?sort=Pub_Date,Pub_List_No_InitialSort&qvq=q:+List_No='0890.196''+;sort:Pub_Date,Pub_List_No_InitialSort;lc:RUMSEY~8~1&mi=o&trs=1)

In *Les Misérables*, after Jean Valjean rescues Cosette, a good deal of time passes before we pick up the story again in 1832, Paris. Ten years have passed. Cosette is now a young woman and Valjean is a prosperous man. They walk in the beautiful Luxembourg Gardens every day. That’s when Cosette and Marius first see each other and fall in love. Valjean has changed his identity again and is still in hiding from Javert and the law. He promised Fantine he would raise Cosette in peace and safety, even if it means always looking over his shoulder.

It’s a time of great unrest in Paris. The poor are suffering and many are dying from cholera including the popular General Lamarque, who dies in the summer of 1832. His death sparks riots and student uprisings. Marius and his friends take part in the riots and plan to revolt against the monarchy by building a barricade. The student’s plan fails. Many of them die. Valjean rescues Marius from the barricade. Cosette and Marius get married. Javert commits suicide and Valjean passes away in peace.

**Students work with a partner to locate the key story locations in Paris, listed below. First use Google Maps ([maps.google.com](https://maps.google.com)) to look up the locations in each scene. Then, search and identify the same locations on printouts of the antique Paris map from 1834. Mark and label the locations with a highlighter.**

**When all pairs are finished mapping, the teacher can project the 1834 antique map on a screen. Student pairs can come up to the image and point out the locations they identified. A discussion about the challenges and discoveries from the exercise should follow.**

**Act 1**

Scene 8—Café of the ABC Friends

Marius and his fellow students met at a cafe in the Place Saint Michel slums.

Scene 9—The Rue Plumet

Valjean and Cosette’s house near the intersection of what is now Rue Monsieur and Rue Oudinot.

Scene 10—Attempted Robbery

The Thénardier’s spot Valjean on his daily walk with Cosette in the Luxembourg Gardens

**Act 2**

Scene 1, 3, 4, 5—Building the Barricade

Hugo describes barricades built near a wine shop called Corinth that was near the intersection of Rue Rambuteau and Rue Mondetour, just east of the Les Halles markets. The wine shop no longer exists.

Scene 6—A Bridge over the Seine

Javert commits suicide between the Pont Notre Dame and the Pont au Change, from a spot between Notre Dame Cathedral and Palais de Justice.

Scene 7—The Wedding

St. Paul’s Church

Scene 8—Valjean’s Room

He died in an apartment close to La Maison des Contes et des Histoires and was later buried at what is now Cimetière du Père Lachaise.

**ANTIQUÉ FULL MAPS/WESTERN AND EASTERN**

[http://www.davidrumsey.com/luna/servlet/detail/RUMSEY~8~1~21028~540005:Eastern-division-of-Paris-----Publi?sort=Pub\\_Date,Pub\\_List\\_No\\_InitialSort&qvq=q:+List\\_No='0890.194'+OR++List\\_No='0890.195'+;sort:Pub\\_Date,Pub\\_List\\_No\\_InitialSort;lc:RUMSEY~8~1&mi=1&trs=2](http://www.davidrumsey.com/luna/servlet/detail/RUMSEY~8~1~21028~540005:Eastern-division-of-Paris-----Publi?sort=Pub_Date,Pub_List_No_InitialSort&qvq=q:+List_No='0890.194'+OR++List_No='0890.195'+;sort:Pub_Date,Pub_List_No_InitialSort;lc:RUMSEY~8~1&mi=1&trs=2)

[http://www.davidrumsey.com/luna/servlet/detail/RUMSEY~8~1~21027~540004:Western-division-of-Paris-----Publi?sort=Pub\\_Date,Pub\\_List\\_No\\_InitialSort&qvq=q:+List\\_No='0890.194'+OR++List\\_No='0890.195'+;sort:Pub\\_Date,Pub\\_List\\_No\\_InitialSort;lc:RUMSEY~8~1&mi=0&trs=2](http://www.davidrumsey.com/luna/servlet/detail/RUMSEY~8~1~21027~540004:Western-division-of-Paris-----Publi?sort=Pub_Date,Pub_List_No_InitialSort&qvq=q:+List_No='0890.194'+OR++List_No='0890.195'+;sort:Pub_Date,Pub_List_No_InitialSort;lc:RUMSEY~8~1&mi=0&trs=2)

## Rehearsing Change

The opening of *Les Misérables* depicts prisoners working under the watchful eye of brutal wardens. In the opening lyrics of the musical, the prisoners sing of their plight:

“Look down, look down  
Don’t look ‘em in the eye  
Look down, look down  
You’re here until you die.”

This first moment in the play viscerally depicts the oppressive conditions many characters in the story are living under. Its heaviness also communicates their despair and unhappiness with these conditions and their desire for change.

Oppression:

What does the word “oppression” mean to you?

Webster’s defines it as:

“The exercise of authority or power in a burdensome, cruel, or unjust manner.”  
“The feeling of being heavily burdened, mentally or physically, by troubles, adverse conditions, anxiety, etc.”

Students and teacher discuss what oppresses them. (This exercise may also start with a writing prompt, so students can formulate their thoughts in a more concrete and private way.)

They define the word “oppression” together.

Are the sources of their oppression external (parent, teacher, boss, society, peer group, etc.) or internal (negative self-talk, fear, doubt, lack of knowledge, etc.)?

Is change desired in these areas? How might that change come about?



Instructions:

Students are divided into small groups of 3-5.

Each group member shares one situation where they are oppressed and feel a need for change in their lives.

The group chooses one story to dramatize.

Specific details of the scene are created: who, what, where and why.

The scene should be structured so that a protagonist is experiencing conflict with the source of his/her oppression and attempting to work through it. (For example: A student has a difficult relationship with a teacher. The student feels that he is being treated unfairly by the educator and wants to address the issue. The scene is about a conversation the student has with the teacher, based on a real-life interaction.)

The group rehearses this scene and eventually presents it to the class.

The classmates watch the scene one time through, uninterrupted.

After observing the scene, students and teacher discuss varying solutions to the problem the protagonist is facing.

The group performs the scene again.

This time, audience members are allowed to insert solutions to the problem.

If a person wants to offer an alternative approach to the conflict:

She calls out "freeze."

She steps into the scene and replaces the protagonist.

She acts out her solution to the problem.

The scene continues.

If another audience member wants to try a different solution, the process is repeated:

He calls out, "Freeze!"

He steps into the scene and replaces the protagonist.

He acts out his solution to the problem.

The scene can have several protagonists.

The scene ends at the teacher's discretion.

Discussion ensues about what the students observed and experienced.

The above is based on an exercise created by Augusto Boal, founder of Theatre of the Oppressed. It was presented in a Master Class at the 2010 California Educational Theater Association conference. The course was conducted by Brent Blair, director of the M.A. program in Applied Theatre Arts at the University of Southern California, and was entitled, "Ensemble Building and Theatre Making Techniques Inspired by Theatre of the Oppressed."

## À votre langue: To your tongue! *An activity to explore the French language*

### PART 1

Students will work in pairs to identify common English words with French origins.

#### Materials:

Oxford English Dictionary, either in book form or online.  
A projector to show definitions on screen.

The title of the musical we will study today is *Les Misérables*. Those are two words in French.

#### **Q: What do you think they mean?**

You probably recognize the English word “miserable” in the title. As English speakers, we borrow the word “miserable” from the French language.

The most widely used record of the English language comes in the form of a dictionary, *The Oxford English Dictionary*. When we look up “miserable” this is what the definition looks like:

ORIGIN late Middle English: from French *misérable*, from Latin *miserabilis* ‘pitiable,’ from *miserari* ‘to pity,’ from *miser* ‘wretched.’

The definition tells us we get our English word “miserable” from the French word “miserable” (pronounced: miz-err-rawb). And the French word comes from the Latin word “miserari” which means ‘to pity.’

#### **Q: What is the origin of the word ‘pity?’**

A: ORIGIN Middle English (also in the sense [clemency, mildness] ): from Old French *pite* ‘compassion,’ from Latin *pietas* ‘piety;’ compare with *piety*.

**Q: Guess the English words created from French and Latin.**

1. **Teacher pronounces** “Ah-von-tour” and shows definition:  
ORIGIN Middle English: from Old French *aventure* (noun), *aventurer* (verb), based on Latin *adventurus* ‘about to happen,’ from *advenire* ‘arrive.’

2. **Teacher pronounces** “Taw-bluh” and shows definition:  
ORIGIN Old English *tabule* [flat slab, inscribed tablet] from Latin *tabula* ‘plank, tablet, list,’ reinforced in Middle English by Old French *tabl* intuitive of *toile* (see *toile*). The word originally denoted a cloth used as a wrapper for clothes; then (in the 17th cent.) a cloth cover for a dressing table, the articles used in dressing and the process of dressing, later also of washing oneself (sense 2). In the 19th century the word came to denote a dressing room, and, in the U.S. one with washing facilities.

4. **Teacher pronounces** “reh-stoh-rahnh” and shows definition:  
ORIGIN early 19th cent.: from French, from *restaurer* ‘provide food for’ (literally ‘restore to a former state’).

5. **Teacher pronounces** “oo-neek” and shows definition:  
ORIGIN early 17th cent.: from French, from Latin *unicus*, from *unus* ‘one.’

**A: 1. adventure, 2. table, 3. toilet, 4. restaurant, 5. unique**

#### **WORK IN PAIRS**

**Q: What are the French roots of the following English words?**  
— *Hotel, taxi, bank, mustard, lamp, art, police, academy.*

Student pairs search, record and share their dictionary findings.

#### **PART 2**

**Students work in pairs to learn how to pronounce the French words and names that are used in *Les Misérables*. At the end of class, students can share what they discovered. Pronunciation mistakes, mispronunciations and laughter are strongly encouraged.**

In the first part of the activity, we learned about how some of the words we speak in English come from the French language.

**Q: Are French words and letters pronounced the same way in English?**

**A:** Yes and no.

The letters b, d, f, k, l, m, n, p, t, v and z are pronounced exactly the same way in French and in English.

But some letters and letter combinations sound different in French.

Here's a guide:

FRENCH LETTER	ENGLISH SOUND
a, à, â	ah
Ai	ay
au, eau	oh
c (before a, o, u)	k
C	s
Ç	s
Ch	sh
E	eh, uh
è, ê, ei	eh
É	ay
g before a, o, u	g
g before e, i, y	zh
Gn	n-y
H	always silent
I	ee
J	zh
O	oh
Oi	wah
ou, où	oo
Qu	k
R	r
S	s
s between vowels	z
U	ew/oo
W	v
X	ks, gz, s
Y	ee

Below are actual lines, places and character names from the *Les Misérables* script. Work with a partner to search for and write the definition, origin and correct French pronunciation of any word or name in **bold underline**. The pronunciation of the word should be written phonetically. Use *The Oxford English Dictionary* and the pronunciation guide. At the end of class, each pair will share their definitions and pronunciations. (Note: Some words only have a French origin, not a French pronunciation.)

**For example:**

*Paris: A city in France.*

ORIGIN named after the **Parisii**, a Gallic people who settled on the Île de la Cité.

Pronounced 'pah-ree.'

**Old Woman 2:**

"What pretty hair! What a pretty locket you've got there. What luck you've got, it's worth a **centime** my dear... let's make a price. I'll give you all of ten francs!"

**Madame Thénardier:**

"Now take that pail! My little **mademoiselle** and go and draw some water from the well!"

"Little dear, cost us dear. Medicines are expensive, **M'sieur!** Not that we begrudged a **sou.**"

"Master of the house, doling out the charm. Ready with a handshake and an open palm. Tells a saucy tale, makes a little stir. Customers appreciate a **bon viveur.**"

**Champmathieu**

{This is the man on trial who is mistaken for Valjean.}

**Marius:**

"Éponine, who was that girl?"

**Éponine:**

"Some **bourgeois** two-a-penny thing!"

**Montfermeil**

**Enjolras**

**Gavroche:**

“This is my school, my high society. Here in the slums of Saint Michele. We live on the crumbs of humble piety. Tough on the teeth, but what the hell!”

Marius:

“My name is Marius Pontmercy.”

**Valjean:**

“Tomorrow to Calais and then a ship across the sea!”

Eponine:

“I have a letter m’sieur. It’s addressed to your daughter, Cosette. It’s from a boy at the barricade, sir. In the Rue de Villette.”

## Finding Your Voice

Jean Valjean is faced with the question of whether or not to speak up and voice his truth. In the scene below, he finds his voice and is empowered to continue his journey, revealing that change is possible. He is not a hardened criminal or liar, but someone who is working to become a better person.

In *Les Misérables*, we witness Jean Valjean’s struggle to identifying himself to Javert, who has been out to destroy him for years. One way to explore these scenes is through Jean Valjean’s experience: by reclaiming his true identity, he finds his authentic voice.

JEAN VALJEAN’s internal struggle at the trial: (excerpts)

WHO AM I?

IF I SPEAK, I AM CONDEMNED  
IF I STAY SILENT, I AM DAMNED!

WHO AM I? MUST I LIE?

I’M JEAN VALJEAN!

AND SO, JAVERT, YOU SEE IT'S TRUE  
THIS MAN BEARS NO MORE GUILT THAN YOU!  
WHO AM I?  
TWO-FOUR-SIX-O-ONE!

Can we find our authentic voice by claiming our identity?

If we can change our minds, can we change? If we can change our minds, does that mean we can change how we express ourselves? And are we changing the world around us?

We have seen change occur because someone had a vision and they persevered until they realized it. One way to realize a vision, is to share it with others.

As our world's people are deciding it's time to have a voice, is our world changing? Can it change? Do we have something we want to voice or share? Have we found our voice so that we can share our vision, our dreams and what we stand for?

## Finding Our Voice

**Exercises:** Through a sequence and variety of exercises, we explore various forms of expression through writing, sound making and language/dialect.

**Aim:** To explore what it means to find our voice by:  
Broadening and increasing our range of expression through writing prompts, and vocal play to exercise and experience pitch range through physical activities.

Building confidence and autonomy within a group in order to improve spontaneity, articulation and multi-lingual abilities.

Developing ear training for one's own sound making.

Listening within a group setting to experience the power of our stories and learn from the stories of our classmates/students.

**Finding Our Voice:**

**Exercise 1: Where did it go?**

This exercise can first be explored as writing prompts and/or then as a discussion. You know your students best and how they will respond most fully.

When you speak, what do you think you sound like? Who do you think you sound like? If you would rather sound like someone else, who would that be? Describe a time when you were afraid to speak up to share your thoughts, your questions, your confusions? What happened? Describe how it felt. Where did your voice go?

Offer these suggestions only if the students are having trouble grasping possibilities for answers: Perhaps your voice got caught in your throat? Or in your stomach where you felt your nervousness? Or perhaps stuck in your head? Perhaps you didn't feel there was room for your story, then where did it go?

Describe a time when you absolutely needed to say something? Describe how you felt? What did you do to make sure you were understood and heard? What was that like? Where did your voice go?

**Discussion Criteria:** Consider using the suggestions below for your discussion. Practicing listening skills so everyone has the opportunity to be heard is critical to the students building or reclaiming their voices. Setting up the discussion as a safe, fair and respectful process allows each student to courageously come forth to share their responses.

**Suggested Criteria:** Let's remember that even if we don't share the same point of view or experience, we can still co-exist and listen with respect.

Take turns speaking/sharing one at a time.

Offer each person non-judgmental, non-advice giving, wonderful attention.

Remember it really is an option to speak/share. We'd love to hear your thoughts, but you can pass if you like.

Let's try to give each person an opportunity to speak/share.

Let's refrain from raising our hand to speak a second time until everyone has had the opportunity to speak once.



If you've already spoken, jot down your thought or question so you won't forget it. Then, when everyone has had the opportunity to speak once, if they wish, you'll remember your thought and we can come back to you.

(Depending upon the amount of time you have to allot towards discussion, you may want to let students know that you might not get to hear everyone this time, but you will try to return to this discussion at another time.)

**Finding Our Voice:**

**Exercise 2: Letting Our Voices Out**

The discipline of warming up is a wonderful way to model the stick-to-it-iveness so our students can see tangible growth in their abilities and confidence over time. Change is possible! The voice can develop and change. Warming up develops and builds our instruments, our voices, for optimal usage and expression.

**Stretching:** Stretching gets our circulation going and signals to the body, mind and spirit that we are going to be increasing our activity. In this way, we prevent injury and the increased circulation allows us more vigorous usage of our bodies.

Have the students stand in a circle or in a way that everyone can see you as you lead the exercises.

Always ask if any student has injuries or physical challenges and be sure to ask them to let you know and/or ask for help to modify the exercise or find an alternative activity.

Without lifting your feet off the floor, begin to bounce very lightly, while softening in the knees. Let the arms just hang and relax the neck and head. In an easy way, shake out the arms while lightly bouncing.

Invite the student to breathe and voice a sigh of relief as you lead them to subside their bouncing. Sighing allows for easy vocalizing with the throat open, soft and relaxed.

Raise the arms and clasp your hands above your head. Reach up high and breathe a sigh of relief.

With hands still clasped above the head, bring your hands over to the left side, stretching out the right rib area. Allow the head to drop over with the body, gently allowing the neck to stretch. Breathe a sigh of relief two times. Coming back through center, breathe a sigh of relief, then, bring the hands over to the right, stretching out the left rib area. Allow the head to drop over with the body, gently allowing the neck to stretch. Breathe a sigh of relief two times. Come back to center and bring the arms down.

Circle the hips in both directions four times. Sighs of relief with each direction of the hip circles.

Circle the neck gently in both directions two times each. Sighs of relief with each direction of the neck circles.

Stretch the right leg back to stretch out the calves—lifting the heel then pressing it down, four times. Switch sides and do this on the left. Sighs of relief on each side as well.

One arm at a time, swing the right arm in circles going front first, four times, then back, four times. Switch and do this on the left. Sighs of relief on each side as well.

Bounce again lightly to shake the body loose again, letting the arms just hang, neck and head relaxed. Invite the students again, to breathe a sigh of relief.

Warming up the articulators does two major things:

Inhaling draws in fuel for the articulators — the facial muscles, lips and tongue with the teeth, roof of the mouth and upper throat area.

Using our articulators causes us to exhale our breath, which triggers an inhalation. We need both inhaling and exhaling to get our articulators moving fully to express ourselves well.

A tip: Instead of asking a student to talk louder, find out why they or their character needs to speak and increase their need. This will motivate their need to communicate and be understood. By doing this, you will naturally activate their articulators and breath support and they will be heard more easily.

**Articulator Warm-up Exercise:** Let this be a fun exploration. If your students are shy, you might try making silly sounds as you progress through this exercise and have them repeat after you. Have them offer you a sound and you repeat it. More than likely laughs will be exchanged and spontaneity will begin to flourish.

Throughout the warm-up, explore making sounds softly and then loudly. This will awaken their breath for different levels of need and they will exercise their rib expansion, activation of articulators and engagement of their lower abdomen muscles for breath support. You might also have them move about the space as they play with sounds. Movement gets their breath going and will support sound making.

We have all the sounds of the world in our mouths. See if you can recognize sounds of other languages even if you're not "speaking" that language. By warming up our articulators and making a variety of sounds, we see the unlimited ways to express ourselves.

As we move through this warm up, see if you recognize any of the sounds used in speaking French.

Begin by making sounds with just the lips. Be creative, there is no right or wrong, explore. Create friction, fluttering, voicing with vibration of the vocal cords, breathing in and breathing out (ingressing and egressing). Be sure to support your sounds with plenty of breath and keep your throat as relaxed as possible so as not to strain your voice.

Add on making sounds with the lips and teeth. Again, be creative, there is no right or wrong. Explore. Create sounds with friction, fluttering, voicing with vibration of the vocal cords, and ingressing and egressing.

Add on making sounds by adding the tip of the tongue. Be creative and explore with the tip of the tongue coming in contact with the lips, teeth and just behind the gum ridge of the upper and lower teeth.

Add tapping the tip of the tongue behind the teeth to your exploration. Again, be sure to use plenty of breath to support your sound making. Ingressing and egressing continue to be wonderful choices as well.

Now add on making sounds and using the middle of the tongue coming in contact with the lips, teeth, behind the gum ridge and into the upper middle of the roof of the mouth (soft palate). Remember there is no right or wrong. Continue to explore knowing you can use friction, fluttering, voicing with vibration of the vocal cords, and add on clicking, too. Continue to include ingressing and egressing.

Next add on making sounds while using the back of the tongue coming in contact with the hard palate (back of the roof of the mouth). Also add friction, tapping and clicking in the glottal area. Continue to include ingressing and egressing. See if you can discover one of the recognizable sounds of French speakers.

Continue to support your sounds with plenty of breath.

**Finding your Voice:**

**Exercise 3: Phonemes For Fun!**

Connecting sound making with a physical action helps us stay centered in our bodies where the breath originates. Offering a whole-body (holistic) approach to our work will support the student's process, strengthen and coordinate all of their abilities.

Once the class is warmed up, we are ready to have fun with sound making. This exercise will increase the students' speaking and singing range.

Model for the students a motorcycle sound by putting your upper front teeth on your lower lip and fueling this contact with the breath and voice to create friction, like a "v" sound.

Encourage the students to ride their imaginary motorcycles up and down their vocal range. Add a gesture as though they are holding onto the handle bars and changing gears. This is yoga for the vocal chords, a wonderful way to begin warming up the voice. Moving about the space as though riding their motorcycles adds a sense of play and can encourage their sound making if they are a bit self conscious.

Playfulness wonderfully encourages you and your students' vocal freedom, overall expression and ultimately, their empowerment.

Like the articulation warm-up above, model a ghost sound of “O-u-u-u-u” as you rise in pitch and come back down. Encourage them to make the sound within their vocal range. They do not need to match your pitch. If they do, it is okay, but for those who are not in your vocal range, it might be useful to let them know their vocal range is just right. Try this several times. Model adding hand gestures, as though they are a ghost making this “O-u-u-u-u” sound. Try this several times.

Next, model using your body by bending your knees and jumping up as you squiggle up and down. “O-O-O-O-O” as you squiggle up into a jump and land softly.

Next, model for the students, taking a few steps in a direction, stopping and pushing the palms of your hands forward and voicing “ah-h-h-h-h-h,” while allowing your head and body to also be headed in the direction of your hands. This means your eyes will be looking towards the floor. Try this several times, changing directions each time. Remind them to stay clear of their neighbor.

If you are in a large gym or rehearsal room, the students can run or walk as quickly as possible across the room, and stop at a designated line and push their palms forward while voicing “ah-h-h-h-h-h-h.”

Now that we have warmed up and exercised the voice, let’s experiment with singing!

These are lyrics of “Do You Hear The People Sing?” at the very end of the show.

WILL YOU JOIN IN OUR CRUSADE?  
WHO WILL BE STRONG AND STAND WITH ME?  
SOMEWHERE BEYOND THE BARRICADE  
IS THERE A WORLD YOU LONG TO SEE?  
DO YOU HEAR THE PEOPLE SING?  
SAY, DO YOU HEAR THE DISTANT DRUMS?  
IT IS THE FUTURE THAT THEY BRING  
WHEN TOMORROW COMES!

Start by speaking the song phrase. As the teacher, speak a phrase first, then have the students repeat after you. Now do the same by singing the song phrase by phrase. You can also sing with the recording to lessen self-consciousness.

Next, have them move about the space like the characters singing this song in the show. Do they walk lightly, do they walk heavily, fast or slow?

After exploring, offer the direction that they are student revolutionaries in *Les Misérables*. Have them cover the space and explore what it means to embody “conviction.”

How do they need to breathe to speak or sing to embody “conviction” in their voices? How do they feel? Different than themselves?

Now, bring the students together to stand in a group and start them speaking, then singing (with the recording or not) while moving across the space as an ensemble. Can they sing or speak in a convincing way so that they could inspire others to join them?

What is their experience of singing as an ensemble? How does it feel? Is there strength in numbers? Where is your voice now?

Only speaking the entire exercise is a wonderful option. Students can delve into acting their parts as revolutionaries before getting worried about how they sound when they sing.

Emphasize the importance of communicating their message so they are heard and understood.

#### **Finding Our Voice:**

#### **Exercise 4: Fun With A French Accent!**

We have sounds from the French part of the world in our mouth! Adopt these pronunciation adjustments and you can sound like you’re speaking with a French accent! Experiment and have fun!

**The “r” sound.** One of the most characteristic sounds of a French accent is the “r.” When you say, for instance, “Rat,” you would push your tongue to the back of your throat as if pronouncing a “g” sound. Your “r” will turn out to be a rolled/groaned “*rgr*”.

It is important to relax the soft part of the back of your mouth as well as the tip of your tongue when you force air between your tongue and the back of your palate (the roof of your mouth).

Another way to create an authentic French “r” sound is to replace the “r” with an English “h” sound, but try to really rough it up, almost gargling as you make the “h” sound.

**Sustained “e.”** Next, when you say your “e,” you will make it as long as possible. Example: “recorder” can sound completely transformed as “rgreh-caw-der.”

**Morphed “i.”** When you say a short “i” sound, you turn it into something more like an “ee”. For example, “fish” will sound more like “feesh,” but do not make it any longer than you would in “fish”.

**Equal stressing.** In French, each syllable has about equal stress (DA-DA-DA-DUM).

So instead of “po-[lice]’ de-[part]’-ment,” think “[poe]’-leece [dee]’-part-[men]’.”

**“Th” to “dz.”** The “th” in words is spoken as a “z.” And if you want to be really accurate, shoot for a “dz” sound, like “dzees” for “this.”

**Stressing the last syllable.** In French, always stress the last syllable of a sentence or before you pause with a rising pitch as if asking a question. (E.g. “I am from New York(?)”)

Here is a link to the I.D.E.A. website where you’ll find French language voice samples from subjects of varying ages and backgrounds. In most cases, there are transcriptions of the recordings. Play this link and see if you can detect the pronunciation adjustments in these recording samples.

<http://web.ku.edu/~idea/europe/france/france.htm>

Try practicing the pronunciation adjustments with a few names from the show. Have fun pronouncing them with a French accent:

Les Miserable: le-ee meezehrabl

Jean Valjean: shjo(short nasal “o”) valshjo(short nasal “o”)

Cossette: Kozet (long “o” sound)

Fantine: fonteen

Javert: shjovehr

## Who Am I? Identity and Change

Throughout the story of *Les Misérables*, characters are forced to change their identities in order to survive. Victor Hugo (who wrote the original novel, *Les Misérables*) and, later, Alain Boublil (who wrote the original libretto for the musical) explore the idea of what it means to be a human being and whether we are ever truly capable of changing who we are and what we believe. When addressing the young revolutionaries early in the play, the character Enjolras declares, “It’s time for us all to decide who we are!” Indeed, each of the characters is searching for the truth about themselves, both in terms of who they are now and who they will eventually become.

The character of Jean Valjean is forced to change his identity in order to survive. He steals a loaf of bread to feed his family, but he pays dearly for his act. In fact, he is transformed in the eyes of society from a loving brother to a thief. As a consequence, he becomes a prisoner. When he is finally able to make a new start, his intelligence and leadership lead him to become a mayor. As the story unfolds, we see Valjean as a loving father, a revolutionary and a man on the run. But, through it all, Valjean’s past is never far behind, and the root of who he really is inside is never far from the surface. It seems whatever role society gives him to play, an internal understanding of who he is at his core makes it possible for Valjean to maintain his own identity.

Inspector Javert is also on a journey throughout the play, searching for Valjean who manages to stay one step ahead. Javert attempts to hold onto his own sense of what is right and what is wrong. His assumptions are simple: The law is the law. Javert feels that Valjean is a common criminal who must come to justice for his crimes, no matter what the circumstances. In Javert’s mind, things are black and white. The spectrum of what makes a human being act a certain way under a given set of circumstances is invisible to him.

In the end, when Javert is confronted with the fact that Valjean, the supposed criminal, may actually be an honorable man, Javert is unable to come to grips with the shift in what he sees as the truth. That his final encounter with Valjean ends not with a heroic stand-off, but a moment of mercy on the criminal’s part, leaves Javert completely rattled. His reaction is to end his own life rather than live in a world where the truth is not absolute.



**Writing Prompts:**

Listen to Javert's Suicide from the *Les Misérables* soundtrack with your students and point out the following lyrics.

*And my thoughts fly apart  
Can this man be believed?  
Shall his sins be forgiven?  
Shall his crimes be reprieved?  
And must I now begin to doubt  
Who never doubted all these years?  
The world I have known is lost in shadow*

**Free Writing:**

Ask your students to explore any of the following ideas by “free writing.”

A human being is...  
I know I am...  
I wish I could be...  
If I could change anything, I would...  
I believe...  
I would fight for...

Give students 3 — 5 minutes to write anything they choose, using the given prompt as a jumping-off point. The exercise requires everyone to be physically writing from the moment the time starts until the final second ticks down. They may feel restricted or like they have nothing to say. In that case, they should write exactly that—“I have nothing to say about this”—over and over again until something is jarred loose and they realize a topic for themselves. We are using writing to physically awaken ideas, open new possibilities for creativity and begin the writing process.

**Structured Writing:**

In the play, the character of Éponine is desperately in love with Marius, the young revolutionary. Both are willing to make huge sacrifices for what they want and what they believe in.

The lives of every character in *Les Misérables* are full of sacrifice. Does this idea exist today?

Through writing or discussion, students should consider the following:  
What does it mean to sacrifice?

How does it feel to sacrifice? Have you ever made a sacrifice? What was it and why did you make it?

If students have seen the play, discuss or write about the following:  
How does Éponine die and why is she in such a dangerous situation?  
How far are the revolutionaries willing to go to achieve their goals?  
Why does Javert feel he can no longer live if Valjean is not a criminal?  
Are there people today who have died or are willing to die for what they believe in?

### Secrets and Lies:

Can we, as human beings, ever really let our true selves be known? The play is full of secrets—Valjean’s true identity is something he keeps from his friends, from his enemies, even from his own daughter. How does keeping a secret change you?

Cover the space:

Explain to students that they will be “exploring the space” by walking quietly around the room, observing what they see and hear.  
When the exercise starts, they should not interact with one another, but rather turn their focus inward, concentrating only on their own breath and what they observe through sight and sound around the room.  
When students have adjusted to the work, introduce outside elements by asking students to behave in some given circumstances:  
It is hot / cold outside  
It is pitch black outside  
There is a war going on in the streets around you

Ask the students to think about who they are and what they need to survive in the world around them as you add the following prompts:

You are starving  
You are scared for your life  
You are vengeful  
You are lonely  
You are heartbroken

### Enemy / Ally:

**Part 1:**

As they continue to walk around the room, students should now start to notice the other people around them.

Ask students to make eye contact with each person they encounter and exchange an unspoken greeting.

When students have had a chance to greet every person in the room, ask them to consider quietly what they noticed about the people around them.

**Part 2:**

Tell students that now they must each secretly choose one person in the room who will represent their sworn enemy. They must do this without telling anyone—especially the chosen person.

Continuing to walk around the space, now students must stay as far away from their “enemy” as possible, never giving up the identity of the chosen person. When this has continued for a few moments, have the students freeze.

**Part 3:**

Now, students will need to secretly choose their ally—someone they can rely on to protect them no matter what the danger.

The object now is for students to keep their allies between themselves and their enemies at all times—all without saying a word to anyone!

This exercise should be kept safe and trouble free by asking students to be careful of one another’s feelings.

Discuss that *Les Misérables* is full of characters who are unsure about who amongst them is an enemy and who is an ally.

If this exercise is done before students have seen the play; ask students to consider this as they watch the play.

If this exercise is done after students have seen the play; ask students for examples of characters who might be unsure of their allies and enemies.

## Assassin:

Ask students to arrange themselves in a circle.

Ask students to close their eyes.

With the students’ eyes closed, silently tap one person on the back. That person will be “The Assassin”.

When the students open their eyes, the “Assassin” will do his or her dirty work by subtly winking at individuals. The object is to do your killing without anyone but the selected student seeing it happen.

When a student has been winked at, he or she should sit down.

They could also choose to perform a short, but dramatic death.

The object of the game is for the other students to guess who the “assassin” is.

If a student in the circle has an idea of who the “Assassin” is, they may raise their hand and make an accusation.

If they are correct, they choose the next Assassin by tapping them on the back at the start of the next round.

If they are wrong, they are out, and the game continues.

Discuss how people in the play must keep secrets and sometimes do certain things they might otherwise not do. The revolutionaries meet and plan in secret; Valjean leads an entire life with a secret identity; Javert poses as a revolutionary to infiltrate the rebel camp. This game illustrates the challenges of carrying out a job in secret while others try to discover you!

## Genre:

### Part 1:

Lead a short discussion about genre:

What is a genre and what are some common examples we all know: comedy, romance, tragedy, film noir, fairy tale, etc.

Create a list of genres on the board.

Explain that *Les Misérables* is a musical. It is also a love story, an epic, a drama and a period piece.

Are there any other genres *Les Misérables* fits into?

How does the given genre impact us as audience members?

### Part 2:

As a group students create a simple script by calling out lines of dialogue that you record on the board.

Select any three lines. They need not be related and, in fact, often make for more interesting work when they are not.

**Part 3:**

Divide the students into pairs.

Secretly give each pair of students a genre from the list you created.

Have each pair prepare the 3-line scene in their given genre.

**Part 4:**

Ask groups of students to perform their scene without divulging what their genre is.

When each group performs, the rest of the students will guess what the genre is and explain how they knew.

## Tableaux and Archetypes:

Short Discussion: What is a Tableau?

A Tableau is a frozen stage picture used to illustrate an element of the work.

A Tableau can be literal or abstract.

Any group of actors in an arrangement on stage can be considered a tableau. Students create tableaux:

Divide students into groups of six.

Provide each group with a theme from *Les Misérables* and ask them to create a tableau to illustrate the theme in whatever way they choose. Themes might include: war, peace, happiness, love, loss, etc. When students are finished sharing their tableaux, ask them to “free-write” on their own for 2-3 minutes about their theme and what it means to them.

Discussion: What is an archetype? What archetypes appear in *Les Misérables*?

Discuss the word and what it means in order to introduce the concept of recurring character-types within the greater context of literature, theatre and art.

The word breaks into two parts—arch=over reaching, and type=sort or kind. An archetype is a typical, ideal, or classic example of something; something that served as the model or pattern for other things of the same type; an image or symbol that is used repeatedly in art or literature

Consider the different archetypes we see most often in literature, theatre, film and television.

Create a list of archetypes on the board.

Explain that within the play students can expect to see many of the archetypes already listed and perhaps some they had not considered.

Add any missing archetypes, including: Ingénue, Lover, Policeman, Hero, Soldier, Revolutionary, Villain, Weasel, Drunkard, Scamp.

Practice creating a single person tableaux of Archetypes:

In a circle, ask students to face outward.

Without making eye contact with their classmates, ask students to think of a villain.

What is their posture?

What is their facial expression?

What does their laugh sound like?

On the count of three, have the students strike a pose as their image of a villain and turn in toward the center of the circle.

Admire the work and repeat with as many archetypes as you want to consider.

## You Show, I Tell:

### **Part 1:**

Start by considering a simple story like a fairy tale with a clear beginning, middle and end.

Have the students illustrate the scenes by creating tableaux as you narrate the plot.

Students should create clear pictures to illustrate the story as it is told.

Have the students try again, this time looking for places to insert the archetypes they created in the previous exercise.

Students should feel free to jump up whenever they are inspired to create a picture that accompanies the word story.

### **Part 2:**

When you have practiced the technique, use the synopsis of *Les Misérables* (provided in the Discovery Guide), and have the students create tableaux as you take them through the plot of the play.

Broken into small groups, ask students to break the play down into the beginning, the middle and the end. Using only three tableaux to tell the whole story.

Ask students to consider their choices and compare them to what they see when they attend *Les Misérables* at Center Theatre Group.

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## Credits

### EDUCATION AND COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

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Center Theatre Group's mission is to serve the diverse audiences of Los Angeles by producing and presenting theatre of the highest caliber, by nurturing new artists, by attracting new audiences, and by developing youth outreach and education programs. This mission is based on the belief that the art of theatre is a cultural force with the capacity to transform the lives of individuals and society at large.

### Education and Community Partnerships

Theatre is an enduring and powerful tool for communicating ideas, stories, emotions and beliefs that fuel the intellect, imagination and creative spirit. Center Theatre Group believes that stimulating awareness, creativity, dialogue and an inquisitive mind is integral to the growth and well-being of the individual and the community; and that nurturing a life-long appreciation of the arts leads inextricably to an engaged and enlightened society.

### Center Theatre Group's education and community partnership programs advance the organization's mission in three key ways:

**Audiences:** Inspiring current and future audiences to discover theatre and its connection to their lives;

**Artists:** Investing in the training, support and development of emerging young artists and young arts professionals who are the future of our field; and

**Arts Education Leadership:** Contributing to the community-wide efforts to improve the quality and scope of arts education in Los Angeles.

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