

# LETTERS ABOUT LITERATURE

MASSACHUSETTS LEVEL III HONORS 2009

Dear Charles Dickens,

I have always been fascinated by war movies and tales of great valor and courage. I love watching old World War II movies or movies about knights fighting to protect what was good and right in the world against the forces of darkness. I could never grow tired of watching someone fight dragons or soldiers lay siege to a city; to me, it is simply good cinema. One thing I never understood, however, was the lengths to which people were willing to go to protect what they held dear. It seemed to me that there was nothing so important in life that it was really worth dying for. On the news we would hear about the soldiers in Iraq dying for their country, and I would sit on my couch and wonder that if the time came that I was asked to make the same sacrifice, would I be able to do it?

When I went to summer camp for eight weeks in New Hampshire, my mom made me take along *A Tale of Two Cities* and made me promise to read it. As I lay in my bunk watching over campers during their free time, I decided I would give the book a chance and began to read. As it turns out, I was unprepared for what I would find. I had thought that *A Tale of Two Cities* would be dull and boring; sometimes my mother had pushed me so my brain would not rot from inactivity during the summer. Instead, the story was exactly like all of the movies I had ever loved. A brave and courageous hero who defied the odds and stood up to protect those he loved. This in and of itself did not move me though; it was Sidney Carton's selfless act of unbelievable bravery at the end of the book that changed the way I thought.

I have many people in my life that I consider important to me: my parents, my family, and my friends. I love them all dearly and I know that I would be heartbroken if one of them were to die. However, before reading *A Tale of Two Cities* I could never understand loving someone so much that I was willing to die for them. I was ashamed of this emotion because I thought it made me weak and cowardly. I thought that if I was unwilling to die for my loved ones, I didn't really love them at all. I see now, however, that this is not the case. After reading your book I finally understand why Carton chose to sacrifice himself.

Sidney Carton knew that the only way to save Charles and Lucie was to make the French think they had killed Charles, so he took Charles' place at the guillotine and faced his fate without complaint. In fact, at the end he was happy to go in Charles' place so that Lucie might live a long and happy life with her husband. My father once told me that when you love someone with all your heart, you are willing to put their happiness before your own, and in their happiness, be happy yourself. I never understood what he meant until I read *A Tale of Two Cities*, and I saw that some things are worth dying for. I know that I never comprehended this concept before I read your book, and so I want to thank you for the opportunity you gave me to learn about myself. I think the knowledge that I have the inner strength to stand up for what I believe in makes me a better person. This new knowledge about myself has caused me to reconsider a great deal of decisions that I have made in my life, and I think that I will be a very different person for having read *A Tale of Two Cities*.

Sincerely,

*Philip*

Philip Kachajian  
Algonquin Regional High School  
Grade 12