**Les Miserables**

**Upward Bound English**

**Introduction:** Les Misérables is a [French](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/19th-century_French_literature) [historical novel](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historical_fiction) by [Victor Hugo](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Victor_Hugo), first published in 1862, that is considered one of the greatest [novels](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Novel) of the 19th century. In the English-speaking world, the novel is usually referred to by its original French title (variations include The Miserable, The Wretched, The Miserable Ones, The Poor Ones, The Wretched Poor and The Victims, and The Dispossessed). Beginning in 1815 and culminating in the 1832 [June Rebellion](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/June_Rebellion) in [Paris](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paris), the novel follows the lives and interactions of several characters, focusing on the struggles of ex-convict [Jean Valjean](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jean_Valjean) and his experience of redemption.

**Jean Valjean:** Cosette’s adopted father. He is an ex-convict who leaves behind his life of hatred and deceit and makes his fortune with his innovative industrial techniques. He finds himself through loving his adopted daughter and helping others in dire situations even if it means risking his own life. His whole life is a life of redemption.

**Cosette:** Fantine’s daughter, who lives as Valjean’s adopted daughter after her mother dies. During her childhood she is a servant to the Thenardiers but Valjean rescues her. She grows up among nuns and becomes educated ultimately falling in love with Marius.

**Javert:** A police inspector who strictly believes in law and order and will stop at nothing to enforce French’s harsh penal codes. He desires to capture Valjean even though he is on the fence about whether or not Valjean is guilty.

**Fantine:** A working class girl who leaves her hometown to seek fortune in Paris. Fantine has an innocent affair leaving her pregnant and abandoned. Even as she descends into prostitution she never stops caring for Cosette. She represents the destruction that 19th century French society cruelly wreaks on the less fortunate.

**Marius Pontmercy**: Son of Georges Pontmercy, a colonel in Napoleon’s army, Marius grows up with his grandfather, M. Gillenormand, a monarchist. Marius has an identity crisis when he learns the real reason for his separation from his father – so he plans to discover himself. He fights for his country and successfully courts the love of his life, Cosette.

**Mr. and Mrs. Thenardiers**: An evil couple that extort and scheme to take money from whomever they can. They abuse Cosette and later on try to rob Valjean and Cosette.

**Eponine**: Thenardiers’ eldest daughter. She helps her parents steal but she is eventually redeemed by her love for Marius. She proves that no one is beyond redemption.

**Assignment Directions:** Les Miserables is an example of a text written during the era of romanticism. Romanticism is seen through Cosette and Marius in many ways.

On the Venn diagram handout compare and contrast Jane Eyre and Rochester’s love to that of Cosette’s and Marius love. How are romantic elements portrayed between the two relationships and films?