

Credits:

Les Miserables, Volume I, Book Second, Chapter III - "The Heroism of Passive Obedience" - by Victor Hugo.

Read by Carole Bos, creator of Awesome Stories.

In-text image: [Frontispiece of Les Miserables](#); online via Archive.org

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/Les-Miserables-Bishop-Myriel-Helps-Valjean-Audio-Reading-0>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/Les-Miserables-Bishop-Myriel-Helps-Valjean-Audio-Reading-0>

Questions 2 Ponder

Why Is It Important to Give People A Second Chance?

Victor Hugo, in *Les Miserables*, portrays the French prison system, in effect at the time of his story, as an institution which did not help prisoners get a "second chance."

What impact would that approach have on the mind-set of a newly freed prisoner?

Does discouraging a person from changing his or her life—and learning from past mistakes—still exist? If so, describe a situation where a person's "past" could continue to haunt that person's "present."

At the beginning of the chapter entitled "The Heroism of Passive Obedience"—*Les Miserables*, Volume I, Book Second, Chapter III—could we summarize Jean Valjean's reality as "once a convict, always a convict?" Why, or why not?

What, if anything, can Valjean do to change that?

Does Free Will Help Us to Decide Our Futures?

In *Les Miserables*, Victor Hugo describes a French penal system, in effect at the time of his novel, which does not help prisoners to get a "second chance" in life.

He also insinuates, however, that Jean Valjean has the free will to commit no more crimes, thereby giving *himself* a second chance.

Although the now-paroled prisoner is still governed by officially imposed restrictions on where he may go, and what papers he must carry, do you think he has the free will to decide that he will commit no more crimes? Explain your answer.

In other words ... even if the long arm of the law still controls where Jean Valjean must live, and how he must travel, does that control extend to his mind? Why, or why not?

If we are free in our own minds, can we also control our own perception of restrictions which the long arm of the law imposes on us? Why, or why not?

Does Mutual Respect Motivate and Sustain Us?

Bishop Myriel, in *Les Misérables*, wants Jean Valjean to know that even a convict is capable of getting, and giving, respect. He orders the best silver to be used during dinner with Valjean.

What is the Bishop trying to convey, to Jean Valjean, when he orders that all the silver should be used at the dinner table?

Does the Bishop's respect of Valjean matter? Why, or why not?

What does respect mean to you?

Does respect, for one another, matter in the 21st century? Why, or why not?

If society, at large, expects a person to fail—even if such an individual tries hard to succeed—is it more likely that he/she will succeed or fail? Why?

Is expecting someone to fail a sign of disrespect? Explain your answer.