

Credits:

*Les Miserables*, Volume I, Book Fifth, Chapter V - "Vague Flashes on the Horizon" - by Victor Hugo. Read by Carole Bos, creator of Awesome Stories.

In-text image, depicting Javert, from an English-language edition of *Les Miserables*, published in New York by Dodd, Mead & Company, Inc., during 1900. Illustration, by Mead Schaeffer, [facing page 44](#). Online via Open Library.

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

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/Les-Miserables-Meet-Javert-Audio-Reading-0>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/Les-Miserables-Meet-Javert-Audio-Reading-0>

Questions 2 Ponder

**What Causes a Person to Lack Compassion?**

In this world, there are people who hold themselves above others. For whatever reason, they live their lives looking down on those whom they consider inferior. They fail to realize that every person has value; every person deserves the best chance at living a good life.

Victor Hugo has created such a person in *Les Miserables*—his name is Javert. He is a police officer who was actually born into humble circumstances. His mother was a fortune teller; his father was a prisoner who worked in the galleys. Javert himself was born in a prison.

When we first meet Javier, in *Les Mis*, he is about 40 years old. He is a most unpleasant man who despises anyone breaking the law. He rigidly believes that every rule and regulation passed by government officials must be obeyed. He doesn't ever break the law himself. Of him, Hugo says:

*As we have said, he had no vices. When he was pleased with himself, he permitted himself a pinch of snuff. Therein lay his connection with humanity.*

Put differently, he had little-to-no connection with humanity at all.

In the chapter where we meet Javert, [Victor Hugo also says](#):

*...in every man there is one of the animal species.*

What does he mean by that?

Hugo also says that Javert is a "formidable man." What does that mean?

How does Victor Hugo's description of Javert impact your assessment of this police inspector? What kind of a man is Javert?

It seems clear that Javert is a person who totally lacks compassion and kindness. What would it be like for such an individual to be a police officer? With such a personality, would he be good or bad at his job? Explain your answer.

What causes a person, like Javert, to lack compassion for others? Do you think it has something to do with his upbringing? What difference, if any, would that make?

If you were the author of *Les Mis*, would you change Javert's personality in any way? If so, how?

### **How Does Suspicion or Conjecture Lead to Wrong Conclusions or Distrust?**

If we don't know the facts, about a person or a situation, it's difficult to draw any conclusions or form any opinions that we can rely-upon. In other words ... we can't really form an accurate opinion about someone, or something, if we don't know the facts.

As Daniel Patrick Moynihan (a now-deceased U.S. Senator) once said:

*You are entitled to your own opinion,  
but you are not entitled to your own facts.*

How does suspicion or conjecture, about a subject for which we lack the facts, lead us to wrong conclusions?

Have you ever had someone "think" they "know" something about you—or something you may have done—that is based entirely on suspicion? How did that make you feel? Were you able to show that the individual was wrong?

In Victor Hugo's story *Les Miserables*, Javert (a police inspector) views Father Madeleine (who is really Jean Valjean) with "suspicion and conjecture." Why does he do this?

Is the police officer looking for a crime where a crime has not been committed? If so, what is his objective?

In the 21st century, "fake news" seems to be a constant issue. Do you think "fake news" comes about through suspicion or conjecture? How?

If "the news" is proven to be wrong, how does that impact our trust of the media?

Is distrust of the media a good or a bad thing? Explain your answer.

What impact does "fake news" have in today's world? What can be done to stop it?