

The Count of Monte Cristo

The Count of Monte Cristo by Penguin Classics ISBN 978-0-14-044926-6

It is important to have the same copy for class discussions!

The following is a very brief overview of the author and historical period. On the back of this sheet, you will find your instructions for what to annotate while reading.

1. Alexandre Dumas

1802-1870

Father died when he was young

Not formally educated, but read voraciously

Wrote historical novels, children's stories, travel books

Admired Napoleon

Dumas wrote novel in 1844 in France. (Also wrote *The Three Musketeers*)

The novel is set during the time period of 1815-1844

Plot inspired by true-life story of Francois Picaud (p.xiv-xv)

2. Key historical events for setting of novel:

July 14, 1789-Bastille Day.

Napoleon rises to prominence during French Revolution.

1793 King Louis XVI is guillotined

Napoleonic Era 1799-1814

Napoleon is beloved by people. Abolishes serfdom, feudalism, and guarantees basic human rights. Dominates Europe by 1808.

1804-Napoleon is voted emperor of all French lands.

1814- Napoleon is crushed by New European Alliance.

Sent to Isle of Elba.

Louis XVIII named King.

March 1, 1815 – Napoleon escapes the Isle of Elba; King flees to Brussels.

March 20, 1815 – Napoleon's Hundred Days of Reign. Prussia, Britain, and Netherlands combine to fight him.

June 18, 1815 – Napoleon is defeated at the Battle of Waterloo; Napoleon sent to St. Helena.

1821 – Napoleon dies.

3. Social context:

Prior to Napoleon, the social system was known as the Old Regime and it had three unequal classes called Estates. **First estate**=powerful clergy 1% of pop.; **Second estate**=nobility 2% of pop. (Neither First nor Second paid taxes); **Third Estate**=subclasses of professionals and merchants (Bourgeois), laborers, and peasants (97% of pop. – they did pay taxes).

After revolution – three main political parties: Girondists who were traditional and conservative, Jacobins who were liberal and radical, and a third party with no definite view (although most eventually sided with Jacobins).

4. Novel begins in 1815. Action centers around Edmund Dantes, the protagonist.

Unjustly accused early in the novel, he spends his life seeking revenge/justice.

Novel begins with an errand he has been given by his captain – a letter to deliver to Napoleon on the Isle of Elba.

5. While you read, use check marks, circles, and/or underlining to note the following:

A. **Keep track of characters.** 1) Circle new character names and underline important information about their identity. 2) Keep track of Dantes/the Count by underlining important aspects of his physical appearance, words, actions, and internal struggles.

B. **Keep track of any references to justice, revenge, or God/(Providence)** by placing a check in the margin and writing: **J, R, or G**

Your annotations are not meant to slow you down considerably. Some chapters will have few marks other chapters may have more. Please don't mark every page. That is not necessary.

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- **Annotations**

- Keep track of characters. Circle new character names and underline important information about their identity.
- Keep track of Dantes/the Count by underlining important aspects of his physical appearance, key ideas, actions, and internal struggles.
- Keep track of any references to justice, revenge, or God/Providence by underlining/highlighting it, and writing J, R, or P in the margin.
- Please note: your annotations are not meant to slow you down considerably. Some chapters will have few marks, while others may have more. Please don't mark every page; that is not necessary.

- **Assignment**

- Select one quote about each of the three topics you were asked to annotate for above. Write the quote out using proper MLA formatting (including parenthetical citation). Then write a paragraph (7-12 sentences) that explains the meaning of the quote and its significance in the greater context of the novel.
- These three paragraphs will be due on the second day of class (Thursday, August 28, 2025).

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Chapters to skip

While I strongly encourage you to read the entire book, there are a number of chapters that are rather loquacious and do little to advance the plot. Given the length of the novel, if you choose to, you may skip the following chapters (a brief summary of which is provided):

- Chapter 18 - We learn the history of the vast treasure on Monte Cristo.
- Chapter 21 - Dantes swims to a nearby island and meets Jacopo.
- Chapter 23 - Dantes sneaks off to be left on the Island of Monte Cristo alone.
- Chapter 26 - Dantes travels to find Caderousse to learn what has happened to key people from before his imprisonment.
- Chapter 29 - We learn that Monsieur Morrel has fallen upon difficult financial times.
- Chapter 31 - Franz lands on the Island of Monte Cristo and meets the Count.
- Chapter 33 - The legend of Luigi Vampa.
- Chapter 34 - Franz and Albert go to Rome and meet the Count.
- Chapter 49 - We are introduced to Haydee.
- Chapter 51 - We learn that Max and Valentine are in love.
- Chapter 53 - Monte Cristo makes an appearance at the opera with Haydee, inciting much gossip.
- Chapter 61 - Monte Cristo sends a false telegram, costing Danglars 1 million francs.
- Chapter 91 - Mercedes and Albert leave Paris. He is going to join the army.
- Chapter 97, 98 - Eugenie and Louise leave for Belgium. On their trip, they encounter Andrea. He is arrested and goes back to Paris. They continue on to Brussels.
- Chapter 114 - Danglars flees to Rome and is kidnapped and held for ransom.