Take-Aways,  
with Sample Student Responses  
from Marva Barnett’s *Les Misérables*: From Page to Stage to Screen, Fall 2014

Take-aways give students an opportunity to reflect on what they have contributed to and gained from the day’s class discussion. Done at the end of the class, while students are still engaged with the day’s ideas and interactions, they take between five and ten minutes. Most students can type their answers very quickly on any digital device, but they can also write their ideas on paper or cards (and if you distribute them, they will all be the same size).

Below are questions I asked as Take-Aways through the web-based tool Learning Catalytics (at times, one question per class; at times, two). Each is intended to seek one or more of these sorts of information:

- how students perceived their thinking to change
- ideas students did not have a chance to share verbally in class
- how students would assess their participation or preparation
- what students would like to explore through discussion
- students’ ideas about possible final projects
- students’ comprehension of a particular aspect of the reading

**Take-Away questions in the order and groupings in which they were asked in Fall 2014:**

1. If you had an idea that you had hoped to express but didn’t, please share it here.
2. What wasn’t clear, or what do you still wonder about, if anything?

1. How do you understand Inspector Javert at this point in the story?
2. What questions do you have about him, what will you be looking to understand better?

*In week three of the semester:*
1. What, if anything, would you like to add to this week’s discussion?
2. How would you grade your participation this week, and why? Take EVERYTHING into account: the thinking and listening you did in class, your reading and writing of Forum posts, the ideas you shared in the Forum and in class.

1. Which of your ideas expanded or changed because of you reading or discussion today?
2. Which sections of this week’s reading would you like to discuss Thursday, and why?
3. What question would you like to ask the two men who created the musical *Les Misérables*?

How did your ideas change or expand? If you can credit a particular person for your progress, please do.

What idea did you not get a chance to share?

*mid-semester:*
What digital media project topics related to themes of ethics or social justice in Les Misérables, or the novel’s contemporary relevance, interest you? Are you interested in connecting the musical to the novel? What topic or question would you like to suggest for Thursday’s class?

What did you learn today—or how did your ideas change—because you listened deeply to others?

1. What would you say now about the ethics of insurrection?
2. What would you like to discuss on Thursday?

Other ideas?

1. What new, or developed, idea(s) did you have because of class discussion?
2. What idea(s) did you have but not get a chance to share?

What idea or question did you not get to express?

1. How did your thinking broaden, deepen, or change because of discussion this week? If you can credit an individual with moving your thinking forward, please do.
2. What would you like to add to what was said?

Is there anything you would like to add to today’s discussion?

1. What did you learn from discussion today?
2. What questions, if any, do you have about “Javert Off the Track” (V, 4, 1)?
3. Ideas you wanted to share and didn’t?

Last class:
1. What did you learn by listening well today, and/or how did your ideas change through discussion?
2. What idea(s) did you want to share but didn’t have a chance to?

Sample student responses (All names have been changed.)

In answer to a question about learning or change / growth in thinking (from various class meetings). Sometimes these questions ask students to credit classmates for ideas, and sometimes not. Especially when students credited quieter, or less participatory students, I emailed the appreciation to the student credited, “from one of your classmates.”

From Bill:
- Sally was the one in our Éponine group who found the connection between “Deep Waters, Dark Shadows” and allowed me to compare Éponine’s view of the world/society around her to a river-like death (with much thanks to Mary for the Fantine connection).
- Jim’s questions about Hugo’s literary techniques (and your teaching of the “métaphore maxima’”) inspires me to view the text in a more literary way, considering how Hugo’s writing style reflects his personal philosophy.
From Anna:
I think that my opinion of Marius changed the most today. I definitely found more sympathy for him and his internal struggle. I had not previously drawn a parallel between his and Jean Valjean’s big dilemmas but I think in some ways, Marius’s emotions are very similar to Valjean’s. I agree with the Alice that this “dent in Marius’s blind love for Cosette” also served to make him much more like able, that he wasn’t just struck completely dumb and made incapable of considering other things.

from Rebecca:
My favorite thing that I learned today was about the recurring symbolism of water. Bill pointed out that the river and water represent death for Eponine, and Mary brought this back to Fantine’s feeling of being swept over by the ocean. These points made me realize that water really is a symbol for hopelessness and the point of no return, as evidenced later by Javert’s suicide and earlier in Deep Waters Dark Shadows. I’m curious what other references to water I’ve missed so far, but I will surely mark them all going forward.

from Eve:
Helen Jones brought to the class’s attention light as a symbol of education. I appreciated how she spoke about how education is still not available to everyone today, making the book still needed, still relevant as Hugo says in his preface.

from Rebecca:
I had never before viewed the friends of the ABC as fanatical. Helen brought that up in discussion and I thought explained it very well. My view had been that they were idealistic but the quotes that she pulled really made me view them as fanatical in that idealism.

from Nancy:
I always appreciate it whenever people chime in about a) the original French novel, and b) insights about religious images. This week, I found it fascinating to learn that Javert began using the formal French “you” after Jean Valjean set him free. And then I think Mary or someone else compared Enjolras to the figure of Jesus Christ, in that he’s willing to die for a cause.

from Mary:
I really appreciated Sally’s point about how scale and magnitude should not be the sole measure of Progress. What I found myself thinking after she made her point is that each individual person encompasses the entire universe, and what I mean by this is, every person’s mind contains the Infinite, and I would love to find a quote that reflects this. Personal progress is so important because it saves and promotes some aspect of the Infinite... We are all worthy of redemption... I hope this makes sense!

In answer to a question about what ideas they would like to have shared—or what they would have liked to discuss more (from various class meetings):

One idea that we had just discussed in our small groups was regarding Éponine’s motivations as an ethical character. We discussed the interaction between Eponine and Father Mabeuf and how he suggests that she will be blessed as she is an angel and Eponine responds, “I’m the devil,
but that’s all the same to me” (871). We discussed the meaning of the last part “that’s all the same to me” and wondered if she views ethics as this ambiguous entity in which there is no huge distinction between right and wrong. It requires further discussion though to investigate why she ascribes herself as the Devil?

One part of the scene in the Gorbeau house as Jean Valjean confronts Thénardier and his gang has consistently bothered me and I was reminded of it again today when that group talked about Valjean’s self-injury. I think the group that talked about this did a great job explaining how Valjean at this point has somehow transcended himself; that his pure soul keeps him safe even when his corporeal body is harmed. However as soon as he proves this to the criminals he throws the weapon away. In a sense this proves his lack of fear but he doesn’t know that Javert is coming and so in so doing he is also throwing his life away. More importantly he is throwing Cosette’s life away and I don’t fully understand why he would do that when he cares about her so deeply and he has a chance to escape.

Why does Hugo give such attention to the Revolution of 1830, Louis Philippe, etc. and the efforts of the Friends of the ABC, but then follow it with the illustration of Rue Plumet? This ordering has proved interesting in light of other historical moments that Hugo has described.

Hmmm, I loved today’s discussion but would want to talk more about Marius’ ethics, kind of going off of Laura’s point: what do we think of selfish means towards selfless ends? This is such an intriguing conversation. How much importance does intention play in results?

Today’s discussion was pretty eye opening for me in that I realized how necessary it is for me to expand my interests in the novel. I feel like I focus too much on certain aspects of the plot and then allow other interesting parts of the novel to fall behind, especially with characters like the students of the ABC. I need to expand my horizons! And this novel is so rich, there’s so much to explore.