

MADAME DEFARGE S KNITTING CIPHER

John, thought madame, checking off her work as her fingers knitted, and her eyes looked at the stranger. Stay long enough, and I shall knit Barsad before you go. (*A Tale of Two Cities*, Book Two, Chapter 16)

Dickens probably had knitted lace or Aran (Irish Fisherman) patterns in mind, but these traditional patterns require a great deal of repetition that would have made a cipher very difficult. Presented here is one possible way to encrypt names by using a unique set of three stitches for each letter of the alphabet, omitting the letter K and diacritical marks. A skilled, rapid knitter would be able to encrypt a name of eighteen letters and marks, such as Charles St. Evremonde, in only fifty-four stitches. Madame Defarge probably found a simple scarf, not a shroud, the best garment to knit in what would appear to be a somewhat abstract design. The cipher would be knitted only on the front side of the garment. Borders of garter stitch would be necessary to keep the coded section clear and the edges neat. Alternate rows would most likely be purled (purl back) to keep the encrypted letters relatively distinct. The knitted code would read across the front-side rows from right to left and would require some patience. One wonders whether Madame Defarge kept a cheater chart under the wine-shop counter!

Vowels, H and S and Y contain only the familiar knit and purl stitches. Directions for lace-pattern stitches are given below. The twist (T) requires two stitches to complete, so it provides only four variants. The back stitch (sometimes called a cross stitch) is used only for Z and fill.

Abbreviations: K = knit stitch
P = purl stitch
O = yarn over

T = twist (two-stitches)
B = back or cross stitch
tog = together (decrease)

RS = right side of garment
WS = wrong side of garment
st(s) = stitch(es)

The Key to the Cipher:

K3	A	O,K1,P2tog	N
K1,K2tog,O	B	K1,P1,K1	O
K2tog,O,K1	C	P1,P2tog,O	P
O,K2tog,K1	D	P2tog,O,P1	Q
K2,P1	E	O,P2tog,P1	R
P1,K2tog,O	F	P3	S
P1,O,K2tog	G	T1,K1	T
P1,K2	H	P1,K1,P1	U
K1,P2	I	T1,P1	V
O,P1,K2tog	J	K1,T1	W
	K = C	P1,T1	X
K1,P2tog,O	L	P2,K1	Y
P2tog,O,K1	M	B3	Z

Directions for twisted stitch: K2tog, leaving sts on left-hand needle, insert right-hand needle from the front between the 2 sts ktog and K the first st again; then slip both sts from the needle tog.

Directions for back stitch: insert right-hand needle in back of loop instead of the front of st to be knitted. Complete stitch as for regular knit.

Directions for overs: overs (O) are done slightly differently depending on the kinds of stitches before and after. You will need to consult a knitting manual if you are not familiar with the four types of overs. The principle is to make a loop of yarn over the needle without doing a stitch, thus creating a hole.

Scarf Directions: Recommended weight: knitting worsted or other medium-weight yarn, size 8 needles or smaller (American). Avoid dark colors, tweeds, and ombre yarns. Keep tension firm.

Cast on 49 stitches loosely.

Rows 1-6 (garter border): Knit.

Row 7 (WS) and all uneven-numbered rows to within last five: K5,P39,K5

Row 8 (RS): K5 (garter edging), using the letter chart begin cipher. Fill out any unused stitches in row with B, ending with K5. *Cipher only on even-numbered rows.*

Example: sts for Charles St. Evemonde:

(First cipher row)	T1,K1
K2tog,O,K1	K2,P1
P1,K2	T1,P1
K3	O,P2tog,P1
O,P2tog,P1	K2,P1
K1,P2tog,O	P2tog,O,K1
K2,P1	K1,P1,K1
P3	O,K1,P2tog
B18	O,K2tog,K1
(Second cipher row)	K2,P1
P3	B6

Madame probably included some dummy even-numbered rows (K49) or even a row of regular pattern stitches, such as K5,*O,K2tog,T*repeat to last 5sts, K5, to fill out her garment.

Continue in pattern until garment is long enough and all your enemies names have been entered in the register.

Last 5 rows: Knit, bind off in knitting.

Finishing: Work in all yarn ends. Add fringe to short ends of scarf, as desired. Prepare for the Revolution!

It is noteworthy that, while Dickens may not have been a *tricoteur* himself, his observation was sufficiently keen to perceive that lace-pattern knitting could be adapted to encryption.

Decoder: Wayne Batten