

Anna Karenina: Leo Tolstoy

Our work with Anna Karenina requires a proper use of the basic tools of education: reading, thinking, discussing and writing. We read intelligently in the hope that we may understand what the writer has said, not, of course, what we would choose to have him say. This kind of understanding may only be attained through close-reading and careful analysis. You have been stimulated, hopefully, in this direction by viewing the B.B.C. dramatization of Anna Karenina which faithfully presented to us the moral dilemma of Tolstoy's heroine.

There now follows a list of analytical questions. You may choose to work on your own or in pairs. Make your choice, then 1) read carefully according to the necessity of your choice; 2) think deeply when applying the question; 3) prepare your response in note form, and 4) make your oral presentation precise, clear, and pertinent.

1) Parentage:

This area might include such parent relationships as that of a) the Oblonsky's, b) the Countess Vronsky, c) Kitty and Levin, d) Karenin, e) Anna, f) Vronsky; also references may be made to the elderly Prince and Princess Shcherbátsky.

2) Schooling, education, preparation for life:

This question requires that a study be made of the childhood of Prince Oblonsky ("Stiva") and his sister Anna, in comparison, perhaps, to what is known, or can be assumed, of the upbringing of Princess Oblonskaya ("Dolly").

3) Religion and philosophy:

Interesting points may be made resulting from the views held by Lévin ("Kóstya") and Karenin, respectively. Further interest could be developed by including an appraisal of views held by the society women.

4) Rank and class:

An understanding of the social environment and mores of the aristocracy - please note what Lévin and his brother Nicholas have to say about the matter of rank. This subject requires a study be made of the attitude, not only of the aristocracy, but of those who serve them.

5) Money - economics:

Money is necessary for the good life of the aristocrats, but not nearly as necessary as the right social conduct. Explain how several of the leading characters are involved in money matters and economics, and how this involvement determines their views and actions.

6) Work, personal industry and regard for labour:

Contrast the attitudes and efforts of Lévin and Karenin with such characters as Oblonsky and Vronsky.

7) Responsibility to life, and self, and others:

Interesting comparisons and contrasts may be drawn from an examination of Anna Karenina and Princess Oblonsky ("Dolly") -- from Lévin and Karenin, also.

8) Motherhood, the responsibility of womanhood:

There are many mothers to choose from including Princess Shcherbátsky (Dolly and Kitty's mother), Princess Oblonsky ("Dolly"), Countess Vronsky, but the principal character to be studied in this respect would be Anna.

- 9) Exemplary behaviour:  
Examine all characters who behave in an exemplary way according to the standards set by the society. Who, among these characters are selfless and compassionate; what extraordinary scenes show an example of men and women at their most noble best?
- 10) Callous indifference and benign neglect of a moral code of ethics:  
There are several characters who could fall into this category who are not bad, but who are, at crucial moments of testing, not good; Karenin, Vronsky, Countess Lydia Ivánovna, Princess "Betsy" Tverskaya, and of course, Anna.
- \* 11) Concepts of death:  
A study may be made of Nicholas Lévin's death and the effect upon his brother ("Kostya"). The most important study remains with Anna - her visions of death and concerns with dying, and finally, her suicide. *↓ - seen men die she should have died! - breaks Anna*
- 12) Anna's choice of associates and companions:  
This would entail an evaluation of the importance of Anna's associates to the development of the action surrounding her. Her preferences often engage action and create circumstances that entangle her. *forever - not enough to stop her*
- 13) Reaction to disappointment:  
Several of Tolstoy's characters suffer bitter disappointment. Their differing reactions are interesting to note. i.e. Lévin; "Kitty"; "Dolly"; Karenin; Seryoja and Anna. *U - can be effected by death in the same way*
- 14) Physical, mental and psychological health:  
A study, in particular, of Anna Karenina. *little man - men dead at railroad*
- 15) Marriage:  
Discuss concepts of marriage as they are expressed and upheld by such characters as Karenin, Princess "Betsy" Tverskaya, Anna Karenina, and her brother Prince "Stiva" Oblónsky.
- 16) Love and Fidelity:  
An examination and discussion of this subject as it refers to Anna Karenina, Vronsky, Karenin, and to "Kitty" and Lévin.
- 17) What did each of the following characters attain in life?  
Karenin, Countess Lydia Ivanovna, Princess Betsy Tverskaya, Countess Vronsky, Prince "Stiva" Oblónsky.
- \* 18) What did these characters leave behind them?  
Constantine Dmitrich Lévin ("Kostya")  
Alexèy Alexandrovich Karenin  
Anna Karenina
- 19) Moral and ethical values:  
a) the moral and ethical views expressed by Karenin,  
b) expressed by Count Alexèy Kirilich Vronsky,  
c) expressed by Lévin,  
d) expressed by Anna Karenina.

This last character's moral dilemma is complex as a result of her violation of the most absolute moral-spiritual law which binds mother and child. Analyse particularly Anna's visit to Seryoja on his ninth birthday.