

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for Crime and Punishment (Unabridged) by Fyodor Dostoyevsky

Book Information

Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Crime and Punishment
(Unabridged)

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Mired in poverty, the student Raskolnikov nevertheless thinks well of himself. Of his pawnbroker he takes a different view, and in deciding to do away with her he sets in motion his own tragic downfall.

Topics: Behavior, Criminal; Common Core State Stds Appendix B Titles, CCSS Grade Band 11-CCR; Community Life, Ethics/Morality; Community Life, Poverty; Countries/Regions, Russia/Soviet Union; Popular Groupings, College Bound; Recommended Reading, ALA Outstanding Books for College Bound; Recommended Reading, California Recommended Lit., English, 9-12

Main Characters

Amalia Ivanovna Marmeladov's landlady

Andrey Semionovich Lebeziatnikov a boarder in the same house as Marmeladov's family, who espouses an "advanced liberal" political ideology

Arkady Svidrigailov Dunia's former employer, who attempts to seduce her

Avdotia (Dunia) Romanovna Raskolnikov's sister, who at the outset of the story is engaged to Luzhin and previously was employed by Svidrigailov

Dmitry Razumikhin a fellow student, who befriends Raskolnikov

Ilia Petrovich a police official

Katherine Ivanovna Marmeladov's wife, who suffers from consumption

Lizaveta Ivanovna the pawnbroker's sister, who Raskolnikov murders when she arrives on the scene unexpectedly

Marmeladov a former government clerk and Sonia's father, Marmeladov is an alcoholic who is run over by a carriage

Mikolay and Mitka painters who were at the scene of the murder

Nastasia the servant of Raskolnikov's landlady, who befriends him

Nikodim Fomich chief of police

Peter Petrovich Luzhin Dunia's fiance at the beginning of the novel

Polenka, Lenia, Kolia Katherine Ivanovna's children by a previous marriage

Porfiry Petrovich the police officer in charge of investigating the murder of the old pawnbroker

Praskovia Pavlovna Raskolnikov's landlady, who complains to the police about Raskolnikov's failure to pay his rent

Pulcheria Alexandrovna Raskolnikov's mother

Rodion (Rodia) Raskolnikov a student who kills an old woman on the basis of his intellectual theory that he is an "extraordinary man" not bound by conventional morals or law

Sonia (Sofia) Semionovna Marmeladov's daughter, who becomes a prostitute to help support the family

Zamiotov clerk in the police station and friend of Razumikhin

Zosimov a doctor friend of Razumikhin who attends Raskolnikov during his illness

Vocabulary

monomania a mental illness characterized by being limited in expression to one idea or thought

nihilist a person who believes that social conditions are so bad as make destruction desirable for its own sake

nonplused to be at a loss as to what to say

quintessentially the essence of a thing in its purest form

Synopsis

Raskolnikov is a student in St. Petersburg in the mid-1800s. He devises an intellectual theory that certain extraordinary individuals are above

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conventional morals and laws. To test his theory, he murders an old pawnbroker whose life he considers worthless. The pawnbroker's sister comes upon the scene, and Raskolnikov murders her, too.

Then Raskolnikov becomes very ill and takes to his bed. He is visited by his friend, Razumikhin, who takes Raskolnikov's care upon himself, and by Luzhin, who is engaged to his sister, Dunia. Raskolnikov is convinced Dunia has agreed to marry Luzhin only to provide income for Raskolnikov and their mother.

Raskolnikov reads about the crime. He goes to the police station, where he nearly faints, and the police become suspicious of him. Walking about, he happens to be nearby when Marmeladov, a drunk whom Raskolnikov met a few days before, is run over by a carriage and killed. Raskolnikov gives money sent to him by his mother to Marmeladov's widow. He meets Sonia, Marmeladov's daughter, who has been driven to prostitution to help her impoverished family.

Raskolnikov's mother and sister arrive in St. Petersburg. Raskolnikov tells Dunia she must choose between him and Luzhin, and she rejects Luzhin. Dunia's former employer, Svidrigailov, has also come to St. Petersburg. He had previously attempted to seduce Dunia and has just become a widower. He tries to get Raskolnikov to help him see Dunia, but Raskolnikov refuses.

Raskolnikov is so tormented by his guilt and wondering how much the police know that he is nearly delirious much of the time. He tells his mother and sister to leave him alone. Ultimately, Porfiry, the police officer, tells Raskolnikov he knows Raskolnikov committed the crime, and suggests he confess.

Raskolnikov confesses to Sonia. Unknown to them, Svidrigailov listens on the other side of the door. Svidrigailov tries to blackmail Dunia into having an affair with him by telling her what he knows. When she refuses, he commits suicide.

Finally, Raskolnikov confesses to the police. He is sentenced to eight years hard labor in Siberia. Sonia follows him there, where Raskolnikov realizes he truly loves her. In the epilogue, he opens the Bible and begins to read.

Open-Ended Questions

Use these open-ended questions as the basis for class discussions, student presentations, or extended writing assignments.

Initial Understanding

Why was Porfiry not worried that Raskolnikov would run away when he gave Raskolnikov time to consider confessing?

He was confident that Raskolnikov had integrity and had realized that the philosophy that led him to kill the old woman had failed. He thought Raskolnikov eventually would recognize that he needed to suffer to be redeemed and would turn himself in so he could do so.

Literary Analysis

What role did Sonia play in the novel?

She represented the compassionate and humane side of Raskolnikov's personality. She sacrificed herself to prostitution to help her family. Sonia also illustrated Dostoyevsky's belief that redemption can occur through suffering; her suffering was great. Ultimately, Sonia helped Raskolnikov redeem himself through suffering and love.

Inferential Comprehension

Why did Raskolnikov ask Sonia to read the passage from the Bible in which Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead?

The story of Lazarus is the story of a miracle in which a dead man is brought back to life. Raskolnikov wondered if he, who was dead in the sense that he was cut off from humanity by his crime, could also be brought back to life.

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Constructing Meaning

What was Dostoyevsky saying about the need for human connection in the novel? Give examples of how Dostoyevsky used the characters to make his points.

Dostoyevsky thought that human beings could not successfully live in isolation from one another. Raskolnikov's intellectual idea could only succeed if it were possible for him to separate himself from humankind. He ultimately could not do this, and hence experienced his guilt and punishment. Svidrigailov, too, ultimately realized he was connected to other people. When Dunia rejected him, he realized he had lost his chance to be connected to people and committed suicide. Sonia, an agent of Raskolnikov's redemption, understood her connection to other people.

Johann Christoph Friedrich von Schiller, the German playwright, poet, and writer of philosophy, history, and aesthetics, who lived from 1759-1805. Ask the students to re-read the sections in which Schiller is mentioned and to research Schiller's philosophies. Hold a class discussion regarding whether and in what ways Raskolnikov and/or Porfiry were "Schillers."

Teachable Skills

Understanding Literary Features Instruct the students to reread the sections of the book that discuss why Raskolnikov originally thought it acceptable to kill the pawnbroker. Ask them to write an essay explaining Raskolnikov's ideas and why the execution of his idea failed.

Understanding Literary Features Hold a class discussion about the character of Porfiry Petrovich. Ask the students at what point in time they think Porfiry knew that Raskolnikov committed the crime and why he did not arrest him then. Discuss Porfiry's purpose in baiting and playing with Raskolnikov. Ask them to think about what points Dostoyevsky made through the character of Porfiry.

Understanding the Author's Craft Ask the students to research Dostoyevsky's life, in particular his political activities. Ask them to relate this information to the themes and characters of the novel in the form of an essay.

Understanding Dialog Several times during their last conversation, Svidrigailov told Raskolnikov that he was a "Schiller." When Porfiry and Raskolnikov discussed the crime, Porfiry referred to himself as a "Schiller." These are references to