

Discussion Questions, *Anna Karenina*, Books 1 -3

1. What does Tolstoy mean when he says "Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way"? Is every happy family alike? Is every unhappy family unhappy in its own way? Which families are happy in the first 3 books? Which families are unhappy?
2. The Oblonskys start out the book being unhappy and are transformed into a happy family. The Karenins start out as a happy family and are transformed into an unhappy family. Does Tolstoy intend that these families are seen as parallels? If so, why are their roles reversed?
3. Is Vronsky intended to be a likeable character? Is he likeable? Does he grow in the first three books, or does he remain the same? How does the incident of the race shed light on Vronsky's character?
4. Konstantin Levin struggles with the relationship of the peasant to the land, as well as the peasant to the landowner. Does he resolve his struggles with these questions in the first three parts of the book? Why are Levin's struggles with these concepts so important to Tolstoy? How do Levin's ideas differ from those of the other characters?
5. Is Alexy Alexandrovitch meant to be a likeable character? Why or why not? Does he seem to have an important job to anyone other than himself? Are his job duties ever clearly defined? Is he meant to stand for all bureaucrats? Why doesn't he react more forcefully to Anna's indiscretions?
6. Does Anna intentionally seek a romance with Vronsky? What is her primary motivation in having an affair with Vronsky? Why does she continue the affair after the initial liaison? Does she see a way out of her predicament after the affair is consummated?
7. What is Kitty Shtcherbatskys role? Why does she reject Levin at first? When the family journeys to Europe, what does Kitty seek? Does she find it? What causes her to reject the notions of Madame Stahl?
8. What are we to think of Levin's brother Nikolay? What specifically troubles him? What are his political beliefs, and how do they affect his outlook on life?
9. Are Madame Stahl and Varenka considered to be a happy or an unhappy family? Is Varenka a believable character? What motivates her? Is she running from something? Is she as good as she is made out to be? Is her life supposed to be an alternative for Kitty?