

Great Books Discussion Questions - *The Trial* and *The Cherry Orchard*

The Cherry Orchard

1. Chekov considered the *Cherry Orchard* to be a comedy. Do you consider the play to be a comedy - why or why not?
2. It seems at times that the characters in the *Cherry Orchard* are talking at one another, rather than to one another. Why do you think Chekov wrote the play in this manner? Does this form of dialogue help or hinder the play?
3. At the end of the play, Lyuba and her brother Lyonya have resolved themselves to the sale of the orchard. Does this seeming acceptance constitute happiness? Is this a satisfactory ending to the play, and does the ending constitute the "comical" nature of the play?
4. Why don't Varya and Lopakhin ever resolve to get married? Does their failure to express their feelings constitute another example of characters not actually reacting successfully with one another?
5. Does Lopakhin seem condescending after his purchase of the orchard? Does his elation at having purchased the estate were his grandfather and father were slaves seem genuine, or is it designed to annoy Lyuba and Lyonya?

The Trial

1. Why doesn't Josef K. have a last name? Does the lack of a last name somehow indicate that he isn't worth addressing by a last name? Is it a coincidence that Josef's last name, beginning with "K" is the same letter as the author's last name?
2. What do you make of the remark that "defendants are attractive?" Josef K seems to attract women - why?
3. Is *The Trial* a metaphor on the meaning of life? Do you think that *The Trial* would have as much meaning in an earlier era?
4. The symbols and imagery of *The Trial* are reminiscent of a dream or nightmare sequence. Do you think Kafka intended the book to be read in this way?
5. Do you think that *The Trial* was written to protest a particular movement or political group, or do you think that the protests contained in the novel are of a universal nature?
6. Is *The Trial* a comment of the "unconnectedness" of modern life? Does Joseph K feel any connection with other human beings in the novel?

7. Does the fact that Josef is never charged with a crime, never sees his accusers, and does not know how the court operates, make his plight seem more futile?
8. Josef K is never imprisoned, yet he is effectively a prisoner of the system. Has he allowed himself to become a prisoner, or has his role as prisoner been thrust upon him?
9. Most people seem to know that Josef has been accused of a crime. Is this part of Josef's paranoid state, or is this some way in which people learn of his crime?
10. Josef was unaware of the alternate judicial system at the beginning of the novel. Is this alternate system real, or is it a figment of Josef's imagination?