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Study Guide

for

**The Brothers
Karamazov**

by Fyodor Dostoevsky



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New York, New York Columbus, Ohio Woodland Hills, California Peoria, Illinois

Meet Fyodor Dostoevsky



Without suffering, happiness cannot be understood.

—from a letter written by Fyodor Dostoevsky

Fyodor Dostoevsky (FEE-uh-door Dos-toy-EVV-skee) was born in the outskirts of Moscow in 1821, the second child of the medical director of a hospital for the poor. The family lived on the hospital grounds, and Dostoevsky grew up surrounded by the patients. His father had moved up the military ranks to bring his family from their inherited status as lowly clerics to the ranks of noblemen, an important distinction in Russia's class-based society. As a noble he could purchase land and serfs, which made it possible for the Dostoevsky children to spend their summers on the family's country holdings.

Dostoevsky's father and mother were interested in the literature of the day, and reading aloud was a family tradition. They also raised their children in the Russian Orthodox religion. Both knew that Fyodor and his older brother wanted to attend a university and become writers, but as practical parents they also knew the boys' futures would be more secure if they were trained for military positions. Fyodor was sent to a military school in St. Petersburg when he was fourteen years old.

Dostoevsky continued his military training and held government posts until he resigned to become a writer. When he was twenty-five, he published his first novel, *Poor Folk*, which an influential critic of the time called the "first attempt at a social novel" by a Russian writer. The novel's success brought Dostoevsky into contact with many of the leading intellectuals in St. Petersburg, Russia's capital city at the time. Dostoevsky took part in the weekly meetings of a group of intellectuals who discussed politics and read books banned by the government of Tsar Nicholas. In 1849 the members of the group were arrested for political subversion. They were cruelly punished with a staged mock execution before being sentenced to a Siberian prison for four years and an unspecified time in military service.

Dostoevsky was a changed man when he returned to St. Petersburg in 1859. After petitioning the royal courts, he was allowed to resume his interrupted literary career, but under surveillance. He and his brother established a weekly magazine of political and literary writings. In 1860 he published *Memoirs from the House of the Dead*, a realistic description of his experiences in prison. With his financial success, he and his wife, whom he had met and married in Siberia, could live well and travel. However, their good fortune was marred by her suffering from tuberculosis, his frequent epileptic seizures, and his gambling addiction.

Dostoevsky's novels, often initially published as serials in magazines, were widely read. He became something of a celebrity and was invited to important social and literary affairs. Because of his popularity among the people, he was chosen to deliver the dedication speech for a monument to Russia's most admired poet, Pushkin. When Dostoevsky died in January 1881, people created the largest funeral procession ever seen in Russia. Students and friends carried the coffin more than two miles from his home to the church.

Introducing the Novel

The Brothers Karamazov has been referred to as “a summing-up of Dostoevsky’s entire career, a work in which themes and motifs from even his earliest works and echoes from his whole past life are once more brought into focus.” Dostoevsky expected to write sequels that would follow the brothers into their futures, but he died soon after completing *The Brothers Karamazov*. Therefore, the book became his final word on themes and subjects of interest to him.

One of these themes is the humanity and fate of the poor and downtrodden in Russian society, a theme he initially explored in his first novel, *Poor Folk*. In this novel, Dostoevsky writes about an underpaid, middle-age clerk and an orphan girl, breaking with a Russian tradition of novels about upper-class people in appealing settings. Dostoevsky’s characters in *The Brothers Karamazov* include servants and the poor, who are portrayed as real people with emotions, strengths, and flaws. From his summers with the serfs of his family’s farm and from his observations of the cruelty inflicted on servants in autocratic society, Dostoevsky saw dangers ahead for a society that treated a class of fellow citizens as less than human.

The psychology of the human mind, especially the mind of the criminal, was another subject of interest to Dostoevsky. In *The Brothers Karamazov*, as in the author’s earlier novel *Crime and Punishment*, one of the characters kills another. Dostoevsky not only looks into the mind and motivations of the killer, but he also examines the minds of others who wanted to see the victim dead.

The concept of religious faith in the face of injustice and suffering in the world has been one of the author’s most controversial themes. Some scholars see him as a great religious writer and a spokesman for Christianity. Others wonder whether he is speaking for or against religion in the lengthy, opposing viewpoints eloquently expressed by the characters. Before he started the novel, Dostoevsky noted that he had struggled with the question of the existence of God “consciously and unconsciously all my life.” Similarly, the three Karamazov brothers struggle with questions of faith.

Scholars generally agree that Dostoevsky uses the emotional and mental make-up of the brothers to examine aspects of humanity that are present in all people. One son is an intellectual who questions everything but comes to no definitive conclusions on matters of right and wrong. Another son is sensual and passionate and acts without thinking but nevertheless has a moral core that sustains his faith. The third son strives to love everyone. His faith is shaken but endures.

The author’s insight into the workings of the human mind and his willingness to explore his characters’ complex motivations have intrigued psychologists, philosophers, theologians, and literary critics since *The Brothers Karamazov* was published. Other leading writers of Dostoevsky’s time, such as Leo Tolstoy and Ivan Turgenev, were at first critical of the popular author who wrote about the inner world of characters from all classes of society. At the end of Tolstoy’s life, however, he kept *The Brothers Karamazov* at his bedside and read it again and again.

THE TIME AND PLACE

The novel takes place over several months in the late 1860s in and near a small provincial town called Skotoprigonievsk. Dostoevsky patterned Skotoprigonievsk (which means “cattle run” in Russian) after Staraya Russa, a town about 150 miles southeast of St. Petersburg, to which Dostoevsky moved in 1877. The Karamazovs’ house in Skotoprigonievsk closely resembles Dostoevsky’s house in Staraya Russa.

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Russia lagged behind the leading nations of Europe in making economic, political, and social reforms. However, at the time of *The Brothers Karamazov*, the country was beginning to change. Russia’s humiliating defeat by the armies of France, Britain, and Turkey in the Crimean War (1853–1856) emphasized the need for reform. The new tsar, or emperor, Alexander II, abolished the ancient system of serfdom in 1861 as an attempt to modernize Russia.

The system of serfdom had dominated Europe during medieval times. Serfs—peasants required to work the land for their masters—could not leave the land, marry, or sell their belongings without the lords’ permission, and they were sold along with the land. By the late eighteenth century, this system had become obsolete in most of Western and Eastern Europe. Russia was one of the last countries to declare peasants free from their landlords.

Other reforms followed the emancipation of the serfs. A new legal system was created based on Western European models. Cities were permitted to govern themselves, and the military was reformed. But Russia remained an absolute monarchy without a democratically elected government. The tsar ruled by divine right, just as medieval kings had a thousand years before. This slow pace

of change enraged more progressive people. Liberals and socialists, both represented in the novel, proposed different solutions to Russia’s problems. Many socialist groups, who were considered to be radical, were devoted to the ideas of German economist and political scientist Karl Marx. After several terrorist actions, an underground group known as People’s Will assassinated Alexander II in 1881. An extreme conservative reaction set in after the assassination, and the government became even more repressive.

Many conservative Russians, Dostoevsky included, were frightened of losing the monarchy and the class system it supported. In 1917, less than forty years after Dostoevsky’s death, the Russian Revolution took place. This mass uprising violently overthrew the monarchy.

Did You Know?

The Russian Orthodox Church plays a major role in *The Brothers Karamazov*. Alexey, the youngest brother, considers becoming a monk in the Russian Orthodox tradition. The Russian Orthodox Church is a division of the Eastern Orthodox Church, which, in addition to Roman Catholicism and Protestantism, is one of the three main branches of Christianity.

A schism, or rupture, in 1054 divided Western Christianity from Eastern Orthodoxy. This split occurred along cultural and political lines. Culturally, the Western division of the Roman Empire was dominated by the use of the Latin language, while Greek dominated the Eastern half. Politically, the Roman Empire in the West collapsed to barbarian invasions in

the fifth century. The Roman Empire in the East survived for another thousand years as the Byzantine Empire. Constantinople became the seat of Eastern Christianity and was called the “New Rome.”

Russia became an Orthodox Christian country in the late 900s. Today, Orthodox Christians constitute the majority of peoples in Russia, Greece, Serbia, and Bulgaria. The Orthodox Church is known for its ancient worship service, its striking icons (religious paintings), its mystical beliefs, and its strong tradition of monks and monasteries. Although suppressed by the Communist government, the Russian Orthodox Church has long played a powerful role in the lives of Russians.

Before You Read

The Brothers Karamazov Books 1–3

FOCUS ACTIVITY

Do you see some of your own personality traits in other members of your family? Explain.

Discuss

Think of sets of brothers and sisters you know, either your own or a friend's. Discuss with a partner some of the characteristics the siblings share as well as ways in which they are different. What might account for the differences?

Setting a Purpose

Read to discover the similarities and differences that exist among three brothers who grew up apart from one another.

BACKGROUND

Did You Know?

In December 1849, not long after his arrest for illegal political activity, Dostoevsky and his fellow activists were led to a public square to be executed by a firing squad. Dostoevsky received the last rites of the church and, with the other prisoners, was forced to stand against a wall. Suddenly, a messenger rode up and announced that the tsar had commuted their death sentences, but not before Dostoevsky had spent several minutes believing he was about to die. So great was the strain of these events that one of the writer's fellow prisoners went permanently insane. Later, it was revealed that the tsar had never actually intended that the execution take place. The last-minute reprieve was part of the tsar's cruel punishment for a "conspiracy of ideas."

VOCABULARY PREVIEW

buffoon [bə fōōn'] *n.* clown

delirium [di lēr'ē əm] *n.* temporary insanity; madness

dowry [dour'ē] *n.* money or property exchanged in a marriage

extenuate [iks ten'ū āt'] *v.* to offer an excuse for

incoherent [in'kō hēr'ənt] *adj.* not understandable

novice [nov'is] *n.* beginner; a person newly and conditionally admitted as a member of a religious community

obstinately [ob'stə nit lē] *adv.* stubbornly

salutary [sal'yə ter'ē] *adj.* healthful; wholesome

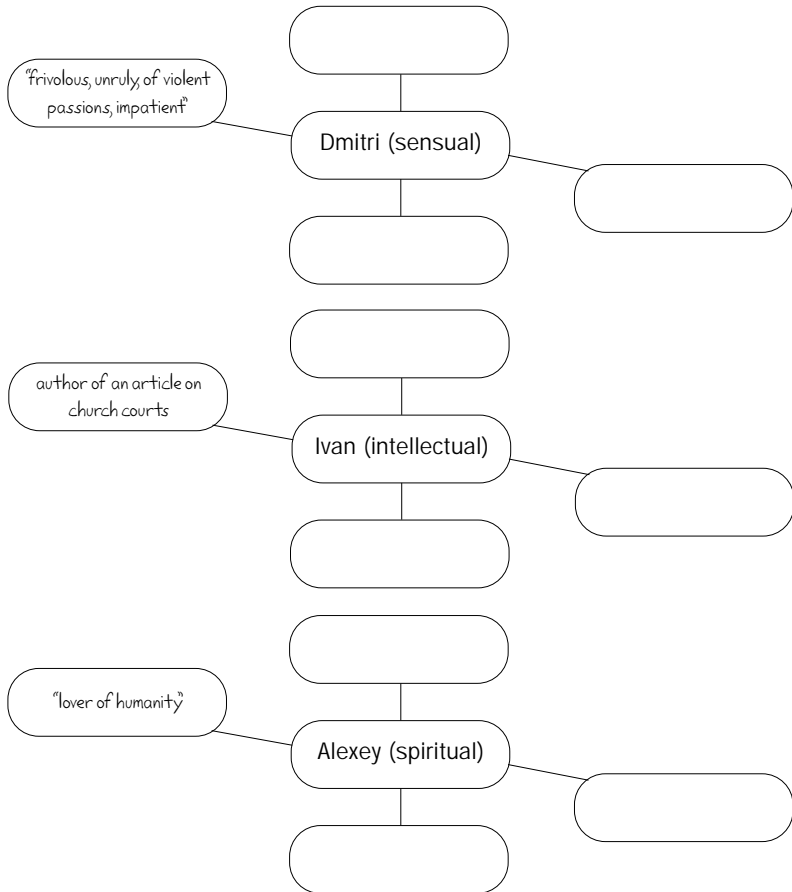
supercilious [sōō'pər sil'ē əs] *adj.* proudly scornful; snobbish

turbulent [tur'byə lənt] *adj.* disturbed; agitated

Active Reading

The Brothers Karamazov Books 1–3

The Karamazov brothers represent three different aspects of human existence: the sensual, or physical (Dmitri); the mental, or intellectual (Ivan); and the spiritual, or religious (Alexey). As you read the first section of the novel, use the word webs on this page to record words, phrases, or incidents that show how each brother represents one aspect of the human personality.



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Responding

The Brothers Karamazov Books 1–3

Personal Response

What is your impression of Fyodor Karamazov and his sons Dmitri, Ivan, and Alexey? Do you think any two of them are alike in temperament? Explain.

Analyzing Literature

Recall and Interpret

1. Why have the Karamazovs gathered at Father Zossima's? Is the meeting a success? Why or why not?

2. What advice does Father Zossima give Alexey about his future? How does Alexey react to the advice?

3. What happens when Dmitri enters his father's house searching for Grushenka? What do you learn about Ivan during and after this episode?

Responding

The Brothers Karamazov Books 1–3

Analyzing Literature (continued)

Evaluate and Connect

4. Who is telling this story? What can you deduce about the narrator from his comments on the action?

5. In Chapter 5 of the first book, the narrator says that faith does not spring from the miracle, but instead the miracle from faith. What do you think this statement means? Explain why you do or do not agree with it.

Literature and Writing

Realism or Not?

Critics argue about whether Dostoevsky should be considered a realistic writer. Some say that his characters are drawn from life and behave in ways that most people would behave. Others accuse him of creating eccentric, perverse, or insane characters who do not behave like ordinary people. Write an analysis of one of the characters introduced in the first part of the novel and examine his or her thoughts and behavior in the situations depicted. Some examples are Fyodor's behavior in Father Zossima's cell, Dmitri's actions toward Katerina when she brings him the 4,000 roubles, or Grushenka's visit to Katerina.

Extending Your Response

Literature Groups

After Dmitri's attack on Fyodor, Alexey asks Ivan whether anyone has the right to decide who is worthy to live. Reread this passage at the end of Book 3, Chapter 9, and note Ivan's answer. Then discuss in your group current attitudes toward judging others. Exchange old sayings and proverbs about judging others. Are there some situations in which it is impossible to avoid judging others? Give examples from the novel, other literary works, and real life to support your position.

Social Studies Connection

At the end of Chapter 5 of Book 2, Father Zossima argues against the separation of church and state. Reread this section. On a separate sheet of paper, compare what Zossima's society might be like in a system like that of the United States, where the Constitution requires that church and state be separated. What societies in the world today do not separate church and state? What are some advantages and disadvantages of both systems?



Save your work for your portfolio.

Before You Read

The Brothers Karamazov Books 4–6

FOCUS ACTIVITY

How do you react when bad things happen to you or to others?

Journal

Write in your journal about how you come to terms with bad things that happen. Do you believe that something good can come out of a misfortune?

Setting a Purpose

Read to discover one of the best-known discussions about evil ever written.

BACKGROUND

Good and Evil

Dostoevsky considered Book 5 the “culminating point” of the novel, and Chapters 4 and 5 are at its heart. The prose poem of the Grand Inquisitor (Book 5, Chapter 5) has become so famous that it is often published as a separate work. Along with the chapter that precedes it, this part of the novel contains Ivan’s devastating criticism of God and his creation. Dostoevsky was concerned that Ivan’s condemnation of God might be *too* convincing for his readers. He wrote in his notebook that some of his readers “have never even conceived so powerful a rejection of God as exists in the Inquisitor and the preceding chapter, to which the whole book will serve as answer.” A defense of God’s goodness in the face of evil is called a *theodicy*. Dostoevsky’s theodicy starts with Book 6, and the rest of the novel serves as the author’s reply to Ivan’s bitter attack.

Did You Know?

The title “Grand Inquisitor” alludes to a position created by the Spanish government in 1483. It was the Grand Inquisitor’s responsibility to oversee the search for and punishment of people who, the government thought, posed a threat to the Roman Catholic Church in Spain. The Grand Inquisitor played a leading role in the Inquisition, which was established by the church in 1231 to stamp out opposition to the church’s teaching. The inquisition process was used in European countries in which a Catholic monarch was willing to carry out the church’s sentences.

In the 1200s and 1300s, punishments for heresy, or holding opinions contrary to church dogma, could range from imposed prayer and fasting to life in prison. In the late 1400s, Spanish rulers found that they could use the civil death sentence along with the church’s Inquisition procedures to enforce their policies and rid the country of people who did not comply with the principles of the Catholic Church. The Spanish Inquisition became notorious for its brutality, oppression, and death sentences. The first Grand Inquisitor was Tomás de Torquemada. Even today, his name is synonymous with obtaining confessions by torture. It is estimated that 2,000 people may have been burned to death during his tenure. The excesses of the Inquisition in Europe gradually lessened. By the early twentieth century, the word itself was removed from the name of the church body that oversees matters of faith. The Grand Inquisitor of Ivan’s story seems to share some of the characteristics of Torquemada.

VOCABULARY PREVIEW

condescension [kon’ di sen’ shən] *n.* superior attitude or behavior

enigma [i nig’ mə] *n.* riddle; puzzle

expansive [iks pən’ sɪv] *adj.* talkative; open

inoculate [in ok’ yə lāt] *v.* to vaccinate; to protect against

prone [prōn] *adj.* lying flat

timorous [tim’ ər əs] *adj.* easily frightened

Active Reading

The Brothers Karamazov Books 4–6

The Grand Inquisitor's visit to Christ in his prison cell is at the heart of the novel's treatment of good and evil. The Inquisitor's argument justifying his actions is complicated but critical to understanding *The Brothers Karamazov*. Use the chart on this page to follow his reasoning and make notes on his argument.

Points in the Inquisitor's Argument	Notes
<p>the Grand Inquisitor says Christ has no right to add to what he said long ago</p>	<p>possibly means that the words of Christ as recorded in the Bible are firmly in the hands of the church, and no one, not even Christ, has the power to change them or reinterpret them.</p>

Responding

The Brothers Karamazov Books 4–6

Personal Response

What are your feelings after reading Alexey's account of the life and teachings of Father Zossima?

Are Zossima's teachings relevant to today's society? Why or why not?

Analyzing Literature

Recall and Interpret

1. The title of Book 4 is "Lacerations." In what ways is this an appropriate title?

2. Who suggests that Ivan go away to Tcherbashnya? What might be this person's reason for suggesting the trip?

3. What event during his military career changed Zossima's life? In what ways was his life changed?

Responding

The Brothers Karamazov Books 4–6

Analyzing Literature (*continued*)

Evaluate and Connect

4. Dostoevsky wrote the account of Father Zossima's life and teachings as a part of his reply to Ivan's poem of "The Grand Inquisitor." Is the account an effective answer? Is it convincing? Give reasons to support your opinion.

5. Near the end of this section, Father Zossima makes a prediction about the kind of society that will result if the nonreligious revolutionaries triumph in Russia. He says, "They aim at justice, but denying Christ, they will end by flooding the earth with blood. . . ." In your opinion, was Zossima's prediction accurate? Explain.

Literature and Writing

Dostoevsky's Many Voices

Dostoevsky's narrative technique has been called polyphonic. This musical term means "many voices" and refers to a composition that has several equal melodic lines rather than one dominant melody. In *The Brothers Karamazov*, Dostoevsky tells the story through the spoken words and thoughts of his major characters. Analyze the effectiveness of this polyphonic approach in Books 4 through 6. Does it add to or detract from the plot and the themes?

Extending Your Response

Literature Groups

At the beginning of the chapter titled "Rebellion," Ivan says, "One can love one's neighbors in the abstract or even at a distance, but at close quarters it's almost impossible." Do you agree with him? Why or why not? Discuss in your group the meaning of this statement. Explain your position, citing evidence from real life, personal experience, and other literary works you have read.

Speaking and Listening

In the **Focus Activity**, you wrote about how you react when bad things happen. Work with a partner to write a pair of dialogues between two people, one of whom has just experienced a personal tragedy. In your dialogues, have the consoling person provide two different explanations or consolations for the tragedy. One consolation should reflect Ivan's attitudes and ideas, while the other one should be based on Father Zossima's attitudes and beliefs. Share your dialogues with the class.



Save your work for your portfolio.

Before You Read

The Brothers Karamazov Books 7–9

FOCUS ACTIVITY

Recall a dream or an experience that changed the way you looked at things.

Freewrite

Freewrite for several minutes about a dream or an experience that brought about a change in the way you looked at life in general or at a certain situation in particular.

Setting a Purpose

Read to find out how a dream changes the life of one character in *The Brothers Karamazov*.

BACKGROUND

Did You Know?

Prisons have played a large role in the history of Russia and the lives of its citizens. Rulers from the time of the tsars to the modern era have used prisons to punish anyone who opposed their regimes. Dostoevsky is only one of several internationally known Russian writers imprisoned for their writings.

A modern writer who, like Dostoevsky, was incarcerated in Siberia as punishment for his political views is Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn. Solzhenitsyn was sentenced to hard labor in Siberia for criticizing Russian leader Josef Stalin in a personal letter. After nine years of forced labor, he wrote *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, a Nobel Prize-winning novel about survival in a prison camp. The inmates of Denisovich's camp were all political prisoners.

Ironically, the prototype for prisons that served political ends began in a Russian Orthodox monastery. Beginning in the days of the tsars, noblemen who offended the monarch were exiled to a monastery on Solovetsky Island in the frigid White Sea. As the years passed, succeeding rulers found the extreme cold and the isolation of Siberia to be ideal for building a string of prisons and forced labor camps. Governments condemned dissidents, artists, writers, and common criminals to these camps.

VOCABULARY PREVIEW

goad [gōd] *v.* to urge; to prod

ingenuousness [in jen 'ū əs nis] *n.* openness, directness

mawkish [mō 'kish] *adj.* overly sentimental

medley [med 'lē] *n.* mixture

restiveness [res 'tiv nis] *n.* impatience, uneasiness

sanctity [sangk 'tə tē] *n.* piety; saintliness

sententiously [sen ten 'shəs lē] *adv.* in a moralizing way; pompously

stealthily [stel 'thə lē] *adv.* secretly, cautiously

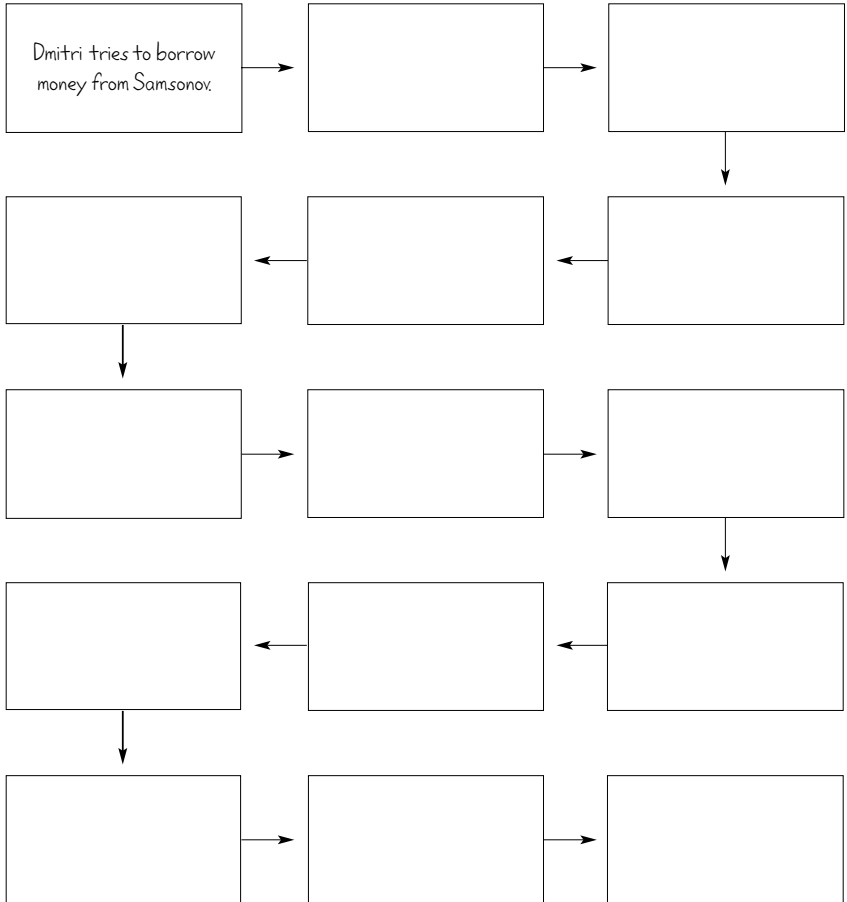
surliness [sur 'lē nis] *n.* gruffness

venomous [ven 'ə məs] *adj.* poisonous

Active Reading

The Brothers Karamazov Books 7-9

The actions of Dmitri Karamazov on the night of his last visit to his father are important to the plot of the novel. Use the chart on this page to list the events as they occur.



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Responding

The Brothers Karamazov Books 7–9

Personal Response

Do you think Dmitri intended to kill his father when he went to Fyodor's house?

Do you think he did kill him? Explain your answer.

Analyzing Literature

Recall and Interpret

1. What happens to Father Zossima's corpse? Why does this occurrence shock the monks and other mourners? How does it affect Alexey?

2. How does Dmitri come to be at his father's house on the night Fyodor is killed? Do you think Grushenka has any responsibility for the events that occur? Explain.

3. Where is Dmitri arrested? Do you think he was trying to escape from the police? Explain.

Responding

The Brothers Karamazov Books 7–9

Analyzing Literature (*continued*)

Evaluate and Connect

4. What is the content of Dmitri's dream in Chapter 8? How is this dream related to Ivan's discussion with Alexey about the suffering of children?

5. How does the realization Dmitri reaches differ from the one Ivan reaches?

Literature and Writing

Exploring Dreams

In this section of the novel, two characters have important dreams. Identify these; then write an analysis of Dostoevsky's use of dreams in Books 7–9 of *The Brothers Karamazov*. Issues you may want to focus on include what Dostoevsky is telling us about his characters through their dreams, how effective and believable this technique is, and why authors might choose to include "nonrealistic" situations in realistic novels.

Extending Your Response

Literature Groups

Dmitri Karamazov describes himself as a man of honor in his inner being. Reread the passage toward the middle of Chapter 3 in Book 9, where he explains his yearning to be honorable. Discuss in your group whether you feel Dmitri is, in fact, an honorable man. Give evidence from the text to support your argument. Then work as a group to develop a short, concise description of the qualities of an honorable person. Compare your description with those of other literature groups.

Creative Writing

In Chapter 3 of Book 7, Grushenka tells Alyosha the story of the onion. Dostoevsky heard this story from a peasant woman, and he was excited to publish this folktale in a book. Folktales are usually passed along orally long before they are ever written down. They can include animal stories, trickster stories, fairy tales, myths, legends, and tall tales, and they generally offer some sort of common wisdom or observation about life. Review the story of the onion once again. Then write a folktale of your own, keeping the message of your story as simple as possible. When you are finished, share it with the rest of your class.



Save your work for your portfolio.

Before You Read

The Brothers Karamazov Books 10 and 11

FOCUS ACTIVITY

In your opinion, if a person wants a crime to occur, is he or she as guilty as the person who actually commits the crime? Explain.

Think-Pair-Share

Work with a partner to share ideas on how to answer this question. What sorts of things must you consider? What does the law say? What do religious and moral codes say?

Setting a Purpose

Examine how several characters approach the question of guilt.

BACKGROUND

The Devil Within

Scholars have noted that Dostoevsky blends realism with a heavily symbolic and religious vision of the world. They call this style “fantastic realism.” The author justified his approach this way: “I have my own special view of reality [in art], and what the majority call almost fantastic and exceptional for me sometimes comprises the very essence of the real.” Dostoevsky believed that the spiritual world is always present in what we think of as the real world. He also makes what happens inside the characters’ minds and souls—their psychological reality—seem as real as what is going on in their outside world. As you read Books 10 and 11, pay attention to how Dostoevsky blends traditional realism—physical descriptions and observation of characters’ speech, behavior, and mannerisms—with elements of his “fantastic realism”—dreams and hallucinations, jumbled time sequences, and thoughts and beliefs.

Did You Know?

Dostoevsky suffered from epilepsy, a disorder of nerve cells in the brain that can cause convulsions, unconsciousness, and other symptoms. He seems to have considered his attacks to be spiritual moments. One of his characters in *The Possessed* describes the moments before an epileptic seizure like this: “You suddenly feel the presence of the eternal harmony perfectly attained . . . it’s as though you apprehend all nature and suddenly say, ‘Yes, that’s right.’ . . . In those five seconds I live through a lifetime, and I’d give my whole life for them, because they are worth it.”

VOCABULARY PREVIEW

allusion [ə lōō’ zhen] *n.* indirect reference

arch [ärch] *adj.* sly; mischievous

audacious [ō dā’ shəs] *adj.* bold

cursorly [kur’ sər ē] *adj.* without attention to detail

diffidence [dif’ ə dəns] *n.* shyness

imperious [im pēr’ ē əs] *adj.* domineering; overbearing

stolidly [stol’ id lē] *adv.* without emotion

subterfuge [sub’ tər fūj’] *n.* deception; trick

upbraid [up brād’] *v.* to scold

Active Reading

The Brothers Karamazov Books 10 and 11

Ivan's three interviews with Smerdyakov in this section of *The Brothers Karamazov* are among the most important episodes in the novel. They show Dostoevsky's understanding of human psychology and his ability to sketch characters' inner reality. The interviews also reveal what happened on the night Fyodor was killed. As you read the interviews, fill in answers to the questions in the left column.

Question	Answer
1. What phrase pops into Ivan's mind when he sees Smerdyakov for the first time?	"it's always worth while speaking to a clever man"
2. What was Smerdyakov's greatest fear?	
3. What answer does Smerdyakov give to Ivan's question "you think that everyone is as great a coward as you?"	
4. What is Ivan's feeling after the first interview?	
5. What does Smerdyakov promise not to tell about the conversation at the gate?	
6. What reason does Smerdyakov give for why Ivan might have wanted Fyodor killed?	
7. What does Ivan receive from Katya that proves to Ivan that Dmitri is the true murderer?	
8. Whom does Ivan meet on the way to the third interview?	
9. What belief of Ivan's does Smerdyakov use to justify the murder?	
10. Were Smerdyakov's fits real or a sham?	
11. Where does Smerdyakov hide the money?	
12. What does Smerdyakov say to Ivan as he is leaving for the last time?	
13. What does Ivan do after leaving Smerdyakov for the last time?	

Responding

The Brothers Karamazov Books 10 and 11

Personal Response

Were you surprised when you learned who the real murderer was? Why or why not?

Analyzing Literature

Recall and Interpret

1. What is Ivan's secret plot? How does it conflict with Dmitri's new beliefs, inspired by his dream?

2. How does Smerdyakov prove he murdered Fyodor? What is Ivan's reaction when he learns this?

3. The philosopher Hannah Arendt used the term *banality* (ordinariness) of *evil* to describe how evil can sometimes assume a nondescript and everyday appearance. She was referring to Nazi war criminal Adolf Eichmann, who organized mass deaths in concentration camps as if exterminating people was a routine task. How does Ivan's visitor in this part of the novel fit this description?

Responding

The Brothers Karamazov Books 10 and 11

Analyzing Literature (continued)

Evaluate and Connect

4. According to what he tells Alexey, in what way has Dmitri become a new man? What do you think of this change? Does it seem believable and psychologically realistic? Explain your answer.

5. When Alexey visits Lise in Chapter 3 of Book 11, she says, "Everyone loves crime, they love it always. . . . They all declare that they hate evil, but secretly they all love it." Do you agree with her? Give examples from current events and other sources to support your position.

Literature and Writing

A Prophet?

Dostoevsky has been called a prophet, primarily for his analysis of abnormal psychology and his predictions about the totalitarian states of the 1900s. Examine this section of the novel for evidence to support or oppose this claim about the author. Sections you might want to focus on are Ivan's interviews with Smerdyakov, Alexey's conversation about evil with Lise, and Kolya's talks with Alexey about "modern ideas." On a separate sheet of paper, list the evidence you have found to support or oppose this claim about the author.

Extending Your Response

Literature Groups

In his meetings with Ivan, Smerdyakov asserts that a person who wishes a crime to be committed is as guilty as the person who actually commits it. Use your answer to the **Focus Activity** as well as the chart you filled out in the **Active Reading** exercise to discuss this idea in your group. Cite evidence from the novel and from real life and other works of literature to support your position.

Performing

In this section of the novel, we learn a good deal about several characters from what they do and say about themselves and from what others say about them. Choose one of the following characters and write a short dramatic monologue that expresses the character's thoughts and feelings about the events of this part of the novel: Smerdyakov, Lise, Dmitri, Ivan, or Kolya. Have your character reflect on important events and other characters. Present your dramatic monologue to the class and lead a discussion afterwards.



Save your work for your portfolio.

Before You Read

The Brothers Karamazov Book 12 and Epilogue

FOCUS ACTIVITY

What types of things can be used as evidence in a trial?

List It

On a separate sheet of paper, list types of evidence that would be useful in helping you arrive at a verdict in a trial for robbery.

Setting a Purpose

Read to discover how different kinds of evidence lead to a surprising verdict in a robbery-and-murder trial.

BACKGROUND

Dostoevsky's Life and *The Brothers Karamazov*

The Brothers Karamazov reflects the author's thinking on the questions that troubled him throughout his life. The novel also contains incidents based on the author's own life and experiences. One of the most striking parallels between the novel and the author's life is the story of an army officer named Illinsky, whom Dostoevsky knew in Siberia. The officer had been convicted of killing his father and was serving a sentence of twenty years. Although Illinsky was, in Dostoevsky's words, "a self-willed, flighty, extremely irresponsible person," he remained cheerful. He also claimed to be—and Dostoevsky believed him—innocent of the crime. Illinsky was later released after the real murderers confessed. Dostoevsky recalled some of Illinsky's characteristics and circumstances when creating Dmitri.

Another parallel with a real-life character is Father Zossima. After Dostoevsky's young son Alexey died in 1878, the novelist made a pilgrimage to the monastery at Optina Pustyn. There, Dostoevsky was comforted by the words of Father Amvrosy. These words appear in the novel as Zossima's speech to the grieving mother in Chapter 3. To most readers, however, the most touching parallel in the novel may be Alexey, who is named after Dostoevsky's dead son. Anna, Dostoevsky's second wife, said, "together with the name, all of a father's tenderness, all the unrealized hopes for his son's brilliant future, were transmitted to the novel's young hero."

Did You Know?

In a trial in the United States, the prosecutor is in charge of presenting the case against the accused person, or defendant. The defense attorney defends the defendant. Both sides call witnesses. The judge (there are three at Dmitri's trial) is in charge of the trial and makes rulings on procedure and other matters. A jury hears the evidence and delivers a verdict of guilty or not guilty.

VOCABULARY PREVIEW

affable [af'ə bəl] *adj.* good-natured; friendly

elude [i lōōd'] *v.* to escape from

incongruous [in kong'grōō əs] *adj.* inconsistent

lurid [loor'id] *adj.* sensational; shocking

meanness [mēn'nis] *n.* baseness; lack of dignity

oblivious [ə bliv'ē əs] *adj.* unaware of

pathos [pā'thos] *n.* sympathy; pity

penitent [pən'ə tənt] *adj.* desiring forgiveness

p poignant [poin'yənt] *adj.* very touching; evoking emotion

Active Reading

The Brothers Karamazov Book 12 and Epilogue

At Dmitri's trial, his lawyer, Fetyukovitch, refutes each witness's testimony. As you read the scenes of the trial, use the chart on this page to keep track of what the witnesses against Dmitri say and how Fetyukovitch attacks their testimony.

Witness/Testimony	Fetyukovitch's Reply
Grigory: the garden door was open	Grigory had drunk the lumbago cure which contained vodka; he didn't know what year it was.
Rakitin:	
Trifon Borissovitch:	
The Poles:	

Responding

The Brothers Karamazov Book 12 and Epilogue

Personal Response

Do you believe that all three Karamazov brothers might now agree that “everyone is responsible” after all they have been through together? Explain.

Analyzing Literature

Recall and Interpret

1. What previously unknown information does Alexey reveal at the trial? What is the significance of this information? How might it help Dmitri?

2. How does Ivan’s behavior affect his credibility as a witness? What does his behavior say about his health?

3. What happens to Ivan at the end of the novel? What does Ivan’s state of mind tell you about Dostoevsky’s opinion of the power and usefulness of human reason?

Responding

The Brothers Karamazov Book 12 and Epilogue

Analyzing Literature (continued)

Evaluate and Connect

4. Some critics have described *The Brothers Karamazov* as a novel not about “causes and effects” but rather about “effects and causes.” Find elements in this section of the novel that support this statement.

5. Do you believe justice is served at Dmitri’s trial? Explain.

Literature and Writing

Parents and Children

One of the major themes of *The Brothers Karamazov* is the relationship of parents and children. This theme is explored at different levels and among different groups of parents and children. Write a few paragraphs in which you analyze Dostoevsky’s treatment of this theme. You may wish to look in particular at Fyodor and his four sons, Captain Snegiryov and Ilusha, and Madame Hohlakov and Lise. Pay attention also to surrogate parents, such as Grigory and Marfa (for Smerdyakov and Dmitri) and Zossima (for Alexey).

Extending Your Response

Literature Groups

Do you feel that *The Brothers Karamazov* has a hopeful ending? Why or why not? In your group, discuss the ending of the novel in terms of outcomes for the characters. Your group may choose to focus on Alexey’s speech to the boys at Ilusha’s funeral, Ivan’s possible recovery from his illness and his future relationship with Katerina, or Dmitri’s feelings about his guilt and his decision to escape to America.

Learning for Life

Who is the hero of *The Brothers Karamazov*? Dostoevsky calls Alexey the hero. But Dmitri is at the center of events, and Ivan is to many readers the most appealing brother. What do you think? Prepare a list of reasons—a sort of campaign poster or position paper—supporting the character you consider to be the hero. Begin by defining what it means to be the hero of a novel. Then examine the reasons for choosing a hero, and analyze the characters in light of the novel’s themes. Share your list of reasons with the class, discussing issues that arise. Conclude by taking a vote and declaring a “winner.”



Save your work for your portfolio.

Holy Sonnet 14 John Donne

Journey of the Magi T. S. Eliot

Before You Read

Focus Question

Do you think that poetry is a good medium for addressing questions about God, faith, and the meaning of life? Why or why not?

Background

These poems, written at very different times in history, address some of the religious themes in *The Brothers Karamazov*. John Donne (1572–1631), a contemporary of Shakespeare, was an English clergyman who combined the spiritual and the intellectual in his poetry. T. S. Eliot (1888–1965), an American-born English poet, frequently addressed religious themes in his work.

Responding to the Reading

1. In “Holy Sonnet 14,” what conflict does the speaker have regarding religious belief?

2. In “Journey of the Magi,” what conflict does the speaker have regarding religion?

3. What does the speaker in “Holy Sonnet 14” believe will make him free?

4. **Making Connections** Which character in *The Brothers Karamazov* do you think would relate to Donne’s poem? Which character would relate to Eliot’s poem? Explain your answer.

Listening and Speaking

Choose one of the poems to read aloud to the class. Practice reading your poem several times. Look up the pronunciation of any words you are unsure about. Read the poem in a way that makes it easy for your listeners to understand as much as possible on a first hearing. That is, read slowly, pause at appropriate moments, and try to match your feeling and phrasing to the sense of the words. After you have read your poem aloud, ask your listeners for their impressions of the poem.

**A Refusal to Mourn the Death, by Fire,
of a Child in London** Dylan Thomas
Another Life Derek Walcott
Intrusion Denise Levertov

Before You Read

Focus Question

What kinds of situations, realizations, or events are likely to evoke feelings of pity from people?

Background

The existence of suffering, death, and injustice has troubled poets and other writers throughout the history of literature. In the poems below, three twentieth-century poets—Dylan Thomas, Derek Walcott, and Denise Levertov—explore similar themes in different ways.

Responding to the Reading

1. For whom does the speaker of “Another Life” feel pity? Give lines from the poem to support your answer.

2. In what ways has the speaker in “Intrusion” separated herself from the past? In what ways is she still affected by the past?

3. **Making Connections** Compare the attitude of the speaker toward children’s suffering in “A Refusal to Mourn the Death, by Fire, of a Child in London” with the attitude of Ivan.

Art Connection

Choose one of these poems and interpret its imagery in a painting, drawing, or collage. You may want to start by reading the poem several times and making notes to yourself about the imagery’s symbolism, effect on mood, or contribution to the poem’s overall meaning. Be prepared to discuss your artwork with the class.

from Cambodia: Back to Sierra Leone?

Robert Kaplan

Before You Read

Focus Question

Do you think governments should try to initiate changes in society? Why or why not?

Background

Robert Kaplan is an American journalist and travel writer. His book *The Ends of the Earth* is an examination of some of the poorest countries on earth, those plagued by extreme poverty, weak or nonexistent governments, exploding populations, ethnic hatred, disease, and environmental pollution. One of the countries he reports on is Cambodia, also known as Kampuchea. In this selection, he describes the origins and policies of the country's radical communist Khmer Rouge government, which was in power between 1975 and 1979.

Responding to the Reading

1. What was the origin of the Khmer Rouge resettlement policy?

2. How did Cambodia's colonial experience contribute to its troubles in the 1970s?

3. In your opinion were the Khmer Rouge leaders evil? Were the children used to move Cambodians to the countryside evil? Explain your answer.

4. **Making Connections** The question of evil is at the heart of the conversation in the tavern between Ivan and Alexey. What do you think each character would say about the selection you just read? Write a response for Ivan and Alexey to Kaplan's history of Cambodia in the 1970s.

Social Studies Connection

From the reading, develop a time line of events in Cambodia from 1431 to 1979. Use your knowledge of American history to add notes about concurrent happenings in the United States. Remember that colonization of the Americas had not yet begun in 1431.

Once More to the Lake

E. B. White

Before You Read

Focus Question

What kinds of events and situations make you aware that time is passing?

Background

Elwyn Brooks (E. B.) White (1899–1985) was an American essayist, reporter, magazine editor and columnist, and children’s novelist. He was associated with *The New Yorker* magazine for most of his career and became one of the most admired writers of the twentieth century. His children’s books, *Charlotte’s Web* and *Stuart Little*, are classics. White lived much of his later life in rural Maine.

Responding to the Reading

1. In what ways has the lake changed? In what ways is it unchanged?

2. What does E. B. White realize at the end of this essay? What phrase does he use to express this realization? Do you think his son shares his realization? Why or why not?

3. **Making Connections** Compare the experiences of E. B. White with those of the three Karamazov Brothers. What did White gain from his relationship with his father that the brothers did not?

Creative Writing

Write a poem, short story, or essay about an experience you have had with a parent, grandparent, or other older relative. Some elements you might want to consider are what you and the adult gained from the experience, how you might be able to pass on what you learned to your own children, and the value of such experiences.

Luke 4:1–13

2 Thessalonians 2:6–12

John 12:24–26

from the Bible

Before You Read

Focus Question

Think of a wise saying, phrase, piece of advice, song lyric, or religious passage that has had a positive influence on your life. Where did you first hear it? Why have you found it to be especially important or meaningful?

Background

When Fyodor Dostoevsky was imprisoned in Siberia for taking part in antigovernment activities, his only reading matter for much of the time was the New Testament of the Bible. *The Brothers Karamazov* reflects Dostoevsky's knowledge of the Bible. Several biblical passages are critical to sections of the novel. The selections Luke 4:1–13 and 2 Thessalonians 2:6–12 play important roles in the argument of the Grand Inquisitor (Book 5, Chapter 5). The novel's epigraph is taken from John 12:24–26.

Responding to the Reading

1. In the reading from Luke, what three things does the devil suggest Jesus do? What does Jesus answer?

2. What warning does the selection from 2 Thessalonians give?

3. What is the symbolic meaning of the lines from John? In your opinion, why did Dostoevsky choose these lines for his epigraph?

4. **Making Connections** Which of these passages is directly referred to in Book 5, Chapter 5, "The Grand Inquisitor"? What is the Grand Inquisitor's opinion of the passage?

Paraphrasing

These Bible verses are from what is known as the King James (Authorized) Version. King James I of England sponsored a new translation of the English Bible, used in Protestant churches. Scholars worked on the translation from the original languages, Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. Some readers find the poetic language old-fashioned and difficult to understand. Choose five verses from the three selections and paraphrase them in the language of today. Decide whether you want to use colloquial or common phrases and slang, or Standard English. Read your paraphrases to the class. Discuss differences in the paraphrases of the same sections.

TEST: *The Brothers Karamazov*

Recall and Interpret (40 points total; 5 points each)

Write the letter of the best answer.

- _____ 1. Dmitri's major complaint against his father is that Fyodor
 a. is an inattentive father. c. refuses to give him his inheritance.
 b. will not recognize Smerdyakov as his son. d. is his rival for the love of Katerina.
- _____ 2. At the meeting at the monastery, Father Zossima bows down to
 a. Fyodor. c. Ivan.
 b. Alexey. d. Dmitri.
- _____ 3. The character who tells the story of the Grand Inquisitor and is the novel's representative of the intellectual side of human nature is
 a. Dmitri. c. Ivan.
 b. Zossima. d. Alexey.
- _____ 4. Alexey reacts to the death of Father Zossima by
 a. becoming disillusioned with the world. c. falling in love with Grushenka.
 b. losing his faith completely. d. trying to teach Lise to walk again.
- _____ 5. After his arrest, Dmitri has a strange dream about
 a. the devil. c. a dead priest rising from his coffin.
 b. a peasant's crying baby. d. Christ returning to the world.
- _____ 6. Smerdyakov confesses to Ivan that he killed Fyodor because
 a. he thought Ivan wanted him to. c. he wanted to claim the 3,000 roubles.
 b. Fyodor did not treat him like a son. d. he was temporarily insane from an epileptic fit.
- _____ 7. Dmitri's attitude toward his conviction and sentence could best be described as
 a. fury at those who convicted him. c. willingness to suffer for his sins.
 b. jealous rage at being separated from Grushenka. d. sorrow that Ivan did not help him.
- _____ 8. At Ilusha's funeral, Alexey tells the children that they should carry with them into the future
 a. a memory of Dmitri's trial. c. a memory of their childhood goodness.
 b. a classical education. d. a religious education.

Evaluate and Connect (60 points total; 30 points each)

Answer two of the following essay questions on a separate sheet of paper.

- Many critics have pointed out that each of the brothers is responsible in some way for the death of their father. Explain how each could be considered to have some guilt, using evidence from the novel to support your explanation.
- Discuss Dostoevsky's inclusion of the prose poem "The Grand Inquisitor" in the novel. Which character narrates it and why? How does it relate to the themes of faith, suffering, and good and evil? What is the thematic relationship of the prose poem to the rest of the novel?
- The epigraph of the novel, from John 12:24–26, is, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit." State the meaning of this epigraph in your own words and explain how Dostoevsky develops this theme throughout the novel through the characters of Dmitri, Ivan, and Alexey.