



Colorado Book Club Resource

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR WAR AND PEACE BY LEO TOLSTOY

1. What is Tolstoy's attitude toward his female characters—the doomed, downy-lipped Lise; the beautiful, bewitching Hélène; the love-struck, long-suffering Sonya; the devout, dowdy Marya? And what of Natasha? How do you account for her transformation throughout the book, from her debut as a high-spirited pixie to her final incarnation as a matronly homebody?
2. Pierre's passionate attachment to the world of ideas takes him from one enthusiasm to another—from free-thinking Francophile to philanthropic Freemason to would-be assassin of the Antichrist, Napoleon. What do you think Pierre is searching for? Why is he invariably ineffective when trying to translate his enthusiasms into practical results? And how has he changed by the end of the book?
3. Platon Karatayev, the peasant who befriends Pierre while both are captives of the French, is a catalyst for Pierre's transformation into a happy man. What does the worldly sophisticate Pierre learn from this humble man? Is there something uniquely Russian about Karatayev? How does he compare with the other peasants described in the book, such as those at Bald Hills, the Bolkonsky estate?
4. Andrey Bolkonsky's pride keeps him from stooping to the politicking and self-promotion of other staff officers and court officials—yet it also poisons his relationship with his wife, Lise, with his sister, Marya, and, for much of the book, with his one-time fiancée, Natasha. How does a terrible wound and a lingering illness change his attitude toward Marya, Natasha, and life in general?
5. Tolstoy advances his own theory of history throughout the book and devotes his entire second epilogue to elaborating and defending it. What do you think about his theory of history? How is it expressed through the lives of his book's characters—both historical and fictional?
6. Napoleon and Kutuzov are a study in contrasts, and it's clear who Tolstoy thinks is the better man—and the better general. How does Kutuzov achieve victory at Borodino and, ultimately, in Russia? Do you think his style of leadership is truly best in all circumstances?
7. What does Tolstoy have to say about the foibles, follies, and strengths of Russia's ruling class during a period of supreme crisis? How do the intrigues, protestations, machinations, and proclamations of Kutuzov's general staff and Alexander's ministers and diplomats affect the course of the war?



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8. Tolstoy's book is overflowing with vivid scenes—the ball in which Andrey falls in love with Natasha, the hunt at the Rostov estate, and the battle of Borodino, to name a few. What are your favorite scenes from the book? What do they say about the characters involved? About the nature of Russian life at the time? Or about the nature of war and history in general?
9. The book is populated by an array of memorable rogues—the repugnant, grasping Kuragin brothers; the brave, blustering Dolokhov; the ambitious, fickle Boris; among others. Yet none is treated as a cartoon. How does history alter these characters and our perception of them?
10. What do you think Tolstoy would make of our present-day leaders and their attitudes toward history, war, and peace?

Questions provided by the Publisher



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