

## Teacher's notes

## Anna Karenina

by Leo Tolstoy



## SUMMARY

**A**nna Karenina is really two stories in one. On the one hand, there is the story of the doomed lovers, Anna and Vronsky. On the other, we have the gradually coming together in perfect happiness of Kitty and Levin.

The novel begins, perhaps as a warning to the reader of the tragedy to come, with the breakdown of a marriage. Oblonsky has had an affair with his children's nurse and his wife, Dolly, does not think that she can forgive him. However, her sister-in-law, Anna, comes to stay in Moscow, and persuades Dolly that forgiveness is in order, partly by saying that she would forgive her husband in a similar situation. In the opening chapters, we are also introduced to Kitty and the man who is in love with her, Levin. But Levin has a rival for Kitty's affection, or at least for her mother's approval, in Count Vronsky, a fabulously wealthy aristocrat. By a quirk of fate, Vronsky has seen Anna at the station on her arrival in Moscow and they have, perhaps, fallen in love at first sight. He has certainly impressed Anna with his sensitivity and generosity, feeling pity for and then ostentatiously giving money to the widow of a station guard who dies in a rail accident.

At first Anna plays the virtuous wife to Vronsky's advances, but she eventually succumbs and becomes pregnant by him. Her husband, Karenin, insists that she gives up her lover and that they stay together and keep up the pretence of a stable marriage. Position in society is all important. But Karenin's hand is finally forced by Anna's continued affair with Vronsky and he agrees to a divorce.

Anna nearly dies at the birth of Vronsky's child and, near death, she persuades Karenin to forgive her and even forgive Vronsky, who is humiliated by the episode and, convinced that Anna is about to die, attempts suicide.

Both Anna and Vronsky survive, however, and, as Anna recovers, the death-bed reconciliation with Karenin recedes. She returns to Vronsky, Karenin refuses a divorce and keeps custody of their son, Seriozha, and Anna and Vronsky go to Italy where they are, briefly, happy.

But the weight of society's rejection is beginning to bear on Anna. She returns to Moscow and tries to face out the censure but cannot. Anna recognises that she is in chains whilst Vronsky is free, and she becomes increasingly jealous and emotionally unstable. Finally, Anna commits suicide, in the same manner as she witnessed at her first meeting with Vronsky, under the wheels of a train.

As a counterpoint to the tragedy of Anna and Vronsky, we catch occasional glimpses of Levin and Kitty through the ups and downs of courtship and marriage. Levin comes to town to propose to Kitty, but she is currently enamoured of Vronsky. She rejects Levin, then Vronsky turns his attention to Anna and Kitty is distraught. Levin is also heartbroken and consoles himself with daily labours on his country estate. Kitty gradually recovers and recognises that Levin is, after all, the man for her. They marry and have a son and Levin finally comes to terms with life.

## ABOUT LEO TOLSTOY

Count Leo Tolstoy was born in 1828 in Yasnaya Polyana in Central Russia, which he inherited in 1847. He wrote his first book in 1853 and continued to write throughout his life. He served in the army and fought in the Crimean War. His most well-known work is *War and Peace*, an epic story of the invasion of Russia by Napoleon. He believed in the non-resistance to evil, the renunciation of property and the abolition of governments and churches.

Leo Tolstoy died in 1910.

## BACKGROUND AND THEMES

Why does Tolstoy give us two stories in one? Taking a broad view of the two plots, it is perhaps easy to see why. Anna moves from a loving if passionless marriage into a passionate affair which ends in isolation, death and despair. Levin moves from isolation and, to him, a meaningless life into a stable and happy marriage where he finds fulfilment. Is Tolstoy simply saying love is more important than passion?

The key character is clearly Anna, but over the years critics have found many ways to view her and her downfall. Is she a fatally flawed character, searching selfishly for personal happiness? In this interpretation, Levin is the counterpoint, working as he does to improve the lot of his labourers and finding true happiness. Or ... is she an early feminist, who does not understand or accept that her role in society is to have babies and keep a home? Certainly, the character Dolly, unable to come to terms with Anna's control over her own fertility seems to point up that interpretation. Or ... is Anna a victim of her society? At the beginning of the novel she is in an arranged marriage; she then breaks the rules of society, not by committing adultery, which was acceptable, but by openly living with the man she loves. But society has the ultimate weapons against Anna – ostracism and the denial of remarriage and custody of her son after divorce. When Anna begins to lose her mind, one of the driving forces seems to be the double standard which allows Vronsky to mix with polite society after the adultery, but not her.

However we interpret Anna, the novel is a true tragedy. There are no villains – Karenin appears cold, even cruel at the beginning but we gradually realise that he truly loves Anna, in his way. Vronsky seems ostentatious and a womaniser, but he is faithful to Anna, despite her increasing jealousy, and devastated by her death. The main characters, in other words, are rounded people, with good and bad sides, brought to destruction by the emotions we all feel with help from the society in which they must live.

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## Communicative activities

The following teacher-led activities cover the same sections of text as the exercises at the back of the Reader and supplement those exercises. For supplementary exercises covering shorter sections of the book, see the photocopiable Student's Activities pages of this Factsheet. These are primarily for use with class readers but, with the exception of the discussion and pair/groupwork activities, can also be used by students working alone in a self-access centre.

## ACTIVITIES BEFORE READING THE BOOK

Put students into groups. Ask them to look at the Table of Contents. Tell them to read the chapter titles and try to work out a love story which fits the chapter titles.

## ACTIVITIES AFTER READING A SECTION

## Chapters 1–3

Put students into groups to discuss these questions.

- Why is the death of the guard in Chapter 2 important?
- Anna loved Vronsky at first sight. What evidence is there in Chapter 2 for and against the idea?
- Anna fell in love with Vronsky at the ball. What evidence is there in Chapter 2 for and against the idea?

## Chapters 4–6

Summarize the events of Chapter 6 in three sentences.

## Chapters 7–9

- Put students into groups and ask them to discuss each of the following events from Chapter 8 as you write it on the board. Were they surprised by this event or did they expect it?
  - Anna's child was Vronsky's.
  - Karenin knew that Anna's child was Vronsky's.
  - Anna wanted Karenin's forgiveness.
  - Anna thought her husband was a good man.
  - Anna was afraid of death.
  - Anna felt she was two women – the 'other woman' fell in love with Vronsky.
  - Vronsky was ashamed of his behaviour.
  - Anna wanted Karenin to forgive Vronsky.
  - Karenin was deeply unhappy when he thought Anna was dying.
  - Anna didn't die.
  - Vronsky tried to shoot himself.
  - Vronsky failed to kill himself.
  - Karenin forgave Anna.
  - Karenin forgave Vronsky.
  - He loved the baby girl.
  - Anna told Vronsky not to come and see her before he went away.
  - Betsy thought Karenin would kill Anna.
  - Karenin agreed to give Anna a divorce.
  - At the moment when Vronsky came to see Anna, she said 'It would have been better if I had died.'
  - Vronsky refused the post in Tashkent.
  - Vronsky resigned from the army.
- When all the events are on the board, ask students to decide which is the most surprising event.

## Chapters 10–12

- Put students into groups. Ask them to consider Anna's choices after reading the section, and the problem with each choice.
- Ask students to work in pairs and to discuss the significance of these things in Chapter 12.

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## Chapters 13–15

Ask students to work in pairs and make a list of the signs in Chapter 14 that Anna is going mad.

## ACTIVITIES AFTER READING THE BOOK

Put students into groups. Ask them to summarize the story of Anna and Vronsky in 10 sentences. Get the groups to read out the summaries and decide which is the best.

## Glossary

It will be useful for your students to know the following new words. They are practised in the 'Before You Read' sections of exercises at the back of the book. (Definitions are based on those in the Longman Active Study Dictionary.)

## Chapters 1–3

**animate** (v) bring to life  
**ball** (n) a large formal occasion where people dance  
**cavalry** (n) soldiers who fight while riding on horses  
**consumption** (n) an illness which used to be fatal  
**despair** (n) feeling of being very unhappy and without hope  
**disgrace** (v) to do something so bad that people lose respect for you  
**estate** (n) (a large area of land in the countryside, usually with one large house on it  
**mazurka** (n) a dance  
**mistress** (n) a woman that a married man has a sexual relationship with  
**omen** (n) a sign of what will happen in the future, often a sign of something bad about to happen  
**passion** (n) a very strong feeling of love or sexual desire  
**prostitute** (n) someone who has sex to earn money  
**regiment** (n) a large group of soldiers  
**saddle** (n) a seat made of leather that is put on a horse's back so that you can ride it  
**scandal** (n) something that happens that people think is immoral or shocking  
**telegram** (n) a message sent by telegraph  
**terrace** (n) a flat area next to a building or on a roof, where you can sit  
**mangle** (v) to damage something badly by crushing or twisting it  
**torture** (v) to deliberately cause someone a lot of pain over a long period of time, especially in order to punish them or make them give you information  
**velvet** (n) a cloth with a soft surface on one side, used for making jackets, dresses etc.

## Chapters 4–6

**duel** (n) a fight between two people with guns or swords  
**maid** (n) a female servant, especially in a large house  
**portrait** (n) a painting of a person

## Chapters 7–9

**adultery** (n) when someone who is married has sex with someone who is not their husband or wife  
**consent** (n) to give your permission for something or agree to something  
**humiliate** (v) to make someone seem stupid or weak  
**mutter** (v) to speak in a low quiet voice which is difficult to hear, especially when you are complaining about something

## Chapters 10–12

**morphine** (n) a powerful drug used to stop pain

## Chapters 13–15

**volunteer** (v) to offer to do something without being told you must do it



## Student's activities

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Students can do these exercises alone or with one or more other students. Pair/group-only exercises are marked.

### Activities before reading the book

Work with a partner. Make a list of the possible stages in a love affair. Compare your list with another pair.

### Activities while reading the book

#### Chapters 1-3

- Who in Chapter 3 said each of these things? Who were they talking to? What were they referring to?
  - I've spoiled everything for Kitty with Vronsky.
  - Tomorrow I'll see Seriozha and my husband, and my nice everyday life will go on as before.
  - You know that I have come to be where you are.
  - I beg of you to forget it as I will forget it.
  - You see, here is your loving husband, burning with impatience to see you.
  - We are at home on Mondays.
  - Time for bed now.
  - Go to Moscow and beg her forgiveness.
  - Can it be that there is no chance of it?
  - I know all the horror of my position but things are not so easy to arrange as you think.
  - What have I done?
  - Your behaviour today was highly inappropriate
  - You can do what you like to me.

#### Chapters 4-6

- Put in order these events from Chapter 4.
  - Dolly arrived at the Shcherbatsky's house and had many problems.
  - Dolly told Levin that Kitty was coming to spend the summer at the house.
  - Dolly tried to persuade Levin to come over whilst Kitty was there but he refused.
  - Dolly wrote to Oblonsky about the problems with the house.
  - Dolly's nurse got the local people to solve most of the problems with the Shcherbatsky's house.
  - Levin saw Kitty in a carriage and decided that he couldn't marry a peasant girl because he still loved Kitty.
  - Levin spent the night in the open air and thought about marrying a peasant girl.
  - Oblonsky gave instructions for some things to be done, but he had forgotten many other things.

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- Oblonsky went and looked over the house.
  - Oblonsky wrote to Levin and asked him to go to the Shcherbatsky's house to solve the problems.
  - One afternoon Dolly decided to take the children to the river to bathe and met Levin.
  - The Shcherbatsky's invited Dolly and the children to stay in their country house for the summer.
- An ABC of phrases! Match words from each column to make phrases from Chapter 5.
 

|                        |                  |
|------------------------|------------------|
| (a) a cruel            | (i) affair       |
| (b) ceased to          | (ii) blow        |
| (c) fight a            | (iii) career     |
| (d) physically a       | (iv) cavalry     |
| (e) a high position in | (v) coward       |
| (f) profit from her    | (vi) crime       |
| (g) formal             | (vii) current    |
| (h) his peace of       | (viii) deceit    |
| (i) break off the      | (ix) divorce     |
| (j) religious          | (x) duel         |
| (k) a Higher           | (xi) failure     |
| (l) special            | (xii) fingers    |
| (m) advance his        | (xiii) husband   |
| (n) helpless           | (xiv) interest   |
| (o) trembling          | (xv) life        |
| (p) crushed my         | (xvi) messenger  |
| (q) lies and           | (xvii) mind      |
| (r) wrote a            | (xviii) note     |
| (s) cheat a            | (xix) Power      |
| (t) an honourable      | (xx) principles  |
| (u) code of            | (xxi) principles |
| (v) a captain of       | (xxii) promotion |
| (w) refusal of         | (xxiii) society  |
| (x) chief reasons for  | (xxiv) state     |
| (y) an electric        | (xxv) woman      |
| (z) a guilty           | (xxvi) woman     |
  - Make sentences about the information in Chapter 5 using the phrases from Exercise 2.

#### Chapters 7-9

- What or who, in Chapter 7 was/were ...?
  - miserable
  - ill and unhappy
  - strange and unpleasant
  - steady and dull
  - long and searching
  - jealous
  - faded
  - afraid
  - nonsense

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## Student's activities

- (j) angry
- (k) unhappy
- (l) distant
- (m) loud and cheerful
- (n) expensive
- (o) fine and splendid
- (p) shy

## Chapters 10–12

- 1 Are these sentences about the information in Chapter 10 true or false?
  - (a) Countess Ivanovna fell in love with Karenin.
  - (b) Anna wrote to Karenin about seeing her son.
  - (c) The Countess persuaded Karenin to refuse Anna's request.
  - (d) Anna didn't expect to be allowed to see her son.
  - (e) The Countess had told Seriozha that his mother was dead, and he believed her.
  - (f) Seriozha was happy to see his mother.
  - (g) Anna wanted her son to love her husband.
  - (h) Anna loved Seriozha more than Ani, the baby.
  - (i) Vronsky came back to the hotel and told Anna he didn't love her anymore.
  - (j) Vronsky didn't want Anna to go to the opera.
  - (k) Vronsky's mother was rude to Anna at the opera.
  - (l) Vronsky and Anna were happy together again when they left Petersburg.
- 2 Match these statements (a–j) and replies (i–x) from Chapter 11.
  - (a) Here's a lovely surprise, Alexei!
  - (b) Why haven't you written to me?
  - (c) I can see that Anna is very happy with you; she's already told me so.
  - (d) What can Anna do?
  - (e) Help me to persuade her to write to him and ask for a divorce.
  - (f) He spoke of ... whether you could not ... put things right and improve your position.
  - (g) He doesn't want your husband to have a legal right to his children.
  - (h) Ani, and other that will come.
  - (i) I can choose either to be pregnant, or to be a friend and companion to my husband.
  - (j) Don't you see that I could not possible want children in my position?
  - (i) Anna could ... it depends on her ... a divorce is essential.
  - (ii) But surely that's not right.
  - (iii) I didn't know what you would think of me.
  - (iv) Of course I will. I will talk to her.
  - (v) Then that's one reason why you should get a divorce.
  - (vi) There will be no more children.
  - (vii) What children?
  - (viii) Yes, she's happy. But can it last?

- (ix) You have no idea how pleased we are to see you.
- (x) You mean a divorce?

## Chapters 13–15

- 1 Make a list of the meetings in Chapter 13? What was the result of each meeting?
  - (a) Oblonsky invited Levin to his club.
  - (b) Vronsky met Levin.
  - (c) Oblonsky and Levin went to see Anna.
  - (d) Levin went home and told Kitty about meeting Anna.
  - (e) Vronsky came home and talked to Anna.
  - (f) Oblonsky met Karenin.
- 2 Match each description (a–g) from Chapter 15 with a person or people (i–vii). Who ...
  - (a) were the Russians fighting?
  - (b) tried to talk to Vronsky at the station?
  - (c) got into the same carriage as Vronsky's mother?
  - (d) saw the death of Anna?
  - (e) said that Anna brought ruin to herself and two fine men?
  - (f) did Ani go to live with after Anna's death?
  - (g) persuaded Vronsky to go to the Serbian war?
  - (i) a young officer who had known Vronsky in his former army days
  - (ii) Karenin
  - (iii) Oblonsky
  - (iv) The Turks
  - (v) Vronsky's coachman
  - (vi) Vronsky's mother
  - (vii) Yashvin
- 3 Who/what in Chapter 15 was/were ... ?
  - (a) useless and hateful
  - (b) terrible
  - (c) mangled but still warm
  - (d) mysterious, beautiful, loving
  - (e) cruel and full of thought of revenge
  - (f) very calm and happy
  - (g) uncertain about the meaning of his life
  - (h) afraid that he had no real feelings for his son
  - (i) struck by lightning
  - (j) smiling, alive, safe
  - (k) full of happiness
  - (l) disappointed
  - (m) no longer meaningless

## Activities after reading the book

Work in pairs. How do you feel about the behaviour of Anna, Vronsky and Karenin during the novel? What was the best and the worst thing which each person did?

