



Anna Karenina

Leo Tolstoy



About the author

Count Leo Tolstoy was born in 1828 in Yasnaya Polyana in Central Russia. 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 best known work is *War and Peace*, an epic story of the invasion of Russia by Napoleon. He believed in renouncing to property and in the abolition of governments and churches. He died in 1910.

For more information see the Introduction.

Summary

Anna Karenina is the protagonist of a tragic love story. Already married and the mother of a young boy, she falls in love with another man and gets pregnant with his child. She must face the pressure of social conventions if she is to fight for that love. Although she manages to share life with Count Vronsky and their daughter for some time, he soon finds their life together dull and she pays the terrible price of not being able to see her son any more. She ends up committing suicide. In contrast, Tolstoy presents the love story of Kitty and Levin, which ends up in a happy marriage, though Kitty was initially in love with Count Vronsky.

Chapter 1: Oblonsky, an upper-class government official, has had an affair with his children's French teacher. Dolly, his wife, is furious. Oblonsky's sister, Anna Karenina, married to an older aristocrat of high reputation, comes to Moscow to try and persuade Dolly to forgive her husband. In turn, Oblonsky's old friend, Constantine Levin, an easy-going middle class young man, is madly in love with Kitty Scherbatsky, Dolly's sister. Oblonsky encourages him to propose to her, but warns him that he has a rival

for Kitty's affection in Count Vronsky, a very wealthy aristocrat. Levin tells Kitty what he feels. She turns him down and indirectly lets him know that she is in love with Vronsky.

Chapter 2: Oblonsky meets Vronsky at the train station while he is eagerly waiting for his sister. When Vronsky sees Anna, he falls in love at first sight. He impresses Anna as well with his sensitivity and generosity, as he ostentatiously gives money to the widow of a station guard who dies in a railway accident while they are still at the station. Anna considers the railway incident a bad omen and she is soon shocked to find that Vronsky, the stranger who has captivated her, may marry Dolly's young sister Kitty. Anna successfully persuades Dolly to give another chance to Oblonsky. Kitty visits the Oblonskys and meets Anna, who congratulates her on her potential betrothal to Vronsky and tells her that she should look forward to the forthcoming ball. At the dance, Kitty dances with Vronsky and expects him to propose to her. However, he fails to do so and he asks Anna to dance with him. Kitty is deeply disappointed and fearful that Vronsky and Anna have fallen in love.

Chapter 3: Realising that she has spoiled things between Kitty and Vronsky, Anna decides to leave Moscow as soon as possible. She is surprised to meet Vronsky on the train. He has decided to follow her. At first, Anna rejects Vronsky's advances, but she eventually succumbs and their relationship is publicly known. Anna is pregnant with Vronsky's baby but refuses to get a divorce for fear of losing her son. At the races, Vronsky, one of the riders, has a terrible accident. Karenin is infuriated to see Anna's reaction and she then confesses to her him that she is Vronsky's mistress.

Chapter 4: Kitty is emotionally shattered after the ball and falls seriously ill, so her parents take her to Europe. In the meantime, Levin, secluded in the country, tries to devote all his time to working. Yet, he is glad to receive a letter from Oblonsky telling him that Kitty is alone and asking him to visit her at the family's country house, where his wife and children will spend the summer. Levin helps Dolly with several house repairs. Dolly tells him that he should not lose hope and that he should come to visit them soon. Levin declines the invitation and decides he will do his best to forget Kitty. He even thinks of marrying a peasant, but, hard as he tries, he cannot forget Kitty.



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Chapter 5: Karenin considers taking revenge on his wife and her lover by means of a duel, a divorce or a separation, but he discards all options, fully aware that he will be publicly affected. He writes a letter to Anna saying that she should give up her lover. They will stay together and keep up the pretence of a stable marriage. Anna and Vronsky meet at the Vrede Gardens and she shows him Karenin's letter. Anna returns home to persuade her husband to divorce her, but he threatens her with not allowing her to see to her child, Seriozha.

Chapter 6: Levin is visited by his brother Nikolai, who is to stay with him for a couple of months to recover from a terrible illness. They talk about future plans but they both know that Nikolai is going to die. Levin and Nikolai have a row and Nikolai decides to leave, but they are both aware that they will not see each other again.

Chapter 7: Anna continues to meet Vronsky secretly, but Karenin is aware of what is going on. The three of them are emotionally crushed. Vronsky visits Anna at her place while Karenin is still there, as Anna seems to be seriously ill and afraid that she may die at childbirth. Karenin is infuriated and threatens Anna with a divorce that will let him keep the custody of their child. Karenin travels to Moscow on business and is invited to dinner by Oblonsky. He also invites Kitty and Levin, who sit next to each other. Levin confesses once again his love for her and Kitty tells him that she feels the same way.

Chapter 8: Anna is about to give birth. Karenin wishes she were dead, but Anna pleads with him to forgive her and Vronsky for what they have done until she persuades him. Vronsky, sure that Anna is about to die of fever, attempts suicide. Oblonsky visits his sister and persuades Karenin to divorce Anna. When Vronsky finds out about Karenin's decision and realises that he could start a new life with Anna, he leaves the army.

Chapter 9: Both Anna and Vronsky recover in Europe and settle down in Italy with their daughter. Anna is blissfully happy. However, Vronsky starts feeling unhappy about the dull life they lead, so both decide to go back to St. Petersburg to enjoy social life and see Seriozha, Anna's son. Levin and Kitty get married and give Levin's brother support by his deathbed. While staying with Nikolai, they learn that Kitty is pregnant. Karenin feels devastated. Countess Ivanovna offers him support and promises to help him with Seriozha, but she tells the child that his mother is dead.

Chapter 10: Anna writes a letter to Countess Ivanovna asking her to help her to see her son secretly, ignoring what the Countess has done. The Countess persuades Karenin not to let Anna see her son. On his birthday, Seriozha wishes he could see his mother, whom he believes not to be dead, and is gladly surprised to find that she has come to him. Mother and son spend some short but intense moments together until Anna rushes out of the room as Karenin enters. That night she decides to go to the Opera with Vronsky, but the weight of society's rejection is very hard, so both decide to leave for the country.

Chapter 11: Dolly decides to visit her sister-in-law who is living a few kilometres away from her. Dolly is amazed by Vronsky's magnificent house, Anna's luxurious clothes and the lavish life that they lead there. Vronsky asks Dolly to help him persuade Anna to ask Karenin for a divorce since he is worried that his daughter and the children they may have in future will all be Karenins. Dolly soon realises that, despite her wonderful life, Anna feels empty without her son. Anna tells Dolly that Karenin will now refuse to divorce her, as he is under the influence of Countess Ivanovna. She also tells Dolly that she wants no more children. When Dolly leaves, Anna is crushed and aware that she will never grow out of her sorrow. Dolly feels happy to go back to her simple but joyful life.

Chapter 12: Anna and Vronsky spend a wonderful summer together. Anna is joyful but Vronsky feels constrained by Anna's possessive love. Vronsky decides to support one of his friends in the local elections in Kashin and tells Anna that he must be away for a few days. She does not complain about his trip. Vronsky meets Oblonsky and Levin in Kashin and has a nice time there, but he receives a message from Anna telling him that he should come back as soon as possible, as little Ani is ill. Vronsky starts to feel suffocated and Anna starts to feel that he is losing interest in her.

Chapter 13: Levin meets Oblonsky and Vronsky in Moscow. Oblonsky invites Levin to meet Anna. At first, Levin hesitates, as he knows that his wife could be hurt, but then he accepts the invitation. Anna makes a strong impact on him and they speak for hours. When he comes back home to his wife he feels guilty and tells her where he has been. She breaks down and fears that he may have fallen in love with her, but their attention is soon drawn to Kitty's birthgiving. When Vronsky arrives home, Anna



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makes a scene and he gets very angry, but is sorry to see how broken-hearted she is. Oblonsky is going through harsh times and asks Karenin for financial aid, which Karenin refuses. He also pleads to Karenin to give Anna the divorce, but he refuses too.

Chapter 14: Anna becomes increasingly jealous and afraid that Vronsky may fall for another woman, which makes her emotionally unstable. Vronsky feels suffocated by a wife that has turned paranoid about the fact that his mother wants him to marry Princess Sorokina. When she reads a telegram from her brother telling her that Karenin will not divorce her, she is emotionally shattered and asks Vronsky to leave for the country together, but he tells her he has to run some errands for his mother before that. Anna feels that Vronsky will see Princess Sorokina, and they quarrel. Vronsky leaves anyway and Anna feels devastated. She sends a telegram urging him to come back but it does not reach him. She then decides to go to him by herself. At the train station, she starts feeling more and more depressed and commits suicide in the same manner as in the accident she witnessed when she first met Vronsky, under the wheels of a train.

Chapter 15: A group of soldiers is on their way to fight the Serbian war against the Turks. Vronsky is on the train, as a volunteer. Standing by the railway tracks Vronsky remembers Anna and wishes he could die at war. In contrast to the tragedy of Anna and Vronsky, Kitty and Levin spend time together and they enjoy each other's company and their son.

Background and themes

Tolstoy gives us two stories in one. Anna moves from a loving if passionless marriage into a passionate affair which ends in isolation, death and despair. Levin moves from isolation and what seems to him a meaningless life into a stable and happy marriage where he finds fulfillment. Is Tolstoy saying love is more important than passion?

Over the years critics have found many ways to view Anna and her downfall. Is she a fatally flawed character, searching selfishly for personal happiness? In this interpretation, Levin is her foil, working as he does to improve the lot of his labourers and finding true happiness. Or is she a non-conformist who does not accept that her role in society is to have babies and keep a home? Certainly Dolly, unable to come to terms with Anna's control over her own fertility, seems to point

towards this interpretation. Or is Anna a victim of the society she lives in? Society has weapons against Anna – ostracism and the refusal 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 standards, which allow 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 complex characters, with good and bad sides, brought to destruction by the emotions we all feel and by social pressure.

Discussion activities

Before reading

1 Discuss: A Special Woman?

Get students to look at the cover of the book and answer these questions: *How old is the woman? What is she doing? What do you think she does everyday? What does she like? Why?*

2 Discuss and write:

Divide the class into two groups. Tell Group One to imagine what were the hobbies, activities, duties, etc. of women in nineteenth century Russia. Group Two should write what women were not supposed to do in those days. Ask students to read their lists out loud.

3 Group work:

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

Introduction

4 Discuss: The Life of Women

Tell your students that they will read a book about Anna Karenina, a different woman, and to answer the questions in 1 and 2 again after reading the Introduction.

5 Predict:

Anna Karenina has been made into several films. Divide the class into those who have/haven't seen any of them. Have each group retell or predict what the story is about using the words below:

<p><i>consumption despair disgrace estate mistress omen passion prostitute scandal torture velvet duel adultery consent humiliate mutter volunteer morphine</i></p>

Tell students to look up the words they do not know on the Word List at the back of the book.



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6 Tie in with films: What are they saying?

If you have access to video or DVD watch the first three to five scenes of any of the film versions of *Anna Karenina* with the sound off. Have students choose one of the scenes and imagine what the characters are saying. Play the film again and check whose guess was closest to the original.

Chapters 1–3

While reading

7 Discuss: The Upper-class

Ask students to work in small groups and to discuss the following: *What view of the nineteenth century upper-class is shown in Chapter 1? What are marriages like? How do people feel?*

8 Role-play: Have students choose one of the two situations in Chapter 2 below and get them to dramatise them:

- Imagine you are Vronsky. You have just seen Anna and you cannot stop thinking of her. Tell a friend what impression she has made on you.*
- You are Kitty at the dance. When you thought that Vronsky was going to propose to you, he starts dancing with Anna. Talk to a friend and tell her how you feel.*

9 Write: Get students to write down Anna's feelings after reading pages 15 to 17. You can use these instructions:

In Chapter 3, we find that Anna is sad and filled with guilt as she travels back home. Write down her thoughts.

After reading

10 Discuss:

Ask students to work in small groups and discuss social duty, individual freedom and unhappiness. Guide them with these questions:

- What examples of lack of individual freedom and unhappiness are shown in these chapters?*
- In what way are people affected by their social duties?*

11 Role-play:

Ask students to work in small groups. Each group chooses any of the short scenes below:

- Dolly and Oblonsky's fighting at the beginning of the story.
- Anna and Dolly's conversation in which Anna tries to persuade Dolly to forgive her brother.
- Vronsky's trying to appeal to Anna and her turning him down.

They should cast the characters, work out a short dialogue and rehearse. Each group performs their scene for the class.

12 Predict. What will happen? Have students do the following:

- Write five questions whose answers you would like to know about how the story goes on. Make sure each question is about a different character.*
- Try to answer the questions imagining what may happen next.*

Chapters 4–6

While reading

13 Discuss: A Happy Life in the Country?

Get students to discuss the following questions in small groups as they read Chapter 4:

- Why are Levin and Dolly in their country houses?*
- How is each of them feeling? What problems are they having?*
- What do they need to feel better?*

14 Discuss and write: A Terrible Letter

Guide your students with these instructions as they read page 29 in Chapter 5:

In pairs, imagine that you are Karenin feeling desperate about his wife having a lover:

- Discuss and write down ideas to write a tougher letter to your wife than the one on page 29.*
- Write the letter in pairs and then read it out loud.*

15 Write: A Different Life

Get students to retell part of the story changing its point of view. Give them these instructions:

In Chapter 6, the narrator tells us how Levin feels and how worried he is about his brother Nikolai. Retell the chapter from the point of view of Nikolai. How does he feel about his brother and the life he has? Does he worry about Levin? What does he expect from his brother?

After reading

16 Check: Were you right?

Tell students to go back to the list of questions they made in Activity 12 and try to answer them now that they have read this section.

17 Research: Social class differences and lifestyles in Russia in the early nineteenth century.

Give your students the following instructions:

- In groups, go over these three chapters and write down the differences in social class that are shown. Discuss what you know about social differences in Russia in the early nineteenth century.*
- Decide what you would like to learn about this and write down your questions. Use the library or the Internet to find out.*

18 Role-play: The Talk of the Town

Tell students to work in pairs and act out the following conversation:

You are two gossips sitting on a bench in the Vrede Gardens. You see Anna and Vronsky secretly meeting and reading a letter. Describe what you see, what you think of them and what you imagine the letter says.

19 Predict: What happens next? Ask students to do this activity: In groups, write down the names of four characters. Predict next to each name what will happen to them in the next few chapters based on what you have read so far.

Chapters 7–9

While reading

20 Role-play: A New Couple

Ask students to work in pairs and act out the following scene from Chapter 7:



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You are Levin and Kitty. You both go to the garden after dinner and you have a secret talk. What do you say?

Write it out.

21 Discuss: Expected Events?

Put students into groups and ask them to discuss each of the following events from Chapter 8. As you write each on the board, ask them:

Were you surprised by this event or did you expect it?

- a *Anna's child was Vronsky's.*
- b *Karenin knew that Anna's child was Vronsky's*
- c *Anna wanted Karenin's forgiveness.*
- d *Anna thought her husband was a good man.*
- e *Anna was afraid of death.*

When all the events are on the board, ask students to decide which the most surprising event is.

22 Write: Separate Worlds, One Life

Ask students to do the following writing activity in pairs:

Re-read pages 54 and 55 in Chapter 9. One of you is Anna writing a letter to a friend telling her how she is feeling in Europe with Vronsky. The other one is Vronsky, also writing a letter to a friend telling him how he is feeling. After writing the letters, read them both and compare them.

After reading

23 Role play:

Ask students to work in pairs and to choose one of the situations below to dramatise:

- a *How Karenin forgave Anna.*
- b *How Karenin forgave Vronsky.*
- c *How Karenin agreed to give Anna a divorce.*

24 Discuss: A Terrible Life?

Put students in small groups and ask them to discuss the following:

At the moment when Vronsky came to see Anna, she said 'It would have been better if I had died.' Why do you think she says so?

Chapters 10–12

While reading

25 Write: A Secret Sadness

Tell students to work in pairs. Give these instructions:
You are Anna in chapter ten after the Opera. As you come back home write in your diary how you feel.

26 Discuss: Different Lives

Ask students to talk about this in pairs:
In Chapter 11, Dolly visits Anna and Vronsky. She is at first amazed at their lifestyle but in the end she is glad to go back home. Why? Would you react in the same way?

27 Group work: A Special Letter

Ask students to do the following in small groups:
In Chapter 12, Anna writes a letter to Karenin asking him to give her a divorce. Discuss what she should write in the letter and put it down together.

After reading

28 Role play: The Gossip Show

Ask students to work in small groups:
Act out the scene in which Vronsky sees Anna alone at the Opera while everybody gossips about her.

29 Discuss: Good Choices?

Ask student to work in small groups and guide them with the following instructions:
Make a list of the choices Anna makes in Chapters 10–12. Discuss her choices and the problems each may involve. Do you agree with the other groups?

30 Discuss: Jealousy

Have students discuss the following:
Is Anna right in being so jealous? Why does she feel like that? Would you feel the same?

31 Role-play: Advice for Couples

Tell students to work in groups of three and act out the following conversation:

Suppose Anna and Vronsky want help to stop quarrelling.

Student A: *Ask Anna and Vronsky what their problems are. Make sure they tell you how they feel. Then give them some advice*

Student B: *You are Anna. Say how you feel about Vronsky. You want help to stop feeling so jealous.*

Student C: *You are Vronsky. Say how you feel about Anna.*

Chapters 13–15

While reading

32 Role-play: A Heated Discussion

Ask students to imagine they are Kitty and Levin in Chapter 13. Ask them to act out the following scene:

Student A: *You are Kitty. Levin has just told you that he was with Anna. What do you tell him?*

Student B: *You are Levin. Your wife is very angry with you. Try to persuade her that her impressions are wrong.*

33 Read and check: A dangerous change?

Ask students to work in pairs and do the following activity:

Make a list of the signs in Chapter 14 that may show that Anna is going mad little by little.

34 Predict: A New life?

Ask students to work in groups and to re-read Chapter 15 so as to add information to it:
Imagine you are Tolstoy and you need to make Chapter 15 longer. What else would you say about Vronsky, Karenin, Kitty and Levin? Where would you add this information?

After reading

35 Discuss: The Last Letter

Ask students to imagine that Anna's last letter is found. What does it say? Have them write it down.

Vocabulary activities

For the Word List and vocabulary activities, go to www.penguinreaders.com.