

Name: _____

Crime and Punishment
Discussion Questions
Part One

First impressions of Raskolnikov

What is he like when the reader first meets him? What is his health, his financial condition, his mood? What are his relations with his landlady, his friends? What has he been thinking about in his little attic room? Describe the section of town he walks through? Why does he choose to walk through such a section.

First visit to the Pawnbroker

Why does he go see her? What object does he pawn? How firm is his conviction to murder her at this point? Why must his victim be a woman, a pawnbroker, ugly, vicious?

Meeting with Marmeladov

What is Raskolnikov's initial reaction to Marmeladov's desire to engage him in conversation? At what point does he change and why? What attitude does Dostoevsky want the reader to take toward Marmeladov's confession? What has caused Marmeladov's misfortunes? How do you explain his explanation of why he drinks: "It is not happiness but sorrow that I seek. I drink, sir, that I may suffer, that I may suffer more and more." Is there any reason that Raskolnikov should take an interest in Marmeladov's plight?

Letter from his Mother

As described in the letter, what kind of person is Dunia's suitor? Why is Dunia marrying him? What attitude does the mother have toward Luzhin and toward the coming marriage? Why should Raskolnikov, who is in dire need financially and who is ostensibly planning murder to repair his fortunes, object to being helped by his sister's suitor? Whom does Raskolnikov compare Luzhin to? Why? Whom does he compare his sister to? Why?

Boulevard Episode of the Violated Young Girl

Raskolnikov has been presented to the reader as gloomy, proud, isolated and unsociable. Are these traits probable grounds for his taking pity on a stranger and giving her money? How do you explain his taking pity on her? Why should he change so quickly, contradicting his first impulse? Which is the real Raskolnikov – the sympathetic one or the one who claims indifference to the girl's fate? Explain his statement: "It's essential, they say, that such a percentage should every year go—that way—to the devil—it's essential so that the others should be kept fresh and healthy and not be interfered with."

The Beating of the Horse

What is the emotional state when he awakens from the dream? Is this state in keeping with or in contradiction to the act he is planning? How is the dream linked explicitly with the contemplated murder? If we treat the dream symbolically, whom does Mikolka stand for? Whom does the mare stand for? Are several interpretations possible? Explain.

The Murder

What can we say of Raskolnikov's motives at this point, and what can we say of his understanding of his motives? Does he murder to help his family, to extricate himself from poverty, to prove his "humanitarian" theory of one useless life for a thousand useful lives? He has been thinking about the act for sometime; what moves him to do it now? How well planned is the murder? Why is the murder of Lizaveta important? Does this murder disprove one of his possible motives.