

#10502

HOW MUCH LAND DOES A MAN NEED?

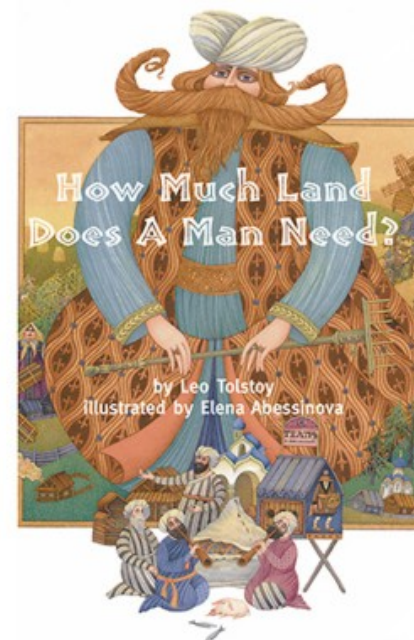
GLOBALSTAGE, 2001
Grade Level: 8-12
40 Minutes

CAPTIONED MEDIA PROGRAM RELATED RESOURCES

[#2659 FOLKTALES FROM TWO LANDS](#)

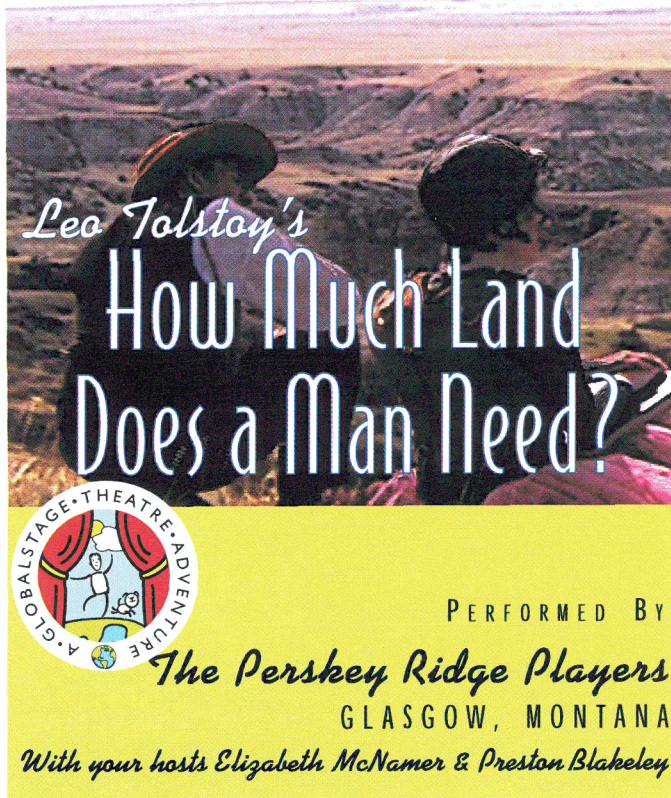
[#3264 LEO TOLSTOY](#)

[#10036 THE SAGA OF WINDWAGON SMITH](#)



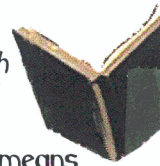
“...a visually stunning and
vividly wrought production...”

Jan Crain Rudeen — Denver Rocky Mountain News



The Story:

GLOBALSTAGE's production of *How Much Land Does a Man Need* is an adaptation of a short story by the famous Russian writer Leo Tolstoy. The term "adaptation" means that another writer, in this case Sean Gaffney, has changed Tolstoy's original story. Literary works such as novels and short stories that are made into movies and videos are always adaptations.



Read Tolstoy's original *How Much Land Does A Man Need*. In what ways does the story differ from the adaptation portrayed in the video?

The main character in our video is a hardworking sharecropper named Buck, an honest "man of the earth" quite content and pleased with his life. This is his state of mind until one day while working in the field, an omniscient Narrator joins him. She is dressed in a soldier's helmet, a gladiator's vest, a shimmering shirt, a pink tutu, and cowboy boots. Her costume symbolizes her representation of the past, the present, the future — she encompasses all of history and with her book, she knows the future. The narrator shatters Buck's happy world by informing him that he does not own his own land and is simply a poor, hardworking sharecropper.

Have you had the experience where a negative comment made by someone changed the way you felt about yourself? Buck's happiness came from within himself. His unhappiness develops from an outside source; something the Narrator tells him. This theme of being content with what you have, and not being concerned with what others think or have, is constant throughout the story.

Buck now wants to have his own farm. He convinces

his wife Irene that they should gather up all the money they possess and can borrow. The couple purchases a small farm. They work the land, they live simply, they raise a good crop, and they are happy. That is, until a stranger visits their humble farm and tells them that the farms on the other side of the river are bigger and more productive.

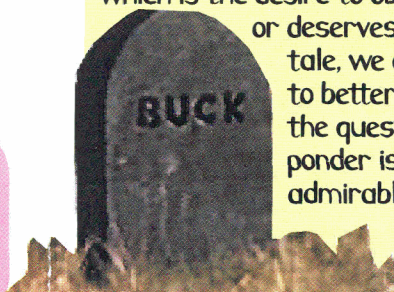
The farm represents freedom and self-sufficiency. It is a source of food, money, and happiness. The work which Buck invests is rewarded. He is his own master. In today's terms, Buck would be called an "entrepreneur," someone who takes the risk of starting their own business. Would you like to start your own business? If so, what kind of business would bring you the most satisfaction?

Buck and Irene make another entrepreneurial leap, and go off to purchase a bigger farm. They are surrounded by the symbols of their success: a car, a large house, the tiara in Irene's hair, the cozy bunny slippers on Buck's feet, and a tuxedo-clad servant. Life is now easy for them. They have more than enough material goods to be content. However, a stranger again appears and informs Buck and Irene that they can cheaply acquire vast amounts of land from a nomadic people known as the Bashkirs. Buck and Irene argue about leaving their prosperous farm to acquire a giant estate from the Bashkirs. Irene insists on staying. Buck insists on leaving. He loves his wife, but not as much as he loves owning lots of land.

Make a list of your happiest memories. Now read over the list. Did these happy events involve material goods or emotional experiences? Ask your parents what they consider the happiest moments in their lives.

When Buck meets up with the Bashkirs, they make him an unbelievably generous proposition: If Buck pays the Bashkirs 1000 dollars, they will give him as much land as he can walk around from sunrise to sunset. The Bashkir chief asks Buck when he wants to begin his walk, and he eagerly tells her he'll start the next day. Buck is so excited about the prospect of owning a vast estate for practically nothing, that he can't sleep. Long before sunrise, he wakes everyone in the Bashkir camp and sets off on his quest. Buck is diverted from his walking schedule when he spies a grove of trees and a river off in the distance. Deciding that he wants these features on his property, he must walk further to include them. The narrator tries to give him helpful advice during his day, but he won't listen to her. Buck makes it back to the starting point before sunset, surprising the Bashkir chief. Overcome with exhaustion, Buck dies at her feet; his outstretched hands are almost reaching the base of a tombstone carved with his name. Buck thought he was taking advantage of the Bashkirs, but they took advantage of Buck's greed.

The main theme of the story is the destructive power of greed. Ambition is the desire to achieve. It is an admirable characteristic because through it, all human achievement and development occurs. However, ambition can turn into greed which is the desire to obtain more than one needs or deserves. At the beginning of the tale, we can admire Buck's desire to better his living conditions. But the question Tolstoy asks us to ponder is at what point did Buck's admirable ambitions change into the obsessive greed that resulted in his death?



The Bashkirs understood the power of greed: they knew Buck would die before he set out on his quest as evidenced by the many graves of people who tried to do exactly what Buck did.

A wise person once said that the secret to happiness is not having what you want but wanting what you have.

The Author:

Count Leo Tolstoy was born into a wealthy aristocratic family in Russia in 1828. His family owned a large estate named Yasnaya Polyana. His family's great wealth did not assure them of happiness. Tolstoy's mother, who was a real princess, died before he was two. When Tolstoy was only nine years old, his father, a retired lieutenant colonel, also died. The orphaned Tolstoy inherited the vast family estate along with many serfs who worked the property. Serfs were like slaves – they were peasants who had no freedom and were controlled by the master of an estate.

Tolstoy lived the life of a privileged aristocrat, yet he became tormented by the fact that his wealth depended on the labor of the poverty-ridden serfs and peasants. This angst in his life influenced much of his writing. Upon the death of his father, various aunts and female cousins raised Tolstoy. As was usual during the nineteenth century, he was not sent

Tolstoy is best known for two of the most famous and acclaimed novels ever written: *Anna Karenina*, about a married woman's love for a young officer, and *War and Peace*, about three families and their experiences in Russia at the time of Napoleon's invasion in the early 1800's.

to school but was educated at home by private tutors. When he was sixteen, Tolstoy entered the University of Kazan. After three years, he left the university without obtaining a degree. Tolstoy served in the Russian army during the Crimean War. After the war he traveled throughout Europe, visiting France, Switzerland, and Germany. He lived in Moscow and St. Petersburg where he engaged in a wild life of drinking, fighting, and womanizing. Tolstoy married early and had thirteen children. His wife, Sophia, was well educated and beautiful. However, Tolstoy was not a faithful husband and this strained their marriage greatly. As he matured, Tolstoy went through a kind of spiritual transformation. He read everything he could about the nature of right and wrong, religion, and the ways in which society was organized. Later in his life, Tolstoy's writing was influenced by the deep regret he felt for the debauchery of his youth. In *Confessions*, he explains vividly:

"I cannot recall those years without horror, loathing, and heart-rending pain, I killed people in war, challenged men to duels with the purpose of killing them, and lost at cards; I squandered the fruits of the peasants' toil and then had them executed; I was a fornicator and a cheat. Lying stealing, promiscuity of every kind, drunkenness, violence, murder there was not a crime I did not commit . . . Thus I lived for ten years."

Eventually Tolstoy stopped writing novels and focused on essays and short stories, which he felt would better depict his new philosophies. He gave up smoking and alcohol and became a vegetarian. He



spent his time trying to help others. Tolstoy was tormented by the fact that he had inherited a vast estate which was supported by the labor of serfs and peasants. As he aged, he tried to appease his conscience. He opened a school for peasant children.

In Tolstoy's original story, Buck was a peasant farmer or serf. During the 1500's and 1600's, the czars, or kings, made laws that forced Russian farmers to become lifetime serfs. Serfs tilled their lord's fields, owned nothing for themselves, and had no access to education. In our story, Buck is able to get enough money to buy his own land. But, in real life, this seldom, if ever, happened. Our video calls Buck a "sharecropper" to set the story in America.

To some friends it seemed as if he had finally decided to free himself from the confines of his inheritance. Soon after embarking on his journey, Tolstoy became ill and died in the stationmaster's apartment at the railway station in the small town of Astopovo, Russia in November 1910.

Fellow aristocrats were unhappy with this school because they believed that the poor should remain ignorant. Tolstoy also set free the serfs who worked on his estate. At the age of forty-six, he gave up the ownership of his property and gave away many of his possessions. His wife and children continued living on the estate. His family was not happy that Tolstoy was putting his ideas into practice. Eventually, he and his wife stopped speaking. All of his children, except his youngest daughter, Alexandra, sided with their mother and so, Tolstoy became estranged from his family. At the age of eighty-two, and accompanied by Alexandra, Tolstoy finally left the estate without a specific destination in mind.

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