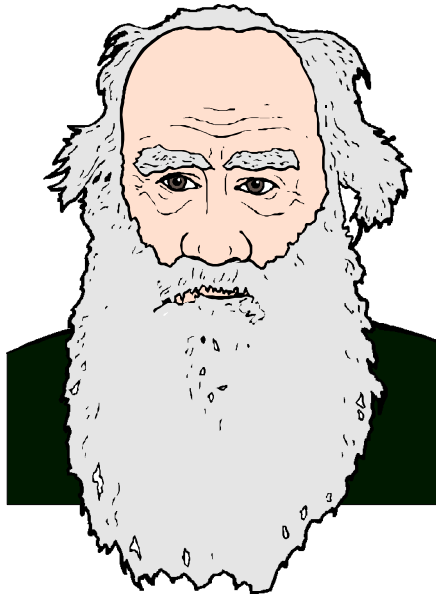


LEO TOLSTOY
1828-1910



CFE 3264V

OPEN CAPTIONED
ALTSCHUL GROUP
CORPORATION

1991

Grade Levels: 11-13+

25 minutes

DESCRIPTION

Leo Tolstoy was born into wealth in Russia in 1828. After joining the army in 1851, he began writing. The Crimean War awoke his sense of patriotism, and his stories made him popular. He married, opened a school, and ultimately renounced his way of life, feeling the deep inequities between the social classes. Though authorities tried to discredit him, he remained a well-respected author until his death in 1910. THE GREAT RUSSIAN WRITERS SERIES.

INSTRUCTIONAL GOALS

- To describe Tolstoy's life and writing.
- To depict life in Russia during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.
- To identify influences and inspirations for Tolstoy's creativity.

BEFORE SHOWING

1. Preview the video to determine unfamiliar vocabulary and language concepts.
2. Create a time line of Russian history from 1828-1910.
3. Review features of the plots, themes, and main characters in *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina*.

DURING SHOWING

1. View the video more than once, with one showing uninterrupted.
2. Add to the time line of Russian history, including notes regarding Tolstoy's life and writing.

AFTER SHOWING

Discussion Items and Questions

1. Discuss writing.
 - a. Give examples from Tolstoy's life of the dedication necessary in a writing career.

- b. Judge how lifestyle, life experiences, difficult periods, and depths of emotions influence writing.
 - c. Evaluate the role that keeping a diary had in Tolstoy's development as a writer.
 - d. Hypothesize the effect on Tolstoy if he had not met other writers who were friendly to him.
 - e. Imagine the effect computers and word processors would have had on Tolstoy's writing.
 - f. Evaluate the reasons that Tolstoy's writing regarding starvation and famine caused such an uproar.
2. Discuss *War and Peace*.
- a. What was Tolstoy's mental state when he wrote this book?
 - b. At what points in Tolstoy's life was his philosophy most similar and most dissimilar to this book's theme?
 - c. How can knowing the author's background help to understand his writing?
 - d. What did Tolstoy mean when he said "I sacrificed five years of my life to write that book, and it was hard, hard work"?
3. Discuss *Anna Karenina*.
- a. Decide if Tolstoy accomplished his goal to "write a story about a woman who lost herself . . . (and) to make her pitiful, but innocent."
 - b. Compare Tolstoy's marriage to the marriage of Kitty and Levin and the relationships between Anna Karenina, her lover, and her husband.
4. Discuss Tolstoy's life.
- a. Hypothesize the reasons that riches are not always synonymous with mental well-being.
 - b. Evaluate the reasons that Tolstoy's being born into wealth and privilege haunted him.
 - c. Compare Tolstoy's initial and later periods of popularity.

- d. Contrast Tolstoy's emotional state shortly after marrying and at the end of his life.
 - e. Hypothesize regarding Tolstoy's visions for living alone in a peasant's house.
 - f. Describe the significance of Yasnaya Polyana to Tolstoy.
5. Debate issues in Tolstoy's life.
- a. Judge if Tolstoy would have been a writer of equal caliber and influence if he had not been born into wealth and privilege.
 - b. Determine if Tolstoy did in fact renounce his upper-class, privileged way of life.
 - c. Judge if Tolstoy's discontent with his family's life of wealth and privilege was spiritual discontent or indication of a prophetic sense of social justice.
 - d. Determine if Tolstoy's decision to live his final days in a peasant house was a triumph or a tragedy.
 - e. Determine if Tolstoy's time at the university and in St. Petersburg society was a waste of time.
6. Write an expository essay using Tolstoy's life and writings, and personal experience to justify or refute one of the following quotes.
- a. "... the regulations . . . imposed by university life were not stimulating my mental activities. In fact . . . they were stifling the development of my mind"
 - b. "I didn't work, I wasn't even interested in anything. I had absolutely no goal or direction in life . . . I enjoyed it."
 - c. "... It was a very difficult period, but at the same time I feel it was a very worthwhile experience."
 - d. "I am writing, not because I am vain, but because I enjoy it."
 - e. (Regarding war) "... people don't put up with these terrible things for the sake of their crosses or because they feel threatened, there

- has to be another sacred, spiritual reason . . . a deep love of their homeland.”
- f. “A school is worthwhile only when its teachers can understand just how people think and the way they live.”
 - g. “Somebody told me, and I believe he was right, that I am wasting my time doing all this, and that I should be writing”
 - h. “If you want to live honestly, you will by necessity be confused on occasions.”
 - i. “You have to make mistakes, fall down, hurt yourself, and lose everything, because peace of mind destroys the soul.”
 - j. “. . . to have thousands of people who are cold, hungry and humiliated is a crime of which I am guilty, because I am not only supporting it, but worse still, I am actually participating in it.”

Applications and Activities

1. Evaluate Tolstoy’s relation to the world.
 - a. Compare Tolstoy’s beliefs in the common man and his experiences as a writer with modern Nobel Prize or Pulitzer Prize authors.
 - b. Compare life in Russia during Tolstoy’s life with modern Russia, modern America, and America during Tolstoy’s lifetime.
 - c. Discuss options a person has who is haunted by being born into wealth and privilege, and if those options appeal to most Americans.
 - d. Compare Tolstoy’s beliefs about literary and manual work with those of his contemporary, George Macdonald in *The Poet’s Homecoming*.
2. Compile a complete bibliography of Tolstoy’s works.
 - a. Add to the time line of Russian history and Tolstoy’s life and writing (developed DURING SHOWING) to include Tolstoy’s works not mentioned in the video.

- b. Read and discuss *War and Peace*, *Anna Karenina*, or *Resurrection*.
- c. Locate, read, and discuss at least one of Tolstoy's works not mentioned in the video.
- 3. Further investigate Tolstoy's life.
 - a. Who were other popular writers during Tolstoy's life?
 - b. How did Tolstoy influence Mahatma Gandhi?
 - c. What other well-known persons were among the frequent visitors in Tolstoy's home?
 - d. What events led to Tolstoy's establishing a school? What kind of educational program did he espouse? Was it successful?
 - e. In addition to his writing regarding famine and starvation, what other events and beliefs led to his excommunication from the church?
 - f. How were the lives of Tolstoy's children and grandchildren influenced by his life and writing?
- 4. Compare themes, inspiration, biographies, and publications for Tolstoy and Henry David Thoreau.

WEBSITES

Explore the Internet to discover sites related to this topic. Check the CFV website for related information (<http://www.cfv.org>).

SUMMARY

Leo Nikolayevich Tolstoy, the great Russian writer, was born September 9, 1828, into a wealthy, privileged family. The family's estate, Yasnaya Polyana, in addition to being his childhood home, was the home where he raised his own family and to where he traced the roots of his love of his country. After becoming bored first with the university and then with the social life in St. Petersburg, he joined the army where he began his literary career while serving in the Crimean War. The *Sevastopol Sketches* depicted war

as unglamorous deeds done by everyday people and made him a popular writer.

He married Sonya Andreyevna Behrs in 1862 and returned to Yasnaya Polyana. His self-evaluation of this time when he wrote *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina* was one of deep love, happiness, contentment, and satisfaction. Returning to Moscow when his oldest children were ready for the university and society, Tolstoy confronted the degradations of urban poverty and the unfairness of his own wealth and privilege. For nineteen years, he remained in Moscow, committed to renunciation of his upper-class way of life. There he wrote *Resurrection*.

During this period of his life, he experienced a growing distance between himself and his wife and their fifteen children due to their use of servants, their purchase of useless articles, and their social life. Tolstoy and his wife lived on separate floors of their home. There he welcomed visitors of varying social classes to pursue truth, and she hosted social gatherings.

During the famine of 1891, Tolstoy and his daughters worked for eighteen months in the hunger-stricken areas. As a result of listening to the people, Tolstoy established 746 food centers and wrote pamphlets and articles denouncing merchants' greed. This writing was vehemently opposed, leading to his excommunication from the church and his increased popularity worldwide.

In 1901, Tolstoy left Moscow to live again at Yasnaya Polyana. He continued to be in good health and was active in politics and writing. He visited Moscow and met with numerous, frequent visitors to his home. Unbeknownst to his family, he left the estate to live the remainder of his life in a nearby peasant house. He died a week later, on November 20, 1910, of pneumonia.