

Study Questions for *War and Peace*, by Leo Tolstoy

In what ways does Tolstoy see Russia as part of Europe? In what ways does he see Russia as a civilization that is not European?

What are important differences between St. Petersburg and Moscow?

What sort of dichotomy is set up in *War and Peace* between what is “French” and what is “Russian”?

How are the three main family groups, Kuragins, Bolkonskies, and Rostovs, different from each other? What are the main characteristics of each of these family groups?

How do relations between parents and children differ within the book’s family groups? How do relations between brothers and sisters differ within the book’s family groups?

How does Pierre Bezukhov fit into the various social and family groups?

What role do friendships play in shaping character?

Contrasts are drawn between Helene and Natasha throughout the book. How do these two women compare? What, if anything, do they have in common?

What are the qualities of a good woman?

What does *integrity* mean to different characters? To which characters does this concept have no meaning?

Which characters seem at times to be at war with themselves? That is, do some characters desire two or more mutually exclusive things at the same time? Does this tension change them? Do you find such depictions realistic?

Which characters are religious? Which ones are not? How much of a role does religion play in *War and Peace*?

Which characters are attracted to mysticism? When they are, is this helpful or harmful?

Which characters attach significance to their dreams?

Which characters look at the sky and find meaning there?

Which characters are most absorbed by questions of life's meaning? How are their actions shaped by this?

Which characters experience moments of transcendence? Why and how do these moments happen? Do women experience them?

How do various characters face the certainty of death?

What relationships do we see between serfs and landowners?
Between conscripts and officers?

What role does serfdom play in the Russian national character?

Why do men go to war? Why do nations go to war?

How do men, especially young men, imagine battle? How does this compare to the actual experience of battle?

What is a battlefield really like? What is a field hospital really like?

How does war affect civilians?

How do men and women differ in their attitudes toward war?

What is true history, in Tolstoy's view? Is a grasp of true history possible?

What do you think Tolstoy has set out to do in this "not" novel? Has he succeeded?

