

Worksheet 5. Crime and Punishment in Theory (teacher version)

Crime and Punishment includes a number of intellectual discussions relevant to Raskolnikov's crime and its aftermath. Closely examine the indicated sections of the text, and answer the questions. Use textual evidence in your answers.

Part 1, Chapter 6

1. What ideas does the student propose, and how does he justify them?

The student says that the old pawnbroker is very rich and, besides, not a nice person. Killing her and giving her money to others in need and with potential could benefit many people, which would justify the murder. She is old and sure to die soon anyway. What is the use of all that money going to purchase prayers for her soul?

2. Does he plan to put those ideas into action? Why or why not?

In response to that direct question, the student says, "Of course not!" He was talking about theories and ideas, not planning a murder; Raskolnikov recognizes a familiar pattern of student discussions and debates that reflect nihilism, rejection of traditional morality and institutional limitations.

Part 3, Chapter 5

3. What ideas did Raskolnikov convey in his essay published in *Periodical Review*?

The article dealt with a criminal's mind before and after a crime. The association of illness with the crime parallels Raskolnikov's experience. Porfiry is more interested in an idea suggested but not fully explored in the essay: the extent to which an extraordinary person is or is not limited by standard notions of morality and legality.

4. How does Raskolnikov respond to Porfiry's comments about the article?

He jumps into the challenge and indicates that Porfiry has oversimplified the theory. Raskolnikov argues convincingly that history demonstrates that great leaders in fact violate all kinds of laws and traditions that limit the vast majority of ordinary individuals.

5. How do the other men respond? What does the conversation reveal about the three men?

Porfiry seems delighted with the theoretical discussion, which Raskolnikov perceives as a cat-and-mouse game. Razumihin is astonished, even shocked.

Raskolnikov is highly educated and articulate; he enjoys expounding theories and has thought a great deal about the distinction between ordinary and extraordinary individuals.

Porfiry is clever and manipulative; he enjoys baiting others.

Razumihin is more naïve and idealistic than the other two men.

Part 5, Chapter 4

6. How does Sonia respond to Raskolnikov's confession?

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She is deeply upset and recognizes how unhappy he is. She wants to understand why he committed the murders. In one of the novel’s most famous passages, she advises him to “bow down, first kiss the earth which you have defiled and then bow down to all the world and say to all men aloud, ‘I am a murderer!’ Then God will send you life again.”

7. What does Raskolnikov mean in the reference to Napoleon?

He has imagined Napoleon in his place—too poor to continue his education or to achieve anything. He asks himself, “Would Napoleon have just given in to the situation? Of course not!”

8. How does he try to justify the murder of the pawnbroker?

He needed money; the old pawnbroker was not really human; he rebelled against his situation; he needed to feel powerful, not powerless. He cannot settle on an explanation or justification, but jumps from one to another, disregarding each.

9. In what sense did he actually murder himself, as he claims?

He has turned his life into misery by crossing a critical ethical boundary. Sonia believes the only way for him to achieve a kind of redemption is to give himself up to the authorities, but he is not ready for that.

Part 6, Chapter 5

10. How does Svidrigailov explain the theory behind the murders?

He vastly oversimplifies the idea that great individuals are not bound by laws and moral codes, but he understands the general theory. Dounia is clearer about the concept, as she has read Raskolnikov’s published essay.

11. How would you explain that theory?

The general idea is that great individuals transcend traditional limitations and do what they have to do to pursue their destinies.

12. How does Dounia respond? Why?

Dounia does not seem concerned about the theory; to her, ideas are not threatening. Her main focus is her brother’s well-being—and, of course, dealing with Svidrigailov.