

Worksheet 7. Societal Schisms and Divisions (teacher version)

For each of the four listed societal divisions, answer the questions. Then fill in the first block with specific examples in which the text shows this type of societal division of the novel; in the second block, articulate a theme statement the author implies about each division.

1. Division between Men and Women

List the most important male and female characters in the novel and explain their respective roles.

Textual Evidence of Division

Pulcheria, Dounia, Sonia, and Katerina Ivanovna (the most important female characters) reflect a society in which women are made nearly incapable to take care of their own financial needs; marriage is the only possibility, and even that does not always work. Women are at risk of physical violence and exploitation—examples range from the intoxicated young woman on the street in Part I, to the pawnbroker and her sister, to Dounia herself. Women in Crime and Punishment often have only themselves to sell (e.g., Sonia, Katerina begging on the street).

Women are associated with emotion and with self-sacrifice (e.g., Dounia's agreement to marry Luzhin and Sonia's prostitution; Pulcheria's devotion to her son; Sonia's decision to go to Siberia), men with reason and autonomy (e.g., Raskolnikov's scholarly article and Porfiry's psychological approach to crime-solving). Men are more prone to long intellectual conversations, women to emotional outbursts.

Theme Statements

The division between men and women, based on a patriarchal system, is artificial and unhealthy for both genders; male and female are meant to be complementary, not separate; each is incomplete without the other.

Women are more likely than men to be the victims of exploitation—and thus, the very injustice that Raskolnikov wants to solve in murdering the pawnbroker. At the same time, some rare women (Sonia being the most important example) have spiritual power that brings them much closer than Raskolnikov to solving the problem of cruelty and injustice on earth.

2. Division between Poverty and Wealth

Which characters in the novel live in genuine poverty? Which characters do not lack money?

Textual Evidence of Division

Poverty forced Raskolnikov to abandon his education and led Dounia to agree to marry Luzhin. Luzhin is fixated on the idea of marrying a poor woman who will appreciate him. Poverty places the Marmeladov family helplessly on the street. It is one of the factors leading to the murder of the pawnbroker. Poverty is the norm in the novel. Exceptions include Luzhin, Porfiry, and Svidrigailov, none of whom appear in a flattering light. Despite poverty, Raskolnikov gives money away on several occasions. Luzhin wants to "save" a poor girl, and Svidrigailov disperses money pretty freely, although he often has ulterior motives. The novel's opening chapter includes a description of the stench of the city, which contrasts vividly with the wealthy scene Raskolnikov encounters a few

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chapters later: elegant men and women on verandas and horseback. Perhaps the most disturbing verbal portrait of poverty comes with Katerina and her children performing on the street for charity.

Theme Statements

Although there is a link between poverty and misery, there is no link between wealth and happiness. Poverty can lead to desperation and crime. Society needs to pay attention to those trapped in hopeless poverty. People helping each other through charity (rather than using money to manipulate people, as Luzhin and Svidrigailov do) create a social and spiritual bond that counteracts misery and alienation we see in Crime and Punishment.

3. Division between Religion and Skepticism

Which characters place a high value on religion? Which characters are nonbelievers?

Textual Evidence of Division

Raskolnikov asks Sonia to read aloud the New Testament story in which Jesus brings his friend Lazarus back to life. Raskolnikov prays after his dream about the peasant and the horse. When Porfiry asks Raskolnikov if he believes in God, the answer is “yes.” Before going to confess to the police, Raskolnikov puts on Sonia’s cross. He asks her to wear another cross.

Theme Statements

In the novel religious faith connects less with intellect than with emotion and even instinct. It has little to do with analyses and theories, but stems from deep instincts. It is clearly associated with something good and desirable in human beings, especially through the character of Sonia.

4. Division between Alienation and Connection

What is alienation? Is it an individual or a societal problem?

Textual Evidence of Division

From Part 1, Raskolnikov seems a person who deliberately stands alone and avoids close interpersonal relationships. At the university, his only friend was Razumihin, who describes him as a person who never listens to what others have to say. His crimes alienate him to the extent that he comes to despise the people he loved the most, his mother and sister. He sometimes connects with Sonia, sometimes pushes her away. Only as the epilogue ends does he show signs of connections with others, and the possibility of personal wholeness begin to emerge.

Theme Statements

Alienation is destructive to individuals, as well as to other people and thus to society. Love can sometimes help to bridge the gap between an alienated person and others. Alienation leads to distorted perceptions and erratic behavior.