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Crime and Punishment

Fyodor Dostoevsky · *1866 · Constance Garnett translation*

A proud, poor former student murders an old pawnbroker to prove a theory about "extraordinary" men. The rest of the novel is his punishment from within: fever, isolation, a patient magistrate, and Sonia, a humble girl who reads him the raising of Lazarus and leads him toward confession and new life.

THE CENTRAL QUESTION

May a superior man step over the moral law for the sake of a great idea?

"I simply hinted that an 'extraordinary' man has the right... that is not an official right, but an inner right to decide in his own conscience to overstep... certain obstacles"

Raskolnikov to Porfiry · Part III, ch. V

The novel answers through conscience itself: the crime cannot be lived with, and life returns only through confession, suffering, and Sonia's self-giving love.

KEY CHARACTERS

Raskolnikov (Rodya)
pride, the idea, a stubborn conscience

Sonia Marmeladov
meekness, faith, sacrificial love

Porfiry Petrovitch
patient justice

Svidrigaïlov
vice without repentance

Dounia
courage and self-sacrifice

Razumihin
loyal, cheerful friendship

Marmeladov
a drunkard's shame and hope

Luzhin
calculating self-interest

SONIA'S COUNSEL

> *"Go at once, this very minute, stand at the cross-roads, 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."*
>
> **Sonia to Raskolnikov** · Part V, ch. IV

Grades 11–12
Read the full text free at classicslaunch.org.

01 The Idea

PART I

A theory nursed in a garret becomes an axe.

- **Raskolnikov**, a starving ex-student, broods over a plan he cannot name
- In a tavern, the drunkard **Marmeladov** tells how his daughter **Sonia** sold herself to feed the family
- A letter: his sister **Dounia** will marry the calculating **Luzhin** to help him
- He dreams of a little horse beaten to death and wakes in horror
- He kills the pawnbroker Alyona Ivanovna — and her gentle sister Lizaveta

> *"Ye are swine, made in the Image of the Beast and with his mark; but come ye also!"*
>
> **Marmeladov, imagining Christ's welcome to sinners** · Part I, ch. II

02 Fever and Pursuit

PARTS II–III

The punishment begins before anyone accuses him.

- Delirious, he buries the stolen purse and trinkets under a stone, untouched
- Marmeladov is run down in the street; Raskolnikov gives the widow all his money
- **Razumihin**, his loyal friend, nurses him and welcomes his mother and sister
- The magistrate **Porfiry Petrovitch** raises his article on "extraordinary" men

> *"Pain and suffering are always inevitable for a large intelligence and a deep heart."*
>
> **Raskolnikov** · Part III, ch. V

03 The Word

PART IV

Light enters through a poor room and an old book.

- The depraved **Svidrigaïlov**, Dounia's former employer, arrives in Petersburg
- Dounia breaks with Luzhin
- Sonia reads aloud from her New Testament the raising of Lazarus
- Porfiry toys with him — then the painter Nikolay falsely confesses

> *"Lazarus, come forth."*
>
> **St. John's Gospel, read by Sonia** · Part IV, ch. IV

04 Confession

PART V

He tells the truth to the one person who will suffer with him.

- Luzhin frames Sonia for theft and is exposed
- Raskolnikov confesses the murders to Sonia; Svidrigaïlov overhears
- Sonia begs him to confess publicly and take up his suffering
- Katerina Ivanovna, Sonia's stepmother, dies destitute

> *"Did I murder the old woman? I murdered myself, not her!"*
>
> **Raskolnikov to Sonia** · Part V, ch. IV

05 Reckoning

PART VI

Two roads: despair or confession.

- Porfiry tells him plainly that he knows, and urges him to confess
- Svidrigaïlov traps Dounia; she fires at him, and he lets her go
- Svidrigaïlov shoots himself
- Sonia puts her cypress cross on Raskolnikov's neck
- He kisses the earth in the Haymarket and confesses at the police station

> *"Suffering, too, is a good thing. Suffer!"*
>
> **Porfiry to Raskolnikov** · Part VI, ch. II

06 Resurrection

EPILOGUE

Not the end of the story, but the beginning of a new one.

- Sentenced to eight years of penal servitude in Siberia; Sonia follows him
- At first he is proud and unrepentant; the convicts love Sonia and shun him
- In fever he dreams of a plague that makes every man certain he alone is right
- By the river he falls weeping at Sonia's feet; her New Testament lies under his pillow

> *"They were renewed by love; the heart of each held infinite sources of life for the heart of the other."*
>
> **The narrator** · Epilogue, ch. II

Pride & the Idea | Conscience | Suffering | Confession | Mercy for the Fallen | Resurrection

What to watch for as you read

GRADES 11–12

1. Track Raskolnikov's fevers, faintings and sudden kindnesses. How does conscience work on him before he admits anything?
2. Compare the people around him — Svidrigaïlov, Sonia, Razumihin. What does each show him he might become?
3. Read the Lazarus chapter (Part IV, ch. IV) slowly, then watch for resurrection imagery in the Epilogue.
4. Notice that Porfiry wins by patience, not evidence. Why does he want a confession rather than an arrest?
5. Ask why confessing at the police station is not yet repentance, and what changes by the river.
6. Follow the money: what each character gives away, hoards, or refuses to touch.

Quotations are verbatim from the Constance Garnett translation, Project Gutenberg #2554, the public-domain text hosted at classicslaunch.org/works/crime-and-punishment/. Citations give book and chapter (or canto and line) so every line can be checked.