

AP English Literature and Composition
Crime and Punishment, Dostoyevsky, trans. Oliver Ready

I hope you have enjoyed reading along in this strange and wonderful masterpiece this summer. These questions are to help keep you oriented as you look to find scenes or passages in the text and to encourage your literary thinking about the novel. Read through all of the questions after you have finished the novel.

There are three assignments listed on the schedule for September.

For the first assignment, choose a question from the first half of the book (parts 1–3).
For the second assignment, choose a question from the second half of the book (parts 4–epilogue)
For the third assignment, circle back and choose one of the questions from the introduction.

For your chosen question, spend 30 minutes preparing and then 40 minutes writing your well organized response to the question. The response you hand in should look like a sample AP exam essay, and, indeed, it will be graded as such.

Later in the quarter, you will have an opportunity to choose the best of your responses and to revise the essay to count as a separate grade. You will submit this revision in your portfolio for the first unit.

Introduction

1. The introduction tells us that the novel's title "suggests a ready-made plot. A man will commit a crime. He will be caught. He will be punished" (xiii). How are the title's expectations supported or undercut (or ironized) by the story that follows? Be specific in your answer, showing your mastery of the capacious text.
2. Consider the political history of leading up to the 1864 publication of the novel. What aspects of the political history of the time do you find reflected in the novel? To what degree is *Crime and Punishment* a political novel?
3. Consider the influence of Dostoyevsky's personal history on the novel's themes, tone, characters, plot (or events), and/or imagery. Be careful not to write in a reductive way about biography—rather, explore confluences between life and art in a way that teaches us more about the text.
4. Ready suggests that the novel is often read as "a murder mystery or as a novel of religious conversion." Consider both of these possibilities. What is gained by such a reading? What is lost?
5. Virginia Woolf says about *Crime and Punishment*: "Against our wills we are drawn in, whirled around, blinded, suffocated, and at the same time filled with a giddy rapture. Out of

Shakespeare there is no more exciting reading” (qtd. in Ready xiv). In a well supported essay, support, refute, or qualify Woolf’s statement.

6. Describe the point of view of the novel and its effect on the tone and mood of the text.

7. Consider the “psychogeography” of the text (xvi). That is, how does setting reflect, underscore, or contradict tonal aspects of the novel?

8. As Raskolnikov overthinks, keep an eye on your growing understanding of this issue as it relates to *Hamlet*. Consider Hamlet’s “There is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so” as you read through Raskolnikov’s rationalization for his crime. Compare and contrast the two texts with regard to this issue; in the end, how do the texts regard thought/philosophy?

9. Ready tells us, “[W]hen the crime is actually set in motion [Raskolnikov] is barely aware of what he is doing: ‘As if a scrap of his clothing had caught in the wheel of a machine that was now pulling him in’” (xix). A reader can regard this lack of awareness as pathology (like Nick Adams in places where he is dissociated from his body in *In Our Time*) or as the powerful spring that has been tripped in tragedy, as Aristotle discusses it in *Poetics*. Further, Ready offers that Raskolnikov’s crime is his punishment, an assertion which sounds not unlike Aristotle’s definition of *peripeteia*. If you read the story as a tragedy, what are the implications for character, free will, and so on? Are there deviations from the genre of tragedy resonate importantly with regard to the meaning of the novel?

10. Dostoyevsky is famous for his “strategy of ambivalence” (xxi), where no single correct reading of the text emerges. Ready looks for answers to this problem in the theme of *knizhnost*, “bookishness” (xxii). Read Ready’s description of this theme and his argument (xxii-xxv). To what degree do you agree with Ready’s reading? First, succinctly identify his argument; then make your own thesis that supports, refutes, or qualifies his reading.

11. Ready’s second reading is not through texts but through people. How do other characters present foils for Raskolnikov? Choose three characters and discuss their similarities to and differences from Raskolnikov; what, overall, is gained through such a characterization-based reading?

12. Ready tells us that the word for “crime” in Russian is etymologically similar to our word “transgression,” a “stepping across” (xxvi). This independent, original step is one that characterizes a coming of age. What are the implications of reading *Crime and Punishment* as a Bildungsroman?

13. Write a personal essay in which you detail your own transgressive move to adulthood. Include similarities (reading? the influences of others? religion?) and differences to Raskolnikov as you go, making this essay both autobiographical and literary.

14. Critics argue about the meaning of the epilogue: sincere conversion and new start? false conversion? no conversion? Provide evidence for your own reading of the ending—consider tone, voice, imagery, symbolism, or other similar devices to corroborate your reading.

Part 1

1. How does Raskolnikov's isolation contribute to the text?
2. The text suggests Raskolnikov's divided self. Find passages that support this reading and that provide evidence for its meaning.
3. Look for characters that double: Alyona/Marmeladov, Sonya/Dunya/girl on the street, Alyona/Lizaveta. In what ways do they double or foil? What is the effect on the overall text?
4. How do you interpret Raskolnikov's dream? (R=Mikolka and the boy?). What does its inclusion add to the text?
5. What is the role of sickness in Raskolnikov's actual carrying out of the crime? What does it add as a literary device relating to point of view? What does it add to your interpretation of events?
6. How do Hegelian ideas (the theory of the *Übermensch* and the ethics of killing one bad person to accomplish something good) play into Raskolnikov's thinking? What accounts for the appeal of these ideas? What is the novel's message about Hegelian ethics? How do you know?
7. How do you account for the scene with Raskolnikov and the girl on the street (R's compassion and then his impassivity)? Answer in terms of Raskolnikov's character and thinking.
8. So far, what possible allusions do you find to *Macbeth*? What do these allusions add to the text?
9. To what degree is the third-person narrator in *Crime and Punishment* reliable? How can you tell?

Part 2

1. What clues does the text provide about point of view?
2. Ready in the introduction suggests that the crime contains the punishment. What evidence of that situation do you see in part 2?
3. What similarities and differences do you see in part 2 between *Crime and Punishment* and *Macbeth*? What do any allusions add to the text?
4. Consider the psychogeography of the text in part 2. What do descriptions of setting (and your visualizing of the setting) add to the atmosphere/mood of the piece? Do these aspects also add to its thematic importance? Consider the several different settings and their descriptions, including outdoor places as well as the police station and Raskolnikov's room.

5. What is your reading of the scene in the police station? Begin with the notion that Raskolnikov feels guilty and details activate his sense of guilt. Deepen this idea with examples of details and then consider how the narration itself operates.
6. Make a quick chart/list of the different characters in the police station and their personalities and roles.
7. In what way does Raskolnikov have “nowhere else to go,” as Marmeladov says? What are the forces that make him desperate?
8. Consider the character doubling that occurs with Raskolnikov and Razumikhin. What is its nature? What do you make of it? Are they two sides of the same coin or the same side of two coins? Provide evidence to support your idea.
9. Explain the scene with Raskolnikov’s hearing the beating of the landlady: What does it say about narrative reliability in the text? What is the importance of your findings here to your overall reading of the text?
10. Nastasya alludes to Genesis 4:10 (Cain) when she talks about Raskolnikov’s shouting blood (110). The allusion is in the text, but Nastasya seems unaware of the connection. What other biblical allusions have you noticed up this point? What do they add to the text? Use Ready’s notes to help you, rather than turning to the Interwebs.
11. What ideas do you have about the role of money in the text? Perhaps it tells us sometimes about social class, sometimes about the morals of individuals. Finally, what does Raskolnikov’s (dis)regard for money tell us about him?
12. To what degree do Raskolnikov’s acceptance of the money and his putting on the new clothes symbolize or foreshadow his redemption?
13. What is the role of psychological evidence in the solving of the crime? What characters consider psychological evidence? What examples of evidence do you find in the text? What is the novel’s attitude toward psychological evidence? The passage that gives rise to the question is on p. 132. Start with Razumikhin’s ideas, but don’t be limited by them.
14. What is your assessment of Luzhin’s character? Use the scene where he visits Raskolnikov in his room as the basis for your inferences.
15. Raskolnikov listens to street music, looking for “the key” (147); Raskolnikov has rejected one solution because it comes together too easily, “like in the theatre” (133). How does the text suggest a real murder mystery, and what factors cause the text to subvert that genre?
16. We know Dostoyevsky himself was sentenced to be executed and then his sentence was commuted at the last instant. Raskolnikov talks about the importance of life itself (148). What do you make of this passage? Consider it on its own and then also in its context; Raskolnikov

goes off in search of human companionship immediately. How does this idea square with Raskolnikov's idea of the *Übermensch*?

17. What do you make of the scene where Raskolnikov describes the murder to Zametov? (153 and forward). Consider the psychological motivations of Raskolnikov.
18. Razumikhin calls Raskolnikov a "bright spark" and also a "walking translation" (156). What is the problem with Raskolnikov with regard to these issues?
19. Why doesn't Raskolnikov understand his own intentions? Why isn't he able to maintain an intention for very long?
20. Why does Raskolnikov return to the scene of the crime? How does he feel about the apartment's being repainted?
21. How does Raskolnikov present himself in the scene with the trampled Marmeladov, from his entrance to the interaction with Polenka? How does this action square with Raskolnikov's stated theories about humanity?
22. To what degree is Katerina Ivanovna a sympathetic character?

Part 3

1. Consider the roles of parts 1–3 as structural components of the novel. What does each accomplish for the text?
2. Consider more character doubles: Sonya/Dunya and Luzhin/Svidrigailov.
3. What do you make of Razumikhin's exuberance? What does it accomplish for the plot? What does it say about his character? What does it contribute literarily to the text?
4. What do you make of the character of Pulkheria Alexandrovna? What does she contribute to the text?
5. Razumikhin considers the "two contrasting characters ... taking turns inside" Raskolnikov (200). Define these characters as you have seen them in the text. Provide examples to support ideas.
6. Luzhin asks that Raskolnikov not be present at his meeting with Dunya and Pulkheria Alexandrovna. What possible motives can you ascribe to him, beyond the unpleasant encounter with Rodya in his room? Further, how does Dunya respond to the letter? What does this response say about Dunya's character?
7. Analyze the scene in which Raskolnikov calls Dunya on her decision to marry Luzhin. Who is right? Why does Raskolnikov question himself about his own involvement, finally?

8. Look at the scene with Sonya in Raskolnikov's room in terms of social class and propriety. How do the characters interact? What does Sonya notice about Raskolnikov? Who behaves with generosity and dignity?
9. Write a characters sketch of Porfiry, based on his appearance in part 3.
10. Explain the socialist theory of crime and the problems with it, according to Razumikhin (238).
11. Porfiry's revelations about Raskolnikov's article "On Crime" give us a window into the thinking of Raskolnikov. Summarize his ideas. Where does Raskolnikov go wrong in his thinking?
12. What is the role of guilt and punishment for the perpetrator of crime? (246).
13. After the confrontation with the tradesman (253), Raskolnikov goes to bed. He thinks about his crime and its failings, as well as the failure of the socialist "universal happiness" (255). What are his ideas and how do they apply to his situation?
14. What is the significance of Raskolnikov's dream?

Part 4

1. Svidrigailov emphasizes that he and Raskolnikov have something in common. What is it?
2. Svidrigailov sees Marfa's ghost, and this event is associated with illness. Throughout part 4, what is the role of illness? Continue the exploration of illness as associated with crime, as introduced through Raskolnikov's paper.
3. Of what values is Svidrigailov an exemplar? What is his relationship to Raskolnikov's idea of the *Übermensch*?
4. To what degree are Svidrigailov and Luzhin character doubles? What do their similarities add to the text?
5. What is Dunya's motive for inviting Raskolnikov to meet with Luzhin, against Luzhin's wishes? Do you agree with her action?
6. Compare and contrast Luzhin's desire for an impoverished wife with Raskolnikov's attraction to the landlady's sickly daughter and also to Sonya.
7. Compare and contrast the characters of Luzhin and Razumikhin.

8. As Raskolnikov leaves, his leaving of his mother and sister with Razumikhin echoes Jesus's leaving the care of Mary to John, the beloved disciple. What do these echoes lend to the text?
9. Explore the psychogeography of Sonya's room, including the symbolism of the candle.
10. What is your analysis of this scene, culminating in the reading of the story of Lazarus? What does the story mean for the different characters?
11. Just as Svidrigailov is hidden behind the partition, so the "man from underground" is hidden outside Porfiry's office. What do you make of this pattern?
12. How do you understand the character of Sonya? Why is she not mad or depraved, as Raskolnikov wonders? Finally, of what is she symbolic?
13. Perform a rhetorical analysis of Porfiry's speech and actions in Chapter V. What is his purpose, and what are his tactics in accomplishing that purpose?

Part 5

1. Describe the relationship between Luzhin and Lebezyatnikov. What does each man want? How does each relate to the idea of the *Übermensch*?
2. Describe, in a reasonably developed paragraph, Lebezyatnikov's ideas. What is the text's attitude toward these ideas? How can you tell?
3. How do Lebezyatnikov's concerns and solutions play in our time? What sounds familiar to our culture? What do you think of Lebezyatnikov's solutions?
4. What motives are given in Chapter II for Katerina Ivanovna's having the funeral banquet? What do you think—should they have the banquet, or spend Raskolnikov's money on necessities?
5. Katerina Ivanovna clearly has some disordered aspects of her psychology. How has her suffering shaped her? What is her flaw? Compare and contrast her with Sonya, who has also suffered.
6. How does the behavior of the lodgers prepare the reader for the scene to come with Luzhin? How has crowd behavior throughout the novel prepared the reader for this scene? Give examples to support your idea.
7. What is the role of dramatic irony (what the reader knows and does not know in relation to what the characters know) throughout the scene where Luzhin accuses Sonya of stealing 100 roubles? Trace your reactions throughout the scene.
8. What is Lebezyatnikov's motive for telling the truth about Sonya?

9. Explain Luzhin's motive for framing Sonya.
10. Sonya has clearly been changed by the experience of being taken advantage of in this way by Luzhin (379). What are the consequences for Sonya? As you read forward, has her outlook been altered by this experience? Why or why not?
11. How has Raskolnikov responded to the framing of Sonya? How's his *Übermensch* theory now?
12. How does Sonya respond to Raskolnikov's hypothetical ideas about killing for the greater good, when put in terms of Luzhin as the necessary sacrifice?
13. How is Raskolnikov's confession scene colored by the reader's knowledge that Svidrigailov is in the next room, listening?
14. Why do you think Raskolnikov ascribes to himself two false motives before he comes up with the true one?
15. What is Sonya's reaction to Raskolnikov's confession?
16. Trace Raskolnikov's various reactions to Sonya's reaction. How's his theory faring?
17. How does Raskolnikov come to think about Napoleon's hypothetical reaction to Raskolnikov's obstacle?
18. Raskolnikov concludes that the murder has killed Raskolnikov himself and that the devil has killed Alyona (394). What do you think about this idea? Does it make sense textually? Theologically?
19. Consider the juxtaposition between Raskolnikov's confession scene and Lebezyatnikov's ideas in Chapter V. What is the effect of the juxtaposition?
20. What is the overall emotional effect of the scene with Katerina Ivanovna and the children in the streets, and then Katerina's death?
21. Do you believe, at the end of part 5, that Svidrigailov's charity is freely given? Why or why not?

Part 6

1. The beginning of part 6 features the narrator's telling us that Raskolnikov recalls all this "much later," thereby letting us know he is not executed. Where are other places the third-person narrator becomes opaque, with foreshadowing or points of view? At this point, how can you classify the narrator?
2. Looking at the diction of the beginning of part 6, what events are foreshadowed here?

3. Svidrigailov says that “every human being needs air” (414). Adding to your ideas of the air motif, how does this idea apply to Svidrigailov both here and later in the text? How does it apply to Raskolnikov in part 6? Be specific in your answer, citing text.
4. What are the roles of pride and shame for Raskolnikov during part 6?
5. In what ways are Svidrigailov and Raskolnikov doubles or foils in part 6? What do the similarities teach you about Raskolnikov? What do the differences teach you? Look at evidence throughout part 6, but be sure not to neglect the doubling of Raskolnikov’s room with Svidrigailov’s hotel room in part 6, chapter 6. Also, note each character’s interactions with the Neva River.
6. Perform a rhetorical analysis of Porfiry’s speeches with Raskolnikov. What seems to be Porfiry’s main goal, and how does he go about accomplishing it?
7. How is suffering regarded by the various characters of part 6? How does the text seem to regard it? How does this idea square with your understanding of suffering, from your religious training? from the larger culture?
8. Based on material mostly from part 6, write a character sketch of Svidrigailov. What seems to be his purpose, aside from advancing the plot, in the novel?
9. Svidrigailov calls Raskolnikov “a Schiller.” From the surrounding text (if not your actual knowledge of Schiller) what do you think he means by this label?
10. Trace the emotional trajectories of Dunya and Svidrigailov in the revolver scene.
11. Follow candle symbolism in part 6 and elsewhere in the text. What does a candle seem to signify in the text? Note the *Othello* allusion (475).
12. Compare and contrast the depiction of Svidrigailov’s dreams and thoughts with that of Raskolnikov’s elsewhere. Is the narration reliable here? What is the knowable purpose of the blurring of consciousness and sleep.
13. American poet Ezra Pound tells us that “the natural object is the adequate symbol.” How does Dostoyevsky use objects throughout part 6 as local symbols that enrich surrounding text? Consider the veal, the mice, the green shawl (though this last is a stronger symbol).
14. What do you make of Svidrigailov’s suicide?
15. Dostoyevsky overtly refers to Raskolnikov’s suffering in terms of the story of Christ, as he notes Sonya’s loyalty as her accompanying Rodya “all along his walk of sorrows” (494). First, where else does Dostoyevsky compare this part of Raskolnikov’s story to the story of Christ or allude overtly to the Gospel story? Second, how has the text prepared us for this bold move?

Third, Raskolnikov is a murderer; to what degree does the comparison hold? Finally, what does the comparison lend to the text?

16. Trace the relationship of Raskolnikov's thoughts, emotions, and spirituality to his theory of the *Urbemensch* as we move through part 6. What inferences do you draw?

17. Just as in the scene with Porfiry, Raskolnikov says, "It wasn't me," (430), like a child, here, with Powder Keg, he starts simply by saying "It was me..." (499). What is the importance of this non-standard and childlike utterance?

Epilogue

1. Why do you think we get information about Raskolnikov in prison through the lens of Sonya's letters to Dunya and Razumikhin? Why not narrate directly?

2. Up to his conversion (517) why does Raskolnikov persist in being unkind to Sonya? Why do you think Sonya persists in following and visiting Raskolnikov when he is so unkind?

3. Nihilism is the philosophical enemy of the novel. Beyond what happens to Raskolnikov, how does Dostoyevsky argue against the idea? As you answer, consider the recurrence of the idea, its several forms, the degree to which Dostoyevsky seems to take it seriously, and the degree to which Dostoyevsky satirizes it.

4. What is your interpretation of Raskolnikov's dream? (514-515).

5. How do you explain Raskolnikov's final conversion of heart? Be detailed and analytical, not sentimental.

6. Stepping away from the book at the end, what is your reaction to the text? Support your emotional responses with an intellectual framework—what in the text gives rise to your emotions?

Scenes to act out with commentary

Raskolnikov's dream of the horse

Dunya-Svidrigailov revolver scene

Raskolnikov's conversion scene in Siberia