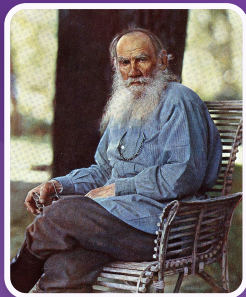


JRF SPECIAL PDF

Leo Tolstoy



1 Tolstoy's Biography

1.1 Who He Was

Leo Tolstoy was a **Russian** writer regarded as one of the **greatest novelists** in world literature. His two great novels — *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina* — are admired for their deep insight into human nature, society, and morality. His style is marked by **close attention to detail**, full **character development**, and **philosophical depth**. Beyond his novels he was a **social reformer and thinker** who

preached **non-violent resistance** and a simpler way of living.

1.2 Birth, Life, and Beliefs

Detail	Information
Born	1828 , in Russia
Died	1910
Period	19th-century Russian realism
Wanted to be	A lawyer (he left his studies)
Military	Joined the army ; wrote during the Crimean War
Beliefs	Anarchist and non-conformist ; his own faith mixing Christian ethics with other ideas

Tolstoy first studied to become a **lawyer** but did not finish, and a spell of farming also failed to hold him. He began keeping a **journal**, a habit that trained him as a writer. His brother drew him into the **army**, and he kept writing all through the **Crimean War**.

Later he searched the **Russian Orthodox Church** for meaning but was dissatisfied. He built his own faith, blending **Christian values** with other ideas, while rejecting core Christian doctrines such as the **divinity and resurrection of Jesus**. He believed God was infinite and tried to live well through **good deeds** and **indifference to money** — ideas he set down in his book *A Confession*. He called himself an **anarchist** and a **non-conformist**, and wrote: *"Everyone wants to change the world, but nobody thinks about changing themselves."*

CONCEPT

Tolstoyan non-violence: Tolstoy preached **non-violent resistance** to evil, an idea most fully argued in *The Kingdom of God Is Within You* (1893). This teaching deeply **influenced Mahatma Gandhi** and his philosophy of non-violence. Tolstoy's **Christian humanism** — his concern with morality, suffering, and how to live rightly — became central to his late reputation.

1.3 Recognition

Tolstoy was nominated for the **Nobel Prize in Literature** every year from **1902 to 1906**, and for the **Nobel Peace Prize** in **1901, 1902, and 1909** — though he won neither. His influence reached writers across Europe: in **1899** the German poet **Rainer Maria Rilke** travelled to Russia, **met Tolstoy**, and was shaped by his ideas on simplicity and spirituality.

CONCEPT

Who was Rainer Maria Rilke? A great **German-language poet, born in Prague (1875) and died of leukaemia (1926)**. As a young man he met Tolstoy and was influenced by him. His last two major works carry the words **"sonnets" and "elegies"** in their titles — *Sonnets to Orpheus* and *Duino Elegies*.

2 Important Works

Work	Approx. Date	Genre	Significance
<i>Childhood, Boyhood, Youth</i> (trilogy)	1852–1856	Autobiographical novels	His debut ; <i>Childhood</i> won praise from Ivan Turgenev
<i>Sevastopol Tales</i>	1855	War stories	Early use of stream of consciousness ; from the Crimean War
<i>Family Happiness</i>	1859	Novella	First published in <i>The Russian Messenger</i>
<i>War and Peace</i>	1865–1869	Historical fiction	His magnum opus ; the Napoleonic Wars
<i>Anna Karenina</i>	1875–1877	Realist novel	Anna's affair and Levin's quest for meaning; in eight parts
<i>The Death of Ivan Ilyich</i>	1886	Novella	A dying man asks whether his life had meaning
<i>How Much Land Does a Man Need?</i>	1886	Short story	A parable on the dangers of greed
<i>The Kingdom of God Is Within You</i>	1893	Non-fiction	On non-violence ; influenced Gandhi

Work	Approx. Date	Genre	Significance
<i>Resurrection</i>	1899	Novel	His last major novel; sin, guilt, and moral renewal

CONCEPT

Other major works (canonical): Tolstoy's later fiction also includes *The Kreutzer Sonata* (1889), a dark novella on marriage and jealousy, and the long essay *What Is Art?* (1897), in which he argues that **true art communicates sincere feeling** and binds people together. *After the Ball* is a late short story, Tolstoy's comment on high culture and social rule seen through one man's experience of love.

3 Important Works in Detail

War and Peace, his magnum opus, is covered on its own in Section 4.

3.1 Anna Karenina (1875–1877)

In one line: a married aristocrat ruins herself in a passionate affair, while a second hero quietly finds the meaning of life.

Set in **late 19th-century Russia**, the novel runs on **two parallel stories**. One follows **Anna Karenina**, the beautiful wife of the cold official **Alexei Karenin**, who falls into a passionate affair with the dashing **Count Vronsky**. The

other follows **Konstantin Levin**, an awkward, thoughtful landowner, in his slow path to marriage and faith. The two plots mirror each other: Anna's love ends in ruin, Levin's in peace.

The book opens in the **Oblonsky** household, which is "in chaos." **Stiva Oblonsky** — Anna's charming, careless brother — has been caught in an affair with the family's **French governess**, and his wife **Dolly** is heartbroken. Anna travels to Moscow to mend the marriage. At the train station she meets Vronsky, and they are instantly drawn to each other; the same day a railway worker is killed under a train — a grim omen. Anna and Vronsky begin an affair. Meanwhile Vronsky has been courting young **Kitty**, who therefore rejects a proposal from **Levin**.

As the affair becomes open, society turns on Anna while sparing Vronsky — the **double standard of a patriarchal world**. Karenin refuses her a divorce to punish her and to guard his public **image**. Anna grows isolated, jealous, and paranoid; cut off from her son **Seryozha** and unable to bond with her baby daughter, she sinks into despair and **morphine**. In the end, certain Vronsky no longer loves her, she throws herself **under a train** and dies. Months later, Levin — now married to Kitty and a father — moves past his own thoughts of suicide and reaches a quiet **faith in God**, affirming that life has meaning.

CONCEPT

The unhappiness in the Oblonsky house: The novel's famous first line — *"All happy families are alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way"* — leads straight into the Oblonsky household. The specific cause of

its unhappiness is **Stiva Oblonsky's affair with the family's French governess**, which leaves his wife Dolly devastated.

CONCEPT **The closing lines belong to Levin, not Anna:**

The novel does **not** end on Anna's suicide. It ends with **Levin's affirmation** that, whatever happens to him, life is *"not meaningless but unquestionably meaningful."* Standing in the spring air, he resolves: *"I must work, that I must love, and that I must live."* This hopeful close balances Anna's tragedy.

EXAM ESSENTIAL

- Published in **1877** (not 1872); written in **eight parts**; set in **late-19th-century Russia**.
- Two central characters: **Anna Karenina** and **Konstantin Levin**; the novel is **revolutionary in its treatment of women**.
- Opening line: **"All happy families are alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way."**
- Anna's defining qualities are her **passionate spirit** and **determination to live life on her own terms**; she is a **victim of the Russian patriarchal system**.
- Anna does **not** accept the exile society imposes; she abandons her family duties (her son **Seryozha**) for her affair.
- Love triangle**: husband **Alexei Karenin**, wife **Anna**, lover **Count Vronsky**.
- Trains and the railway** are the novel's key symbol — progress, fate, and inevitability; Anna's **suicide is under a train**.

- The novel concerns **the trivia of day-to-day life**, an **insistent quest for meaning**, love, jealousy, guilt, and the conflict between personal happiness and social duty.
- Themes: **betrayal, faith, family, marriage, Imperial Russian society, desire, and the rural–urban divide.**

CONCEPT

A famous line on hollow marriage: Among the novel's quoted lines is *"Respect was invented to cover the empty place where love should be"* — Anna's bitter judgement that mere social respect cannot stand in for genuine love. Tolstoy also gives the warning *"If you look for perfection, you'll never be content."*

3.2 The Death of Ivan Ilyich (1886)

In one line: a successful judge falls ill, faces death, and realises he wasted his life on things that did not matter.

Ivan Ilyich is an ambitious man who climbs the social ladder to become a **judge**, marries without love, and pours himself into his career while his home life grows cold. One day, hanging curtains in his fine new house, he **falls and hurts his side**. The small injury turns into a worsening, undiagnosed pain.

As the illness takes hold, Ivan becomes irritable, and those around him pretend he is merely unwell. Dying and in agony, he clings to the belief that he should not suffer because he has lived a **"good" life** — and then begins to doubt whether his respectable, conventional life was good

at all. The story forces the reader to weigh an outwardly successful life against an inner emptiness.

EXAM ESSENTIAL

- A **novella** (1886) blending **fiction, philosophy, and dark comedy**.
- The plot turns on **a family's reaction to a member's terminal illness** — a theme NOT central to *Anna Karenina*.
- Central question: did a respectable, career-driven life have any **real meaning**?

3.3 How Much Land Does a Man Need? (1886)

In one line: a peasant's hunger for more and more land kills him, and he ends up needing only a grave.

This **short story**, told from a **third-person point of view**, follows **Pakhom**, a poor farmer who boasts that with enough land he would fear nothing, "not even the Devil." The Devil overhears and decides to tempt him. Pakhom buys land, prospers, but always craves more, moving on each time to a bigger holding.

He finally reaches the **Bashkirs**, who offer him a strange bargain: for **a thousand roubles** he may have **all the land he can walk around in a single day**, on the one condition that he return to his starting point **by sunset**. Greedy, Pakhom walks too far. He races back and just reaches the start as the sun sets — then **drops dead from exhaustion**. His servant buries him, and the story answers its own title: a man needs only **enough land to be buried in** — about six feet.

EXAM ESSENTIAL

- A **short story** in **third-person** narration; main theme = the **dangers of greed**.
- The deal with the **Bashkirs**: all the land Pakhom can walk around in **one day** for **a thousand roubles**, returning by **sunset**.
- He dies of exhaustion; the answer to the title is **only enough land for a grave**.

3.4 The Kingdom of God Is Within You (1893)

In one line: a non-fiction argument that true Christianity means non-violence — a book that helped shape Gandhi.

This is a **non-fiction** work arguing for **non-violence** and passive resistance as the heart of Christ's teaching. Tolstoy rejects the readings of **Roman and medieval scholars** who, he says, narrowed and tamed that teaching. Banned in Russia, the book was first **published in Germany**. Its argument for non-violent resistance had a lasting **influence on Mahatma Gandhi**.

EXAM ESSENTIAL

- **Non-fiction**; subject = **non-violence**; first **published in Germany** after being banned in Russia.
- Rejects the interpretation of **Roman and medieval scholars**; influenced **Gandhi**.

3.5 Early Works: The Trilogy and the War

Tales

In one line: the books that launched Tolstoy — his fictionalised boyhood and his frontline reports from the Crimean War.

Tolstoy's first books form an **autobiographical trilogy** — ***Childhood*** (1852), ***Boyhood*** (1854), and ***Youth*** (1856). *Childhood* appeared when he was just **23** and was an instant success, earning the notice of older novelists including **Ivan Turgenev**. *Boyhood* and *Youth* were both published in the Russian literary journal ***Sovremennik***.

His ***Sevastopol Tales*** (1855) drew on his own service in the **Crimean War** and focused on **what soldiers actually think and feel**. They were among the first writings to use **stream of consciousness** — a style that puts the reader inside a character's mind. The opening tale, *Sevastopol in December*, uses an unusual **second-person narrative**, and the cycle follows two brothers, **Mikhail and Vladimir Kozeltsov**, who both fight and die for Russia.

EXAM ESSENTIAL

- Autobiographical trilogy = **Childhood, Boyhood, Youth**; *Childhood* praised by **Ivan Turgenev**.
- *Sevastopol Tales* (1855): early **stream of consciousness**; *Sevastopol in December* uses **second-person narration**.

4 War and Peace

This is Tolstoy's grandest and most important work, so we will study it carefully.

4.1 The Big Idea

In one line: across the years of Napoleon's wars, several Russian noble families love, marry, fight, and suffer – and Tolstoy argues that history is driven not by great men but by countless small actions.

War and Peace (written **1865–1869**) is a **Russian historical-fiction novel** set during the **Napoleonic Wars**. It famously mixes a sweeping **fictional narrative** with long **chapters of history and philosophy**. The story begins in **St. Petersburg in 1805**, as Napoleon's advance across Europe alarms Russia, and follows several aristocratic families through war, peace, and the **French invasion of Russia in 1812**.

The novel's deepest theme is the **philosophy of history**: Tolstoy argues that no single "great man" – not even Napoleon – truly controls events. History is the sum of the actions of **countless ordinary people**, and individual free will is far smaller than it seems. This argument is set out most fully in the novel's **epilogue**.

CONCEPT

Determinism and free will – in the epilogue:

Tolstoy places his long discussion of **determinism versus free will** in the novel's **epilogue** (not its prologue, and not in any dialogue between the characters). There he weighs individual choice against the vast external forces of history,

concluding that historical events arise from the interwoven actions of many.

4.2 Key Facts and Numbers

Item	Detail
Written	1865–1869
Setting	The Napoleonic Wars ; opens in St. Petersburg, 1805
Genre	Russian historical fiction , mixing narrative + history/philosophy
Opening line	"Well, Prince, so Genoa and Lucca are now just family estates of the Buonapartes."
Key battles	Austerlitz (Andrei wounded) and Borodino (1812)
Free-will debate	In the epilogue

CONCEPT

"Loose Baggy Monsters": The novelist **Henry James** coined the phrase **"loose baggy monsters"** to describe **novels** — sprawling, crowded works with little tight structure. He used it in connection with vast novels like *War and Peace*: huge, rich, and unwieldy. The term describes **novels**, not poems or anything else.

4.3 What Happens

The story opens at a **St. Petersburg party in 1805** and introduces its main figures. **Pierre Bezukhov**, the awkward but warm-hearted illegitimate son of a rich count, unexpectedly inherits his father's fortune. He marries the

beautiful, faithless **Helene Kuragina**, is miserable, leaves her, and turns to **Freemasonry** in search of meaning. His friend **Prince Andrei Bolkonsky**, clever and ambitious, goes to war and is badly wounded at the **Battle of Austerlitz**; his wife **Lise** dies in childbirth.

Among the lively **Rostov** family is young **Natasha**. She and Andrei fall in love and become engaged, but his father insists they wait a year. In that time Natasha is nearly seduced into eloping by the worthless **Anatole Kuragin**; the engagement collapses, and Andrei is bitterly hurt.

In **1812 Napoleon invades Russia**. Andrei returns to the army. After the great **Battle of Borodino** the French take Moscow. Pierre, wandering the burning city with a wild plan to kill Napoleon, is captured and, in prison, befriends the simple, wise peasant **Platon Karataev**, who teaches him acceptance. Andrei, mortally wounded, is reunited with Natasha, who nurses him; he forgives her and dies. As the French retreat, **Petya** Rostov is killed and Platon is shot.

After the war, Pierre — freed and changed — realises he loves Natasha, and they **marry**. Natasha settles into contented motherhood. **Nicholas** Rostov marries Andrei's devout sister **Princess Mary**, repairing the family's fortunes. The novel ends in domestic peace, then turns, in its **epilogue**, to history and free will.

4.4 The Characters

Pierre Bezukhov

- The **illegitimate son** of a rich count who suddenly **inherits a fortune**

- Marries the unfaithful **Helene**, leaves her, and seeks meaning in **Freemasonry**
- Taken prisoner by the French; learns acceptance from the peasant **Platon Karataev**; finally marries **Natasha**

Prince Andrei Bolkonsky

- A clever, ambitious officer, the son of a retired commander
- Wounded at the **Battle of Austerlitz**; engaged to **Natasha** but estranged after her near-elopement
- Mortally wounded at **Borodino**; reconciles with Natasha and dies forgiving her

Natasha Rostova

- The lively, warm-hearted Rostov daughter at the novel's emotional centre
- Engaged to Andrei, nearly eloping with **Anatole Kuragin**, she matures through suffering
- Marries **Pierre** and becomes a devoted wife and mother

Other key figures

- **Nicholas Rostov**: Natasha's brother, an army officer who marries **Princess Mary**
- **Helene Kuragina**: Pierre's beautiful, faithless first wife
- **Platon Karataev**: the simple peasant prisoner whose calm faith transforms Pierre
- **General Kutuzov**: the old Russian commander, Tolstoy's model of patient, humble leadership

CONCEPT

The themes and the famous lines: The novel's two great themes are **spirituality** and **family happiness as the ultimate reward for spiritual suffering**. Its memorable lines include *"There is no greatness where there is not simplicity, goodness, and truth"* and *"If everyone fought for their own convictions there would be no war."*

5 Criticism

Critic / Source	What they said
Henry James	Described novels (vast ones like <i>War and Peace</i>) as "loose baggy monsters."
George Orwell	Wrote the essay "Lear, Tolstoy and the Fool" (1947), examining Tolstoy's hostile reading of Shakespeare's <i>King Lear</i> .
A. D. Hope	In <i>A Book of Answers</i> (1961) responded poetically to Tolstoy and to the French poet Mallarmé .
Rainer Maria Rilke	The German poet who met Tolstoy in 1899 and was shaped by his ideas on simplicity and spirituality.
Mahatma Gandhi	Took Tolstoy's <i>The Kingdom of God Is Within You</i> and its non-violence as a key influence on his own philosophy.

CONCEPT

"Lear, Tolstoy and the Fool": This **1947 essay by George Orwell** defends Shakespeare against Tolstoy. Tolstoy had attacked *King Lear* as overrated and immoral; Orwell answers that Tolstoy's **bleak, moralistic** reading

misses the play's richness and ambiguity, using the clash to explore **art versus didacticism**.

CONCEPT

A. D. Hope's poetic replies: In *A Book of Answers* (1961) the Australian poet **A. D. Hope** writes verse "answers" to great writers. Two of them are **Tolstoy** — engaging his thoughts on morality, life, and suffering — and the Symbolist poet **Stéphane Mallarmé**, engaging his theories of poetry and language.