



ANNA KARENINA:

BRINGING TOLSTOY'S EPIC STORY OF LOVE TO THE BIG SCREEN

A series of questions for readers and moviegoers.



QUESTION 01 | FAMILIES

THE NOVEL *Anna Karenina* starts with the famous line “Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.” How does that apply to the families in the novel? What makes the families in *Anna Karenina* so “unhappy”? Are there any happy families?

THE FILM How are the different families’ homes represented in the film? How does Alexei Karenin’s home differ from that of Dolly and Oblonsky, or from Levin’s homestead?

QUESTION 02 | LOVE

THE NOVEL In many ways, *Anna Karenina* is a novel about love, but each character seems to define (as well as be defined by) love in very different ways. What is love to Anna? Count Vronsky? Constantine Dmitrich Levin? Kitty Shcherbatsky? Stepan “Stiva” Oblonsky? How do you define love?

THE FILM How does Joe Wright portray love cinematically for the different characters? For Anna (Keira Knightley), the world literally disappears at one point. What happens to other characters in the film when they are in love?



QUESTION 03 | AFFAIRS

THE NOVEL While the novel begins with an act of infidelity with Stepan “Stiva” Oblonsky having an affair, it’s Anna’s affair with Vronsky that becomes the novel’s center, as well as the target of society’s censure. Why is Oblonsky’s affair handled so differently than Anna’s? Is it just that he’s a man and she’s a woman? Or is there something bigger at stake with Anna?

THE FILM How does Joe Wright show the public spectacle of Anna’s affair versus the private and familial concern that is attached to Oblonsky’s indiscretions?

QUESTION 04 | TWO ROMANCES

THE NOVEL The two main plotlines of *Anna Karenina* follow two different romances – one between Anna and Vronsky and the other between Levin and Kitty. What defines these different relationships – how do they begin, grow, end? Which one do you find more interesting?

THE FILM How does Joe Wright use production design and costumes to help define these two relationships? How is the sumptuousness of Anna’s world contrasted with the starkness of Levin’s?



QUESTION 05 | THE RACETRACK

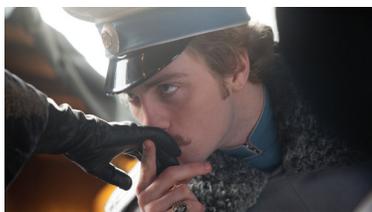
THE NOVEL The racetrack scene is a powerful and telling moment in the novel; one in which actions appear to symbolize more profound feelings and emotions. For example, how does Frou-Frou’s agitation before the race speak to the uncertainty of Anna and Vronsky’s future? How does the spectacle of the race highlight the ways Anna’s affair has come under public scrutiny? What does Vronsky’s reaction to Frou-Frou’s tragic accident say about his relationship to Anna? What does Frou-Frou’s death symbolize to you?

THE FILM How does Joe Wright’s handling of the racetrack scene play with the relationship between spectacle and spectatorship, between the race being a fashionable social event and an arena in which everyone scrutinizes each other’s behavior? How do Vronsky (Aaron Taylor-Johnson), Anna (Keira Knightley) and Karenin (Jude Law) create a triangle on screen?

QUESTION 06 | NATURE VS SOCIETY

THE NOVEL Nature plays a huge role in *Anna Karenina*, especially for Levin, whose connection to the earth brings him a sense of peace and purpose. One of the most memorable scenes in the novel is the mowing scene in Book 3, where Levin joins the farm workers in the fields, an action that seems to bring him the connection and purpose for which he has so sorely been searching. How do you think nature functions in the novel? How does Tolstoy describe the Russian landscape? How are natural scenes compared to the high-society events in Moscow?

THE FILM Joe Wright’s adaptation of *Anna Karenina* makes a bold distinction between the theatricality of Russian society and the people and practices that appear outside of it. Levin, for example, often appears in natural settings. What does this suggest about Levin’s role in the story and in Russian society as a whole?



QUESTION 07 | TRAINS

THE NOVEL Trains figure significantly in *Anna Karenina* – as symbols of progress and harbingers of tragedy, as instruments that drive the plot forward and moving representations of Russia’s entry into the industrial age. How do you feel trains function in the novel? Is there a connection between their propulsive power and the power of passion?

THE FILM In Joe Wright’s adaptation of *Anna Karenina*, he creates a visual link between trains as dangerous machines and as childhood toys. How does that compare to the love that transports Anna?

QUESTION 08 | FRIENDSHIP

THE NOVEL Stepan “Stiva” Oblonsky and Constantine Dmitrich Levin are close friends in *Anna Karenina*, even though they seem like very different people. Oblonsky is gregarious, loves high society, and has an unwavering concern about his own well-being, while Levin is deeply introspective, favors the country, and searches for ways he might help others. What makes these two men such close friends? How do the two complement each other? How do they define different attitudes towards being alive and present in the world? Does either (or both) character change over the arc of the novel?

THE FILM In Joe Wright’s adaptation of *Anna Karenina*, Levin (Domhnall Gleeson) and Oblonsky (Matthew Macfadyen) often create a comical contrast but display real affection for each other. How do the actors capture the essence of each character? How does their costuming help us understand the characters’ principles?



QUESTION 09 | KITTY

THE NOVEL At the start of *Anna Karenina*, Kitty Shcherbatsky looks up to Anna but is soon angered and hurt when Vronsky chooses Anna over her. But at the end of the novel, Kitty is saddened and disheartened by Anna, repeatedly exclaiming how the luxury of Anna and Vronsky’s life makes her uncomfortable. In what ways are Kitty and Anna similar? Why do you think they move in such different directions to end up by the novel’s end in such contrasting circumstances?

THE FILM In Joe Wright’s adaptation of *Anna Karenina*, Kitty (Alicia Vikander) seems to be the character who changes the most. How do we see the changes Kitty goes through on screen?

QUESTION 10 | KARENIN

THE NOVEL In *Anna Karenina*, Alexei Alexandrovich Karenin is a high-ranking government official whose keen sense of propriety and principles makes him a rising political star tasked with designing the new legal architecture of a changing Russia. But when Anna’s affair with Vronsky brings him public ridicule, his stature is diminished and his political capital depleted. How do you view Karenin? Is he a victim, villain or survivor? Why does he willingly parent both Seryozha and Anna (the love child of Anna and Vronsky)? By the end of the novel, do you feel he is in a better or worse place than he was at the story’s start?

THE FILM In Joe Wright’s film, Karenin (Jude Law) is a figure of immense self-control and restrained emotions. How do Law’s costumes and makeup suggest what is happening internally? What do you feel the film’s final and powerful shot of Karenin suggests?



QUESTION 11 | INNOVATIVE STORYTELLING

THE NOVEL Many consider Leo Tolstoy’s *Anna Karenina* as one of the world’s greatest novels, not the least for the author’s innovative and complex ways of telling his story: his freewheeling approach to perspective, giving voice to every point of view, including a dog’s; his willingness to include extended and complicated arguments about faith, politics and God; his mix of realism with a complex symbolic vocabulary. What moves you about Tolstoy’s writing? What surprised you about his prose and storytelling?

THE FILM In adapting *Anna Karenina*, Tom Stoppard’s elegant screenplay was able to contain the rich scope and thematic integrity of Tolstoy’s epic novel into a feature film. How did Stoppard dramatically focus the novel? How did he translate the novel’s sensibility to the screen? Also how do you think Joe Wright’s bold approach in adapting *Anna Karenina* reflects Tolstoy’s own bold stylistic choices?