

HIGH SCHOOL | BLUE VALLEY DISTRICT NOVEL RATIONALE

***The Death of Ivan Ilych* by Leo Tolstoy**

English Language Arts, 12th Grade

WHAT'S THE STORY?

Tolstoy's rendition of a premature death opens with the "friends" and acquaintances of Ivan Ilych complaining because they must go to the funeral services of Ivan and pay their appropriate, social respects. The introductory scene lays the fabric upon which the tapestry of Ivan's life is painted. In flashback, the reader discovers that Ivan's life has not been well lived. In fact, his preoccupation with status, prestige, and money has caused him to ignore those things in life that make life worth living even with all its hardships and frustrations. As he recounts his childhood, early adult, and adult life in flashback, he realizes that the status he has always sought amongst his neighbors, work associates, and family is of little to no value. After contracting a fatal illness and living through its diagnosis and its pain, Ivan's epiphany is simply that he lived life according to society's rules rather than his own and that those events and people for which he should have lived his life are not willing to share in his grief at losing it. His servant, Gerasim, is the only one with whom Ivan can identify because he is the only figure who wants nothing more than to help Ivan through the dying. The reader is left understanding that living life well is far more important than living life according to the expectations of a society.

CONNECTIONS TO CURRICULUM*

The following are some, but not all, of the connections to curriculum for this novel.

- **Unit 4: Universal Human Experience**
 - Essential Question: "How can reading reveal universal truths about the human experience?"

KEY STANDARDS ADDRESSED

- Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience. W.12.4
- Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain. RL.12.1
- Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases based on grades 11–12 reading and content, choosing flexibly from a range of strategies. RL.12.11
- Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings. RL.12.1