



Colorado Book Club Resource

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR BROTHERS KARAMAZOV BY FYDOR DOSTOYEVSKY

1. "The Grand Inquisitor" chapter of *The Brothers Karamazov* has been published as a separate novella. Many have been so moved by its skeptical attitude toward faith and human goodness that they feel that it stands as an achievement on its own. Do you feel the rest of the book provides a sufficient response to "The Grand Inquisitor," or does it steal the show?
2. Smerdyakov, you recall, didn't leave much of a suicide note, and he never wrote out a confession. Some readers believe that he is, as the prosecutor claims, too weak a character to commit murder. Do you think Smerdyakov really did it?
3. Do you think Ivan merely hallucinated the devil in Book 12, Chapter 9, or did the devil actually appear to him?
4. In his preface, Dostoevsky names Alyosha as the hero of his novel. Make the case that another character – say, one of the other Karamazov brothers – is the real hero.
5. Dostoevsky's novels often develop characters that "double" or mirror each other. For example, Smerdyakov is a twisted double for Ivan, Dmitri's life resembles Zosima's as a young man, and Kolya echoes Rakitin and Ivan. Who are some other doubles in the novel? How do doubles help you understand the novel's main ideas?
6. Dostoevsky never lived to write the sequel to *The Brothers Karamazov*. Imagine you were hired for the job – what would you write?
7. The novel seems to have an issue with mothers. The mothers of the Karamazov brothers are dead. The mothers who are alive in the novel – for example Madame Khokhlakov, Lise's mother, and Mrs. Snegiryov, Ilyusha's mother – aren't exactly stellar models of maternity. The novel never really goes into the relationship of mothers and their children, while it spends an awful lot of time haranguing fathers. What's up with that?
8. The critic Robert Belknap has pointed out that there are twelve different accounts of murder in the novel (quoted in Terras 85). Can you name them all? Did you find more than twelve?
9. What if the novel was called *The Sisters Karamazov*? How would the novel be different if it were about three sisters instead?

Discussion Questions from Schmoop.com



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