

# [Anna karenina analysis essay](https://assignbuster.com/anna-karenina-analysis-essay/)

Anna KareninaLeo Tolstoy’s novel, Anna Karenina, upon its release received amix critical reception, with Russian critics either condemningor applauding the novel primarily on its views of Russian society. Thematically, the novel parallels its heroine’s, Anna Karenina, moral and social conflicts with Constantin Levin’s internal struggleto find the meaning of life. There are many others underlying themeswhich links the novel as a whole, yet many critics at the time onlylooked upon its critical view of Russian life. Henry James calledTolstoy’s novels as “ loose and baggy monsters’ of stylessness, butTolstoy stated of Anna Karenina “….. I am very proud of itsarchitecture–its vaults are joined so that one cannot even noticewhere the keystone is.” That is absolutely correct, because withinAnna Karenina, there exists many themes that are all linked togetherto create such a wonderful piece of work. Critics tend to miss therole that the theme of life and death plays in Tolstoy’s AnnaKarenina. Despite its apparent meanings, these two themes areintertwined in the novel and provides a backbone for some of the otherexisting themes. With a masterful touch, Tolstoy is able to use thesetwo themes to show the characters in their true forms at both stages. The characters are shown to be living in a state of delusion, and asthe characters find themselves at times of near death situations or ontheir deathbed, they are able to reveal themselves truthfully. Many of the characters in the novel are able to show their “ realself” and at times of death, there is a point of reversal in thecharacters. This is most evident in the scene of Anna’s near deathexperience during her illness. This event brings about a change inKarenin and even Vronsky as they trade positions. Karenin suddenlybecomes human and not hidden from life by his administrativeregulations. His carapace cracks, and he becomes drunk with sympathy, dazzled by his own generosity. Death for Karenin becomes the basictruth which makes him\_\_\_ a living human being capable of love. Whileon the other hand, Vronsky takes on the role of Karenin, he is unableto deal with Anna’s deathbed crisis and even goes as far as attemptingto suicide. This awareness of life-in-death provides the climax of thenovel, with the main characters perceiving the truth from theheights of their emotional intensity. Hate and deceit no longer existin the presence of death, and the three characters live in amoment of pure innocence. Yet as the crisis ends, and everything returns to normality, Anna, Vronsky and Karenin return to their old ways to live in that world ofdelusion. Anna and Vronsky continues with their ill-fated love, whileKarenin despite his ennoblement, finds Anna cannot love him andreverts back to his old ways. This clearly shows that death bringsabout the ultimate truth of life and the world of the living is just adelusion. Death in the novel is personified by Levin’s brother, theall-too-intimate Nikolai, whose lingering, ghastly death pushes Levinto make the leap of faith. This the leap of faith which the othercharacters had experienced, but were unable to retain after theirdramatic experience with death. Levin is unlike them, and is in fact, able to discover for himself the meaning of life in the world andretain his leap of faith. For Levin in the end, he is no longer afraidof death and even though he does not completely change, he now knowsthe meaning of life and is at peace. Levin’s example here provides for the reader an insight intoTolstoy’s intertwining and complex structure in Anna Karenina. Thereader is able to better understand how the role of death is criticalto the novel. Levin serves as the backbone for Tolstoy’s emphasis onthe “ natural life” where one loves and procreates, as opposed to the“ unnatural life” where one lives by abstract principles. The naturalman, according to Tolstoy, grasps life through all its realities andcan then understan death. Intellect and spirit merely bypass essentialtruths. While in the world of the living, Tolstoy shows the reader thedelusions of life through various characters. Especially apparent isthe princess Betsy Tverskoy who is so caught up in her daily life andis unable to change. She throws extravagant dinner parties for thatpart of society which feasts on delusions. The irony behind it is thatthey, despite their disillusionment, mocks Anna at one of the partieswhere she had shown up with her lover, Vronsky. This is in essence thedownfall of Anna, who has succumbed to passion for her lover. The themes of life and death will come to review itself in thenovel. As for Anna, she embodies the both of them even thought shedidn’t know it. In the end as Anna traces the career which drives herto suicide in her long soliloquy, she discovers that her love hadturned to hate, that her life has become a “ stupid delusion” and deathprovides the only alternative. Anna now accepts death as she she hadspontaneously and naturally confronted her love. Anna’s death is anaffirmation of her deep commitment to life and that death is the finaltruth to her illustrious career. “ And the candle by which she \_ hadbeen reading the book filled with trouble and deceit, sorrow and evil, flared up with a brighter light, illuminating for her everything thatbefore had been enshrouded in darkness, flickered, grew dim, and wentout forever.” (Tolstoy, p. 816)Tolstoy cleverly uses the themes of life and especially deathbeneath the other themes in an intricate structure. Tolstoy uses thethemes as a vehicle to link the themes together to relate it to thereaders. The theme of death is most critical to the novel, because itinvokes the characters in the novel to do what they do. That fear ofdeath and not being able to understand it, is the reason forcharacters’ actions. It is the backbone for the other themes of the“ natural man,” love and deceit, “ unhappy family,” adultery, and someother themes that exists in the novel.

In Anna Karenina, Tolstoy seems to be in search of answers for hisown questions through the two main characters of the novel, Anna andLevin. There are aspects of each character that can be accredited toTolstoy himself, and this provides the reader with a chance to see thedevelopment of not only Anna and Levin, but also Tolstoy himself. Tolstoy is also afraid of death and through his character’sdevelopment he is able to discover for himself. Tolstoy’s Anna Karenina provides a lot of insight into our ownlives. We need to look to the past to protect the future, and yetwe tend to forget that. Nevertheless, Tolstoy has created a wonderfulpiece of literature with a intricate plot structure. As SydneySchultze puts it, “ the study of the novel’s construction is rewardingbecause the book is so beautifully crated.” With regards to the theme, I would be justified to say that it is the keystone, which Tolstoymentioned about, of the architecture of the book. Death is an integral part of everybody’s life and no matter who itis, everybody fears death. To come to terms with death is somethingthat takes a lot of courage and a full understanding of oneself. Tolstoy in his novel, has revealed to us the effect that death canhave on a person and advocates us to not succumb to the daily life ofthe world which we live in, because it is all a delusion. Yet if welive as naturally as possible, we can get a better grasp on the trueessence of life as Levin does in the novel. He finds joy out ofworking and enjoying the fruits of his labor, instead of indulginghimself in the materialism of the hypocritical aristocrats. Modernculture has lost this aspect of life and we need to check ourselvesbefore we lead our lives into a downfall.