**Notes on Ivan Ilyich:**

Introduction

* Leo Tolstoy bio
* Russian literature
* The reality of death and the meaning of life

Chapter 1

* What do we learn about Ivan’s circle of friends in the first scene?
* What are some of the clues that their friendship with Ivan had not been very deep or genuine?
* Pg. 35—Ivan and an expression of “greater significance”—some foreshadowing here
* What do we learn about Ivan’s wife from her conversation with Pyotr?
* In this chapter, two different perspectives or worlds are set up—the one where money, position, and leisure matters and the one where temporality of these things is in focus.

Chapter 2

* Meaning of “sinecure”—position or title with a salary but little or no work
* Meaning of “phoenix of the family”—most likely to succeed and also foreshadows his rebirth
* The motto inscribed on his medallion *respice finem* "look to the end" is both a helpful suggestion for a future lawyer to focus on the outcome, and a warning for a man living an artificial life to prepare himself for death
* Did Ivan have a successful career?
* Was he a good man? (lived a sinful life politely and respectfully—a respectable sinner)
* Why did Ivan get married?
* Selfishness in marriage is bound to bring strife and resentment
* Men, marriage, and work
* Where did Ivan find fulfillment in life?

Chapter 3

* What “injustice” greatly upset Ivan when he was in the middle of his career?
* What other problems add to Ivan’s anger and depression?
* What change for Ivan made him “perfectly happy”? 55
* Paragraph on bottom of 57—those who are not rich yet want to look rich
* Ivan’s “professional” detachment from the people he worked with 59
* Where did true pleasure come from for Ivan?
* The chapter ends—“and everything was fine.” Really? Is that the way you see it?

Chapter 4

* Ivan’s health problems and his irritability
* Finding the doctor’s manner exactly the same as his own professional manner
* We see Ivan in the same difficulty here as many people still find themselves who have a medical condition—conflicting reports, lots of advice, and confusion about who to believe or what to do
* The spiral downwards—a vicious cycle of anxiety, fear, irritability, anger, strife, and loneliness

Chapter 5

* Give me some words or phrases that show Ivan’s emotional state whenever he confronted the possibility of death

Chapter 6

* The difference between a general truth and a personal truth—syllogisms and life
* What is *It?*
* How is the messed-up photo album a metaphor ?—the life he envisioned is falling apart and he is trying desperately to hold it together

Chapter 7

* What is the most significant part of this chapter?
* The terrible lie—that Ivan was only ill, that he wasn’t dying, even though people knew he was
* What was different about Gerasim? Why did his great strength and energy not offend Ivan like other people’s? List 5 differences between Gerasim and most other of Ivan’s acqaintances?
* Was this lie a kindness? What did the lie prevent? It prevented true compassion, which Ivan craved even though he couldn’t actually admit it.
* All men want compassion and pity when they are suffering

Chapter 8

* The two worlds that we had mentioned in the first chapter keep showing up—
  + The doctor’s visit and his supposed remedies
  + the members of the family going to the opera while Ivan is dying is another one (notice the appropriateness of the opera event—opera is deliberately fictional; their lives are little different)

Chapter 9

* Getting pushed into a dark sack: this is imagery of a womb and relates to his rebirth—this continues in chapter 12
* Finally, after a life of basically ignoring God, Ivan is getting around to God’s role in all of this
* The beginning of a rebirth—p. 100-102: Ivan begins to see into the real world

Chapter 10

* Rehearsing the past over and over
* Image of the falling stone, increasing in velocity as it hurtled downward—What does this represent?

Chapter 11

* After months and years of pretense and hypocrisy, Ivan finally begins to treat people without pretense—it’s not pretty but at least it is real—this honesty offers more hope for change than does the pretense that everything is OK
* Key paragraph—bottom of 108: he no longer is able to deny that what he has lived for has not been real; he confesses that it was an illusion; this is confession—to agree and confirm what is really so
* Taking the sacrament—what does this mean?

Chapter 12

* Screaming for three days—Where is this horror coming from? Or what is causing it?
* The sack—symbolizes a womb and his rebirth
* “I can make it the real thing” “What is the real thing?”—Have students take a few minutes and write about what happens in Ivan’s mind and heart in response to this question
* Repentance and rebirth—What really happens in Ivan here at the end? Is this a conversion?

The climactic moment also completes the logic of reversal that has been operating throughout the story. Just as Ivan's life has caused his inner, spiritual death, so too, through his physical death Ivan achieves new spiritual life. The metaphor of the railway car captures the idea. At his moment of illumination, Ivan realizes that he has actually been traveling opposite his intended direction. Moving up in social esteem has not led to joy, fulfillment, and life, but to misery, emptiness, and death. Blinded by the values of high society, he has been traveling in the wrong direction on the road of life. When Ivan realizes his error and comes to a fuller understanding of the nature of life, he is reborn spiritually and experiences extreme joy. Tolstoy's message is clear: compassion for and empathetic connection with other human beings are the hallmarks of a proper life. The death of Ivan Ilych is not the result of his physical degeneration, but of his failure to understand the true nature and meaning of life. In actuality, however, Ivan's death does not represent a cessation of life, but rather its affirmation. *~Sparknotes*

**Theme Paper:**

Compare and contrast the two ways of living that Leo Tolstoy portrays in *The Death of Ivan Ilyich.* (A focus on self-centeredness vs. other-centeredness might be the best focus.) Use extensive references to the text to support your arguments. Refer to the theme paper handout for guidelines and procedure. (1,000 word minimum)

* Day 1: Develop an extensive outline for your paper that includes page numbers from the text
* Day 2: Write rough draft
* Day 3: Do peer reviews, revise and finish paper.