

# 10

## Lesson Ten

### FOCUS: What Makes a Great Book?

Works of fiction illustrate the connections between individuals and questions of humanity. Great stories articulate and explore the mysteries of our daily lives while painting those conflicts in the larger picture of human struggle. Readers forge bonds with the story as the writer's voice, style, and sense of poetry inform the plot, characters, and themes. By creating opportunities for learning, imagining, and reflecting, a great book is a work of art that affects many generations of readers, changing lives, challenging assumptions, and breaking new ground.

#### Discussion Activities

Ask students to make a list of the characteristics of a great book. Write these on the board. What elevates a book to greatness? Then ask them to discuss, within groups, other books they know that include some of these characteristics. Do any of these books remind them of *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*? Is this a great book?

A great writer can be the voice of a generation. What kind of voice does Tolstoy create in *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*? Does this book speak for more than one man and his personal concerns? What does this voice tell us about the choices and responsibilities of life for a middle-class man in 19th century Russia?

Divide students into groups. Have each group determine the single most important theme of the novella. Have a spokesperson from each group explain the group's decision, with references from the text. Write these themes on the board. Do all the groups agree?

#### Writing Exercise

Ask students to write a letter to a friend, perhaps one who does not like to read, explaining why *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* is a good book. The student should make an argument that explains why the novella has meaning for all people, even those who have no interest in other times or other places.

#### Homework

Students will finish their essays and present their essay topics and arguments to the class.