Questions on Leo Tolstoy’s *The Death of Ivan Ilych*

1. Why is Ivan's method of dealing with life's unpleasantness ultimately unsuccessful?
2. What role does pain play (does it become the teacher) in bringing Ivan to consciousness or awareness?
3. According to Tolstoy, why is it important to acknowledge one's own mortality?
4. Are people in Tolstoy’s novella too concerned with appearances of what is right while compromising reality and meaningful relationships?
5. Do you think Tolstoy's satire of the middle class of his day applies more broadly to other classes, or to people in general? Does it apply today?
6. In what ways do characters in the story misplace priorities, except for Gerasim?
7. Does Tolstoy's interest in teaching a moral through the story compromise it as a work of art? Is this novella too moralistic?
8. Does Tolstoy’s statement that “Ivan Ilych’s life had been most simple and most ordinary and therefore most terrible” hold any significance for people in the 21st century? Are we in any way like people of the late 19th century?
9. Does *The Death of Ivan Ilych* have any compelling value or worth as a work of art *besides* its moral message? What else might make it a great work of literature?
10. Do Ivan and Praskovya see each other as “Sugar Daddy” or “Sugar Mamma,” and if so, is this material concern conducive to a great, long lasting relationship?
11. Do you find the ending of *The Death of Ivan Ilych* satisfying? Why or why not? How much do you think the answer to that question depends on whether you share Tolstoy's religious beliefs?
12. Although Ivans’s life is often depressing or painful, it appears that in his last moments compassion brings happiness or peace. Would it have been better if Ivan had learned of compassion sooner?

Self Awareness/Personal Responsibility: How does Ivan deal with unpleasant situations or relationships?

(A) He analyzes them logically and identifies the source of the problem

(B) He pushes them away and isolates himself from the disagreeable influence

(C) He embraces them and tries to talk them out

(D) Ivan's life does not contain unpleasantness