Crime and Punishment
Student Timed Write

1988 Prompt: Choose a distinguished novel or play in which some of the most significant events are mental or psychological; for example, awakenings, discoveries, changes in consciousness. In a well-organized essay, analyze how these internal events are related to the meaning of the work as a whole. Do not merely summarize the plot.

The self-condemning Raskolnikov in Fyodor Dostoevsky's Crime and Punishment is branded by his commitment of murder and struggles to identify himself to others as innocent. He undergoes a gradual transition throughout the novel in which he recognizes that he is not the extraordinary and intellectual genius that he once presumed himself to be, revealing his shame and demolishing his pride. Through Raskolnikov's self-condemnation, Dostoevsky exposes how one often creates punishment for himself that is far worse than that of any law, forcing himself to accept a life of poverty and desperation.

Raskolnikov identifies himself thoroughly as a genius, advocating radical, even violent, social reforms; however, he reveals his genuine character through his lack of ability to perform his crime in a rational manner. Before the murder, Raskolnikov recognizes that most criminals are apprehended because of their "loss of faculties" and further states that his "will and intellect" will not suffer under morally challenging circumstances. His overwhelming pride foreshadows his utter destruction due to his debilitating shame; however, during a conversation with Zametov, he becomes offended when Zametov mentions that the crime was messy. Also, he explains to Zametov how a group of kids who were caught in a counterfeit scandal should have handled it with more practicality and is even pompous enough to explain how the murderer would have hid the articles of jewelry. Raskolnikov's memory of his own crime is completely clouded by the power he feels he has gained from it, but once the adrenaline subsides and the memories of failure flood back in, he seeks isolation and falls ill in his shame. Raskolnikov demonstrates his loss of pride subtly in the beginning because he is unconscious of his actual identity and feels pulled by two forces: his desire to punish himself by creating a barrier between himself and society and his thirst for power over other human beings.

As Raskolnikov comes closer to his confession and is finally convicted of murder, he begins to acknowledge his weakness and finds that, without hope for a better future, he will remain a desperate, isolated man. When both Porfiry and Raskolnikov's mother mention his article from the newspaper, which distinguishes that "extraordinary people are allowed to commit a crime" because of their superiority, Raskolnikov is reminded of his failure and feels ashamed because he now understands that he is no longer "extraordinary." His definition of intelligence is being able to destroy your conscience in times of immorality and perform with logic and composure, so when others, such as Svidrigaylov, say that his intellect is widely known, he struggles to bury the feeling that he is no longer a part of this higher society. When in prison, however, Raskolnikov looks at Sonya and is reborn with a newfound optimism and faith in himself. He officially accepts himself as ordinary, recognizing that if everyone were extraordinary, then life would be in chaos. Raskolnikov overcomes his demolished pride and rids himself of the desire to punish himself for his actions, allowing a new, more hopeful story to begin.
Dostoevsky demonstrates the search for power as one that challenges a person's morality and that succumbing to temptation leaves a person riddled with guilt and shame. Raskolnikov, although not regretful of his general choices, becomes obsessed with demolishing himself and separating himself from those who care about him, isolating himself from any future success or feelings of passion or love. When man becomes riddled with guilt, his conviction is often the end of his emotional suffering; however, Raskolnikov needed the establishment of hope and faith that something not so tangible could give him the peace and love that he both fears and desires.