

## Anton Chekov's "The Bet"

### Guided Reading and Discussion Questions

1. Answer the Banker's question: "Who is the more humane executioner, one who kills you in a few seconds or one who draws the life out of you incessantly, for years?"
2. What is meant by "The State is not God?"
3. Do you think the lawyer is right that the "death sentence and the life sentence are equally immoral?" Why or why not.
4. Why do you think the lawyer takes the bet? What do you think this says about his life?
5. Why does the narrator call the bet "wild" and "senseless"?
6. Why does the narrator call the lawyer an "unhappy man"? Do you think the lawyer is unhappy? Why or why not?
7. Why does the lawyer move from novels of "light character" to the "classics"? Is this a step up or a step down? Explain.
8. What are "classics"? How would they differ from novels of "light character"?
9. In the sixth year the lawyer devours over six hundred volumes of language, philosophy and history. Why do you think he is so motivated?
10. The lawyer writes in his letter, "The geniuses of all ages and of all lands speak different languages, but the same flame burns in them all." What does he mean by this? Is this true?
11. Why, after reading over six-hundred volumes in four years would the lawyer spend one year reading the New Testament?
12. Why does the banker characterize the New Testament as "easy to read, and by no means thick?" Is the New Testament easy to read? Why or why not?
13. Why does the banker call the bet "cursed"?
14. Why does the banker fear being pitied by the lawyer?

15. A paragraph in the second half of the story includes, "The garden was dark and cold. It was raining. A damp, penetrating wind howled in the garden and gave the trees no rest." How does this language and atmosphere relate to what is going on in the story?
16. The lawyer looks terrible, much older than his 40 years. Why?
17. The lawyer writes that he has experienced all kinds of things in books: love, hunting, mountain climbing, storms, miracles, religions, wars, etc. Is reading about something the same as experiencing it? Which is better and why?
18. How much can one live *vicariously* through books? (vicariously means- felt or enjoyed through imagined participation in the experience of another)
19. The lawyer once saw the two millions as "paradise," but now he despises the money. Why?
20. Would it have been better to take the money? Why or why not?
21. Why does the banker have contempt for himself after reading the lawyer's letter?
22. In what ways is the lawyer a different man?
23. In what ways is the banker a different man?
24. Would you take such a bet? For 5 years? For 1 year? Why or why not?
25. Did you like this story? Why or why not?