

Pahom looked at the sun, which had reached the earth: one side of it had already disappeared. With all his remaining strength he rushed on, bending his body forward so that his legs could hardly follow fast enough to keep him from falling. Just as he reached the hillock it suddenly grew dark. He looked up—the sun had already set!

He gave a cry: “All my labor has been in vain,” thought he, and was about to stop, but he heard the Bashkirs still shouting and remembered that though to him, from below, the sun seemed to have set, they on the hillock could still see it. He took a long breath and ran up the hillock. It was still light there. He reached the top and saw the cap. Before it sat the chief, laughing and holding his sides. Again Pahom remembered his dream, and he uttered a cry: his legs gave way beneath him, he fell forward and reached the cap with his hands.

“Ah, that’s a fine fellow!” exclaimed the chief. “He has gained much land!”

Pahom’s servant came running up and tried to raise him, but he saw that blood was flowing from his mouth. Pahom was dead.

The Bashkirs clicked their tongues to show their pity.

His servant picked up the spade and dug a grave long enough for Pahom to lie in, and buried him in it.

Six feet from his head to his toes was all he needed.

Leo Tolstoy

(1828–1910)



Tolstoy is remembered almost as much for his unusual life as for his work.

Born into a rich family, he inherited

his family estate at age nineteen and then tried to improve the lives of the peasants who lived on his land. At age thirty-four, he married an energetic woman who supported his work, copying his masterpiece *War and Peace* nine times by candlelight to send to publishers.

After the publication of *Anna Karenina*, his other masterpiece, Tolstoy suffered a spiritual crisis. He created his own religion, gave up drinking and smoking, and often wore peasants’ clothes and worked in the fields. His strange behavior caused problems in his marriage and resulted in his leaving home. He died in an obscure railroad station in 1910.

Review and Assess

Thinking About the Selection

1. **Respond:** Do you sympathize with Pahom? Why or why not?
2. (a) **Recall:** At the start of this story, what does Pahom believe is the only trouble that peasants face? (b) **Analyze:** What details of his situation at the time lead him to think this way?
3. (a) **Recall:** How does Pahom come to buy his first parcel of land? (b) **Analyze Cause and Effect:** In what ways does Pahom’s attitude toward the peasants begin to change with this first purchase? Why?
4. (a) **Recall:** How does Pahom learn about each new opportunity? (b) **Analyze:** Why is he eager to keep buying more land?
5. (a) **Compare and Contrast:** How do Pahom’s and the Bashkirs’ attitudes toward landownership differ? (b) **Infer:** How does this difference increase the tension of the story?
6. (a) **Summarize:** Briefly summarize what happens on the last day of Pahom’s life. (b) **Evaluate:** Explain whether you think that most people would behave as Pahom does if they were put in his situation.
7. **Make a Judgment:** Do you think that Pahom deserves what he gets? Explain why or why not.