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Johnston Public Library Book Discussion Questions

A Gentleman in Moscow by Amor Towles

Summary

With his breakout debut novel, *Rules of Civility*, Amor Towles established himself as a master of absorbing, sophisticated fiction, bringing late 1930s Manhattan to life with splendid atmosphere and a flawless command of style. Readers and critics were enchanted.

A Gentleman in Moscow immerses us in another elegantly drawn era with the story of Count Alexander Rostov.

When, in 1922, he is deemed an unrepentant aristocrat by a Bolshevik tribunal, the count is sentenced to house arrest in the Metropol, a grand hotel across the street from the Kremlin.

Rostov, an indomitable man of erudition and wit, has never worked a day in his life, and must now live in an attic room while some of the most tumultuous decades in Russian history are unfolding outside the hotel's doors. Unexpectedly, his reduced circumstances provide him a doorway into a much larger world of emotional discovery.

Brimming with humor, a glittering cast of characters, and one beautifully rendered scene after another, this singular novel casts a spell as it relates the count's endeavor to gain a deeper understanding of what it means to be a man of purpose.

Discussion Questions

1. Start with the Count. How would you describe him? Do you find him an appealing, even memorable character?
2. In what way does his gilded cage, his "prison" for decades, transform Count Rostov? How do you see him changing during the course of the novel? What incidents have the most profound effect on him? Consider the incident with the beehive and the honey.
3. The Metropol serves literally and symbolically as a window on the world. What picture does Amor Towles paint of the Soviet Union—the brutality, its Kafka-esque bureaucracy, and the fear it inspires among its citizens? What are the pressures, for instance, faced by

- those who both live in and visit the Metropol? Does Towles's dark portrait overwhelm the story's narrative?
4. Talk about Nina, who even Towles considers the Eloise of the Metropol. Nina helps the Count unlock the hotel (again, literally and symbolically), revealing a much richer place than the it first seemed. What do we, along with the Count, discover?
 5. What might Casablanca be the Count's favorite film? What does it suggest about his situation?
 6. Talk about the other characters, aside from Nina, who play an important part in this novel the handyman, the actress, his friend Mishka, and even Osip Glebnikov. Consider the incident with the honey.
 7. The Count was imprisoned for writing the poem, "where is it now?", which questioned the purpose of the new Soviet Union. Care to make any comparisons now with Russia under Putin, 70-some years later?

Summary from publisher.
Discussion Questions from www.litlovers.com