

# Advanced English: Russian Literature

Spring 2011, A Period Classroom: 211 Instructor: Eric de Lora

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## COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course has two primary goals: (1) for you to become better readers, speakers, and essay writers and (2) for you to become acquainted with Russian literature. We will cover prose works written by Russian writers of 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, reading them in mostly chronological order. The reading list contains many short stories, two short novels, and two longer novels. In addition to focusing on important themes and characters, we will explore the distinctive style and structure of each work and will place texts in their cultural and historical contexts. We will also discuss the literary movements of Romanticism, Realism, and Modernism as well as compare the works we read and make connections between them.

## COURSE OBJECTIVES

- Read carefully a substantial number of texts, including novels, short stories and one play;
- Analyze literary texts through close reading, so that you can identify aspects, such as characterization, plot structure, and symbolism, which interact to produce the artistic effect and meaning of the work;
- Reason inductively about drama; for example, by examining specific instances in the text being analyzed, you will practice recognizing meaningful patterns in language and incident and identifying themes;
- Comprehend and use such elementary critical terms as exposition, rising action, climax, denouement, etc.;
- Relate individual texts to the conventions of genre and, to a lesser degree, to other contexts, such as the literature of a nation, movement or period, and the other works of a particular author or group of authors;
- Engage in focused discussion of literature;
- Write detailed and informed analyses of literary works that demonstrate increasing mastery of the above objectives.

## COURSE TOPICS/TEXTS

Week 1: Overview of Russian Literature. Structures/Analysis.

Week 2: Alexander Pushkin and the *Belkin Tales*. (1831)

Week 3: Nikolai Gogol and the *Petersburg Tales*. (1835)

Week 4: Mikhail Lermontov: *A Hero of our Time*. (1839)

Week 5: Lermontov: *A Hero of our Time*.

Week 6: Fyodor Dostoevsky: *Notes from Underground*. (1864)

Week 7: Dostoevsky: *Notes from Underground*.

### **Paper I Due: March 15.**

Week 8: Leo Tolstoy: *Hadji Murad*. (1896-1904)

Week 9: Tolstoy: *Hadji Murad*.

Week 10: Anton Chekhov and the Short Stories. (1883-1903)

Week 11: Chekhov and The Theatre: *The Three Sisters*. (1900)

### **Paper II Due: May 2.**

Week 12: Isaac Babel: *Red Cavalry Tales*. (1926)

Week 13: Alexander Solzhenitsyn: *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*. (1962)

Week 14: Vladimir Nabokov: *Pnin*. (1957)

Week 15: Nabokov: *Pnin*.

### **Final Exam/Paper III Due: June 6.**

## MATERIALS & ASSIGNMENTS

1. **Classroom discussion (20% of grade)** is a central element in this course. To share your astute insights and ask important questions are of vital importance in the class. Patience and listening skills are also vital to this course. Be sure to give yourself ample time to think about what you are reading and discussing. Reflection and recording of those thoughts are an important part of learning and growth. The reading assignments will be approximately 20 pages a night. Reading homework will be announced in class and is posted on the Russian Lit Calendar (find it under Syllabi—English—Russian Literature on the Maybeck website ([www.maybeckhs.org](http://www.maybeckhs.org))).

2. **Short Writing (20% of the grade):** You will need to keep an online folder specifically used for just this course. I will keep track of all submissions but it is always wise to keep track of everything you send me, just in case I don't actually receive and record it. It will be used for collecting and organizing your thoughts and writings on handouts, chapter responses, note-taking and research. Your writings will often consist of two parts: 1) specific questions and thoughts that occur to you during each assignment and 2) how your research question relates or is reflected in your reading. ***In all cases work should be submitted in an electronic format.*** At some point in the coverage of the texts we study together, I will ask you to write a paragraph or two stating your own personal ideas or reactions to questions I will derive from particular chapters, scenes, themes, plot developments, dramatic devices, or characters. At the end of the semester, the marks earned on these brief assignments will be averaged, and that average will be used as a grade equal to the grades earned on the two major papers. There will be about 2 per week.

3. **Long Writing (i.e. Essays)(40% of the grade):** The essay writing assignment for this course is two short papers (5 to 6 pages) and one long paper (8-10 pages). The guidelines are as follows:

**First Essay (10% of grade):** Analyze, in a Russian novel you have read on your own, how complex characters, including those with conflicting motivations or divided loyalties, develop over the course of a text, interact with other characters, advance the plot and develop the themes. **Due: March 15.**

**Second Essay (10% of grade):** Analyze, in a Russian novel you have read on your own, the impact of the author's choices regarding how to develop and relate elements of the text (e.g., where the story is set, how the action is ordered, how the themes, symbols and/or motifs are introduced and developed). **Due: May 2.**

**Third Essay (20% of grade):** Comparison of the work NOT read in class (the same one as used in the First and Second Paper) to a work we will read together. **Due: June 6.**

4. **Final Exam (20% of grade)** will occur at the end of the course in June. It will be three hours in length and consist of 2-3 essay questions. Begin studying and organizing your notes now.

### **EVALUATION**

Your final grade will come from:

Class Participation/Discussion	20%
Short Writing	20%
Long Writing (Essays)	40%
Final Exam	20%

### **PRACTICES** (*Thanks to Dave Ramin for these thoughts.*)

- I hope you feel welcome in this class and help make others feel welcome too. It should be an intriguing study – we will be encountering some serious issues. I hope you have a positive, rewarding and even exciting time this semester in our class. If not, please let me know. Never hesitate to talk with me before or after class, during office hours or any other time we can arrange. My email is at the top of this syllabus for you to use.
- Always remember: understanding something is not necessarily agreeing with it. With this in mind, our primary rule in class is: *Everyone, everything treated with RESPECT.*