

RUSS 155W: Keys to Russian Literature

Department of European Languages and Literatures, Queens College

Fall 2016
MW 5-6:15pm
QH 350F

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Office hours: by appt.

“[T]he content in college is just a hook to engage students . . . the really important stuff learned in college is how to engage, think, and analyze; to ask questions and answer them; to work alone and with others; to listen and communicate.”¹

About the course

In this course we will read *and discuss* some of the most influential works of literature by eminent Russian writers from the 18th century to (almost) the present day. No prior knowledge of Russian or of literature is required. Our critical analysis of the texts will rely on *observation* (close, attentive reading of our assigned texts) and *discussion* (in which we will share and test our ideas about what the text is doing). The success of this approach depends on commitment and participation from every member of the class.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of the course, you can expect to:

- know quite a bit about Russian culture and history
- be able to talk knowledgeably about Russian literature in its historical and cultural context
- be able to talk knowledgeably about technical aspects of literature (beyond the “story”)
- acquire critical reading skills that you can use on any text (not just literature)
- sharpen your critical writing skills (i.e., your ability to make a compelling argument in writing)
- become a better reader, writer, editor, and peer-reviewer.

Rules of engagement

Since our class is a community, we need to have some basic rules of engagement in place:

- Complete the reading assignment listed for each class before that class begins.
- Come to every class—and bring with you (a) a hard copy of that day’s reading assignment and (b) all loose papers associated with the class (handouts, marked-up essay drafts, graded essays, etc.)
- Eating and drinking is not allowed in smart classrooms, unfortunately. Please respect this rule.
- I strongly prefer and recommend that you do all your reading and note-taking for this class on paper,² UNLESS you have a documented learning difference that makes in-class use of electronic devices indispensable—in which case, please let me know early in the semester.
- Please silence your phone (“vibrate” mode is fine) and store it out of sight while in class.
- Come ready to share your thoughts, and to back up your opinions with evidence from the text! Please don’t take disagreements personally – they are a necessary part of healthy intellectual debate and therefore of learning. I may sometimes play “devil’s advocate” to introduce discord if there is too much consensus.
- Be sensitive to group dynamics: an introverted person may need to force him/herself to speak up, an extroverted person may need to hold back and make space for others to speak.
- All work submitted must be your own, and must be produced exclusively for this course. Plagiarism is easier to detect than you may imagine, and carries gruesome penalties.³ It is also a waste of everyone's

¹ Jeanne Slattery (Professor of Psychology, Clarion University), “What Did You Learn?”
(<https://handinhandclarion.wordpress.com/2014/07/25/what-did-you-learn/>)

² Research suggests that both reading on paper and note-taking by hand improve cognitive processing and retention of what you’ve learned: <http://www.npr.org/2016/04/17/474525392/attention-students-put-your-laptops-away> ;
<http://www.fastcodesign.com/3048297/evidence/everything-science-knows-about-reading-on-screens>

³ From the CUNY Policy On Academic Integrity: “Academic Dishonesty is prohibited in The City University of New York and is punishable by penalties, including failing grades, suspension, and expulsion.” You can read the full policy, including detailed descriptions of what constitutes plagiarism or other forms of academic dishonesty, here:
<http://web.cuny.edu/academics/info-central/policies/academic-integrity.pdf>

time; no one here cares what a random stranger on the Internet thinks about Tolstoy. We don't care what Famous Scholar X thinks either. We want to know what *you* think.

Grading

The single most important thing you can do is keep up with the reading so that you can participate actively in class. The more active you are in class, the better prepared you will be for the essay assignments and exams. To help you stay motivated, 20% of your grade is based on class participation and in-class quizzes on the reading. To meet minimum participation requirements, you should plan on speaking at least once in every class: valid forms of participation include asking questions (to the instructor, or to classmates during the discussion); answering questions; responding to classmates' ideas and arguments; and taking an active role in small-group activities and workshops.

Your final grade will be calculated as follows:

Class participation	10%
In-class quizzes (see "Quizzes," below)	10%
Three critical essays (see "Writing," below)	60%
Cumulative final exam (on Blackboard)	20%

Absence Policy

I do not "excuse" absences. You are expected to be in every class. However, naturally there may be times when either you are not well enough to attend, or you have a major event or opportunity (job interview, invitation to the White House, Grandma's 100th birthday) that conflicts with the class schedule in a way you cannot control. It is up to you to make these decisions, and to get notes from a classmate if you are unable to be present. Your participation grade will be based on the quality and frequency of your contributions when you are present. If you need to be absent on a day when an assignment is due, contact me *before* class and submit the assignment by email.

Readings

All readings will be made available in PDF form on Blackboard. You may print them out yourself, or order a printed coursepack at the beginning of the semester (price TBA).

Blackboard

Access to Blackboard is indispensable for this course. If you don't have a functional BB account, please take care of it ASAP! Homework assignments and important guidelines, as well as all the readings for the course, will be posted on Blackboard. Please check the BB announcement page (and/or your email account registered with BB) for communications from me regularly.

Writing

This course is writing intensive; expect to spend a lot of time working on your writing. In addition to taking notes in class (which is strongly advised!), you will write three essays, each of about 1000-1250 words (4-5 double-spaced pages in 12-point Times New Roman font), on topics assigned by the instructor. Due dates are given in the schedule below; note that you are expected to turn in a prospectus for each essay, which you will receive feedback on before the full essay is due. The prospectus is mandatory; in order to receive a grade for your essay you must submit both the prospectus and the final essay. A series of in-class writing clinics, designed to support your work on the essays, will be offered in the first half of the semester.

Each of your essays should make an *argument* in which you support a *complex claim* using *evidence from the text*. You are not required to use any outside sources to write these essays, but if you do consult a secondary source (e.g. for historical information) **be sure to cite it**, preferably in Chicago format: <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/717/1/>). The language in which you write need not be excessively formal—in fact, the closer you can stick to your "natural," everyday voice, the better—but it should be carefully proofread to make sure that it says what you want it to say; that your sentences are clear and grammatically sound; that the logic of your transitions from sentence to sentence and from paragraph to

paragraph is made clear to the reader (who should never have to read your mind); and that it conforms to the basic expectations of standard written English.

You should print out each essay, staple the pages together, and bring it to class on the due date. If you need to request an extension, please contact me by email **before** the essay deadline, **and do not skip class on the due date**.

Honor Code

By enrolling in this class, you signal that you will be bound by the following honor code, which you will write out and sign on the first day of class:

“As a member of an intellectual community built on honesty and rigor, I understand that all my work in this course must be my own. I pledge that I will not copy the words or ideas of others without appropriate citation, and I will not give or receive illegitimate help on assignments or examinations.”

Additional resources

- All students should be aware of the Writing Center in 209 Kiely Hall, which offers feedback and support to student writers:
<http://www.qc.cuny.edu/Academics/SupportPrograms/SupportCenter/Pages/WritingCenter.aspx>
- Students with disabilities that may require accommodation or additional support should register with the Office of Special Services in 111 Frese Hall:
<http://www.qc.cuny.edu/StudentLife/services/specialserv/Pages/default.aspx>
- Please make special note of the CUNY Policy On Academic Integrity:
<http://web.cuny.edu/academics/info-central/policies/academic-integrity.pdf>
- The Blackboard site for this class will collate additional resources, including copies of essay assignments, readings not contained in the required anthology, and this syllabus.

Schedule of class discussions and assignments

All readings will be provided on Blackboard.

<u>Aug.</u>	M 29	Introduction: Russian history and culture to 1900
	W 31	Karamzin, “Poor Liza” (pp. 104-117)
<u>Sept.</u>	M 5	<i>Labor Day – college closed</i>
	W 7	Pushkin, <i>Bronze Horseman</i>
	M 12	Pushkin, “The Queen of Spades”
	W 14	Pushkin, cont./writing clinic [literary evidence]
	M 19	Lermontov, “Bela” (from <i>A Hero of Our Time</i>)
	W 21	Lermontov, cont./writing clinic [intro paragraphs]; topics for essay 1 distributed (Karamzin, Pushkin, Lermontov)
	M 26	Gogol, “The Nose” due in class: essay prospectus consisting of your <u>intro paragraph</u> for Essay 1 plus <u>two relevant quotations</u> , each introduced and explained according to the models in the “Literary Evidence” tutorial (http://www.groundsforargument.org/drupal/node/601)
	W 28	Gogol/writing clinic [body paragraphs] essay prospectuses turned back
<u>Oct.</u>	M 3	<i>Rosh Hashanah – college closed</i>
	W 5	Turgenev, “Bezhin Meadow” due in class: essay 1, final version
	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">Th 6</div>	Tolstoy, “The Devil,” Ch. I-IV (pp. 85-94)/writing clinic [transitions]

<u>Oct.</u>	M 10 W 12	} No class (Columbus Day + Yom Kippur)
	M 17	Tolstoy, "The Devil," Ch. V-XX plus alternative ending (pp. 94-123) essay 1 turned back
	W 19	Dostoevsky, <i>Crime and Punishment</i> , Part One, Ch I-II (pp. 3-27)
	M 24	Dostoevsky, <i>Crime and Punishment</i> , Part One, Ch V-VII (pp. 52-86); topics for essay 2 distributed (Gogol, Turgenev, Tolstoy, Dostoevsky)
	W 26	Chekhov, "Lady with a Lapdog"
	M 31	Chekhov, "Heartache"; Bunin, "Light Breathing" due in class: essay prospectus (intro paragraph for Essay 2 plus <u>three relevant quotations</u> with appropriate introduction/explanation per "Literary Evidence" tutorial)
<u>Nov.</u>	W 2	Silver Age poetry (Symbolism, Acmeism, Futurism) essay prospectuses turned back
	M 7	Lecture: Russia in the Twentieth Century (Revolution, Civil War, and Soviet culture) due in class: essay 2, final version
	W 9	Blok, <i>Twelve</i>
	M 14	Babel, three stories from <i>Red Cavalry</i> essay 2 turned back
	W 16	Zoshchenko, "The Lady Aristocrat"; Kharmis, selections from "Incidences"
	M 21	Nabokov, "Spring in Fialta" topics for essay 3 distributed (Chekhov, Bunin, Blok, Babel, Zoshchenko, Kharmis, Nabokov)
	W 23	Akhmatova, <i>Requiem</i>
	M 28	Solzhenitsyn, excerpt from <i>The Gulag Archipelago</i> due in class: essay prospectus (intro paragraph for Essay 3 plus <u>four relevant quotations</u> with appropriate introduction/explanation per "Literary Evidence" tutorial)
	W 30	Shalamov, short stories from <i>Kolyma Tales</i> ("Through the Snow," "Dry Rations," "The Injector," "A Child's Drawings") essay prospectuses turned back
<u>Dec.</u>	M 5 W 7	Iskander, "Uncle Sandro" from <i>Sandro of Chegem</i> Aitmatov, "Piebald Dog Running Along the Shore" due in class: essay 3, final version
	M 12	Pelevin, "Nika" essay 3 turned back