

## CONTEXTUALIZING: BRIDGING STUDENTS AND TEXTS

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**Abstract:** With the influx of international students, post-secondary institutions are becoming focal points of global intellectual synthesis. However, multiple cultural perspectives pose new challenges for instructors when non-native English speakers are mainstreamed. A major concern is contextualizing course material for students lacking the background to access the required academic texts. Incorporating more context into the content-specific curriculum raises the following questions: How to ensure that all students are on a somewhat level playing field? How much information is needed in the scaffolding process? How to avoid alienating students who already have the ability to access the text?

Through three case studies, we explore these questions and demonstrate the need for contextualizing in the college writing classroom. Our discussion highlights practical ways (syllabi, lesson plans, worksheets) to provide foreign-background students with the information necessary to access the course texts, while also engaging their culturally-attuned peers.

The first case study is an entry-level ESL college composition class which covers readings across academic disciplines. We discuss how to reconcile the established rhetorical conventions with the diverse modes of critical reading and exposition in other cultures, while addressing the pressing language needs.

The second one is a 100-level literature-based writing course, Modern and Contemporary American Poetry. Its purpose is to develop appreciation of varied poetic traditions in America while practicing inquiry and communication skills. American students have a distinct advantage: knowledge about their own culture from history classes, media, and daily life. The international students not only struggle with language but may lack comparable cultural information and sensitivity as certain background knowledge cannot be assumed.

The third case study is a 150-level course on Russian Literary Masterpieces, a research writing seminar for a similar population, which may also include students with Russian background. Along with teaching the rhetoric of American academic writing, the cross-cultural challenges here are articulating "rich" context to American students, managing perceived cultural advantages of Russian speakers, and accounting for the perspectives of other internationals.

We conclude by emphasizing that contextualization practices not only address the needs of students but also aid in training of instructors bound for diverse language and content-based classrooms.

### **I. The Problem of Cultural Context**

The following excerpt from a warm-up exercise (courtesy of Prof. S. Molinsky, School of Education, Boston University) illustrates ways in which we depend on background knowledge for constructing even a simple narrative through multiple-choice questions. Unprepared, nonnative English speakers would be quite at a loss for "the best answer" --from being unable to place the small town in North Carolina to being stumped by the choice among arguments, shotgun, and prayer.

#### **Hickory Nut George**

(Imagine a young man in his mid-thirties in short sleeves standing on top of a mountain.)

*Select the best answer for each of the following questions.*

1. Dr. Bond practices in the\_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. foothills of Tennessee
  - b. mountains of North Carolina
  - c. plains of Virginia
  
2. George Bond studied medicine because\_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. he was interested in science
  - b. he saw the people's need for medical help
  - c. he was admitted to McGill Medical School
  
3. At first his practice in Bat Cave was hampered by\_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. the fear and distrust of the people
  - b. the great area he had to cover
  - c. his inexperience
  
4. An old woman used\_\_\_\_\_to try to prevent Dr. Bond from giving her daughter an anti-tetanus injection.
  - a. arguments
  - b. prayer
  - c. a shotgun

### **II. The Writing Program at Boston University**

The writing program at Boston University is university-wide, and its courses fulfill a graduation requirement. The purpose of this program -- from which our three case studies are drawn -- is to help students read challenging texts with comprehension and critical discernment and to write about them cogently and with a lively sense of style. Writing

seminars differ with regard to content -- spanning multiple topics and themes across the humanities, the natural sciences, and the social sciences -- but are bound at each level by a common sequence of assignments. Other skills that are emphasized include stylistic versatility, grammatical correctness, speaking ability, and the process of revision.

In terms of structure, the program offers two courses for entry-level ESL students (WR097 and WR098); a WR098 sister course for students -- frequently of generation 1.5-- needing supplemental assistance in grammar and composition (WR099); seminars focusing on primary texts (WR100); and seminars focusing on library and Internet research (WR150). WR100 is mandatory for all BU students while WR150 satisfies the second writing requirement in schools and colleges that have a two-semester writing requirement. Non-native speakers who successfully complete WR098 (along with WR099 students) are mainstreamed into WR100, and then WR150.

### **III. Curricular Goals for WR098, WR100, and WR150**

#### WR098: College Reading and Writing in English (ESL)

Prereq: placement test results. Emphasis on analytical and persuasive writing. Intensive study of prose mechanics and essay structure. Grammar and punctuation: patterns for composing sentences and paragraphs; proper citation of sources in support of a thesis. Extensive reading, including one long reading and works that exemplify a variety of styles. Individual conferences. 4 credits, either semester.

#### WR100: Writing Seminar

Prereq: placement test results. Imaginative engagement through reading and writing with a theme or topic in literature, thought, and society. Emphasis on assimilation of challenging readings into essays that are clear, accurate, persuasive, and engaging. Practice in classroom discussion of ideas and refinement of speaking skills. Special attention to comparison and synthesis. Individual conferences. 4 credits, either semester. See the catalogue for specific course descriptions.

#### WR150: Writing and Research Seminar

Prereq: WR 100 or placement test results. Imaginative engagement through reading and writing with a theme or topic in literature, thought, and society. Emphasis on research techniques, including the location, evaluation, and synthesis of secondary sources. Special attention to the role of evidence in persuasive writing. Assignments include oral presentations and two research papers. 4 credits, either semester. See the catalogue for specific course descriptions.

### **IV. Needs of L1 and L2 Students in a Writing Classroom**

Each level of writing seminar presents unique challenges for incorporating contextual and cultural information so as to create a level playing field for all learners. Moreover, when students move from an ESL class (WR098) to the mixed classrooms of WR100 and WR150, instructors face an additional task of juggling the needs of different types of students. Below we lay out a way to conceptualize the kinds of needs that arise when

context and culture are fore-grounded in a writing classroom.

The basic system of common needs may be summarized as follows:

### **Linguistic Needs**

1. Lexicon
2. Syntax
3. Grammar

### **Rhetorical Needs**

1. Argumentation structure
2. Essay structure
3. Genres of academic writing

### **Academic Skills**

1. Reading comprehension
2. Annotating
3. Generating discussion
4. Avoiding plagiarism

## **V. Level-Specific Needs of L1 and L2 Learners: the Three Case Studies**

Because of different populations and curricular goals, each level of writing seminar exhibits a slightly different mix of student needs and thus calls for different strategies on the part of the instructor.

### ***Case Study 1***

#### **WR098: College Reading and Writing in English (ESL)**

This ESL class focuses on composition skills in the context of readings across academic disciplines.

The challenges L2 students encounter in WR098 are twofold. They not only have to internalize a logic of argument that is inherent in Western intellectual culture but must also adopt the rhetorical patterns of

academic writing. In addition to these daunting tasks, the international students need to fill the culture gaps when dealing with the course content.

L2 students' needs may be categorized as follows:

**Linguistic needs**

- lexicon (a limited vocabulary range, unidiomatic usage, and struggle with register conventions, connotations, and stylistic nuances)
- syntax (simplistic constructions, word order issues, repetitions and redundancies, punctuation problems)
- grammar (agreement errors, tense problems, pronoun reference errors, article mistakes)

**Rhetorical needs**

- argumentation (learning the structure of argument within the American intellectual tradition, e.g., coming to terms with the linear nature of presenting a claim and substantiating purpose)
- essay structure (learning the introduction/body/conclusion pattern so as to avoid confusing the American audience)
- genres of academic writing (learning standards for major types of critical writing assignments that constitute the core of academic discourse: summary, thesis-driven analysis, and synthesis -- the templates for which are also largely culture-specific).

**Academic skills needs**

- reading comprehension (handling dense academic texts that feed on context, managing lack of exposure to American historical heritage, managing ambivalent sensitivity by virtue of one's own culture)
- annotating (working on lexical means to articulate reflections on the texts while also learning context)
- generating discussion (overcoming native cultural expectations not to express one's views in favor of deferring to teacher authority, learning to act as peers to their classmates, dealing with the psychological difficulties of speaking publicly in a foreign tongue)
- avoiding plagiarism (learning the relevant core values of Western society -- such as respect for individual ownership of ideas vs. perception of knowledge as common property; learning conventions for identifying sources, giving due credit, and citing appropriately)

***Case Study 2***

**WR100: Writing Seminar -- Modern and Contemporary American Poetry**

The focus of this theme-based seminar is upon key works in modern and contemporary American poetry. The seminar introduces students to a critical vocabulary for discussing poetry, offers assignments in rhetorical analysis and synthesis of expository and literary texts, and involves a review of prose mechanics and punctuation. There is an extensive reading list, including critical texts.

Similar categorization obtains for the needs of L2 learners, as shown below, but the instructor must also pay attention to the mixed nature of the classroom and address contextual scaffolding in a way that neither disadvantages the L2 student nor alienates the already quite knowledgeable L1 population.

**Lexicon Needs:**

When ESL students are mainstreamed into classes for native speakers, especially the WR100, they still may wrestle with vocabulary range and idiomatic usage as well as with stylistic nuances. These issues can be highlighted when discussing Modern American Poetry, which, in some cases, relies heavily on the understanding of idiomatic language as well as specific American cultural references not as readily available to the ESL students as to the American student.

**Syntactical Needs:**

Both the L2 and L1 student deal with stylistic issues, but in different areas. The question is how to satisfy syntactical needs of each type of student without overwhelming the ESL student and understimulating the native English speaker.

**Rhetorical Needs:**

*Argumentation, Essay structure, Genres of academic writing*

The problem is how to address the rhetorical needs of both the L1 and L2. The L2 learner may not be fully acquainted with the conventions of American argument and therefore may need basic review, whereas the L1 learner may be familiar with the overall structure but lack key skills in summary, thesis-driven analysis, and synthesis. The challenge for the instructor is to find a way to address all these various needs without overemphasizing one skill and alienating either the L1 or L2 learner.

**Academic Skills:**

*Reading Comprehension, Annotating*

The ESL student surrounded by L1 learners in an American poetry class has to deal not only with dense poetic texts that are difficult enough for the L1 learner, but also with cultural language references and unknown vocabulary. This will put the ESL student behind in reading comprehension as well as annotating skills.

**Generating Discussion:**

The L2 learner may not feel comfortable with generating a class discussion in a room full of L1 learners. L2 learners may have difficulty not only voicing their opinions, but doing so on texts with unknown language and cultural references. The L2 learner is also in an environment with the L1 learners who, if nothing else, can rely on their native language skills to discuss a difficult text.

*Case Study 3*

## **WR150: Writing and Research Seminar -- Russian Literary Masterpieces**

This writing seminar endeavors to reinforce the skill of close reading while also introducing students to library and Internet research. The course themes and readings are grounded in early twentieth century Russian prose and are thus a dense and complicated matter. Students in this seminar tend to fall into three groups: L1 learners, L2 students of Russian background, and L2 students without much exposure to Russian culture who are coming out of the WR098/WR100 sequence.

The research element in WR150 permits deep study of context yet simultaneously presents to the instructor its own cross-cultural challenges: articulating "rich" context to American students, managing perceived cultural advantages of L2 students with relevant cultural backgrounds, and accounting for the perspectives of other internationals -- sensitive to context as such but having special difficulty studying another (non-American) culture while also learning the rhetoric of American academic writing.

Once again, we rely on the scaffolding of Linguistic / Rhetorical / Academic Skills needs to organize the variety of learning tasks and trajectories in this mixed classroom.

### **Linguistic Needs:**

- American students -- becoming sensitive to the challenges of translation at the lexical and syntactic level, both in general and as regards the specific cultures and languages involved
- L2 students with relevant cultural background -- expanding vocabulary range, mastering syntax and grammar in English; learning to serve as "cultural informants", to articulate language-related observations with clarity and tact
- L2 students without relevant cultural background -- same as for American students, plus expanding vocabulary range, mastering syntax and grammar in English

### **Rhetorical Needs:**

- American students -- becoming sensitive to other cultures' intellectual traditions and modes of academic discourse
- L2 students with relevant cultural background -- the above plus reinforcing skills learned in WR098-100 in argumentation, essay structure, genres of academic writing; learning to approach one's own culture from a distance
- L2 students without relevant cultural background -- same as for American students, plus reinforcing skills learned in WR098-100 in argumentation, essay structure, genres of academic writing

### **Academic Skills:**

- American students -- acquiring more rigorous skills in reading comprehension and annotation; learning to read for "rich" context; learning to generate interpretations that take cultural context into account; learning to account for -- and yet question -- perspectives from "cultural informants"
- L2 students with relevant cultural background -- reinforcing academic skills learned in WR098-100; when serving as "cultural informants", to go beyond informal,

impressionistic observations and to question the sources and validity of their interpretations

•L2 students without relevant cultural background -- same as for American students, plus reinforcing academic skills learned in WR098-100

### **V. Proposed Practices**

To meet the needs identified above, we propose the following practices, illustrated in section VII with lesson plans and worksheets:

1Providing background

2Building rhetorical awareness

3Cultivating academic discourse

### **VI. Syllabi Excerpts for the Three Case Studies: WR098 (College Reading and Writing, ESL), WR100 (Modern and Contemporary American Poetry), and WR150 (Russian Literary Masterpieces)**

#### **WR 098: CAS, College Reading and Writing in English Course Syllabus Fall 2008**

WR098 Fl: T/Th 9:30-11, STH 440

Instructor: Maria N. Zlateva

Office: English Dept., 236 Bay State Rd., 110

Phone: (617) 353-2511; e-mail: [mariazl@bu.edu](mailto:mariazl@bu.edu)

#### Course Description

WR 098 is a reading-based course, with emphasis on critical textual analysis, vocabulary development, note-taking, and speaking skills. It is designed to prepare students for the challenges of WR100 (Writing Seminar). The course tasks will respond to the linguistic needs of the students by reviewing specific elements of English grammar and style. Writing assignments progress from summary to analysis, from abstracts to longer analytical overviews, so that students may achieve written and oral fluency. By the end of the semester, students finish reading a full-length text as well as a series of short essays and are able to write a thesis-driven argument of 4-5 pages.

#### Required Texts (available at BU Bookstore)

- *The Mercury Reader*. Pearson Custom Publ., 2008 (with free Thesaurus)
- Wolff, Tobias. *This Boy's Life: A Memoir*. New York: Grove Press, 1989
- Kirsznner&Mandell, eds. *The Concise Wadsworth Handbook*. Thomson, 2008
- English-English dictionary (your choice)

#### Course Requirements

- Annotated readings, with short summaries or journals assigned
- Informal and formal presentations on assigned readings
- Short papers and four formal papers with multiple drafts

- Frequent in-class writing
- Unit quizzes (on vocabulary, grammar, and/or reading comprehension)
- 2 individual conferences (with instructor and an ESL tutor) to discuss your writing
- Consistent attendance and participation in class discussions

Below is a description of the focus of each of the four units of the course and the corresponding major writing assignments:

**Unit 1: *Language and Literacy*** - summaries of different length and for different purposes. Included is a review of the academic conventions for incorporating sources.  
 Readings: *Mercury Reader* — Roberts, Frye, Zinsser, Gallant  
 Writing assignment: Paper 1 — Analytical summary (2 1/2 -3 pages) of one of the designated readings.

**Unit 2: *Culture, Nature, Nurture*** — explication, formulation of a thesis, argumentation, citation.  
 Readings: *Mercury Reader* — Orwell, Morris, Heilbroner, Pinker  
 Writing assignment: Paper 2 - An argumentative essay (3-4 pages) that uses explication of significant passages to support a thesis.

**Unit 3: *Society, Change, Observation, and Inquiry*** - supporting paragraphs with solid arguments and textual evidence.

Readings: *Mercury Reader*— Gould, Blum, Anthony, Gladwell  
 Writing assignment: Paper 3—Comparative analysis (4-5 pages) of a pair of readings.

**Unit 4: *Reflecting, Revisiting*** — review of the writing skills developed throughout the semester.

Readings: *Mercury Reader*— Twain, Eiseley, *This Boy's Life*  
 Writing assignment: Paper 4 - Analysis of the treatment of a theme in two readings(4-5p.)

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**WR100: Modern and Contemporary American Poetry .College of Arts  
and Sciences, Boston University,  
Spring' 2008**

**Instructor:** *Kimberly Shuckra*  
**Section M2 TU/TH 2:00-3:30**  
**Email:** *kmsbarth@bu.edu*

**Course Description**

This seminar focuses upon key works in modern and contemporary American poetry. We will study major figures, artistic movements, and genres (both traditional and experimental) between World War I and the end of the twentieth century. Our purpose will be to combine a deepening appreciation of varied poetic traditions in America with energetic, critical readings of the works. The seminar will introduce you to a critical vocabulary for discussing poetry. We will investigate the ways in which American poetry seeks to retain its vital force and will study the critical prose of creative writers. To obtain the goals of the course we will take part in editing, individual conferences, rhetorical analysis, and synthesis of expository and literary texts. The course also includes a review of prose mechanics, punctuation, essay structure, and quoting and citing sources in academic writing. We will work hard, have fun, and you will leave the course a skilled and confident writer.

**Course Objectives:**

- practice responding to various forms of writing
- understand how audience, purpose, genre, and context shape the meaning and effectiveness of all writing
- use writing and reading for inquiry, learning, thinking, and communicating
- discover your own habits of writing and develop stronger writing skills
- engage in discussions that offer multiple perspectives
- locate, summarize, cite, critique, and synthesize sources
- review prose mechanics and punctuation

**Texts:** *The following books are available at the Barnes and Noble in Kenmore Square.*

**Required:** *The Columbia Anthology of American Poetry*, ed. Jay Parini, Columbia University Press

*Ultra Marine* by Raymond Carver, Vintage Books

*Dien CAI Dau* by Yusef Komunyakaa, Wesleyan University Press

*The Concise Wadsworth Handbook* by Kirsznner and Mandell

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**Russian Literary Masterpieces**  
**CAS WR150, Boston University, Spring 2008**

D1, MWF 11-12, MCS B33

E1, MWF 12-1, SOC B63

358-1512

courseinfo.bu.edu → click on “My Courses”

**Maria Gapotchenko**

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## Course Description

### Topics

The political turmoil following the Russian revolution of 1917 has inspired works that are artistically complex, rich in philosophical and religious reflection, and deeply and sometimes tragically involved with the historical background against which they were created. What was the role of literature in the Soviet Union? How did writers respond to the assault on human life and dignity perpetrated by the state or by fellow man? To begin answering these questions, the seminar will focus on several Russian classics of the first half of the twentieth century: Eugene Zamyatin’s dystopia *We*, and two of Mikhail Bulgakov’s genre-defying and provocative novels, *Heart of a Dog* and *The Master and Margarita*. We will also read an important nineteenth century precursor, Dostoevsky’s *Notes from Underground*, as a lens through which to view the later authors’ themes and emphases.

### Objectives

This seminar has several interrelated purposes. You will

- 1)hone your close reading, argumentation, and editing skills, as introduced in WR100;
- 2)perform sophisticated and efficient library research;
- 3)analyze and evaluate background and secondary sources and integrate their

- arguments into your thinking and writing process;
- 4) practice public speaking as a mode of scholarly exchange of ideas.

Assignments

The course will entail continuous practice in the writing of clear and correct English in a sequence of research-based essays which steadily increase in both length and difficulty. You will begin with summary, proceed to a motif paper, and then incorporate a theoretical perspective into the revision process. Your first research paper proper will integrate subtexts and literary criticism to arrive at an interpretation of a text. Your final paper will do the same – and also incorporate contextual information which you will research on your own and in groups. At the end of the course, you will make a formal oral presentation to the class, building on the speaking skills practiced throughout the semester.

Texts (available at the BU Bookstore/Barnes & Noble; please do not purchase other editions or translations)

- Eugene Zamyatin, *We* (translator Clarence Brown, Penguin Classics)
- Mikhail Bulgakov, *Heart of a Dog* (translator Mirra Ginsburg, Grove Press)
- Mikhail Bulgakov, *The Master and Margarita* (translators Diana Burgin and Katherine O'Connor, Vintage Classics)
- Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Notes from Underground* (translator Mira Ginsburg, Signet)
- The Concise Wadsworth Handbook* & a college dictionary

\* Other readings will be made available as handouts, uploaded on the course website, or placed on reserve at the Mugar library. Make sure to have copies of these readings with you on the days they are assigned.

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**VII. Proposed Activities, Lesson Plans, and Worksheets**

Instructional materials presented below (as appendices) demonstrate ways of meeting linguistic, rhetorical, and academic skills needs of L1 and L2 students in several types of classroom. These lesson plans and worksheets have been designed to foreground context and cultural knowledge, access to which may in large part determine the student's success in the writing classroom.

**WR098 (1)**

Lesson Plan

Aim: To help ESL students contextualize the background information on American and European cultures to access the text “*The Discovery of What It Means to Be an American*” by James Baldwin.

- The teacher puts the specific American and European references on the board and tests the students on their knowledge.
- For homework, the instructor would have assigned research on specific textual references.
- The findings will be presented in groups or individually. The students will be required to take notes on each presentation. The presenters must also come up with discussion questions, to create a dialogue about the cultural references and help students retain the information provided.
- For follow-up homework, everybody has to write a brief summary on one of the cultural references from each category (American and European).

### **American References (New World)**

Henry James

Civil Rights Movement in NYC in the 1960's

Texas G.I.

Bessie Smith (American Black Jazz Singer)

“pickaninny”, “watermelon”: racist images of the 1960s in America

the idea of the American Writer

the classless system of America in the 1960s

distrust of intellectualism

odd jobs

regular fellow

to make it

American social paranoia

pockets of NY

Little Rock

the American Identity

smashing taboos

### **Non-American (European, etc.) references/realia – Old World**

the mountains of Switzerland

social classes

the artist in Europe

intellectual activity, letters

vocation

The Right Bank/The Left Bank

bourgeoisie

les misérables

Pigalle (pimps and prostitutes)

Neuilly

Algerian taxi-driver

Albert Camus

café terrace

Anna Karenina  
Tolstoy

## WR098 (2)

Presentation outline: For each assigned anthology reading, teams of students (typically 2) are in charge of leading a class discussion. They are required to prepare a handout dissecting the text along linguistic and analytical categories.

### Section I: Analysis of theme

Three eloquent passages. Each passage should represent a different theme that you have identified within the text.

### Section II: Analysis of rhetorical technique

Three short passages which illustrate unique rhetorical points. Choose from:

- repetition
- parallelism
- metaphor
- simile
- symbolism
- definition
- tense shifts
- tone shifts
- alliteration
- rhyme
- irony
- satire
- varying sentence structure and/or length
- dialect or non-standard usage

### Section III: Vocabulary

Note three new vocabulary items. Write out the entire sentence from the text and underline the unfamiliar word/expression.

### Section IV: Discussion questions

Formulate three insightful discussion questions, at least one of which connects to other readings from our textbook.

**Note:** \*\* Each passage should be referenced with page and paragraph number --- (e.g.,

237:4)

Please make enough copies of the presentation outline for the entire class. Discussion leaders should involve ALL students in the discussion. This forum is meant to foster a lively intellectual exchange of ideas.

## **WR100 (1)**

### Lesson Plan

**Aim:** To help ESL students and native speakers of English conceptualize the background information on the American Poem, “Serpent Knowledge”, by Robert Pinsky.

**Warm Up:** The teacher puts the specific American and European references on the board and tests the students on their knowledge. The American students will share their knowledge briefly, providing an overview of what will be covered. The instructor may put key points on the board to provide students with a visual reference.

**Presentations:** For homework the instructor would have assigned presentations on specific American and European textual references. Presentations can be done in groups or individually. Each group should have a handout outlining the major points of the presentations. In order to engage the entire class, the students will be required to take notes on each presentation. After the presentations, the presenters must come up with discussion questions, to create a dialog about the cultural references and help students retain the information provided.

**Group Work/Quiz:** After the presentations, the students are divided into groups of two or three depending on the class size. Each group must come up with quiz questions about the information they just received. Students will receive a worksheet that guides them on the quiz format. Because the students have taken notes, this should take no longer than five-eight minutes. Once they create the quiz, the groups exchange and answer a different quiz. They only will have five minutes, and can use their notes. After the time limit they give the quizzes back and correct the quizzes. The class discusses the questions and answers.

**Library:** One handout from each presentation may be collected and kept in a file, so students can go back and look through them as they study the text. They can also be recycled for future classes.

**WR100 (2)**

**Quiz Work Sheet**

**Please create five quiz questions on the presentations using the format below. Use your notes as a point of reference.**

**1. Create a true or false question.**

*Question:* \_\_\_\_\_

Circle the correct answer: True    False

**2. Create a multiple-choice question with three possible answers.**

*Question:* \_\_\_\_\_

A. \_\_\_\_\_

B. \_\_\_\_\_

C. \_\_\_\_\_

**3. Create a fill in the blank question.**

\_\_\_\_\_  
—

**4. Create a comprehension question using: Who..? What.? When....? Where.....? Why....? Or How..?**

*Question:* \_\_\_\_\_

*Answer:* \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**5. Create your own question.**

*Question:* \_\_\_\_\_

*Answer* \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

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WR150 (1)

### Russian Names

A full Russian name consists of three parts – a person's first name, patronymic, and last name:

Anton          **Pavlovich**          Chekhov

The patronymic is always derived from one's father's first name, but its precise form varies based on one's gender.

So, for example, Anton Chekhov's father was named Pavel, so Chekhov's patronymic is Pavlovich, and his full name is Anton Pavlovich Chekhov. His sister Maria shares the patronymic, only it changes form because she is a woman:

Maria          **Pavlovna**          Chekhov

**So, what's *your* full Russian name? ☺**

Your first name: \_\_\_\_\_

Your father's first name: \_\_\_\_\_

Your gender: \_\_\_\_\_

Your patronymic: \_\_\_\_\_ (add **-ovich** to your father's first name if you are a man; add **-ovna** if you are a woman)

Your last name: \_\_\_\_\_

Your full Russian name:

\_\_\_\_\_

## WR150 (2)

### Lesson Plan: Aural Immersion into Russian Culture

**Aims:** To aid American and L2 students in understanding the cultural subtext behind musical references in Mikhail Bulgakov's *Heart of a Dog*; to provide students with Russian background with an opportunity to serve as "cultural informants"; to open up for debate the notion of culture as monolithic vs. fluid and heterogeneous, especially during periods of upheaval.

**Preparation:** Students are asked to visit the course website to hear clips from three distinct categories of music referred to in *Heart of a Dog*: Russian folk music performed on the balalaika (images provided), 1920s Soviet songs performed by a chorus of ordinary citizens, and arias from classical Western operas, specifically Verdi's *Aida*, as performed in the Moscow Bolshoi Theater.

**Warm-Up:** Students share impressions of each type of music they heard. Attempts are made at this stage to relate the music each character in the novel prefers to some overall interpretation of that character's position in and attitude toward the early Soviet culture and the Bolshevik revolution. (Students already informed about Russian culture often speculate boldly at this stage about a firm correspondence between the character's attitude toward Soviet society and the type of music he or she prefers.)

**Lecture:** Instructor provides background information on each type of music, i.e. its role in Russian culture prior to, during, and after the Revolution. This material complicates the rigid picture drawn by "cultural informants" in that it demonstrates the Russian culture's heterogeneous quality.

**Group-Work:** Students work in small groups to apply their impressions and the instructor's lecture points to a specific passage in the text where music makes an appearance.

**Follow-Up:** The response paper due next class asks students to articulate their small group's work in writing.

## WR150 (3)

## Comparing Translations

### I. Word choice in Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground*

\*\*\* Only excerpts are given below. In class, I distribute the first paragraph in its entirety.\*\*\*

This exercise sensitizes all students to the difficulties of cross-cultural communication by highlighting the challenges translators face.

Students are asked to read aloud the following three versions of the opening passage. Then, in small groups, they list every instance where translators have chosen different diction to render the same lines in the original. Class-wide discussion ensues about the importance of word choice and connotations and about the trade-offs a translator must make.

- a) "I am a sick man... I am a spiteful man. I am an unattractive man. I think my liver is diseased. Then again, I don't know a thing about my illness; I am not even sure what hurts." (tr. Katz)
- b) "I am a sick man... I am a spiteful man. No, I am not a pleasant man at all. I believe there is something wrong with my liver. However, I don't know a damn thing about my liver; neither do I know whether there is anything really wrong with me." (tr. Magarshack)
- c) "I am a sick man... I am a wicked man. An unattractive man. I think my liver hurts. However, I don't know a fig about my sickness, and I am not sure what it is that hurts me." (trs. Pevear & Volokhonsky)

### II. Sentence Structure in Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita*

This exercise pursues largely the same goals as the one above, except that here our focus is on sentence structure.

First, students are presented with an admittedly awkward literal translation from the Russian of the first sentence in Chapter 2 of the novel. They are asked to parse the sentence, identifying grammatical units such as clauses, prepositional phrases, and the like. The goal is to determine the order in which the original depicts Pontius Pilate's surroundings, clothing, gait, and other elements of the setting and character. Then we debate the choices translators have made about the order and the syntax.

- a) Literal version:  
"In [a] white cloak with [a] blood[red] lining, [with a] shuffling cavalryman's gait, [in] [the] early morning of [the] fourteenth day of [the] spring month of Nisan into the covered colonnade between [the] two wings of [the] palace of Herod [the] Great walked [the] procurator of Judea Pontius Pilate."
- b) "Early in the morning on the fourteenth day of the spring month of Nisan the Procurator of Judea, Pontius Pilate, in a white cloak lined with blood-red, emerged with his shuffling cavalryman's walk into the arcade connecting the two wings of the palace of Herod the Great." (tr. Glenny)
- c) "Early in the morning on the fourteenth day of the spring month of Nisan, wearing a white cloak with a blood-red lining, and shuffling with his cavalryman's gait into the roofed colonnade that connected the two wings of the palace of Herod the Great, walked the procurator of Judea, Pontius Pilate." (trs. Burgin & O'Connor)
- d) "In a white cloak with blood-red lining, with the shuffling gait of a cavalryman, early in the morning of the fourteenth day of the spring month of Nisan, there came out to the covered colonnade between the two wings of the palace of Herod the Great the procurator of Judea, Pontius Pilate." (trs. Pevear & Volokhonsky)

## **VIII. Conclusion, or the Importance of Teacher Training and Background**

The basic system as well as level-dependent permutations of needs that we outline above can help instructors in ESL and mixed classrooms to refine their teaching goals and practices and to anticipate problems. The worksheets and lesson plans that we supply may be used as models for developing training materials for instructors in our truly global classrooms. In other words, we believe that theoretical grounding and effective materials are indispensable for a context-sensitive class to succeed. Other factors, however, are also relevant.

Ideally, the faculty hired to teach these courses will have similar professional background and the ability to handle the needs of both kinds of student populations. In reality, the teachers are not always prepared to take on the cultural scaffolding component of instruction. This may be due to lack of experience with international students or their own lack of experience living abroad or learning a second language. As a result, the instructor tilts the level of the class toward his or her own comfort zone, rather than providing the L2 (and, in some cases, L1) students with the contextual supplementation when needed.

One risk in an ESL-only class, for example, is that heavy emphasis would be put on language instruction, which is the identifiable need of the students, to the detriment of the acculturation component. Another problem, more likely to occur in mixed classrooms, is too much focus on content while the language component suffers. We have proposed activities that seek a delicate balance of these two aspects, essential for reconciling the needs of L1 and L2 learners. Such practices, we hope, will go some way toward helping instructors expand their comfort zone in the classroom and perhaps even seek out international experiences elsewhere.

More broadly, establishing valid context and meaning for every college student is an important goal in teaching in a globally-oriented institution. Our proposal to build awareness of the international dimension in curriculum development may be used in training of instructors bound for diverse language and content-based classrooms.