

RUSSIAN 280
INTRODUCTION TO RUSSIAN CIVILIZATION

BULLETIN INFORMATION

RUSS 280 - Introduction to Russian Civilization (3 credit hours)

Course Description:

A multimedia introduction to Russian culture from its beginnings to the present. No knowledge of Russian required.

SAMPLE COURSE OVERVIEW

This course is designed as a multimedia introduction to the rich and complex culture of Russia, the world's largest country. Topics for class meetings and assignments are deliberately interdisciplinary. They range from medieval Russian art to twentieth-century Socialist Realism, from the music of Tchaikovsky to the balladeers of the 1970s, from the poetry of Pushkin and the soul-searching of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky to contemporary, post-Soviet Russian writers. We will focus on learning to analyze and interpret key works of Russian literary, artistic, musical, and cinematic culture, with particular focus on the historical and stylistic development of Russian cultural life.

ITEMIZED LEARNING OUTCOMES

Upon successful completion of Music 280, students will be able to:

1. Explain main trends and practitioners in Russian culture over a 1000-year period
2. Describe major events and figures in Russian history during the same period
3. Interpret and communicate the connections between Russian historical and cultural events during this period
4. Apply criteria for the interpretation and analysis of cultural works
5. Demonstrate discipline-appropriate critical skills by speaking and writing lucidly and convincingly on Russian cultural styles, development, figures, and works.

SAMPLE REQUIRED TEXTS/SUGGESTED READINGS/MATERIALS

1. Nicholas Rzhevsky, *An Anthology of Russian Literature from Earliest Writings to Modern Fiction*.
2. Additional readings and assignments in class and on course Blackboard site

SAMPLE ASSIGNMENTS AND/OR EXAM

1. Preparation for class: completion of reading *before the class for which it was assigned*. This will be demonstrated through active and well-informed participation, both in class and on Blackboard. Note: all readings are in English translation; no knowledge of Russian is necessary. If you prefer to do readings in Russian, please contact me to make arrangements.

2. One written reaction statement to a Russian cultural event (concert, movie, reading, etc.--please check with me before choosing), discussed in class and submitted via Blackboard. For your reaction statement, you may not comment on a film or other work shown/discussed in class. Your statement must be based on an additional, out-of-class activity and must demonstrate awareness of period and style of composition and also discipline-appropriate analytical and communicative skills.
3. Two tests (short-answer, multiple choice)
4. One final examination (25%).

SAMPLE COURSE OUTLINE WITH TIMELINE OF TOPICS, READINGS/ASSIGNMENTS, EXAMS/PROJECTS

Week 1:

Class 1: Introduction to the course. Russia in linguistic context: the Slavic languages and the Cyrillic alphabet. The geography of Russia: how has it affected Russian history and culture? Russian culture and history: connections (ongoing relationship between the artist and the state).

HW: Reading (in Rzhevsky): *The Tale of Igor*, "Boris and Gleb." You will be learning of Russia's conversion to Christianity in our next class. Would you characterize *The Tale of Igor* as pagan or Christian, and on what basis? Does the style remind you of other texts you have read?

Class 2: The earliest Russia: Kievan Rus' (9th-mid-13th centuries). Russia's conversion to Eastern Orthodox Christianity in 988. Russia's first historical written document: The Primary Chronicle (12th century). Russia's only surviving epic: *The Tale of Igor* (purportedly late 12th century), and questions of its authenticity. The genre of the saint's life: "Boris and Gleb" (11th century).

HW: Reading (in Rzhevsky): "The Life of Alexis, Man of God." Compare this saint's life to the previous one you read. Based on your reading, what are the characteristics of the Russian saint's life genre?

Week 2:

Class 3: Icons: the significance of Russian religious art and of Russian Orthodoxy in Russian culture. Three periods of Russian icon-painting (14th—16th centuries). Major icon-painters (Andrei Rublev, Dionysius). Icons to focus on: Angel with the Golden Hair, Old Testament Trinity, Our Lady of Vladimir. Saint's life: "The Life of Alexis, Man of God" (versions throughout this "medieval" period of Russian culture), discussion. Film:

“The Face of Russia” (former US Librarian of Congress and Russia scholar James Billington discusses the characteristics and the role of the religious icon and particularly Our Lady of Vladimir in Russian history and culture).
HW: Reading (in Rzhevsky): Alexander Pushkin, *Boris Godunov*. Based on Pushkin’s description in the text, what historical movements can you point to during the period his play describes? Who are the major players? How does Pushkin present his own ancestor?

Class 4: Moscow and Muscovy (mid-13th—mid-15th centuries). The Mongol Yoke and Russia’s liberation by Dmitrii Donskoi and followers. Boris Godunov and the “Time of Troubles” (late 16th-early 17th centuries). The Romanovs establish a dynasty (1613-1917). An assessment of this period by “the father of Russian literature,” Alexander Pushkin: *Boris Godunov* (1831). Analyzing Pushkin’s latter-day historical drama as literary text. Discussion: what is the difference between writing fiction and writing history?

Week 3:

Class 5: Guest lecture: Father Thomas Moore, a Russian Orthodox priest, on the Russian Orthodox Church.

HW: Reading (in Rzhevsky): *The Life of Avvakum*. This work has been characterized as a saint’s life, even though Avvakum himself wrote it, about himself. How does it compare to the saint’s lives you’ve read thus far? If this text is a history of Avvakum’s life, is it comparable to the Primary Chronicle? To Pushkin’s play?

Class 6: The Schism and Old Believers (mid-17th century). Tsar Aleksei Mikhailovich and the Patriarch Nikon. The first Russian autobiography by a leading Old Believer priest: *The Life of Avvakum* (17th century). Discussion: what elements of the text make it a literary work? A historical document? The relationship between the church and the state in 17th-century Russia.

HW: Reading (in Rzhevsky): Alexander Pushkin, “The Bronze Horseman: A Petersburg Tale,” Gavriila Derzhavin, “Felicity.” With these texts we move into a new period of Russian culture: the period of Westernization commenced by Tsar Peter the Great (ruled 1682-1725) and continued by Catherine the Great (ruled 1762-1796). How does Pushkin, writing a century after Peter’s death, describe Peter and his city? How does Derzhavin, in Catherine’s court, describe Catherine? Is their writing stylistically similar? Make a list of adjectives to describe both.

Week 4:

Class 7: The founding of St. Petersburg and the rule of Peter I (the Great). Eighteenth-Century Neo-Classicism. The rule of Catherine II (the Great). Pushkin's *Bronze Horseman* (1833). How do the two sections of the text differ and to what end? Viewing: artistic renderings of Falconet's 1782 statue of Peter ("the Bronze Horseman"), dedicated to Peter by Catherine, and discussion. What moods do Pushkin's text and Falconet's statue create in the reader/viewer? How can we describe them? Derzhavin's "Felicity" (1782) and the role of a court poet. The ongoing links between art and power in Russian culture.

HW: Start reviewing for first test next week!

Class 8: In-class video assignment: Russian opera. Scenes from leading Russian operas, focusing on the Russian composer Modest Moussorgsky's 1868-1873 opera based on Pushkin's *Boris Godunov*. Discussion: how does hearing and seeing an opera change your view (or does it) of Pushkin's literary text? What effect does the music have, and what terms do we use to describe it?

HW: Reading (in Rzhevsky): Nikolai Karamzin, "Poor Liza." As you read, try to imagine why contemporary audiences found this text shocking. How is it different from anything we've read thus far in the course?

Week 5:

Class 9: The late 18th-century Russian Sentimentalist movement and Nikolai Karamzin. "Poor Liza" (1792): "Even peasants have feelings." Compare Derzhavin's Classical poetry with Karamzin's Sentimentalist writings; how do we describe the differences in the two movements based on these texts? Review material thus far: literary movements, major historical events and figures, the texts, literary and artistic, we have covered.

HW: Study for first test!

Class 10: First test.

HW: Reading (in Rzhevsky): Mikhail Lermontov, "Taman," Alexander Pushkin, "The Queen of Spades." These are examples of Russian Romanticism. Based on these representative readings, what would you say are the leading characteristics of the Russian Romantic movement?

Week 6:

Class 11: The early to mid-19th century. Russian Romanticism: characteristics. Lermontov, "Taman" (1841), and Pushkin, "The Queen of Spades"

(1833). The Russian Romantic “hero”: the superfluous man. Karamzin as precursor of the Romantics.

HW: Reading (on Blackboard): notes and assignment on Russian composers (Glinka, Tchaikovsky, Balakirev, Borodin, Cui, Mussorgsky, Rimsky-Korsakov). Have you listened to classical music before? If so, is this different from “Western” classical music? Why or why not?

Class 12: 19th-century Russian music. Film: “Russian Composers.” Glinka, Chaikovsky, and the “Mighty Handful” (Balakirev, Borodin, Cui, Moussorgsky, Rimsky-Korsakov), and their mission to create uniquely “Russian” music. Nationalism and art: is it necessary, as these composers believed it to be? Discussion: having listened to examples of all seven musicians’ work, what characteristics do you now associate with specifically “Russian” music?

HW: Reading (in Rzhevsky): Nikolai Gogol, “The Overcoat,” Ivan Turgenev, “Bezhin Meadow.” How do the two texts differ?

Week 7:

Class 13: The mid-19th century. Russian Realism and its interpretations. City and country in the nineteenth century: St. Petersburg, Moscow, and the Russian country estate. Gogol, “The Overcoat” (1842), and Turgenev, “Bezhin Meadow” (1852). Gogol as a bridge between Russian Romanticism and Russian Realism. Discussion: what are the characteristics of a “Realist” text?

HW: Be prepared to talk about what you’re planning for your cultural event report assignment! You should know the period of composition for the work/s you’ll be discussing, so that you can examine and analyze them in historical and cultural context.

Class 14: Discussion of cultural event assignment. Presentations of student plans. How do we evaluate and describe a literary text? A concert? A film? Brief review of material covered thus far, questions.

HW: Reading (in Rzhevsky): Fedor Dostoevsky, “The Meek Woman: A Fantastic Story,” Leo Tolstoy, “Holstomer: The Story of a Horse.” Dostoevsky and Tolstoy are probably the most famous Russian writers. Based on your reading thus far, can you understand why? If so, why, and if not, why not?

Week 8:

Class 15: The late 19th century: Russian Realism, continued. Dostoevsky's "Meek Woman" (1876), Tolstoy's "Holstomer: The Story of a Horse" (1886). Literary technique: the concept of estrangement. The great writers of Russian Realism: Russian literature decisively enters the world stage. Western reactions to the Russian "great novel": a "baggy monster"?

HW: Reading (in Rzhevsky): Anton Chekhov, "The Lady with the Lapdog," *The Cherry Orchard*, Act One. Unlike his predecessors, Chekhov does not strive to lecture or teach his readers. Does he seem to withhold judgment in his writing? How would you characterize his stance?

Class 16: Late nineteenth-century Russian art: the Wanderers. Art's response to the Mighty Handful: creating a "Russian," national art. Artists and works to focus on: Ivan Kramskoy, "Christ in the Wilderness" (1872), Isaak Levitan, various nature scenes, Vasilii Surikov, "Boyarina Morozova" (1887, based on follower of Avvakum), Iliia Repin, "They Did Not Expect Him" (1884-8). On the verge of a new era. The turn-of-the-century paintings of Viktor Borisov-Musatov: an artistic bridge from Realism to Modernism. Chekhov and "twilight Russia": describing a changing world. Chekhov as a literary bridge from Realism to Modernism: "The Lady with a Lapdog" (1899), *The Cherry Orchard*, Act One (1904).

HW: Reading (on Blackboard): Maksim Gorky, "Twenty-Six Men and a Girl." Have we seen characters like this before? What is the significance of Gorky's focus on these poverty-stricken men? (Compare his subject matter to that of the Romantics, for instance.)

Week 9:

Class 17: The turn of the twentieth century. The Russo-Japanese War (1904-5) and the Russian Revolution of 1905. Gorky's "Twenty-Six Men and a Girl" (1899): one facet of Modernism—a new, Marxist Realism. The theme of political revolution enters literature.

HW: Reading (in Rzhevsky): Alexander Blok, "A Puppet Show," Marina Tsvetaeva, "I ask the mirror for a glimpse," "Verses About Moscow," Valery Briusov, "Barely a Tenth," Andrei Bely, "The Escape," from *Petersburg*. Do these works represent an "escape" from the world Gorky is describing in his stories? From revolution? Are they revolutionary in any way?

Class 18: The early twentieth century and Russia's "Silver Age": more facets of Modernism. A revolution of style. Symbolism (poetry and prose): Blok's "Puppet Show" (1906), Briusov's "Barely a Tenth" (1916), Bely's *Petersburg* (1911, 1916). Acmeism and Futurism. Tsvetaeva's "I ask the

mirror for a glimpse" (1915). The Symbolist paintings of Mikhail Vrubel: focus on "The Demon" (1890, 1901, based on a Lermontov poem), "The Swan Princess" (1900). The revolutionary music of Igor Stravinsky: focus on "The Rite of Spring" (1913). Characterizations and comparisons: the art of the Wanderers and the art of Vrubel; the music of Chaikovsky and the music of Stravinsky.

HW: Study for second test!

Week 10:

Class 19:

Second test.

HW: Reading (on Blackboard): Alexander Blok, "The Twelve." How does Blok portray the Bolshevik Revolution? What kind of language does he use? How does it differ from the earlier Blok text you read?

Class 20:

World War I (1914-18) and Revolution. The two Russian revolutions of 1917 (the Constituent Assembly and the Bolshevik takeover). Rasputin and the end of the Romanov dynasty. Blok's "The Twelve" (1918): the controversial Christ at the end of the poem. The rise of Russian film: Sergei Eisenstein, *Potemkin*, *October* (excerpts). Writing, filmmaking and political propaganda: the Soviet case. The House of Arts: rescuing a generation of artists.

HW: Reading (in Rzhevsky): Ilf and Petrov, "The Union of the Sword and the Plow," from *The Twelve Chairs*; Mikhail Zoshchenko, "Crime and Punishment: A Comedy in One Act." Are these works comedies? If so, why? If not, why not?

Week 11:

Class 21:

The Russian Civil War (1917-1921) and the New Economic Policy (NEP) (1921-1927). Ilf and Petrov's "Union of the Sword and Plow" (1927), Zoshchenko's "Crime and Punishment" (1933): satire and the early Soviet period. What is satire? More on the relationship between the Russian writer and the state. Introduce Stalinism: basic concepts and terms (collectivization, 5-Year-Plans, the purges, Socialist Realism and writers as "engineers of the human soul").

Class 22:

Stalinism (1927-53). Film on one of the many Stalinist GULAG labor camps: *Kolyma*. Discussion: how did you react to the film? What features of the film created that reaction?

HW: Reading (on-line at <http://www.poemhunter.com/poem/requiem/>): Anna Akhmatova, "Requiem." Can you understand why the Soviet government did not permit publication of this work until 1987?

Week 12:

Class 23: More on Stalinism: the Great Terror of the late 1930s. Akhmatova's "Requiem" (1935-40): a poet's commitment to her people. The power of the poet and of survival. The Akhmatova-Zoshchenko affair. Discussion: what does it say about the power of words when a dictator seeks to kill or otherwise silence writers it deems dangerous?

HW: Reading (on Blackboard): Alexander Solzhenitsyn, *Matryona's House*. What does Matryona represent? What is the narrator's background?

Class 24 World War II (1941-45). The death of Stalin in 1953. Nikita Khrushchev comes to power and begins the "Rehabilitation" of victims of Stalin's purges. Khrushchev's 1956 "Secret Speech." The Thaw and its effect on writers, artists, etc. Example: Alexander Solzhenitsyn's "Matryona's House" (1963): a newly released political prisoner pays tribute to a dying Mother Russia. Khrushchev deposed in 1964: too much "thaw"? Discussion: how would you characterize Solzhenitsyn's writing style? What makes it so effective?

HW: Reading (in Rzhevsky): Vladimir Vysotsky, "Morning Exercise." You are reading the text of a song by one of Russia's best-known singers. Are the words surprising? Why/how?

Week 13:

Class 25: The sixties and seventies. Leonid Brezhnev comes to power in 1964, resulting in "the period of stagnation." Voices of resistance to Soviet authority: the bards, Vladimir Vysotsky (focus on 1970s "Morning Exercise" and "I Don't Like") and Bulat Okudzhava (focus on "Union of Friends," sing it!). Samizdat (self-publishing) and magnitizdat (making copies of tapes as means of unofficial publication). Video: Vysotsky as Hamlet, 1971. The significance of their songs to this day.

HW: Reading (on Blackboard): Tatiana Tolstaia, "Sleepwalker in a Fog." Are there references to the Soviet past in this book? Describe Tolstaia's style; is it like anything we've read this semester? (Interesting note: Tolstaia is the great-niece of Leo Tolstoy!)

Class 26: The eighties. Beginnings of a new era. Mikhail Gorbachev's rise to power in 1985. Glasnost' (openness) and perestroika (restructuring). Tolstaia's "Sleepwalker in a Fog": the inhabitants of the late Soviet Union as sleepwalkers in a meaningless space. Tolstaia's ornamental prose.

Week 14:

Class 27: Guest lecture, Dr. Gordon Smith. The end of the Soviet Union: 1991. Russia in the twenty-first century and contemporary Russian politics. Vladimir Putin and his significance.

HW: Reading: Peter Aleshkovsky, *Fish*, Chapters 1-3 (minimum!) (on-line at <http://www.scribd.com/doc/45640446/Fish-A-History-of-One-Migration-by-Peter-Aleshkovsky>). This is a new work that addresses the situation of post-Soviet Russians in the former Soviet republics. Does the main character remind you of anyone we've met in a previous work?

Class 28: Conclusions: Russian culture today. New genres for a new era? Aleshkovsky's *Fish* (2006): a post-Soviet Mother Russia. Review for final exam. Cultural reaction statements due today at the latest (via BB)!

Week 15:

Final exam according to University exam schedule