

Title: Chekhov's and Shenderovich's *Van'ka*: Teaching Language and Culture at the Advanced Level through *Kukly*

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This paper demonstrates how Viktor Shenderovich's satirical television puppet show can be used to teach language, literature and culture, in Russian, to advanced students. The opening scene of one *Kukly* episode, *Van'ka*, based on the Chekhov short story of the same name, will be shown to the audience, who will play the role of students.

Before showing the film clip the lecturer/teacher will explain that the show is based on the Chekhov short story. The lecturer will then pass out xeroxed copies of the Chekhov story and ask the audience/students to read a few sentences out loud. (In an actual class the students would read the entire story. However, time constraints will not allow the entire story to be read at the AATSEEL conference). The audience will then view the opening scene. (In an actual class the students would watch the entire 15-minute episode).

After showing the opening scene the lecturer will hand out a script of the scene to the audience. (In an actual class the students would be handed the script of the entire episode). The lecturer will ask one member of the audience to read out loud the role of Putin and another person to read the role of Yeltsin. The lecturer then asks the audience whether they understood all the words. The lecturer/teacher explains any words the audience does not know.

The lecturer then discusses the political jokes contained in the scene. The Putin puppet, cast in the role of the peasant boy, Van'ka, assigned as an apprentice to a wicked shoemaker, writes a letter to his grandfather, "ded," in the country, complaining of his sad life. The grandfather he is writing to is the Yeltsin puppet. The lecturer explains the political humor involved in Putin's calling Yeltsin "grandfather," or "ded." Yeltsin chose Putin as his successor, urging voters in his televised resignation speech of New Year's eve, 1999, to vote for Putin as the next president of Russia. The lecturer will then explain why Yeltsin wanted Putin to succeed him. Yeltsin's daughters, son-in-law and friends, collectively nicknamed by the press, "the family," were involved in illegal financial activities. Putin signed a bill the night of Yeltsin's resignation speech, that guaranteed Yeltsin and his family" immunity from prosecution.

Another reason the Putin puppet calls the Yeltsin puppet "ded" is that that was the nickname given to Yeltsin by Russian journalists.

After explaining the political jokes in the scene, the lecturer/teacher asks the audience to note how closely the lines of the Shenderovich parody follow the words of the Chekhov original. The lecturer shows the clip a second time. She then asks each member of the audience to explain the basic message of the clip. The lecturer then explains that in an actual class the students at this point in the lesson would write compositions about the episode they just viewed and discussed.

The lesson teaches students about Russian literature by introducing them to the Chekhov short story. Reading the script out loud helps them with their pronunciation, as the teacher corrects their stress and intonation. They learn new words by going over the script with the teacher. The students learn about contemporary Russian politics by discussing the political jokes in the scene. The final composition the students write enhances their writing skills, as well as their grammar and vocabulary, and solidifies their knowledge of the Russian political landscape. At the advanced level students benefit most from an immersion environment, in which language is used ACTIVELY, speaking, reading, listening and writing in Russian to express abstract ideas.

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