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Reading and Discussion Activities for the Introductory Literature

The “Introduction to Literature” course taught in the target language (TL) presents challenges to undergraduate students for a number of documented reasons (Kramsch 1985; Fecteau, 1999; Polio & Zyzik, 2009; Bernhardt, 2011). Furthermore, in the case of Russian literature, if one starts with the classic prose of Pushkin’s *Belkin Tales*, the texts that students encounter are generally much longer than textbook selections for second and third year classes (cf. V puti, *Focus on Russian, Russian Grammar in Context*). The texts’ vocabulary is quantitatively and qualitatively beyond the students’ current level. The texts’ cultural worlds may be alien to students, which impedes their ability to follow the logical flow of the story as well as to draw explicit and implicit contextual inferences. These factors can so complicate students’ ability to comprehend the text that little time and energy is left to preparing to talk about the work of literature in class.

My presentation will target these key problematic areas, suggesting different kinds of classroom activities to address each area of difficulty. First, I will outline activities to expand readers’ vocabulary base for understanding the texts, including words that evoke specific historical contexts. Second, I will present strategies for making students more familiar with the cultural world of the text, which can facilitate students’ ability to draw correct inferences while reading. Finally, I will consider several models of how to structure comprehension activities in a way that prepare students to talk about the work in class. The discussion activities rely heavily on scaffolding to ensure attention to certain critical aspects of language form while students engage the content of the reading. I will work interactively with the audience through a representative set of sample vocabulary, culture, comprehension and discussion activities, explaining their purpose, structure and sequencing.