

Title: A Russian Life: Biographies as Linguistic and Cultural Teaching Tools in the Intermediate Classroom

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Abstract:

Intermediate students of Russian are often eager to learn about and discuss current events and politics, but tend to lack the vocabulary and grammar necessary to read lengthy newspaper articles or excerpts of academic books addressing these subjects, to watch complex television news reports and interviews, or to express their views and opinions on abstract topics. An intermediate Russian course in which biographies of prominent Russian political and cultural figures provide the main textual content allows students to build towards fluency in reading, writing and speaking about these topics of interest while providing the linguistic input necessary in a second or third year course. Students build and expand on their knowledge of vocabulary and grammar around family, education and careers while becoming familiar with the most important individuals determining domestic and international diplomacy in contemporary Russia, and learn about related topics such as education reform and legislation around controversial social issues. This presentation will address the elements of curriculum and activity design for a course of this nature and discuss the challenges involved in the selection and adaptation of materials. It will also address balancing the need for traditional language instruction at the intermediate level with the desire of students to gain a greater understanding of contemporary Russian culture.