

Anonymous

CDIPS: 2021-2022 Cohort

The Message is in the Music: Establishing Themes of Diversity and Social Critique in the Second Year Russian Language Classroom

Part I: Executive Summary and References List

The course I have designed is a yearlong second-year Russian language course that will establish themes of diversity and social commentary, primarily through the addition of Russian-language musical texts. In the first semester, learners will work in a collaborative intellectual community to grow their language proficiency and intercultural competence through engagement with genres such as hip hop, rock, and bard song. In the second semester, they will work on a series of presentations related to the musicians to whom they were introduced in the first semester. Undertaking this mid-stakes project will allow them to grow their own intellectual curiosity and gain research experience in both Russian and English. By engaging with public figures whose music serves as a social critique, or whose biography undermines the narrow conceptualization of “Russian” often displayed in first-year Russian textbooks, I aim to expand learners’ understanding of “Russianness” and the “Russian soul.” This is critical at the intermediate level of language development when many undergraduate learners end their language study; my hope is to expand learners’ conceptions of the Russian-speaking world at this critical juncture. Being mindful of the course’s primary objective—to support learners as they move toward intermediate sublevels of Russian language proficiency—I will scaffold materials to the appropriate proficiency levels and provide English language resources where necessary. Focusing on diversity and social issues will help learners to expand their conceptualizations of Russia and the Russian-speaking world in accordance with the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) intercultural communication proficiency benchmarks.

I will rely on my academic research background in Russian hip hop and contemporary culture to support this undertaking. I have consulted with the following references while developing my course syllabus, course plans, and this report:

Ajlen, R, Plummer B, Straub E & Zhu E. (2020), *Motivating learner to Learn: Transforming Courses Using a Gameful Approach*, CRLT Occasional Paper, 40.

- Brunvand S. & Hill D. (2019) Gamifying your Teaching: Guidelines for Integrating Gameful Learning in the Classroom, *College Teaching*, 67:1, 58-69, DOI: 10.1080/87567555.2018.1518893
- Crookes, G. (2012). Critical pedagogy in language teaching. In Ortega L. (Ed.), *The encyclopedia of applied linguistics*. (pp. 1-9). Wiley-Blackwell.
http://sls.hawaii.edu/Gblog/?page_id=13
- Garza, T.J. (2021) "Here, There, and Elsewhere: Reimagining Russian Language and Culture Course Syllabi for Social Justice," *Russian Language Journal*: Vol. 71: Iss. 3, Article 3.
- Holman, C. "Level-up Learning: How School Could Be a Better Game." TEDxUofM, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k0NaJpQbwA0>
- Ladson-Billings, G. (1995). Toward a theory of culturally relevant pedagogy. *American Educational Research Association*, 32(3), pp. 465-491.
- Swalwell, K. & Spikes, D. (2021) *Anti-oppressive education in "elite" schools*. Teachers College Press.

Part II: Analysis (300-500 words)

Intermediate Russian language courses explore biographical themes: the self, the family, and the local community. These themes often align with the proficiency benchmarks at the intermediate sublevels, as expressed by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL); the goal is to help learners achieve proficiency at these sublevels by maintaining not only linguistic but thematic communication. My course supplements these themes with corresponding musical texts that discuss real issues of Russian society, Soviet society, and the Russian-speaking world. In adding musical texts to the course content, I aim to encourage critical engagement with social issues, rather than observation of or participation in "Russian culture" (Garza 22). By aiming for cultural synthesis in this way, I ask learners to join a collaborative intellectual community in which understanding is negotiated and built through analysis.

I will employ elements of gameful pedagogy in this course, namely in the second semester during which learners will have the opportunity to choose different assignments to test their interest in different topics before choosing one for a series of presentations. Drawing from self-determination theory, gameful presupposes a connection between learning and intrinsic motivation. While education systems tend to rely on extrinsic motivation, like letter grades, as Catilin Hayward mentions in her TEDxUofM talk "Level-up Learning," games leverage intrinsic motivation – the inner drive that calls us to partake in a task for some inherent satisfaction, such as a feeling of accomplishment or pursuing curiosity. Gameful considers how learning experiences can use intrinsic motivation and

other aspects of games to reshape learning into a more meaningful experience; by allowing learners the autonomy to pursue a topic of interest, I hope to enrich their overall engagement with diversity and social commentary in the Russian-speaking world.

The course will be taught at a large research university with an undergraduate enrollment of over 30,000 (nearly 50% in-state and 50% out-of-state). Tuition is approximately \$16,000 in-state and \$52,000 out-of-state; free tuition is offered for in-state learners whose family incomes are at or below \$65,000. The class size can range from 6-12 learners, with 9-10 being the average. Many learners will have multiple majors or minors, hold at least one job, and participate in co-curricular activities.

Enrollment for a second-year Russian language course at this university is comprised of undergraduate learners but also includes Masters and Doctoral learners. The language requirement at this university is four semesters, meaning that undergraduate learners typically enroll in the course to complete a requirement, though a few go on to complete minors or majors in the target language; graduate learners often have different academic goals for enrolling in the course, such as supporting a future research project. Occasionally, each section of the course will have one heritage speaker whose proficiency is more suitable for an intermediate level course, than for a heritage-track course.

All learners will have completed one year of Russian language study, or the equivalent, and will have tested at or above the novice-mid proficiency level (ACTFL). They will have studied using a textbook centered on Moscow and St. Petersburg, with little interaction with other regions of Russia and rarely, other parts of the Russian-speaking world. Their cultural exposure will have been limited to canonical and traditional figures and experiences: Alexander Pushkin, New Year's celebrations, samovars, and the like. My course does not discount this culture, rather it seeks to dynamize learners' understanding of what "Russian culture" is through analysis of authentic texts. By engaging learners with musical texts, and learning together about the artists who created them, I will introduce them to a broader representation of the Russian-speaking world and its social issues.

While cultural components are central to this course, the essential content is the second-year Russian language curriculum focused on solidifying learner knowledge of the case system and introducing foundational grammatical concepts such as verbs of placement, verbs of motion, and participles, and moving toward intermediate sublevels of proficiency. Chosen texts will thematically correspond to units while expressing social critique or commentary. Still, they will also serve learners' linguistic development and be used to engage learners in multiple modalities: listening, reading, writing, speaking, and grammar. Overall, the goal is to use the Russian language as a conduit to a deeper and more critical understanding of "Russianness" and the "Russian soul." Lessons in the first semester will include variations on the following themes and artists:

- Soviet anti-war songs (Bulat Okudzhava, Vladimir Vysotsky)
- Contemporary anti-war musical performances (Oxxxymiron, NoizeMC, Monetochka)
- Social commentary and discussion of everyday life (Kino, DDT)
- Social criticism (Kasta)
- Multilingualism in the Russian-speaking world (Tatarka)

In the second semester, I plan to incorporate artists outside of Russia, allowing learners to choose one Russian-speaking artist (broadly defined) representing another country or geographic region on which to deliver several biographically focused presentations. I am still working on developing a list of artists for this purpose and will allow learners to conduct preliminary research in English so that we can build this list together.

Contextual materials will be provided in English to discuss the nuances of the themes, connecting them to systemic, regional, and global movements. Song lyrics and videos (where applicable) will be analyzed in Russian, with scaffolding. Together, we will explore the artists' biographies, including their native regions and languages. Since biographical topics will be familiar to learners at this proficiency level, I anticipate that much of the work in the first semester will focus on building vocabulary and cultural competence through that theme, while the second semester will involve putting the new vocabulary and grammar into practice alongside learner choice research.

Part III: Design

Performance Objectives

Learners will:

- Describe their perception of attributes of "Russian" culture before and after the course.
- Critically engage with authentic texts to build language proficiency and cultural competence.
 - Develop an understanding of the diversity of Russian-speaking populations across and within geographical regions.
- Practice using new vocabulary to describe their own biographies and the biographies of Russian-speaking artists.
- Describe how music has been used as a means of expressing social commentary in the Russian-speaking world.
- Recognize the interconnectedness of Slavic cultures (second semester).

Learning Assessments

Learners will:

- Engage with written information about selected artists in the “reading comprehension” portion of select unit exams (formative assessment)
- Deliver individual oral presentations about a Russian-speaking artist (broadly defined) within the second semester, focusing on the artist’s biography, to the extent possible at the intermediate sublevels of proficiency (formative assessment)

Strategies, Activities, Methods

- Each lesson that incorporates a musical artist or text will include contextual information in English, a vocabulary list of focus in Russian, and a short grammar lesson. All musical texts will be introduced with lyrics, before the first of several scaffolded group listening sessions.
- Learners' research will be conducted within a narrow scope defined by the instructor, but the learners will choose the artist of focus for their series of biographical presentations in the second semester.
- Stills will complete oral check-ins with the instructor and reflective writing assignments in English to track their project progress.
- For each presentation, learners will select 5 vocabulary words related to the presentation to share with the class; the instructor will pre-screen these words and assist with the collection and distribution of vocabulary lists.

Alignment

Objective	Assessments	Strategies/Activities/Methods
Describe their perception of attributes of "Russian" culture before and after the course.	Ungraded survey (English)	Discussions, writing prompts
Critically engage with authentic texts to build language proficiency and cultural competence.	Low stakes, ungraded listening and reading comprehension activities	Textual analysis, listening exercises, vocabulary study

Describe how music has been used as a means of expressing social commentary in the Russian-speaking world.	Written reflections (in English); reading comprehension (reading in Russian, response in English)	Class discussions, supplemental reading, collective textual analysis
Practice using new vocabulary to describe their own biographies and the biographies of Russian-speaking artists.	Oral presentations	Research, reflective writing, script writing, slide creation, vocabulary handout creation
Recognize the interconnectedness of Slavic cultures (second semester).	Post-presentation write-up	Reflective writing, class discussion

Grading

- Learner presentations will be graded in several stages, from scripting to revision to delivery. All presentation topics will be chosen through a series of low-stakes, ungraded assignments, allowing learners autonomy in surveying their interests without any risk (according to gameful pedagogy).
- Learners will reflect on their presentations through a series of ungraded reflective surveys in English (second semester)
- Learners will complete regular assessments of their linguistic skills, separate from the cultural project components listed in this report.

Part IV: Development

- Learners will be provided with digital and paper copies of the ACTFL proficiency benchmarks and “Can Do” statements for all three modes of communication (including cultural). They will be informed of the limits and potentials for their understanding of cultural and linguistic content in the target language.
- Course materials will be found on a learning management system course site which has been designed with accessible principles, such as the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines) in mind.
 - Other than the textbook, I have elected to use materials that are either open access or hosted on free platforms that do not require subscriptions, such as Youtube.

- The course will occasionally use Perusall, a group annotation tool, that is integrated into the course's learning management system. This will be used for English language readings.
- I have the support of my advisor, my supervisor, and several cohorts of trained graduate learner instructors for conducting this course. I also have access to resources from a renowned center for learning and teaching, in addition to a language-focused instructional designer, to assist me with the logistics of the course.
- Some components of the chosen musical texts will involve the artists' undermining of stereotypes, which may, at first glance, appear controversial to learners. I have planned to heavily scaffold and contextualize these materials so that learners are aware of the cultural critique afforded by the text *before* their first encounter with it.

Part V: Implementation

- My syllabus asks learners to adhere to the university's code of conduct, as well as to be respectful and supportive of one another by learning one another's names and pronouns, and not laughing at anyone's mistakes or discomfort.
- Inspired by the CDIPs program, I am hosting "student hours," rather than office hours. These will be both in-person and virtual (alternating) to accommodate learners who live off campus or otherwise are unable to attend in person. Many first-generation learners may not be aware of the purpose of "office hours," so by implementing a change in language, I am attempting to better center learners in that experience. Separately, I am inviting learners to chat with me in person in my department, in a shared space, during the first week of classes.
- All course materials, with the exception of the textbook (required by the department), will be from free or open access sites; the textbook will be used for 2 semesters and can be purchased used, or in e-copy. Learners are not required to pay for any tools. Accessible and free materials and tools will alleviate financial stress for learners.
- It is my policy to assign peer review and partner/group projects for this course. All of the planning and execution of these assignments will happen *during class time*. It is inequitable to ask learners to meet outside of class, on their own time, given their other responsibilities, in order to meet a learning objective for my course.
- Learners are afforded a generous unexcused and excused absence policy, and attendance will be allotted a low overall percentage of the course grade. Participation and engagement will be graded separately.

- Finally, I will print all materials for learners; anything not printed will be submitted online.

Part VI: Evaluation

- At the end of each unit, I will take notes about which activities worked well and why, and which needed development. I will do so in conversation and collaboration with another second-year instructor and my supervisor. I will also rely on learner feedback (see below) to lead my reflection. As Lange and Kane write in *Dead Ends and Paths Forward*, reflection is critical to antiracist teaching (Swalwell and Spikes 66).
- Learners will have multiple opportunities to provide feedback on the course, at various stages:
 - On the first day, they will submit publicly visible syllabus annotations that will then be reviewed and incorporated into the course syllabus
 - On the first day, they will also complete a survey that gauges their personal interests (related to the course topics), their learning preferences and challenges, and collects some personal information, such as their preferred names and their pronouns in English and Russian
 - Learners will participate in a midterm feedback session with a representative of a center for learning and teaching. The results of this session will be addressed by the instructor and incorporated into the course (in the semester in which information is collected, and the following semester).