

CDIPS 2022-2023
Jenya Mironava
Harvard University
mironava@fas.harvard.edu

**RUSSIAN THROUGH CONTEMPORARY RUSSOPHONE LITERATURE
(A FOURTH-YEAR LANGUAGE COURSE)**

“Russian through Contemporary Russophone Literature” represents a revision of the traditional Russian-language course “Fourth-Year Russian: Language through Literature” (Russ 113) that for the longest time has been taught at Harvard University in the format of the “greatest hits” from the Russian canon. (Readings included works by Gogol, Chekhov, Blok, Pasternak, Akhmatova, Mandelstam, Bulgakov, Platonov, and Okudzhava.)

The course description—updated for the course catalogue in 2022—emphasizes linguistic proficiency and cultural knowledge, but is open-ended in terms of content:

This fourth-year advanced-level Russian language course emphasizes reading, analysis, and discussion of Russian literary works in their linguistic and cultural contexts. The course is designed to help students improve proficiency in the language and to develop increased fluency and confidence of expression while deepening their understanding of Russian culture. Discussions of relevant cultural, social, and historical issues along with the study of the nuances of Russian grammar, syntax, register, and style will be grounded in authentic Russian literary texts. The course meets 3 days/week without additional small-group speaking sections. (<https://courses.my.harvard.edu>)

I hope to capitalize on the vague description of content (“authentic Russian literary texts”) in the course description, turning it into an opportunity to redesign the course within the existing framework, without having to petition for a new course to be approved—a lengthy and involved process with no guarantee of a successful outcome.

The new iteration of the course that I’d like to propose aims to broaden the definition of “Russian literature.” Inspired by Naomi Beth Caffee’s definition of Russophonia as “the widespread and variegated uses of the Russian language outside of the customary boundaries of ethnicity and nation” (ii), the course will focus on contemporary Russian-language texts of various genres and media from Belarus, Ukraine, Litva, Latvia, Estonia, Central Asia, and Israel, as well as by authors from the Russian Federation who are not or do not write about ethnic Russians.

This shift of emphasis aims to decolonize the course and make Russian-language instruction less Russocentric. By prioritizing the voices and experiences of multicultural and multiethnic speakers of Russian—often seen as minor, peripheral, both marginal and marginalized, largely excluded from the canon—I intend to “demonstrate the ethnic, economic, and intersectional diversity of the Russian-speaking world” (Garza). Additionally, the texts will allow us to engage with urgent issues and current affairs (eg., the ongoing war in Ukraine, Belarusian protests) and to explore a number of themes that relate to social justice, such as the role of language in cultural and personal identity, relations of language and power, the constructed distinctions of major/minor and insider/outsider, and strategies of resistance.

The course seeks to address the following “essential questions” (Grant & McTighe):

- What is “Russian” literature?
- Whose language is the Russian language? Who, if anyone, “owns” it?
- How does the language I speak define who I am? Am I different in different languages I speak?
- How does where I was born and/or where I live shape who I am?
- How does what/whom I am reading influence how I read it?
- How do my beliefs, values, experiences shape my approach to a text?
- How can I explore, describe and appreciate individuals and cultures without stereotyping them?

All our work will be guided by the fundamental question that, according to Swaffar, defines foreign language study as a discipline: “How do individuals and groups use words and other sign systems in context to intend, negotiate, and create meanings?” (157).

In my revision of the course, I intend to adjust both *what* is taught (the content and the materials of the course) and *how* I teach it (my pedagogical strategies and techniques). The course on “Language through Literature” offers a perfect opportunity to implement the multiliteracies framework, a critical pedagogy that “integrates teaching and learning with social justice and critical consciousness” (Paesani & Menke 118). I also want to make a conscious and a conscientious effort to ensure that my policies and procedures are humane, and that my syllabus makes my commitment to inclusive practices explicit and reflects it in language, style, and tone.

I. BIBLIOGRAPHY

On anti-oppressive, critical, and culturally sustaining pedagogies:

- Chandler-Ward, Jenna, & Elizabeth Denevi. *Learning and Teaching While White: Antiracist Strategies for School Communities*. W. W. Norton & Company, 2022.
- Freire, Paulo. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. 50th anniversary ed., Bloomsbury Academic, 2018.
- Ladson-Billings, Gloria. "Toward a Theory of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy." *American Educational Research Journal*, vol. 32, no. 3, 1995, pp. 465-91.
- _____. "Three Decades of Culturally Relevant, Responsive, & Sustaining Pedagogy: What Lies Ahead." *The Educational Forum*, vol. 85, no. 4, 2021, pp. 351-54.
- Paris, Django. "Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy." *Educational Researcher*, vol. 41, no. 3, 2012, pp. 93-97.
- Swalwell, Katy & Daniel Spikes, eds. *Anti-Oppressive Education in Elite Schools: Promising Practices and Cautionary Tales From the Field*. Teachers College Press, 2021.
- Social Justice Standards: The Learning for Justice Anti-Bias Framework*. 2nd edition, Learningforjustice.org, 2022.

On the pedagogy of multiliteracies:

- Cope, Bill, and Mary Kalantzis. "The Things You Do to Know: An Introduction to the Pedagogy of Multiliteracies." *A Pedagogy of Multiliteracies: Learning by Design*, edited by Bill Cope & Mary Kalantzis, Palgrave Macmillan, 2015, pp. 1-36.
- Kalantzis, Mary, et al. *Literacies*. 2nd ed., Cambridge University Press, 2016.
- Kern, Richard. *Literacy and Language Teaching*. Oxford University Press, 2000.
- _____. "Reconciling the Language-Literature Split through Literacy." *ADFL*, vol. 33, no. 3, 2002, pp. 20-24.
- _____. "Making Connections through Texts in Language Teaching." *Language Teaching*, vol. 41, no. 3, 2008, pp. 367-87.
- New London Group. "A Pedagogy of Multiliteracies: Designing Social Futures." *Harvard Educational Review*, vol. 66, no. 1, 1996, pp. 60-92.
- Paesani, Kate et al. *A Multiliteracies Framework for Collegiate Foreign Language Teaching*. Pearson, 2016.
- _____, and Mandy Menke. *Literacies in Language Education: A Guide for Teachers and Teacher Educators*. Georgetown University Press, 2023.
- Swaffar, Janet. "The Case for Foreign Languages as a Discipline." *Profession*, 1999, pp. 155-67.

On differentiated instruction:

Frankel, Rachel, and Smith, Karen F. "Leveling the Playing Field Inside the Classroom." *Journal of First-generation Student Success*, vol. 2, no. 2, 2022, pp. 118-25.

Lazda-Cazers, Rasma, and Helga Thorson. "Teaching Foreign Languages to Students With Disabilities: Initiatives to Educate Faculty." *Worlds Apart. Disability and Foreign Language Learning*, edited by Tammy Berberi et al., Yale University Press, 2008, pp. 107–34.

Leons, Eve et al. "Students With Learning Disabilities and AD/HD in the Foreign Language Classroom: Supporting Students and Instructors." *Foreign Language Annals*, vol. 42, no. 1, 2009, pp. 42-54.

_____, and Christina Herbert. "World Languages and the Student With Learning Disabilities: Best Practices." *Teaching in the Disciplines. Classroom Instruction for Students With Learning Disabilities*, edited by L. Shea & S. Strothman, Landmark College, 2002, pp. 51–86.

Major, Adrienne Antrim. "Teaching Literature." *Teaching in the Disciplines. Classroom Instruction for Students With Learning Disabilities*, edited by L. Shea & S. Strothman, 2002, pp. 87–120.

Moore, Ashley R. "Interpersonal Factors Affecting Queer Second or Foreign Language Learners' Identity Management in Class." *The Modern Language Journal*, vol. 103, no. 2, 2019, pp. 428-42.

On inclusive syllabus design:

CARLA (Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition, University of Minnesota). "Designing an Inclusive and Diverse Syllabus with UDL in Mind." carla.umn.edu/lpd/modules/mod2/considering.html. Accessed 5 August 2022.

Garza, Thomas Jesús. "Here, There, and Elsewhere: Reimagining Russian Language and Culture Course Syllabi for Social Justice." *Russian Language Journal*, vol. 71, no. 3, 2021, pp. 15-37.

Taylor, Sherria, et al. "The Social Justice Syllabus Design Tool: A First Step in *Doing* Social Justice Pedagogy." *Journal Committed to Social Change on Race and Ethnicity*, vol. 5, no. 2, 2019, pp. 133-166.

Other resources:

Caffee, Naomi Beth. "Russophonia: Towards a Transnational Conception of Russian-Language Literature." PhD Dissertation. University of California Los Angeles, 2013.

Claggett, Fran. *Drawing Your Own Conclusions: Mapping Metaphors in the English Classroom*. Heinemann, 1992.

Hlas, Anne Cummings. *Practical Creativity. Activities and Ideas for Your Language Classroom*. Cognella, 2019.

- Koller, Alex M., and Eric Young. "Meet the Class of 2025. Makeup of the Class." *The Harvard Crimson*, <https://features.thecrimson.com/2021/freshman-survey/makeup-narrative/>. Accessed 23 June 2023.
- Lynd, Hilary, and Loyd, Thom. "Histories of Color: Blackness and Africanness in the Soviet Union." *Slavic Review*, vol. 81, no. 2, 2022, pp. 394-417.
- Merrill, Jason. "Our Russian Classrooms and Students: Who is Choosing Russian, Why, and What Cultural Content Should We Offer Them." *Russian Language Journal*, vol. 63, 2013, pp. 51-78.
- Murphy, Dianna, and Ghaedi, Hadis. "Who Are(n't) Our Students? The Gender and Ethnoracial Distribution of U.S. Bachelor's Degrees in Russian Language and Literature over Twenty Years, from 1999–2000 to 2018–2019." *Russian Language Journal*, vol. 71, no. 3, 2021, pp. 17-39.
- Rifkin, Benjamin. "Teaching Compassion in the Russian Language and Literature Curriculum: An Essential Learning Outcome." *Russian Language Journal*, vol. 69, 2019, pp. 45-59.
- Smorodinska, Tatiana. "The Literary Canon and Precedent Texts in Teaching Russian Language and Culture At the Intermediate Level." *The Art of Teaching Russian*, edited by Evgeny Dengub et al., Georgetown University Press, 2020, pp. 359–76.
- Stauffer, Rachel. "Addressing the Representation of Diversity in Russian Language Textbooks." *The Art of Teaching Russian*, edited by Evgeny Dengub et al., Georgetown University Press, 2020, pp. 280–306.
- Wiggins, Grant, and Jay McTighe. *Understanding by Design*. 2nd expanded ed., Assn. for Supervision & Curriculum Development, 2005.

II. ANALYSIS

Institutional Context

My hope is that I will be able to teach “Russian through Contemporary Russophone Literature” as an iteration of the traditional course “Fourth-Year Russian: Language through Literature” (Russ 113) at Harvard University, where I am currently working as a Preceptor, in the Fall 2023 or Fall 2024.

Harvard is an elite private institution, whose student body is “largely affluent, white, straight, and from the country’s coastal regions” (Koller and Young). According to the results of an anonymous survey of incoming first-year students conducted in 2021, summarized for *The Harvard Crimson*,

53.1%	of the respondents identified as white,
23.6%	as Asian,
15.7%	as Black or African American,
13.4%	as Hispanic or Latinx,
8.3%	as South Asian,
0.9%	as American Indian or Alaska Native,
and 0.6%	as Pacific Islander.

Nearly half the respondents (45.1%) reported a combined family income of over \$125,000, which is “nearly twice the median household income in the U.S.,” as the authors of the summary of the survey results point out. The correlation between income and ethnicity is noteworthy: “Consistent with data from previous classes, students’ family wealth largely correlated with their ethnic background. Only 8.4 percent of white freshmen reported that the combined income of their parents was under \$40,000—the smallest fraction of any demographic.” The number of non-white students who reported a family income in that bracket is higher: 29.4% of Hispanic or Latinx students, 19.5% of Black or African American students, and 13.5% of Asian students.

Income and ethnicity data (summarized in Table 1) for the cohort of first-generation students in Harvard College Class of 2025 (20% of the respondents identified as such in the survey) confirms the correlation between the two. These students are largely non-white, nearly half of them Hispanic and Latinx (46.8%). About two thirds (70.6%) of first-generation students come from families that make less than \$80,000, with an “overwhelming majority” (90.7%) reporting receiving “some form of financial aid from Harvard.”¹

While undoubtedly valuable, the statistics hide the heterogeneity of the student body, suggesting that an average first-generation student is non-white and of lower socio-economic status. Such generalizations—and the conflation between marginalized groups and first-generation students in particular, as we learned from Sunnie Rucker-Chang’s presentation—are dangerous in that they tend to support the stereotypes that may hinder our ability to serve the actual students in our classrooms.

For example, 12% of first-generation students in Harvard College Class of 2025 identified as white in the survey. That’s 36 unique individuals (if my math is right) that are likely to be presumed to have what it takes to succeed in college and to be treated—by default—as if they belong. The

¹ Harvard touts its need-based financial aid packages—available to all students, regardless of nationality, citizenship or citizenship status—on the Admissions website. In accordance with the latest expansion of the program announced in March 2023, families making less than \$85,000 a year (up from \$75,000) will “pay nothing for their student’s education.” The University’s commitment to making college more affordable no doubt contributes to making it also more diverse. <https://college.harvard.edu/admissions/why-harvard/affordability>.

expectations grounded in such assumptions may make these students' experience all the more stressful: they may be off the instructors' radar, so to speak, and, hesitant to reveal that information about themselves, may be less likely to seek help proactively and put extra pressure on themselves out of fear of undermining those expectations. Just because white students are in the minority in the first-generation cohort does not mean that their unique needs can be ignored. And that, in turn, does not mean that we as instructors can disregard the challenges that non-white first-generation students face.

Inclusiveness and inclusivity are not a zero-sum game.

The number of students in the Harvard College Class of 2025 who identified as genderqueer/non-binary (1.8%) or transgender (~0.7%) may appear negligible,² but those individuals cannot be neglected. And although most incoming students in 2021 identified as heterosexual (71.1%), while 2% of the respondents preferred not to say, the remaining “minority” of students is itself a heterogeneous group: 12.5% identified as bisexual, 7.1% as homosexual, 2% as other, and 5.4% said they were questioning their sexual orientation. Moreover, “of the students who do not identify as heterosexual, 60.5% said they have not yet come out” (Koller & Young)—a crucial fact that only a close side-by-side reading of the statistics would reveal.

We do not teach statistically average, median, and mean students who can be “profiled” through data. Each student is an individual. As a teacher and mentor, I can succeed only if I take the unique needs of the actual students in my courses into account.

One concrete way in which I intend to improve my efforts to get to know my students and to build personal relationships with them going forward is to redesign the initial survey that I usually have students complete on or before the first day of class. Taking cue from Moore, who makes a case for developing a “proactive inclusive” practice that “is harmonious with the general desire [...] of students] that nonheteronormative identities do not become a ‘big deal’ and do not unwittingly out queer students in the class”—and in accordance with the fundamental principle of UDL that inclusive practices benefit *all* learners and “contribute to the ongoing mission of anti-oppressive critical pedagogy” (440)—I plan

- to move my first-day survey online,
- to add questions about identity and background (e.g., gender, sexuality, place of origin,³ religious beliefs) to those that the survey traditionally covers: about how and why the students came to study Russian, other languages they speak or have studied, their strengths and weaknesses, interest in the course, and what they hope to get out of it, etc,
- to make those sensitive personal questions optional, so that the students can choose to keep that information private,
- to preface the survey with an explicit statement about my commitment to inclusive teaching.

² “Gender identity” and “transgender identity” were separate questions on the survey. The former listed the following categories to choose from: Female (51.4%), Male (46.1%), Genderqueer/non-binary (1.8%), Other (0.3%), Prefer not to say (0.5%). The latter asked if the respondent identified as transgender (0.7%) or not (98.5%), or prefers not to say (0.8%) (Koller & Young).

³ Most Harvard students hail from urban (33.9%) and suburban (56.7%) areas. Only 9.4% of the respondents to the Class of 2025 survey, were coming to Cambridge, MA from rural areas (Koller & Young).

The latest long version of that statement, which I include in my syllabus, reads:

Creating a conversation-oriented classroom where all of us can find a welcoming home is my primary goal as a teacher. In nearly everything I do, I aspire to foster an inclusive learning experience that will help all of us, myself included, become more attuned and engaged readers of the world, sensitive to changes and differences both across cultures and within our own.

In interacting with our readings, we will learn the art of looking closely, discerning patterns, formulating questions, and answering them rigorously and creatively, but in a way that respects the integrity of the text and of the culture, to which it belongs.

I expect you to show the same attentiveness, openness, and regard to each other. Let's engage with others—in the classroom, on campus, and beyond—in a thoughtful open-minded way. Let's be kind, respectful, and humane.

I encourage you to share your preferred pronouns and names and I ask that in our classroom community, unlike in the Russian Federation, our gender identities and gender expressions be affirmed and honored without exception. Please let me know if it would be helpful to have a session for discussing options for expressing non-binary gender identification in a language as highly gendered as Russian.

Table 1. Ethnicity and income data for Harvard College Class of 2025 from an anonymous survey conducted via email in 2021 ([https://features.thecrimson.com/2021/freshman-survey/makeup/.](https://features.thecrimson.com/2021/freshman-survey/makeup/))

Class of 2025 (1,965 students)	Incoming first-year students (1,537 respondents)	First-generation students among them (20%)
ETHNICITY:	53.1% White / Caucasian	46.8% Hispanic or Latinx
	23.6% Asian / Asian-American	25.6% South Asian
	15.7% Black / African American	25% Black or African American (incl. Africa and Caribbean)
	13.4% Hispanic / Latinx	16.7% American Indian or Alaska Native
	8.3% South Asian	15.4% Asian (entire continent, excl. South Asia and Middle East)
	0.9% American Indian / Native American	12% White (incl. Middle Eastern and North African)
	0.6% Pacific Islander (incl. native Hawaiian)	11% Pacific Islander (incl. native Hawaiian)
Prefer not to say	1.1%	20%
INCOME: under \$40,000	13.9%	41.9%
\$40,000 - \$79,999	12.1%	28.7%
\$80,000 - \$124,999	12.3%	12.2%
\$125,000 and over	45%	8.2%
Prefer not to say	16.7%	9%
RECEIVE FINANCIAL AID:	54.8%	90.7%

Target Audience

“Russian through Contemporary Russophone Literature” would be one of four thematic fourth-year Russian-language content courses offered at Harvard University, an elite prestigious private institution. Offered only in the fall, Russian 113 is usually, but not always, taken in one’s seventh semester of Russian-language study. Third-year Advanced Russian sequence (Russ 101 and Russ 103) is a prerequisite, but students can also enroll with instructor’s permission or after taking a placement test. The fact that all fourth-year Russian-language courses at Harvard, as emphasized in the course catalogue, are “independent semester-long courses that may be taken in any order” gives students some flexibility at this level, which tends to lead to the creation of new groups of learners, diverse in terms of background, interests, and language proficiency. Rarely does a whole cohort enroll in the same fourth-year course, for example, so the enrollees do not necessarily already know each other.

Russian 113 classes are small, ranging from 6 to 14 students, but often include

- Harvard College undergraduates,
- students in the Davis Center’s two-year REECA program (The Master of Arts in Regional Studies—Russia, Eastern Europe, and Central Asia),
- graduate students (primarily, but not exclusively from Harvard’s Slavic Department),
- cross-registered students from MIT.

Fourth-year Russian courses often bring together students who started learning Russian at Harvard in their first or second year, heritage learners of Russian, American and international students who grew up speaking/hearing Russian or had some formal instruction in the language in the post-Soviet space. The students who enroll in these courses are usually Advanced Low/Mid proficiency level, although some may be at Intermediate High (ACTFL scale). The goal of the fourth-year courses is to help students solidify their Advanced Low/Mid proficiency and to progress towards Advanced High.

“Language through Literature” appeals to the students who have Slavic Literatures and Cultures as their first/second major or minor (primary/double/joint concentration or secondary field, in Harvard’s terms). It also attracts those who are learning the language just for fun, both those who always wanted to and those who thought they would hardly be able to read Russian literature in the original after college. REECA students, who have a professional and academic interest in the region, often choose other fourth-year courses (on mass media, for example). The new focus of Russian 113 should make the redesigned course more appealing to them. With their knowledge of the socio-political issues in particular, they would make an important contribution to our work in the course.

All students who would consider taking “Russian through Contemporary Russophone Literature” certainly have some general knowledge about the former republics of the Soviet Union and may be able to identify (some of) them on the map. They are likely familiar with key moments in the history of Russian Empire, Soviet Russia and Soviet Union, and the Russian Federation, as well as with canonical figures and texts, cultural products, practices, and perspectives. Some may have traveled to and/or around the region, and there are often those who have experience living, working, or studying there. However, the depth and breadth of the students’ knowledge about “Russia,” “Russian” history, literature, and culture, and about Russophone world varies greatly.

III. DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT

“Russian through Contemporary Russophone Literature” is envisioned as an opportunity to tap into and to build on the knowledge (explicit and implicit) and lived experiences that the students bring to the classroom. Indeed, we will strive to uncover, articulate, and synthesize the perspectives on Russia, post-Soviet, and Russophone world that we as a community share and to discuss—with curiosity and an open mind—those that we do not. We will work together to unpack the histories, experiences, and assumptions that inform the texts we’ll engage with and analyze how language and discourse are shaped by cultural values, norms, genre conventions, etc. Finally, we will apply what we discovered by using language in new and creative ways to create texts of our own.

Broadly speaking, we will work to understand how texts make meaning, why, and for whom, or, borrowing a key term from the pedagogy of multiliteracies, we will engage in “meaning design”—a “dynamic process of discovering form-meaning connections through the acts of interpreting and creating written, oral, visual, audiovisual, and digital texts” (Paesani et al. 43).

Our work in the course as a whole and with each individual text will be structured in a way that takes us through the four essential “knowledge processes,” or “things you do to know” (Kalantzis et al.), which are the foundational “pedagogical moves” of the multiliteracies framework (Cope & Kalantzis). Nonhierarchical and nonsequential, these “pedagogical acts” (summarized in the table below) are meant to help us “teach in a way that facilitates students’ access to the language, conventions, cultural content [...] and also engages them in the learning processes of interpretation, collaboration, problem solving, and reflection” (Paesani et al. 37).

DIMENSIONS OF LITERACY PEDAGOGY (New London Group)	KNOWLEDGE PROCESSES / PEDAGOGICAL ACTS (Kalantzis et al. / Paesani & Menke)	DEFINITION (Paesani & Menke 84)
Situated practice	Experiencing	Learning through immersion in texts, activities, and social situations.
Examples of learning activities: Associations Brainstorming, Jigsaw, Polling, Predicting, Reacting, Think-pair-share		
Overt instruction	Conceptualizing	Learning how language forms, conventions, organization, and other features of texts work to convey meaning.
Examples of learning activities: Concept map, Reading matrix, Selected deletion, Text annotation, Word substitution		
Critical Framing	Analyzing	Learning by connecting the content of texts to social, cultural, and historical contexts.
Examples of learning activities: 3-2-1 Summary, Debating statements, Reader’s theater, Textual comparison		
Transformed Practice	Applying	Learning by using new knowledge, skills, and understandings and by producing language in creative ways.
Examples of learning activities: Elaboration, Genre reformulation, Imitation, News broadcast, Parody, Promotional video, Role Play		

Guiding Pedagogy

*Knowledge is not (just) the stuff that ends up in our minds. It is what we do and make.
Learning is a consequence of a series of knowledge actions,
using multimodal media to externalize our thinking. [...]
Learning [...] is also very social, as we rely on the artifacts of collective memory,
and work with others in the essentially collaborative task of knowledge making.*

—Cope & Kalantzis, 32

My approach to the (re)design of the fourth-year Russian language course is grounded in the multiliteracies framework (New London Group, Kern 2000, Kalantzis et al., Paesani et al., Paesani & Menke). In its application to foreign-language teaching and learning, this pedagogy—rooted in “the interconnectedness of language, culture, and social context”—“place[s] texts at the center of language curricula” at all levels and “prioritizes the learning of language through textual context” (Paesani & Menke 2, 1), which Harvard’s “Language through Literature” already aims to do, albeit implicitly.

Here are the key terms and features of pedagogy of multiliteracies that are most relevant to my project:

1. Literacy is defined as a “social practice rather than an individual skill” that is “shaped through interaction,” “varies according to social context and is embedded in cultural practices” (Paesani et al. 10). Literacies, in the plural, is often used to distinguish this capacious understanding of the concept from the conventional definition of literacy as the ability to read and write, that is, “the ability to inscribe and decode written language” (Kern 2002, 21).
2. The term multiliteracies coined in the 1990s is meant to capture the “‘multi-’ of enormous and significant differences in contexts and patterns of communication and the ‘multi-’ of multimodality.” (Cope & Kalantzis 3).
3. The definition of text as “any concrete observable product that communicates meaning” (Paesani & Menke 2) is expanded to include written, oral, visual, audiovisual, digital, and multimodal texts.
4. Moreover, in the multiliteracies-based foreign language instruction, texts are not just “something to talk about (that is, the content for the sake of practicing language). They offer students the chance to position themselves in relation to distinct viewpoints and distinct cultures” (Kern 2008, 380).
5. Reading and writing are thus “not just peripheral support skills” that merely help the process of language acquisition, “but a crucial nexus where language, thought, and culture converge” (Kern 2008, 374).
6. “Complementary and overlapping,” the four modalities of language—reading, listening (text interpretation) and writing, speaking (text production)—are conceived as acts of meaning design: active, dynamic, creative, and socially situated (Paesani et al. 14).
7. Reading in particular is emphatically not a passive, “receptive skill that involves decoding the linguistic features of a text,” but a “recursive, interactive act of meaning construction” and, significantly, “a social and cultural act that includes cognitive processing and understanding of discourse features” (Paesani et al. 143, 144).

8. Similarly, writing is not merely a “transcription tool,” but “an activity for making and discovering meaning.” It is “both an individual, personal act that involves creativity, emotions, and imagination, as well as a collaborative activity that involves shared assumptions, relationships, and conventions.” It is, above all, “a multidimensional process of learning to think in another language” (Paesani et al. 174, 179, 172).
9. “Meaning design”—the foundational concept of the multiliteracies framework that informs every aspect of this pedagogy—has linguistic, cognitive, and also sociocultural dimensions:
 - “making connections between language forms and meanings they express in texts”
 - “engaging in higher-order thinking through learning processes such as interpretation, problem-solving, and reflection about the world and one’s place within it”
 - “attending to the social context, background knowledge, and lived experiences that inform ideas expressed in texts and how we interpret those ideas” (Paesani & Menke 8).
10. Multiliteracies-based foreign language instruction seeks to move beyond the functional emphasis (prominent in the communicative approach) toward “the goal of reflective communication” that is “informed by the awareness of the situated nature of language use” (Paesani et al. 62). We “still want to teach students to do things with words,” Kern writes, “but we also want them to reflect on how things are done in their native language and culture as compared with the ways they are done in the new language and culture” (2002, 23). In addition, because language is “a system of choices, a system of meaning potential” and the choices we make (“influenced by, among other things, the situational context, the cultural context, and our communicative goals”) are “significant—not only in and of themselves, but also in relation to the backdrop of competing options that were *not* selected” (Kern 2000, 52), we must also help students reflect on the differences within the target language.
11. “Our job as teachers,” then, is “to get students to understand that texts will not be read the same way by people operating within different cultural contexts,” and to get them “to produce texts (both oral and written) *within, upon, and against* the texts they read” (Kern 2008, 374).

In literacies-based language teaching, cultural understanding and critical thinking are just as important as language proficiency and communicative competence. Crucially, particularly in its emphasis on the sociocultural dimension, this approach aligns well with anti-oppressive and culturally sustaining pedagogies, and is itself considered a reflexive, or critical pedagogy.

It is also a pedagogy that supports learner diversity in its very essence. In Chapter 15 of *Literacies*, the authors focus on five multiliteracies principles that contribute to creating an inclusive environment and make “differentiated literacies instruction” possible. Their discussion of how the very idea of “design” serves diversity is particularly relevant to my redesign of the course on “Language through Literature” as a literacies-based course:

Every student brings to the class a repertoire of ‘available designs’ of meaning across a number of modes—the things they have read, heard, and seen as a part of their lifeworld and previous educational experiences. From learner to learner, no two experiences of ‘available designs’ can ever be quite the same. These may be supplemented by new designs offer by the teacher—different kinds of written, oral, visual, gestural and other texts. The student then undertakes the process of ‘designing.’ They interpret the new texts the teacher has given them, and no two

interpretations will ever be quite the same. They create a new text—in writing, video, recorded voice, and the like. And once more, no two texts will be the same, representing the student’s reworking of design elements from their lifeworld and the particular educational experiences. As students share their designs, [...] student work re-enters the world of meaning and learning [...]. This is a model of literacies learning that recognizes diversity, voice and constant change rather than uniformity, regimentation, and enforced stability.

[...] the space we here call ‘designing’ [...] is] a ‘third space’, located between the primary space of lifeworld experiences and informal learning, on the one hand, and on the other, a secondary space of formal school learning. (478-479)

Resources and course materials

The texts for the course will be selected from the “Long List” below. Focusing on the works of authors who represent “non-dominant” communities of Russian speakers moves the course materials away from “socially normative representations of target language culture and society.” It has the added benefit of allowing us to “desanctify” the notion of “good” (proper, correct) Russian and the image of the native speaker (CARLA).

- The list is a growing compendium of relevant materials that *could* be included in the course. (Your suggestions and comments are welcome!)
- The list is organized by country of origin/residence for the sake of convenience. I doubt that the course will follow this structure, which may unduly foreground and reify the ethnic and national divisions within the Russosphere. It’s likely that the final selection of readings will be organized thematically.
- I may very well need to narrow the scope of the first iteration of the course, especially if I am to teach it in Fall 2023, in which case I’ll focus on the works by authors from Belarus, Ukraine, and non-Russian writers from the Russian Federation (and/or possibly Russian writers from outside Russia).

Tentative Readings. The Long List

Belarus:

Queer-Fem writing from 2023 collection *Rasciajenne* (rasciajenne.com): L’va Bezumna, “Ja ne mogu vernut’sia”; Masha Gulina, “Sem’ nedel’ voiny”; Ganna Otchik “My igrali v kvadrat...”; Viktoria S. “Kabinety i bumagi”

Maksim Znak, selections from *Zekameron* (2022)

Ol’ga Shparaga, prison reflections (originally posted on FB) and drawings, from *U revoliutsii zhenskoe litso. Sluchai Belarusi* (2021); potentially read along/against a short excerpt from Svetlana Alexievich’s *U voiny ne zhenskoe litso*

Tat’iana Zamirovskaia, short stories

Dmitri Strotsev, *Otets i syn* (2020, with illustrations by Tat’iana Sergeeva), and other poems

Poems by Sabina Brilo, Vera Filenko, Inesa Gankina, Kasia Iofe, Lina Kazakova, Nadezhda Kokhovich, Iulia Shatun, Tania Skarynkina, Lena Zinski, Ol’ga Zlotnikova

V tumanе / In the Fog (2012), film by Sergei Loznitsa based on a story by Vasil Bykau

Ukraine:

Yevgenia Belorusets, selections from *Schastlivi padinnia / Schastliiye padeniia* (2018) alongside photographs from the book and from the author's website belorusets.com

Andrei Kurkov, short stories and/or selections from *Dnevnik Maidana i voiny* (2015)

Poems by Olga Andreeva, Irina Evsa, Aleksandr Kabanov, Boris Khersonskii, Liudmila Khersonskaia, Iia Kiva, Andrei Poliakov, and/or others

Russian Federation:

Alisa Ganieva, "Vran'yo. Skazka pro mal'chika, kotoryi plakal" (2015), "Batonchiki i sekretiki" (2016) and/or other short stories; <https://rus.alisaganieva.com/>

Guzel' Iakhina, "Dereviannye doma" (2018), "Rodoslovnaia" (2018), "Noch', stsenarii dlia chteniia" (2016) and/or other short stories; <https://yakhina.info/>

Eduard Bagirov, "Vvedenie" and "Gonimye i goniteli" from *Gastarbaiter* (2007)

Islam Khanipaev, *Tipa ia. Dnevnik superkrutogo voina* (thank you, ST, for the suggestion!)

Israel: Linor Goralik, Leonid Shvab, Gali-Dana Zinger

Estonia: Igor Kotiukh

Latvia: Semen Khanin (also pseud. Aleksandr Zapol'), Dmitrii Kuzmin, Sergei Trofimov

Litva: Georgii Efremov, Mikhail Didusenko

Armenia: Narine Abgaryan (thank you, YP, for the recommendation!)

Uzbekistan: Shamshad Abdullaev, Sanzhdhar Ianyshv

Kazakhstan: Pavel Bannikov, Ivan Beketov, Anyuar Duisenbinov, Aigerim Tazhi

Web-based resources:

youtube, litkarta.ru, lyrikline.org, ROAR-review.com, www.5wave-ru.com/

IV. IMPLEMENTATION AND EVALUATION

In revising the policies and procedures I intend to implement in the redesigned course “Russian through Contemporary Russophone Literature” and in other courses I teach, I strove above all to make them (more) humane. Many of the best practices listed below are informed, in particular, by the readings that address the issue of how we can best support students with disabilities because they offer concrete practical suggestions that are relatively easy to employ and that, as emphasized by the principles of Universal Design, will benefit *all* students.

General best practices and notes to self:

1. Be transparent. Discuss syllabus choices and teaching methodologies explicitly. “Present clear explanations of process, purpose, and goals for each classroom procedure,” activity, assignment (Major 92).
2. Engage students in the process. Have them design a policy on the use of technology in the classroom collectively. Have an extra unit and/or a few extra readings in each unit to allow students to choose which themes, texts, authors they’d like to engage with.
3. Publish an agenda or plan for each unit and class meeting to “help students understand the patterns of academia: that all questions and activities have a purpose,” for example. Include estimations of how long a certain in-class activity may take to “give students some indication of the relative importance or difficulty of a section under consideration.” Conclude with a reminder about upcoming homework and longer-term assignments. Do not be afraid to repeat information from the syllabus. Consider “running class as a board meeting,” with different students being responsible for “moderation, recording information, summarizing main points, [...] reviewing the work of the class and reminding [...] everyone] about homework.” (Major 91)
4. Teach multi-modally. Include a variety of resources and texts (broadly defined). Give students an opportunity to experiment with the format of assignments, allowing them to annotate a text with images, or sound, for example. Incorporate multi-modal assignments: e.g., quick-draw, sun-shadow mandala (Claggett), storyboarding, cartooning (Major), emoji storytelling, sound-sequence storytelling, whole-body voting (Hlas).
5. Structure activities for success with thoughtful scaffolding.
6. Emphasize process and teach for mastery. Grade homework for completion. Allow retakes and make room for peer review, revision, and self-correction in the course.
7. Incorporate a variety of means of assessment and always give students a choice: a traditional essay or an art project, for example, or a free writing assignment or a response to a question; create quizzes and tests in the format of “complete 3 out of 5”; a debate on a single topic or a conference style roundtable with individual presentations, etc.
8. At least for the essays, consider using “self-referenced assessments” that follow each student’s individual progress by “documenting successive achievement of criteria” over time (Kalantzis et al. 505). Learn more about this! Such individualized assessments could be difficult to implement logistically.
9. Move the first-day survey online and add optional questions about identity and background.

10. Give individual one-on-one in-person feedback on the first essay. Use the session as an opportunity to learn about the students' goals, strengths and weaknesses.
11. Conduct a simple midpoint evaluation/review, asking students to list: a) 3 things that are working well, b) 2 things that could be improved, and c) 1 other thing you'd like to bring to my attention.
12. Consider introducing regular quick end-of-unit check-ins and/or encourage students to slip anonymous notes into the box outside my office any time.
13. Depending on the students' performance on tests, quizzes, essays, etc, a reflections worksheet could help students reflect on their process and give me insight into how and what they are doing. Frankel and Smith provide a helpful example (121-122).
14. Keep a teaching diary and/or take the time to annotate the lesson plan. Reflect on what worked, what didn't (and why), what you'd want to do differently next time.

Syllabus redesign

I made a number of changes to my Russian 113 syllabus for the Fall 2022 relying primarily on CARLA and Garza. My goal was to make the syllabus more student- and reader-friendly, inclusive, and humane. Most of the changes had to do with language, style, and tone.

1. I transformed headings into questions:
 - “What I am going to learn?” (formerly Course objectives),
 - “What materials do I need?” (Course materials),
 - “How can I succeed in this course?” (Requirements/expectations); in this section, I also rewrote the components into short imperative answers to the question:
 - “Be present” / Attendance
 - “Be active” / Participation
 - “Be prepared” / Homework
 - “Speak Russian” / Language policy
 - “How will my progress be assessed?” (Grading).
2. I used “you” rather the impersonal faceless “student/s” and—to emphasize that we are a community—“we” when appropriate. Here is the revised first paragraph of the “Grading” section, for example:

You will have many chances to demonstrate your learning regularly throughout the course. Your homeworks, contributions to class discussion, essays, quizzes, and oral presentations will help us (both me and you) track your progress, allowing us to make necessary adjustments as we go in order to ensure you get the most out of the course. I may change the focus or the kinds of activities we all do in class, for

example, and I'll be happy to offer additional optional exercises tailored to your individual needs.

3. I wrote in “a friendlier and more approachable tone” and made an effort to “make promises rather than demands” (CARLA). I reiterated that I understand that life happens throughout and emphasized that I am here to help, not to police or penalize. I offer my notes about homework and absences as examples:
 - Be prepared. Class time will be spent almost exclusively actually *doing* things with language and with our texts. Help me make our time together most productive by coming to class fully prepared. As a rule, I will ask you to complete the following tasks before each class [...]. Ideally, you will complete each and all assignments carefully and on time. The world we live in, however, is far from ideal, and I understand that you may on occasion be unable to do it all and to do it equally well. At a bare minimum, please read the text.
 - A situation may inevitably arise that will make your attendance difficult. If you expect you will have to miss a class, please let me know in advance. I encourage you to make arrangements with me and/or with your colleagues to help you catch up on what you miss. If circumstances cause you to miss more than three classes, please contact me to discuss your options.
4. I expanded my definition of “disabilities” in the syllabus statement regarding accommodations and included information about the process of seeking accommodations:

Disabilities are real and require accommodations.

If you need academic adjustments because of a documented disability, please share with me the letter from the Disability Access Office (DAO) within the first two weeks of the semester. Please notify DAO if at any time during the semester adjustments to your communicated accommodation plan are needed.

If you require an accommodation that you have not yet officially received, please contact your school's Local Student Disability Coordinator (LDC) “to initiate the reasonable accommodation exploration process” (<https://accessibility.harvard.edu/student-accommodations>).

I take disabilities, including those related to mental health and life circumstances, seriously and am always glad to speak with you if that might help. I am committed to providing reasonable accommodations that will enable you to get the most out of the class, and I encourage you to reach out to me and discuss your options if/when a situation arises that impacts your ability to do the work for the course.

In revising the syllabus for this course and other courses I teach, I plan to go over it using the 19 concrete reflection questions provided in “The Social Justice Syllabus Design Tool” (Taylor et al.). Although I do not think I am ready to go the infographic route, I do want to make my syllabi also more appealing and accessible visually, less text heavy, and easier to navigate.