

Literary Competition

Tasks 1 and 2 are meant for students in their four-nine years at school. For this reason, they will not be taken into account for those in their 10 and 11 years. The rest of the tasks are addressed to all contestants. It is advisable to do thoroughly at least one task or answer the questions that do not seem very difficult. A contestant is not expected to do every task.

Task 1. (For students in their 4–9 years at school)

Here are extracts from two stories.

1. Making wooden human-size figures was a new job for X, so to begin with, he extemporized a trial piece. This soldier had a fierce face, of course, with eyes made of glass buttons. To animate the soldier, X dusted his head and breast with a magic powder but lingered for a while, when all of a sudden a wooden arm unbent and dealt him such a powerful blow that he flew off five feet away. Furious, X seized an axe and was about to cut the figure on the floor into pieces but stopped at once. “It will be too much trouble for me”, he thought. “How strong he is, though... Having such soldiers, I’ll be invincible!”

2. Y came into his cubbyhole and sat on the only chair by the legless table. He turned the piece of wood this way and that and began to chip out a puppet. “How shall I call it?” he thought. “Let it be Z. This name will bring me a fortune. I used to know a family — all of them had this name: Z the father, Z the mother; the children were all Z too... Their life was happy and carefree...” First of all, he cut out hair, then the forehead, then the eyes...

Suddenly the eyes opened by themselves and stared at him. “My dear little wooden eyes, why are you looking at me like that?” Y continued to carve, chisel, and pick. He made the puppet’s chin, neck, shoulders, body, arms and hands. No sooner had he finished with the last finger, Z began beating Y on the pate with his little fists, nipping and twitching him.

Look here, — Y said in a severe voice. I have not finished my work on you yet, and you are already misbehaving: What next? Eh? ... And he looked at Z disapprovingly.

Write the names of the authors, the titles and the characters from the stories (the names are behind the letters X, Y and Z).

Compare the described situations and characters. (Remember, that to compare means to examine and judge two or more things in order to show how they are similar to or different from each other.) Do these extracts show the authors’ attitude to their characters?

Do you know any other stories in world literature that tell how an inanimate object made by a human being begins to live?

Write, if you can, what similar situations and adventures are described in such stories.

Task 2. (For students in their 4–9 years at school) *Read the short poem by Wynstan Auden (1907–1973).*

Those who will not reason
Perish in the act:
Those who will not act
Perish for that reason.

The poem produces some comic effect because of the play upon words. Try to paraphrase the poem explaining the meaning.

Task 3. *Here are two poems about sun-rise. One is written by William Shakespeare, the other by Ezra Pound, an American poet (1885–1972).*

1. The Garret

Come, let us pity those who are better off than we are.
Come, my friend, and remember
that the rich have butlers and no friends,
And we have friends and no butlers.
Come, let us pity the married and the unmarried.

Dawn enters with little feet
like a gilded Pavlova,
And I am near my desire.
Nor has life in it aught better
Than this hour of clear coolness,
the hour of waking together.

2. Full many a glorious morning have I seen
Flatter the mountain-tops with sovereign eye,
Kissing with golden face the meadows green,
Gilding pale streams with heavenly alchemy;
Anon permit the basest clouds to ride
With ugly rack on his celestial face,
And from the forlorn world his visage hide,
Stealing unseen to west with this disgrace:
Even so my sun one early morn did shine
With all-triumphant splendour on my brow;
But out, alack! He was but one hour mine;
The region cloud hath mask’d him from me now.
Yet him for this my love no whit disdaineth;
Suns of the world may stain when heaven’s sun staineth.

Which poem is written by Shakespeare? What makes you think so? Try to find as many similarities in these poems as possible (examine the meaning and the form). What are the principal differences?

Which of the poems is written in a fixed pattern? What are such poems called? What are the basic features of such poems?

Task 4. *This is an extract from the short story “White Nights”, written by a contemporary Russian author Ephraim Sevela (1928–2010). The scene is laid during the Great Patriotic War.*

The German’s face was pale. Just to match his fair hair that was tangled with sweat on his forehead. His eyes had no colour, like the skies above the tundra, but they were full with horror such that can only strike you while facing inevitable and imminent death. The danger was lurking in the round black hole of the gun that was swinging rhythmically together with the Russian pilot’s heavy awkward steps. Sasha had changed running to walking. It was not because he got tired. He had seen the enemy’s face. A normal human face. An incredibly common face of a frightened boy. The German was much younger than him. Now, with his telephone headset off, with his disheveled sweaty hair, he did not look older than twenty. The fury that burned in Sasha while he was chasing him in the sky, while he was running with a gun on the ground, began to disappear. Sasha walked the last feet that were between him and the German holding his gun down to the hip.

A moment ago Sasha was ready to tear at the German pilot, but now he looked at his soft boyish features, felt puzzled and smiled in puzzlement. The German grasped at that smile like a drowning man will catch at a lifebuoy, and smiled too, blinking with his reddish eyelashes. . .

What do you think may happen next in this story? This episode was written under a certain influence of Russian classical literature and one novel in particular. Which one? What episodes resembling this one could you remember? Do you know any other works from Russian and world literature that show enemies meeting face to face? They could belong to hostile parties, or countries, or armies.

Why, in your opinion, authors might need such episodes and how could they end? (Analyze a few examples).

Task 5. *The poem “Bratskaya Power Plant” by Yevgeniy Yevtushenko (b. 1932) begins with his address to his great predecessors. Here are a few fragments with the missing names of the poets.*

And falling quietly to my knees,
prepared for death and victory,
I humbly ask for help, from you,
great Russian poets. . .

Give me, ____ [1], your harmony,
your speech, free and unchained,
your captivating fate —
as if in jest, to call down fire with words.

Give me, ____ [2], your bitter gaze,
the venom of your contempt,
and of your soul secluded as a cell
where hidden in the silence of your harshness
breathes sister-like the lamp of human kindness.

Give me, ____ [3],
while soothing my exuberance,
the agonies of your lashed muse
at main entrances,

. . .

____ [4], give me for good luck
your tenderness to birch trees and meadows
to beasts and to people,
and to all others on the earth
that you and I love so defenselessly.

Give me, ____ [5],
your boulder-lumpiness,
your turbulence
your deep bass,
your grim refusal of appeasement for the scum,
so that even I
hacking my way through time
may tell of it
to comrade-descendants.

Fill in the blanks with the missing names [1], [2], [3], [4], [5].

Explain your choice with as many arguments as possible.

Compose a poem of your own addressing another famous poet. Try to use the same hints to help guess the poet you address. (You have to include the name into your address by all means.)