

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)

This conversation comes from the short story “Uncle Feodor’s Special Girl”. Two buddies, a dog and a cat, in fear that the boy who they call Uncle Feodor might neglect them because he is in love with a girl, make a list of his faults to show it to Katya the girl. Sharick the dog and Matroskin the cat are talking like that:

- He is too young, — Matroskin began.
- Very true, Sharick agreed. — Too young. Is it a fault?
- Sure it is, Matroskin says. Young means inexperienced. Inexperienced means stupid.
- He is too fond of his parents, — Cat says.
- So what? I would be fond of my parents if I had them.
- It is nothing to you, but this may mean a lot to others. If he is too fond of his parents, he cannot care much for others.
- Got it. — Sharick says. — Anything else?
- He never fights.
- Is it bad? — Dog says.
- Sure. This means he won’t be able to stick up for himself. It may happen that he needs to teach a boxer a lesson, but he can’t. Write on: he is not interested in money-saving or selling milk in the market.
- Neither am I, — Sharick says.
- It’s OK with you. In our company, you are a worker of all nations. You have been working all life. You are not Sharick, you are our Sharikov the worker. Meanwhile, Uncle Feodor has a life ahead. If one did not learn to sell milk and save money in their childhood, they’ll start to trade in military secrets in an old age.
- What for?
- To make a living. Add another fault: Uncle Feodor reads too much.
- So what? — cries out Sharick.
- It means nothing to you, — Cat argues, — but what about his eyesight failing in his old age?

It took Sharick and Matroskin quite a time to make the list. At last it was ready to be taken to the girl. Both the guys felt happy. They slowly went out and walked by easy stages to see Katya. The summer setting sun kissed them, the road rolled under their feet like a carpet. Only the best things were in store for them.

What do you think Katya’s opinion will be of the list? Write what may happen next and give your arguments.

What other works from Russian and world literature contain “lists”, or catalogues, and what role do they play? Consider a few examples.

Task 2. (For students in their 4–9 years at school)

Read the poem ‘Jabberwocky’ by Lewis Carroll.

Lewis Carroll

(from *Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There*, 1872)

’Twas brillig, and the slithy toves
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe:
All mimsy were the borogoves,
And the mome raths outgrabe.

“Beware the Jabberwock, my son!
The jaws that bite, the claws that catch!
Beware the Jubjub bird, and shun
The frumious Bandersnatch!”

He took his vorpal sword in hand:
Long time the manxome foe he sought —
So rested he by the Tumtum tree,
And stood awhile in thought.

And, as in uffish thought he stood,
The Jabberwock, with eyes of flame,
Came whiffing through the tulgey wood,
And burbled as it came!

One, two! One, two! And through and through
The vorpal blade went snicker-snack!
He left it dead, and with its head
He went galumphing back.

“And, has thou slain the Jabberwock?
Come to my arms, my beamish boy!
O frabjous day! Callooh! Callay!”
He chortled in his joy.

’Twas brillig, and the slithy toves
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe;
All mimsy were the borogoves,
And the mome raths outgrabe.

This is a very famous poem that consists of non-existent words but any reader could guess what is described. “However, somebody killed something: that’s clear, at any rate” — said Alice. Which words were invented by the poet? Why do you think he did it? Compose a poem with words of your invention and make it understandable for readers.

Task 3. *This is what a great Russian poet wrote about another one whose name is substituted by X.*

“... On the third volume the poet wrote a madrigal dedicated to me: ‘Beauty’s terrible, they’ll tell you...’ I never had a Spanish shawl mentioned there, but X was infatuated by Carmen at that time and so he made me look Spanish as well. <...>. It is not by accident that the poem is written like a Spanish ‘romancero’.”

Read this poem in an English translation.

Beauty’s terrible, they’ll tell you —
Round your shoulders languidly
You will draw a Spanish shawl,
Put a red rose in your hair.
Beauty’s simple, they will tell you —
Awkward, with your flowered shawl
You will cover up the baby,
Let the rose lie on the floor.
But, as you are listening vaguely
To the words you hear around you,
You will suddenly turn pensive,
You will murmur to yourself:
“I’m not terrible or simple,
Not so terrible that I would
Simply murder, or so simple
Not to know life’s full of terror.”

(Translated by Alex Miller)

Write the names of both the poets, if you know them.

Do you know any works from Russian literature that are connected with Spain, its people, history and culture?

Compose your own Spanish verse.

Task 4. Due to the fact that this task is dedicated to analysis of poems written in Russian it can not be translated into English. See the task in the original Russian version.

Task 5. *Read this passage from a Russian novel.*

Suddenly something like a song caught my ear. It was indeed a song, and the voice was pleasant, feminine, but where did it come from? I listened to it. It was a strange melody, now slow and plaintive, now fast and lively. I looked around, but saw no one. I listened again, and the sound seemed to drop from the heavens. I looked up, and on the roof of the hut I saw a girl in a striped dress, a real mermaid with loose long hair. Shading her eyes from the sun with her hand, she was looking into the distance, now smiling and talking to herself, now starting up the song again.

I memorized the song word for word:

Over boundless billows green,
Over billows surging,
Fly the ships with sails a-spread,
Onward urging.
There among those ships at sea,
Sails my shallop sprightly,
Curtsying to wind and wave,
Kissed by combers lightly.
Stormy winds begin to blow,
Stately ships a-rocking,
Widely do they spread their wings —
To leeward flocking.
The angry ocean then I pray,
Bending low before him:
“Spare my bark, Oh fearsome one!” —
Thus I do implore him. —
“Precious goods are stowed on board! —
The sea foam is a fright! —
Keep her safe — a crazy one steers
Through the darkening night!”

Write the title and the author’s name. Why do you think the author cites the words of the song? Is there any connection between the words and the events described in the passage?

Do you know any works from Russian and world literature with singing characters that cite at least a few lines of the songs? What purpose can this device serve? (Consider a few examples.)