

Literature Competition

Assignments 1 and 2 are recommended to students of grades from 4 to 9. They will not be taken into account for the students of grades 10 and 11. All other assignments are addressed to the students of all grades. You should not try to answer every question, no matter how. It would be much better to do one assignment thoroughly or to answer only those questions in every assignment that you quite understand completely and feel sure of the answer.

Assignment 1. (for grade 9 and younger) *The following is an extract from the reminiscences of Yuri Rytkheu (1930–2008), an author who was born in Chukotka to a family of a hunter.*

A few days later Tatro brought to class a familiar volume of Pushkin's writings and began to read. (...)

It was absolutely different to those things my friends and I had heard before. On the one hand, we understood it was a Russian speech, but every one we knew — those who worked at the Polar station, the peltry purchaser; Nikolai Pavlov, the baker; and after all, our schoolmates, Petya and Vladik, did not talk like that! What a strange Russian speech! — I could not hold it any longer and said so. And Tatro said that word again: Because it is poetry: What does this mean, poetry? — I asked another time and incurred Tatro's displeasure. — I am going to translate these words for you right now, said Tatro and revealed for us something amazing: On the coast the outline of which suggests a bow curve, there is a green tree; its wood is used for dogsled struts. There is a chain on that tree. This chain is made of nummary metal; our school principal's two teeth are made of that very metal. An animal that looks like a dog but is much smaller and very nimble too, walks round that tree day and night. This animal is learned, it can talk. . .

What was the poem that the teacher read to his class?

Which words had no equivalent in the Chukchi language? Which words were hard for you to understand in the translation?

Could this translation help you understand what poetry is? Why do you think so?

Assignment 2. (for grade 9 and younger) *Read this extract from The life and opinions of the . . . Murr.*

“Yes, it cannot be otherwise, I must have been born in an attic! Never mind your cellars and woodsheds — I'll plump for the attic! Climate, native land, customs and usage — how indelible an impression they make! Aye, they alone shape the citizen of the world both within and without! Whence comes that elevated feeling into my soul, that irresistible urge towards what is lofty? Whence that wonderfully rare facility in climbing, that enviable mastery of the boldest and most skilful leaps? Ah, what sweet melancholy fills my breast! The longing for my native attic stirs powerfully within me! I consecrate these tears to thee,

fair fatherland — to thee do I dedicate this plaintively exultant mew! These leaps and bounds are in thy honour; there is virtue in them and patriotic courage! O native attic, thou grandest me many a little mouse in thy generosity, and what's more, a person can snatch many a sausage and flitch of bacon out of the chimney, a person can filch many a starling and even a little pigeon now and then. ‘How mighty is love for thee, O Fatherland!’”

Name the author if you know him. Complete the title.

What makes the character's language so amusing? Find the sentences and phrases which make it clear that the narrator is not human and in this case it will be certain that the missing word is correct.

Try to recollect as many compositions from Russian and world literature that tell about animals. Name the authors and characters.

Why, in your opinion, writers should choose animals for characters? (Consider various cases.)

Assignment 3. The following is the beginning of the “Ode to the West Wind” written in terza rima by Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792–1822).

O wild West Wind, thou breath of Autumn's being,
Thou, from whose unseen presence the leaves dead
Are driven, like ghosts from an enchanter fleeing,

Yellow, and black, and pale, and hectic red,
Pestilence-stricken multitudes: O thou,
Who chariotest to their dark wintry bed

The winged seeds, where they lie cold and low,
Each like a corpse within its grave, until
Thine azure sister of the Spring shall blow

Her clarion o'er the dreaming earth, and fill
(Driving sweet buds like flocks to feed in air)
With living hues and odours plain and hill:

Wild Spirit, which art moving everywhere;
Destroyer and Preserver; hear, O hear!

What kind of verse is this? You might guess if you look carefully at the rhyme scheme.

Once V. Brusov, a Russian poet, wrote a poem in terza rima, Dante in Venice. Why, in your opinion, he chose this type of verse? What do you know about Dante? What other poets wrote in terza rima? What other poets do you know that wrote in terza rima?

Compose your own poem in terza rima.

Assignment 4. *One of these two poems is written by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1807–1892), the other by George Mackay Brown (1921–1996).*

Which of them do you think is written later, in 20 c? What makes you think so?

What do these poems have in common? What makes them different? Pay attention both to the theme and the form. Try to find as many features as you can.

Which of them, in your guess, is called ‘Beachcomber’?

1. Monday I found a boot —
Rust and salt leather.
I gave it back to the sea, to dance in.

Tuesday a spar of timber worth thirty bob.
Next winter
It will be a chair, a coffin, a bed.

Wednesday a half can of Swedish spirits.
I tilted my head.
The shore was cold with mermaids and angels.

Thursday I got nothing, seaweed,
A whale bone,
Wet feet and a loud cough.

Friday I held a seaman’s skull,
Sand spilling from it
The way time is told on kirkyard stones.

Saturday a barrel of sodden oranges.
A Spanish ship
Was wrecked last month at The Kame.

Sunday, for fear of the elders,
I sit on my bum.
What’s heaven? A sea chest with a thousand gold coins.
2. The tide rises, the tide falls,
The twilight darkens, the curlew calls;
Along the sea-sands damp and brown
The traveler hastens toward the town,
And the tide rises, the tide falls.
Darkness settles on roofs and walls,
But the sea, the sea in darkness calls;
The little waves, with their soft, white hands
Efface the footprints in the sands,
And the tide rises, the tide falls.

The morning breaks; the steeds in their stalls
Stamp and neigh, as the hostler calls;
The day returns, but nevermore
Returns the traveler to the shore.
And the tide rises, the tide falls.

Assignment 5. *The tale by V. Sollogub “Tarantas” begins like this:*

Vassily Ivanovitsch was a country gentleman in the government of Kazan about fifty years old of short stature and so stout that you could hardly look at his cheerful rotundity without a smile. His face was broad and of a high colour, his eyes small and grey. He was attired like any other country squire: a white felt cap with a huge peak, a blue dress-coat with bright brass buttons, (the workmanship of a one-eyed tailor in Kazan, whose sign-board has for the last forty years proclaimed him “newly arrived from St. Petersburg”) pea-green trousers, undulating in picturesque folds above his boots, a stock buckled by an enormous metal clasp; a glass bead watch-guard of a celestial blue colour adorned his waistcoat.

Vassily Ivanovitsch paced the Tverskoy boulevard, and smiled inwardly as he recapitulated those enjoyments which Moscow affords in so great a profusion.

And this is a description of a character from another book that was published in 19 c.

All his clothes were fresh from the tailor’s and were all right, except for being too new and too distinctly appropriate. <...> Pyotr Petrovitch treated it too respectfully and held it too carefully in his hands. The exquisite pair of lavender gloves, real Louvain, told the same tale, if only from the fact of his not wearing them, but carrying them in his hand for show. Light and youthful colours predominated in Pyotr Petrovitch’s attire. He wore a charming summer jacket of a fawn shade, light thin trousers, a waistcoat of the same, new and fine linen, a cravat of the lightest cambric with pink stripes on it, and the best of it was, this all suited Pyotr Petrovitch. His very fresh and even handsome face looked younger than his forty-five years at all times. His dark, mutton-chop whiskers made an agreeable setting on both sides, growing thickly upon his shining, clean-shaven chin. Even his hair, touched here and there with grey, though it had been combed and curled at a hairdresser’s, did not give him a stupid appearance, as curled hair usually does, by inevitably suggesting a German on his wedding-day.

Name the author and characters of this book.

Compare the portraits and the style of the descriptions. Do you think the author shows his attitude to the characters?

Do you remember any other descriptions of characters and their appearances in Russian and world fiction? How much can we know about characters by their portraits? (Analyse several examples).

Try to make a classification of literary portraits of your own.