

12.4.2 Lesson 1

Introduction

In this first lesson of the unit, students begin their analysis of the short story “The Overcoat” from *The Collected Tales of Nikolai Gogol* by Nikolai Gogol. Students read and analyze pages 394-399 of “The Overcoat” (from “In the department of . . . but it would be better not to say” to “those who neither give counsel nor take any themselves”), in which Gogol introduces the setting and the character Akaky Akakievich. Student analysis focuses on the development of Akaky Akakievich’s character, paying particular attention to Akaky Akakievich’s physical description, explanations of his work, and the way in which he relates to the world around him. Student learning is assessed via a Quick Write at the end of the lesson: What does the narrator’s statement “There, in that copying, he saw some varied and pleasant world of his own” (p. 397) suggest about Akaky Akakievich’s character?

For homework, students read pages 399-410 of “The Overcoat” and annotate for the development of Akaky Akakievich’s character. Additionally, students select 3-4 phrases from the excerpt that are particularly fresh or engaging and explain why they selected these phrases.

Standards

Assessed Standard(s)	
RL.11-12.3	Analyze the impact of the author’s choices regarding how to develop and relate elements of a story or drama (e.g., where a story is set, how the action is ordered, how the characters are introduced and developed).
Addressed Standard(s)	
RL.11-12.4	Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including words with multiple meanings or language that is particularly fresh, engaging, or beautiful. (Include Shakespeare as well as other authors.)
W. 11-12.9.a	Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research. a. Apply <i>grades 11-12 Reading standards</i> to literature (e.g., “Demonstrate knowledge of eighteenth-, nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century foundational works of American literature, including how two or more texts from the same period treat similar themes or topics”).
L. 11-12.4.a, b	Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases based on <i>grades 11-12 reading and content</i> , choosing flexibly from a range of strategies. a. Use context (e.g., the overall meaning of a sentence, paragraph, or text; a word’s position or function in a sentence) as a clue to the meaning of a word or phrase. b. Identify and correctly use patterns of word changes that indicate different meanings or parts of speech (e.g., <i>conceive, conception, conceivable</i>).

Assessment

Assessment(s)

Student learning is assessed via a Quick Write at the end of the lesson. Students respond to the following prompt, citing textual evidence to support analysis and inferences drawn from the text.

- What does the narrator’s statement “There, in that copying, he saw some varied and pleasant world of his own” (p. 397) suggest about Akaky Akakievich’s character?
- Throughout this unit, Quick Writes may be assessed using the Short Response Rubric.

High Performance Response(s)

A High Performance Response should:

- Explain what the statement “There, in that copying, he saw some varied and pleasant world of his own” (p. 397) suggests about Akaky Akakievich’s character (e.g., This statement suggests Akaky Akakievich’s “zeal” and “love” (p. 397) for his work. Through work, he escapes the physical world where he is “not very remarkable” (p. 394) and instead finds joy and “content[ment]” with his “lot” in life (p. 399). Thus, work is a “pleasant world” of solitude for Akaky Akakievich where he feels “[d]elight” (p. 397).).

Vocabulary

Vocabulary to provide directly (will not include extended instruction)

- irascible (adj.) - easily provoked to anger; very irritable
- tome (n.) - a book, especially a very heavy, large, or learned book
- titular (adj.) - existing or being such in title only; nominal; having the title but none of the associated duties, powers, etc.
- despotism (n.) - absolute power or control; tyranny
- conducive (adj.) - tending to produce; contributive; helpful; favorable (usually followed by *to*)
- transfixed (v.) - made or held motionless with amazement
- irrepressible (adj.) - incapable of being restrained; uncontrollable
- whist (n.) - a card game
- kopeck (n.) - an aluminum-bronze coin of Russia
- rusks (n.) - slices of sweet raised bread dried and baked again in the oven
- chibouks (n.) - Turkish pipes with a stiff stem sometimes 4 or 5 feet long
- diversion (n.) - distraction from business, care, etc.

Vocabulary to teach (may include direct word work and/or questions)

- zeal (n.) - fervent or enthusiastic devotion, often extreme or fanatical in nature

Additional vocabulary to support English Language Learners (to provide directly)

- decrees (n.) - official orders given by a person with power or by a government
- hemorrhoidal (adj.) - relating to certain arteries and veins supplying blood to the region of the rectum and anus
- jeered (v.) - laughed at or criticized someone in a loud and angry way
- inhumanity (n.) - the quality or state of being cruel to other people or to animals
- knack (n.) - an ability, talent, or special skill needed to do something

Lesson Agenda/Overview

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Student-Facing Agenda	% of Lesson
<p>Standards & Text:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Standards: RL.11-12.3, RL.11-12.4, W.11-12.9.a, L.11-12.4.a, b Text: “The Overcoat” from <i>The Collected Tales of Nikolai Gogol</i> by Nikolai Gogol, pages 394-399 <p>Learning Sequence:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Introduction of Lesson Agenda Homework Accountability Reading and Discussion Quick Write Closing 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5% 20% 60% 10% 5%

Materials

- Student copies of the Short Response Rubric and Checklist (refer to 12.4.1.Lesson 1) (optional)

Learning Sequence

How to Use the Learning Sequence	
Symbol	Type of Text & Interpretation of the Symbol
10%	Percentage indicates the percentage of lesson time each activity should take.
no symbol	Plain text indicates teacher action.
	Bold text indicates questions for the teacher to ask students.
	<i>Italicized text indicates a vocabulary word.</i>
▶	Indicates student action(s).
☞	Indicates possible student response(s) to teacher questions.
ⓘ	Indicates instructional notes for the teacher.

Activity 1: Introduction of Lesson Agenda

5%

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Begin by explaining that in this unit, students analyze two fiction texts: Nikolai Gogol’s short story “The Overcoat” from *The Collected Tales of Nikolai Gogol* and Jhumpa Lahiri’s novel *The Namesake*. Students explore how each author develops characters and central ideas, and consider the role that structural choices play in the text. Throughout the unit, students refine the close reading, writing, and discussion skills they developed in Modules 12.1, 12.2, and 12.3.

- Students listen.

Review the agenda and the assessed standard for this lesson: RL.11-12.3. In this first lesson of the unit, students read and analyze the short story, “The Overcoat” by Nikolai Gogol, focusing on the development of the text’s main character, Akaky Akakievich.

- Students look at the agenda.
- **Differentiation Consideration:** Consider explaining to students that “The Overcoat” was first published in 1842 in Russia and contains several antiquated words and phrases that are indicative of the time and setting in which the text was written.
- Instruct students to read the text notes for “The Overcoat” found on page 435. Encourage students to refer to these notes as needed during reading to support their comprehension of the story.

Activity 2: Homework Accountability

20%

Instruct students to take out their responses to the first part of the previous lesson’s homework assignment. (Read pages 394–399 of “The Overcoat” from *The Collected Tales of Nikolai Gogol* by Nikolai Gogol and annotate for the development of Akaky Akakievich’s character.) Instruct students to form pairs and share their annotations.

- Student annotations may include:
 - “In the department he was shown no respect at all” (p. 396) - The lack of respect shown to Akaky Akakievich by his colleagues suggests he is a character of low standing in the story, and that he lacks social relationships at work.
 - “It would hardly be possible to find a man who lived so much in his work. It is not enough to say he served zealously—no, he served with love” (p. 397) - This indicates that Akaky Akakievich is a person who is devoted to his work in way that sets him apart from others.
 - “But Akaky Akakievich, even if he looked at something, saw in everything his own neat lines” (p. 398) - This suggests Akaky Akakievich is a character who lives in his own world, removed from the physical world around him.

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Lead a brief whole-class discussion of student responses.

Instruct students to take out their responses to the second part of the previous lesson’s homework assignment. (Additionally, prepare a brief written response to the following prompt: What tone does Gogol create through the voice of the narrator?) Instruct student pairs to discuss their responses.

- The voice of the narrator creates a tone that is familiar and conversational with the use of informal words and phrases such as “[t]hey say” (p. 394), “I don’t remember” (p. 394), “one might say” (p. 394), and “we” (p. 395).

Lead a brief whole-class discussion of student responses.

Activity 3: Reading and Discussion

60%

Instruct students to form small groups. Post or project each set of questions below for students to discuss. Instruct students to continue to annotate the text as they read and discuss (W.11-12.9.a).

- **Differentiation Consideration:** Throughout the unit, consider providing masterful readings of the text as necessary.
- **Differentiation Consideration:** Consider posting or projecting the following guiding question to support students throughout this lesson:

How do descriptions of Akaky Akakievich’s physical appearance and his work develop his character?

Instruct student groups to refer to pages 394-397 (from “In the department of . . . but it would be better not to say” to “even in a man the world regards as noble and honorable”) and discuss the following questions before sharing out with the class.

Provide students with the definitions of *irascible*, *tome*, *titular*, *despotism*, *conducive*, and *transfixed*.

- Students may be familiar with some of these words. Consider asking students to volunteer definitions before providing them to the group.
 - Students write the definitions of *irascible*, *tome*, *titular*, *despotism*, *conducive*, and *transfixed* on their copies of the text or in a vocabulary journal.

- **Differentiation Consideration:** Consider providing students with the definitions of *decrees*, *hemorrhoidal*, *jeered*, and *inhumanity*.
 - Students write the definitions of *decrees*, *hemorrhoidal*, *jeered*, and *inhumanity* on their copies of the text or in a vocabulary journal.
- Consider explaining that a “titular councillor” (p. 394) refers to a mid-level civil service rank in Russia established during the time of Peter the Great in 1722 (see pp. XXI-XXII).

How does the narrator’s description of the “police chief” refine his earlier statement about “every private individual” (p. 394)?

- Student responses may include:
 - The description of the “police chief” refines the narrator’s earlier statement that “every private individual considers the whole of society insulted in his person” (p. 394) by suggesting people are overly concerned about their status in society and eager to take offense when they perceive disrespect for their rank. The “police chief” objects to descriptions in a “novelistic work” that include mentions of a drunk “police chief” (p. 394). Although this “tome” is not about him specifically, he feels his name is “being taken in vain” (p. 394).
 - The description of the “police chief” refines the narrator’s earlier statement that “every private individual considers the whole of society insulted in his person” (p. 394) by suggesting people are overly concerned about what others think. The “police chief” from “the department” feels that mentions of a drunken “police chief” in a “novelistic work” are evidence that “the government’s decrees are perishing” (p. 394) because he has the same title.
- **Differentiation Consideration:** If students struggle, consider posing the following scaffolding questions:

Paraphrase the statement “Nowadays every private individual considers the whole of society insulted in his person” (p. 394).

- Every person has such an inflated view of him/herself, and is so concerned with what others think, that they think all of society is impacted when he/she is personally insulted.

Why would it “be better not to say in which department” and simply call it “a certain department” (p. 394)?

- Based on the description of the “police chief” taking offense to negative references made about another police chief, the narrator determines it is wise not to mention the specific “department” (p. 394). He acknowledges that “all ... officialdom” is

“irascible,” (p. 394), and thus easily angered, so he chooses to avoid offending anyone by referring vaguely to “a certain department” (p. 394).

What does the narrator’s description of “officialdom” and “the whole of society” (p. 394) suggest about the structure of the society in which the story takes place?

- The narrator’s description of “officialdom” and “society” suggests the importance of position, rank, and power in “Petersburg” (p. 394). The narrator makes it clear that the people who comprise “all these departments, regiments, [and] offices” are extremely sensitive, and “irascible,” or easily angered, in matters concerning their titles and “rank” (p. 394).

What do the narrator’s descriptions of the physical appearance of the “certain clerk” (p. 394) indicate about the clerk?

- The narrator states that the “certain clerk” is “not very remarkable” and is “somewhat pockmarked, somewhat red-haired ... somewhat nearsighted” and “slightly bald” (p. 394). The use of the words “not very,” “somewhat,” and “slightly” all suggest the clerk is a person who is not remarkable in appearance (p. 394). The description of the “wrinkles” and “hemorrhoidal” complexion (p. 394) also indicate that the clerk is unpleasant-looking or not attractive.

How does the description of Akaky Akakievich’s naming develop his character?

- The description of Akaky Akakievich’s naming shows that his mother was “a very good woman” (p. 395) who put great thought into finding the right name for him. When she could not settle on any suggestions given to her, she realized his “fate” was to have his father’s name, a name that others “perhaps find ... somewhat strange and farfetched” (p. 395). Combined with the physical description of Akaky Akakievich, his naming suggests fate has made him unusual or unappealing.

How does the comparison of Akaky Akakievich to a “mere fly” (p. 396) further develop his character?

- The narrator compares Akaky Akakievich to a “mere fly” because his co-workers treat him with indifference or insignificance, just as they would treat a fly. Those beneath him in rank “d[o] not rise from their places when he pass[es],” and those above him treat him with “cold despotism” (p. 396) or power. When assigned new work, “[s]ome chief clerk’s assistant simply shoved papers under his nose” (p. 396), not communicating with Akaky Akakievich at all. Thus, the comparison demonstrates that others view Akaky Akakievich as unimportant, or not even human; he simply exists, “always ... seen in one and the same place, in the same position” (p. 396).

How does the reaction of the “young man” to the “moments of greatest merriment” (p. 396) further explain Akaky Akakievich’s position at the “*certain department*” (p. 394)?

- Student responses may include:
 - The “young man[’s]” reaction shows that beyond his own pity and shame, no one in the “*certain department*” (p. 394) has an emotional connection with Akaky Akakievich. Akaky Akakievich is the object of ridicule, “jokes” (p. 396), and “inhuman[e]” treatment from men who are otherwise regarded as “noble and honorable” (p. 397).
 - The “young man” (p. 396) is so upset by the treatment Akaky Akakievich receives, he imagines Akaky Akakievich saying to the tormenting co-workers, “‘I am your brother’” (p. 397). With this thought, the young man recognizes that although Akaky Akakievich is one of their fellow employees, he is regarded as an outsider and not even considered a part of their work community or family.

Lead a brief whole-class discussion of student responses.

Instruct student groups to refer to pages 397-399 (from “It would hardly be possible to find a man” to “who neither give counsel nor take any themselves”) and discuss the following questions before sharing out with the class.

Provide students with the definitions of *irrepressible*, *whist*, *kopeck*, *rusks*, *chibouks*, and *diversion*.

- Students may be familiar with some of these words. Consider asking students to volunteer definitions before providing them to the group.
 - Students write the definitions of *irrepressible*, *whist*, *kopeck*, *rusks*, *chibouks*, and *diversion* on their copies of the text or in a vocabulary journal.
- **Differentiation Consideration:** Consider providing students with the definition of *knack*.
 - Students write the definition of *knack* on their copies of the text or in a vocabulary journal.

Why is it “not enough to say [Akaky Akakievich] served zealously” (p. 397) in his work?

- The narrator establishes that Akaky Akakievich’s passion for his work is beyond “zeal” and dedication, and in so doing explains Akaky Akakievich’s deep connection to his work as “love” (p. 397). It is this love for his work that inspires Akaky Akakievich’s only

attempts at asserting himself; when co-workers “jostl[e]” his arm, “interfering” with his work, he tells them, “Let me be” and asks, “Why do you offend me?” (p. 396).

How does the description of Akaky Akakievich’s service to “his work” on page 397 help define the word *zeal* on page 397? (L.11-12.4.a, b)

- Akaky Akakievich demonstrates *zeal* or enthusiasm by “liv[ing] ... in his work” and showing “[d]elight” in his tasks (p. 397). The narrator explains that if Akaky Akakievich’s “zeal had been rewarded correspondingly, he might ... have gone as far as state councillor” (p. 397), so *zeal* must mean “an enthusiastic devotion to a task.”

Why does Akaky Akakievich not “pay attention to what [is] going on or happening” around him (p. 398)?

- Akaky Akakievich does not “pay attention to what [is] going on or happening” around him (p. 398) because “[o]utside [his] copying nothing seem[s] to exist for him” (p. 397). He wants only to continue in his copying work, and has no desire for a “diversion” (p. 399) from it. Promotion to “something more important than the usual copying” does not interest him, leaving him content in “copying forever” (p. 397).

How does Akaky Akakievich relate to the world when “he look[s] at something” (p. 398)?

- “[E]ven if he look[s] at something,” and sees with his physical eyes the streets or other details of the world, Akaky Akakievich does not interact, but sees “his own neat lines” of copying (p. 398). In this way, he isolates himself from the real, physical world.
- **Differentiation Consideration:** If students struggle, consider posing the following scaffolding question:

How do “diversion[s]” impact Akaky Akakievich’s “peaceful life” (p. 399)?

- Akaky Akakievich does “not give himself up to any diversion” (p. 399). He wants nothing more than to “writ[e] his fill” for work (p. 399) or for “pleasure” at home (p. 398).

Lead a brief whole-class discussion of student responses.

Activity 4: Quick Write

10%

Instruct students to respond briefly in writing to the following prompt:

What does the narrator’s statement “There, in that copying, he saw some varied and pleasant world of his own” (p. 397) suggest about Akaky Akakievich’s character?

Instruct students to look at their annotations to find evidence. Ask students to use this lesson’s vocabulary wherever possible in their written responses.

- Students listen and read the Quick Write prompt.
- Display the prompt for students to see, or provide the prompt in hard copy.

Transition to the independent Quick Write.

- Students independently answer the prompt using evidence from the text.
- See the High Performance Response at the beginning of this lesson.
- Consider using the Short Response Rubric to assess students’ writing. Students may use the Short Response Rubric and Checklist to guide their written responses.

Activity 5: Closing

5%

Display and distribute the homework assignment. For homework, instruct students to read pages 399-410 of “The Overcoat” (from “There exists in Petersburg a powerful enemy of all” to “without tarrying, he got dressed, put on his overcoat, and left”) and annotate for the development of Akaky Akakievich’s character (W.11-12.9.a). Additionally, instruct students to select 3-4 phrases from the excerpt that are particularly fresh or engaging and explain why they selected these phrases (RL.11-12.4).

- Students follow along.

Homework

Read pages 399-410 of “The Overcoat” (from “There exists in Petersburg a powerful enemy of all” to “without tarrying, he got dressed, put on his overcoat, and left”) and annotate for the development of Akaky Akakievich’s character. Additionally, select 3-4 phrases from the excerpt that are particularly fresh or engaging and explain why you selected these phrases.