

Introduction to *Uncle Vanya*

Video Script

February 12th, 2025

Instructional designer:

Sasha Khmelnik

Instructional goal:

After completing this module, creative writing graduate students will read and meaningfully engage with an English translation of *Uncle Vanya*, able to connect to its content personally as humans and professionally as writers, integrating into their reading the play's historical and literary context and its place in present-day culture.

Designer's note: The visuals should consist of stills and clips that make the world of Chekhov's Russia tangible and relatable and fairly accessible to a contemporary audience. There should be color and movement wherever possible.

	Narration	Media
1	Intro music	- Chekhov society
2	Coming into the 1800's Russia was a vast and separate empire ruled by absolute monarchy . It adopted western culture but remained traditionalist in its social structures . Around 80% of the Russian population were peasants who worked the land owned by nobility. The majority of the peasants were serfs, bound to the land and their lords.	- Map of Russia - Depiction of monarchy - Depiction of peasants
3	After the French Revolution , Napoleon wanted to expand his sphere of influence, and in 1812 marched 600,000 troops across eastern Europe and captured Moscow , which burned soon after in a great fire . Still, Russia refused to capitulate . Denying Napoleon a decisive battle , Russia exhausted his dwindling, undersupplied troops until Napoleon retreated amid a cold, Russian winter.	- Paintings of Napoleon's conquest, battle, retreat

4	<p>Russia's refusal to surrender became a source of national and military pride, and ordinary Russian people, who had stood up against the invaders alongside the nobility, began to see themselves in a new light, though they remained largely subjugated. </p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Illustration of Moscow as a growing power - Individual, closeup peasant photos
5	<p>Meanwhile, young, liberal-minded officers who had traveled to Europe and had fought against Napoleon alongside serfs, began to advocate for societal reform. In 1825, some of these young noblemen, calling themselves Decembrists, made a failed attempt to overthrow the monarchy. </p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Paintings of Decembrists
6	<p>Russia began to alternate between conservative Czars and liberal ones. In 1861 (the year Abraham Lincoln became president in the United States), Alexander II, a more liberal and reform-minded czar, abolished serfdom, overturning the centuries-old social order. Small regional governments, called zemstvos, formed to serve the interests of newly freed but economically struggling peasants. </p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Two Czars, paintings - Abraham Lincoln cameo - End of serfdom illustration - Zemstvo sketch - Peasants photo

7	<p>Anton Chekhov was born in <u>1860</u>, a <u>year before</u> the end of serfdom, in Taganrog, near <u>Ukraine</u>. He was the <u>son</u> of a small-town <u>shopkeeper</u> and the <u>grandson</u> of a <u>serf</u>. When Anton was 16, his family <u>left</u> Taganrog for <u>Moscow</u> after his father's shops went bankrupt. </p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Chekhov's house photo - Taganrog photos - Moscow photos
8	<p>Anton joined them three years later to attend <u>medical</u> school, and through scholarships, tutoring income, and boarders, managed to financially <u>support</u> his siblings and parents. While still in medical school, at age 20, Chekhov published his first <u>story</u> under a <u>pseudonym</u> in a <u>small magazine</u>. </p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Moscow video - Journals photos
9	<p>Chekhov continued to <u>write</u> and <u>publish</u> through the rest of his life. As a <u>doctor</u>, he saw patients in his home in <u>Moscow</u> and later as a <u>zemstvo doctor</u> in Melikhovo. He helped organize district medical surveys and treated <u>patients</u> during epidemics of Tuberculosis, Typhus, and Cholera. His work in <u>medicine</u> by turns <u>fed</u> and <u>exhausted</u> him. </p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Books photos - Chekhov's places photos: Moscow, Melikhovo - Medical survey example - Illustration of typhus

10	<p>Chekhov's <u>medical</u> practice brought him into contact with people from all social <u>classes</u>, which provided much of the material for his <u>writing</u>. His stories and plays most often concern themselves with what we as people need and want <u>out of our lives</u> and what we owe to <u>one another</u>. Chekhov's characters are often either suffocated by <u>stasis</u> (like Gurov and Anna in <i>The Lady with the Little Dog</i>) or <u>overwhelmed</u> by the prospect of <u>mobility</u> (like Nikolai in <i>Gooseberries</i>). </p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Illustrations from Chekhov's stories: "<i>The Student</i>," "<i>Big and Little</i>," "<i>Lady With the Little Dog</i>," "<i>Gooseberries</i>"
11	<p>Uncle Vanya in particular is <u>remarkable</u> for the <u>intelligence</u> and <u>compassion</u> with which it manages to <u>capture the pathos</u> of this human disequilibrium. We see the characters in an otherwise <u>ordinary moment</u>, encountering <u>each other</u> as they try to understand the <u>meaning</u> of their own lives.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Posters, photos, and illustrations from plays

12

Theater in the 1800's tended to be overtly **comic or tragic**, with clear **heroes and villains**, driven by **plot** and **melodrama**. || Chekhov's **observant, neutral,** occasionally satirical **eye**, his pervasive **empathy**, and an ear for the things we **mean** but don't **say**, made his **writing** distinctly **modernist**. || That he was able to **capture with such remarkable attention** the **lives of people living on the precipice of profound societal change** makes his work still deeply **relevant** today.

- Examples of theater
- Illustrations and photos from Chekhov's plays