

UNIT 7

VANKA

Anton Chekhov (1860-1904)

Students Learning Outcomes:

On completion of the unit, students will be able to:

- answer the comprehension questions.
- apply rules of change of number of nouns.
- analyze and compare business letters
- locate appropriate synonyms and antonyms in a thesaurus.
- use useful expressions during conversation.

Pre-reading:

- How should we treat the orphans?

Vanka was a little boy of nine who, three months before, had travelled from the countryside to be apprenticed to Aliakin, the shoemaker, many many miles away in Moscow. On Christmas Eve he did not go to bed. He waited until his master had gone out to church, and then fetched a bottle of ink and a rusty pen from his master's cupboard, spread out a crumpled sheet of paper before him, and began to write. As he wrote, more than once he looked fearfully round at the door.

"Dear Grandpapa," he wrote, "I am writing you a letter. I wish you a merry Christmas and I hope God will give you all sorts of good things. You know I have no papa or mamma, and you are all I have."

Vanka turned his eyes to the dark window, on which shone the reflection of the candle, and vividly pictured his grandfather, a small, thin, but extraordinarily active man of sixty-five, with a perpetually smiling face. By day he slept in the kitchen and at night, wrapped up in a huge sheepskin coat, he walked about guarding the grounds shaking his watchman's rattle. Behind him, in Vanka's imagination, pace the dogs Kashtanka and The Eel, (so called because he is black and his body is long) wagging their tails. The weather is glorious. The night is dark, but the whole village is visible: the white roofs, the columns of smoke rising from the chimneys, the trees, silvery with frost, and the snowdrifts. The sky is strewn with gaily twinkling stars, and the Milky Way is as bright as if it had been washed and scrubbed with snow. Vanka sighed, dipped his pen in the ink, and went on:

“Yesterday my master dragged me into the yard by my hair and beat me with a stirrup because I went to sleep while I was rocking the baby. Last week my mistress told me to clean some herrings and I began cleaning one from the tail, and she took it and poked its head into my face.

The apprentices make me steal the cucumbers, and then my master beats me with whatever is at hand. And I have nothing to eat. I get bread in the morning and porridge for dinner, and bread for supper. My master and mistress drink up all the tea and the soup. And they make me sleep in the hall, and when the baby cries I don't sleep at all because I have to rock the cradle. Dear Grandpa, please take me away from here, home to the village. I can't stand it. I beg you on my knees. I will pray to God for you all my life. Take me away from here, or else I shall die.”

Vanka's mouth twisted. He rubbed his eyes with a grimy hand and sobbed.

“I will grind your tobacco for you,” he continued, “and pray to God for you. If don't you can kill me like Sidorov's goat. And if you want me to work, I can do the ploughing and clean the boots. Dear Grandpa, I can't stand it. I shall die. I wanted to run away to the village on foot, but I haven't any boots, and it is so cold. And when I am big I will always take care of you and not allow anyone to hurt you at all, and when you die, I will pray to God for you as I do for my dead mother. Moscow is a big city. There are lots of horses, but no sheep. Dear Grandpa, when they have the Christmas tree at the big house, keep some **gilded** nuts for me and put them away in the green chest. Ask Miss Olga for them and say they are for Vanka.”

Vanka heaved a shuddering sigh and stared at the window again. He remembered how he and his grandfather used to go to the forest for the Christmas tree. Those were such happy days. Grandfather would drag the fallen fir tree up to the big house, and there they would all set to work decorating it. The busiest of all was Miss Olga, Vanka's favourite. While Vanka's mother was still alive and a housemaid at the big house, Miss Olga used to give little Vanka biscuits, and because she had nothing better to do, she had taught him to read and write, to count up to a hundred, and even to dance the quadrille. But when his mother died, the orphaned Vanka was banished to the kitchen, where his grandfather was, and from there he was sent to Moscow, to Aliakin, the shoemaker.

“Do come, dear Grandpapa,” Vanka went on. “Please come. I beg you to come and take me away. Have pity on your poor little orphan, because everyone scolds me, and I'm so hungry, and it's so lonely. I can't tell you how lonely it is. And the other day my master hit me on the head, so that I fell down and almost didn't come to again. Give my love to Kashtanka and the Eel, and to the coachman, and don't let anyone touch my accordion. Dear Grandpapa, do come.

Your loving grandson,
Vanka.”

Vanka folded the paper in four and put it in an envelope which he had bought that evening for one kopeck. He reflected an instant, then dipped his pen in the ink and wrote the address:

To my Grandpapa in the village.

Delighted to have finished his letter without interruption, he put on his cap and, without waiting to throw his little overcoat over his shoulders, ran out into the street in his shirt. The butcher, whom he had asked the evening before, had told him that when letters are put into a mail-box, they are collected from there and carried all over Russia in mail wagons with ringing bells. Vanka ran to the nearest mailbox and dropped his letter in.

An hour later he was sound asleep, **lulled** by the sweetest hopes. He dreamed he saw a stove. By the stove sat his grandfather swinging his legs and reading his letter to the cook. Near the stove walked The Eel, wagging his tail.

About the Author

Anton Chekhov was one of the Russian greatest writers. He was born in 1860 and died on 15th July, 1904 at the age of 44. He was a Russian physician and author of short stories. His career as a dramatist produced four classics and his best stories are held in high esteem by the writers and critics.



Reading and Thinking Skills:

1. Answer the following questions.

- i) How did Vanka's master and mistress treat him?
- ii) Why did Vanka frequently look “fearfully” round at the door as he wrote his letter?
- iii) What was Vanka's promise to do for his grandfather?
- iv) What were the things which made Vanka unhappy?
- v) Describe Vanka's life before and after he was sent to Moscow.
- vi) How has the writer made his description more vivid?
- vii) Do you think Vanka's letter would reach to his grandfather?
- viii) Why was Vanka writing a letter to his grandfather?

- ix) How did Miss Olga treat Vanka?
- x) Why will Vanka's grandfather not be able to receive the letter?

2. Choose the correct answer.

- i) **Vanka was**
 - (a) an orphan of nine years.
 - (b) a boy who went to Harrow for higher study.
 - (c) a sportsman.
 - (d) a rowdy boy.
- ii) **Vanka wrote to his grandfather on**
 - (a) Christmas Eve.
 - (b) Sunday.
 - (c) Eid-ul-Fiter.
 - (d) Birthday.
- iii) **Who taught Vanka to read and write?**
 - (a) his father.
 - (b) his mother.
 - (c) Miss Olga.
 - (d) his grandfather.
- iv) **Why did Vanka go to Moscow?**
 - (a) to become a mechanic.
 - (b) to be apprenticed to Aliakin as a shoe maker.
 - (c) to learn the trade of a plumber.
 - (d) to study medicine.
- v) **In the story, "Eel" was:**
 - (a) a kind of fish.
 - (b) the name of Vanka's dog.
 - (c) Vanka's pet cat.
 - (d) Vanka's parrot.
- vi) **Vanka had travelled from the countryside**
 - (a) to be apprenticed to Aliakin, the shoemaker.
 - (b) to be the slave of the King.
 - (c) to be apprenticed to Aliakin, the dentist.
 - (d) to be a teacher of Aliakin, the shoemaker.
- vii) **Vanka writes, "The apprentices make me steal**
 - (a) the oranges".
 - (b) the apples".

- (c) the mangoes”.
- (d) the cucumbers”.
- viii) Vanka rubbed his eyes with
 - (a) a towel.
 - (b) a grimy hand and sobbed.
 - (c) a piece of cloth.
 - (d) a grimy hand and laughed.
- ix) Vanka remembered how he and his grandfather used to
 - (a) go to village.
 - (b) go to England.
 - (c) go to the forest.
 - (d) go to fields.
- x) Miss Olga used to give little Vanka biscuits and
 - (a) taught him to read and write.
 - (b) taught him how to read.
 - (c) taught him how to write.
 - (d) taught him how to speak.

3. Mark the sentences as True or False.

- i) Aliakin was a shoemaker. (T / F)
- ii) Vanka had three dogs. (T / F)
- iii) Vanka wrote a letter to his grandfather that he was very happy in Moscow. (T / F)
- iv) Vanka wrote the correct address on the envelope. (T / F)
- v) Vanka lived in a village. (T / F)
- vi) Vanka could not sleep at all because he had to rock the cradle. (T / F)
- vii) Vanka wrote to his grandfather, “I will grind my tobacco for you.” (T / F)
- viii) Miss Olga was Vanka's mother. (T / F)
- ix) When Vanka's mother died, he was banished to the kitchen. (T / F)
- x) Vanka was ten years old. (T / F)

Critical Thinking:

- How does corporal punishment affect the personality of children?

Grammar:

Rules of change of number of nouns (Singular Plural)

1. Add 's' to the singular noun

Examples:

- i) toy – toys
- ii) table – tables

2. Add 'es' if a noun ends in 'ch, sh, s, x, or o' after a consonant

Examples:

- i) class – classes
- ii) bench – benches
- iii) bush – bushes
- iv) mango – mangoes
- v) tax – taxes

3. By changing the last letter 'y' into 'ies'

Examples:

- i) story – stories
- ii) city – cities

4. By changing the inside vowel of the singular.

Examples:

- i) man – men
- ii) tooth – teeth

5. By suffixing 'en' to the singular.

Examples:

- i) child – children
- ii) ox – oxen

6. By changing 'f' or 'fe' into 'ves'

Examples:

- i) life – lives
- ii) thief – thieves

Exceptions

- i) chief – chiefs
- ii) roof – roofs

7. By adding 's' to the main word in a compound word.

Examples:

- i) son-in-law – sons-in-law
- ii) passer-by – passers-by

Activity:

Write down plural of the following nouns.

chair,	buffalo,	Negro,	army,	lady,
goose,	foot,	leaf,	knife,	proof,
step-son,	student,	maid-servant,	class,	page,
library,	college,	shelf,	computer	

Writing Skills:

Business / Formal Letter

A formal / business letter is usually written for official or business purposes. The language should be much more formal than in friendly letters. It should be polite and concise.

Analysis of a business letter

- **Parts of a business letter**
 - (a) Sender's address (your address)
 - (b) Date
 - (c) Address of the person you are writing to
 - (d) Salutation
 - (e) Topic sentence/Subject title
 - (f) Main body of the letter
 - (g) Closing
 - (h) Signature
 - (i) Name
- Recognize the audience and purpose.
- Use appropriate vocabulary, *style* and *tone* according to the relationship, the knowledge and the interest of the recipient.
- Emphasize the central idea.
- Follow the conventions of a business letter with formats, fonts and spacing in order to improve the document's impact and readability.
- Revise business letters.

Formal Letter Layout

use this letter layout when you write your letter

*Date**

Your address

Name, job title and address of the person you are writing to.

Insert Sir/Madam or Surname Name with title (Mr, Ms, Mrs, Dr, etc.)

Dear _____.

Topic sentence what is the letter about

Main body of letter

Yours sincerely if you know the recipient's name; "Yours faithfully" if you do not.

Yours _____

Signature

Your name

Activity:

Write a letter of complaint to a publishing firm about the numerous mistakes you have found in the book which you ordered.

Research Project

Write a research report on the impact of child labour on children.

Vocabulary:

Synonyms

A synonym is a word which has almost the same meaning as another. The purpose of synonyms is to give flexibility and variety of a style. The great speakers and writers are lavish in their use of synonyms.

"Odd one out" a person or thing differing from all other members of a particular group or set in some way.

Activities:

1. Below are five words from the text with the number of other words in line. Identify the "odd one out". The first one is done for you.

a	perpetually	constantly	continually	usually	<u>forever</u>
b	strewn	spread	sprinkled	dotted	shinning
c	banished	sent away	exiled	dismissed	forbidden
d	scolds	beats	tells me off	reprimands	rebukes
e	lulled	soothed	comforted	encouraged	quietened
f	fetch	get	retrieve	carry	sell
g	vivid	dark	bright	lively	clear
h	pity	sympathy	rude	compassion	tenderness
i	interrupt	permit	intervene	interfere	infringe
j	crumple	squeeze	squash	wrinke	fresh

2. Write antonyms of the following words.

Words	Antonyms	Words	Antonyms
active	_____	glorious	_____
afraid	_____	ancient	_____
hire	_____	major	_____
mature	_____	noisy	_____
optimist	_____	praise	_____

Oral Communication Skills:

Useful expressions during conversation

When taking part in a conversation, it is important that you give yourself and your partner time to think. To fill in that gap different expressions are used such as:

Now let's see

Just a moment please

I'm not sure perhaps

Well

Actually ...

Activity:

With the help of the expressions given above, construct and present a dialogue.