

The Ninny (Short Story)

Anton Chekhov, *Translated by Robert Payne*

After completing this lesson, students will be able to:

- speak confidently and fluently in a wide range of contexts, For example, (conflict resolution, panel discussion, role-play, dialogue, etc.) to fulfil different purposes (exposition, argumentation etc.)
- engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade-level topics, texts, and issues
- read with accurate pronunciation, appropriate pitch and voice variation suitable for fictional and nonfictional texts
- ask and answer higher-order questions to guide/assess reading
- evaluate how authors use language, including figurative language, considering the impact on the reader.
- use pre-reading and while-reading strategies to analyse and explore different layers of meaning within texts including biases and opinions.
- choose words and phrases for effect (mood of the story).
- comment on implied meaning, e.g. writer's viewpoint, relationships between characters etc.
- evaluate the particular elements of a story or drama (e.g., how the setting shapes the characters or plot). Evaluate stages of plot development in a fictional text. (exposition, setting, climax, character development, resolution)
- evaluate different points of view (e.g., first-person, third-person narrative) Examine an author's point of view or purpose in a text
- read, view and analyse a variety of reading grade-appropriate and high-interest books and texts from print and non-print sources: c. Narratives (e.g., fables, historical fiction, science fiction, legends)
- cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text
- identify and correctly use patterns of word changes that indicate different meanings or parts of speech (e.g., different types of gerund)
- demonstrate knowledge and application of parts of speech (gerunds) in oral and written communication in varying degrees of complexity
- produce legible work that shows the correct spelling of the conventions of punctuation and capitalization
- produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to the task, purpose, and audience
- write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective techniques, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences
- engage and orient the reader by setting out a problem, situation, or observation and its significance, establishing one or multiple point(s) of view, and introducing a narrator and/or characters; create a smooth progression of experiences or events
- use a variety of techniques to sequence events so that they build on one another to create a coherent whole and build toward a particular tone and outcome (e.g., a sense of mystery, suspense, growth, or resolution).

Pre-Reading

- Recall the theme of any short story you have read earlier.
- Search any two famous short story writers.

Reading

Just a few days ago I invited Yulia Vasilyevna, the governess of my children, to come to my study. I wanted to settle my account with her.

"Sit down, Yulia Vasilyevna, " I said to her. "Let's get our accounts settled. I'm sure you need some money, but you keep standing on ceremony and never ask for it. Let me see. We agreed to give you thirty rubles' a month, didn't we?"

"Forty. "

"No, thirty. I made a note of it. I always pay the governess thirty. Now, let me see. You have been with us for two months?"

"Two months and five days. "

"Two months exactly. I made a note of it. So, you have sixty rubles coming to you. Subtract nine Sundays. You know you don't tutor Kolya on Sundays; you just go out for a walk. And then the three holidays . . . "

Yulia Vasilyevna blushed and picked at the trimmings of her dress but said not a word.

"Three holidays. So, we take off twelve rubles. Kolya was sick for four days—those days you didn't look after him. You looked after Vanya, only Vanya. Then there were the three days you had toothache, when my wife gave you permission to stay away from the children after dinner. Twelve and seven makes nineteen. Subtract. . . . That leaves . . . hm . . . forty-one rubles. Correct?"

Yulia Vasilyevna's left eye reddened and filled with tears. Her chin trembled. She began to cough nervously, blew her nose, and said nothing.

"Then around New Year's Day you broke a cup and saucer. Subtract two rubles. The cup cost more than that—it was an heirloom, but we won't bother about that. We're the ones who pay. Another matter. Due to your carelessness Kolya climbed a tree and tore his coat. Subtract ten. Also, due to your carelessness the chambermaid ran off with Vanya's boots. You ought to have kept your eyes open. You get a good salary.

While-reading

Ask the students to locate the specific information such as names, dates, times, and numbers mentioned in the story.

While-reading

Skim the text for finding main idea of the text.

So we dock off five more. . . . On the tenth of January you took ten rubles from me. "

"I didn't, " Yulia Vasilyevna whispered.

"But I made a note of it. "

"Well, yes—perhaps . . . "

"From forty-one we take twenty-seven. That leaves fourteen. "

Her eyes filled with tears, and her thin, pretty little nose was shining with perspiration. Poor little child!

"I only took money once, " she said in a trembling voice. "I took three rubles from your wife . . . never anything more. "

"Did you now? You see, I never made a note of it. Take three from fourteen. That leaves eleven. Here's your money, my dear. Three, three, three . . . one and one. Take it, my dear. "

I gave her the eleven rubles. With trembling fingers she took them and slipped them into her pocket.

"Merci," she whispered.

I jumped up and began pacing up and down the room. I was in a furious temper. "Why did you say *merci*"? I asked. "For the money. "

"Don't you realize I've been cheating you? I steal your money, and all you can say is *merci*"!

"In my other places they gave me nothing. "

"They gave you nothing! Well, no wonder! I was playing a trick on you—a dirty trick. . . I'll give you your eighty rubles, they are all here in an envelope made out for you. Is it possible for anyone to be such a nitwit? Why didn't you protest? Why did you keep your mouth shut? Is it possible that there is anyone in this world who is so spineless? Why are you such a ninny?"

She gave me a bitter little smile. On her face I read the words: "Yes, it is possible. "

I apologized for having played this cruel trick on her, and to her great surprise gave her the eighty rubles. And then she said "*merci*" again several times, always timidly, and went out. I gazed after her, thinking how easy it is in this world to be strong.

Post-reading

- Who apologized for having played a trick?

Anton Pavlovich Chekhov (1860-1904), a twentieth-century master storyteller and playwright, was born in southern Russia. He studied medicine in Moscow, supporting his family by writing comic stories. After Chekhov published his first book in 1886, he concentrated on writing. He also wrote plays, among them the classics *The Three Sisters* and *The Cherry Orchard*. That Chekhov sought to "paint life in its true aspects, and to show how far this life falls short of the ideal life" can be seen in "The Ninny."

Theme is the central idea of a story, or the general idea about life that is revealed through a story. Sometimes the theme of a story is stated directly. Sometimes you must draw a conclusion about it—by considering all of the story's elements. In "The Ninny" the theme is stated directly in the conclusion that the employer draws about certain people.



Glossary

Given below are the difficult words from the unit. Look at their meanings and give synonyms of each in the given column. The first one is done for you. Also use these words in your own sentences.

words	Meanings	Synonyms
rubles	units of money used in Russia, now the Soviet Union.	currency of Russian Federation
merci	for "Thank you"	
perspiration	sweat	
nitwit	stupid or silly person	
ninny	a foolish and weak person	
governess	nanny	
trembling	shiver	
apologized	confess	
timidly	delicately, slightly	
gazed	glare, see	



Reading and Critical Thinking

a) Answer the following questions:

1. According to the governess, how much should she be paid per month?
2. Name three reasons why the employer subtracts money from the governess's salary.
3. How does the governess behave as the employer goes over their accounts?
4. How much money does the employer pay the governess in reality?
5. Why does the employer trick the governess?
6. In this story, the governess whispers or speaks hesitantly "in a trembling voice"—or says nothing at all. Based on this, what do you infer about her character?
7. What can you infer about the employer from his "furious" speech at the end of the story?
8. Choose the best definition for the following italicized words, based on context:
 - Mr. Breen stormed and shouted, his face red, his hair flying, his manner *berserk*.
a. surprised b. hurt c. frenzied
 - Cheryl, smiling and nodding pleasantly, *acquiesced* to any plan, rather than refuse.
a. rejected b. agreed to c. opposed

b. Choose the best answer:

- i. The writer invited Yulia Vasilyevna, the governess of his children, to come to his study to _____.
a) arrange an event for them. b) settle the account
c) prepare food for them
- ii. The governess had three days holiday, so, the writer took off _____.
a) ten rubles. b) eleven rubles. c) twelve rubles.
- iii. The employer tricked the governess because he wanted to help the governess _____.
a) earn money b) stand up for herself. c) randomly



Oral Communication

Atmosphere or Mood of A Story

Atmosphere is the emotional tone of a literary work. It determines an emotional mood to the readers, whether happy or (more commonly) terrifying or disastrous. For example, Shakespeare establishes the tense and fearful atmosphere at the beginning of the play Hamlet by the terse and nervous dialogue of the sentinels as they anticipate a reappearance of the ghost. Coleridge engenders a compound of religious and superstitious terror by his description of the initial scene in the narrative poem Christabel (1816). Alternative terms frequently used for atmosphere are mood and ambience.

The mood is the feeling that the writer tries to evoke in the readers e.g., anxiety, calmness, anger or joy. It's maintained through settings, tone, word choice, theme, or subject matter in a story. Setting refers to the physical location in a narrative. Tone determines the attitude of the narrator. Words with negative or positive connotations evoke particular feelings, and subject matter or theme also creates sad or happy mood respectively.

Most often, the words which are used to describe emotion can be used to describe the mood of a story. Gloomy, humorous, reflective, idyllic, melancholy, ominous, mysterious, calm, lonely, exciting and fearful are some common words used to describe mood in a piece of Literature.

Activity

Discuss the mood of the story in group by stating setting, tone, word choice and theme of the story. Afterwards, each group leader must share his/her the views of the group with the rest of the class.



Vocabulary and Grammar

Gerund: A gerund is the -ing form of a verb that functions the same as a noun. For example, "Running is fun." In this sentence, "running" is the gerund. It acts just like a noun.

Types of gerunds

The four types of gerunds and gerund phrases are as following:

1. Gerund as a Subject

Gardening is my favorite hobby. (Gardening is normally a verb, but here it is the name of an activity.)

Gardening in the summertime is a challenge because of the heat. (The gerund is followed by a modifying adverbial phrase, forming a gerund phrase.)

2. Gerund as a Direct Object

My neighbors admire my gardening. (The admiration is not for the action of gardening, but for the results of the action.)

I am enjoying my gardening this year. (The direct object of the subject is "my gardening this year.")

3. Gerund as an Object of Preposition

I have received several awards for my gardening. (The awards have been given for the results of the activity.)

Some people consider my interest in gardening an obsession. (The gerund phrase is "gardening an obsession.")

4. Gerund as Subject Complement

My favorite hobby is gardening. (Again, gardening is described as something done, not the act of doing it. The statement is the inverse of the first sentence in this group; here "My favorite hobby" is the subject, and gardening is its complement.)

I do my gardening in the morning. (The phrase "gardening in the morning" is the subject complement.)

b) Make sentences of the gerunds *Swimming* and *Flying* as Subjects, Direct Objects, Objects of Preposition and Subject Complements.

c) Punctuate the given lines.

did you now you see never made a note of it take three from fourteen that leaves eleven here's your money my dear three three three one and one take it my dear

d) Give antonyms of the following.

ago _____ settle _____ never _____

shut _____ little _____ strong _____

e) Use the given phrasal verbs in sentences:

put down _____

put off _____

put out _____

put together _____

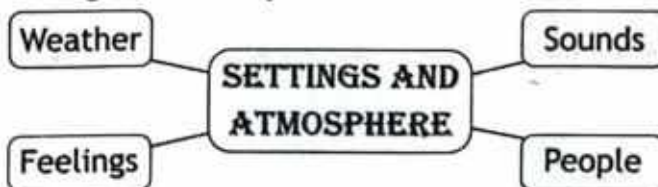
put on _____

run into _____



Writing

- Do you agree with the theme of the story? Give reasons for your answers.
- State the theme in your own words.
- Fill the given mind map according to the story's mode.



Activity

Create another story on the theme of 'Dignity of Labour' keeping in your mind the mood you want to highlight in your story.

References:

Abrams, M. H. (1999). *A glossary of literary terms* (9th ed.). Earl McPeck.
<https://www.masterclass.com/articles/how-to-create-atmosphere-and-mood-in-writing>
<https://www.litcharts.com/literary-devices-and-terms/mood>

Teacher's Point



- Ask students to bring short narratives from the Islamic History regarding the dignity of labor.