

Russian Cities, Russian Stories

Classroom at a Glance

Teacher:	Jane Shuffelton
Language:	Russian I and IV
Grades:	9–12
School:	Brighton High School, Rochester, New York
Lesson Date:	March 6
Class Size:	20
Schedule:	45 minutes; modular schedule*

*Russian I meets four times every six days: three times by themselves and one time with Russian IV. Russian IV meets three times every six days: two times by themselves and one time with Russian I.

Video Summary

In this lesson, Russian I and Russian IV students meet to discuss Russian geography and the origins of Russian city names. Working in mixed-level groups, they read and interpret a story derived from their geography lesson. They conclude by creating and then presenting their own stories to the class. In a separate activity, Russian IV students debate the role of the leader in Russian history after reading an article about Vladimir Putin.

Standards Addressed

- Communication: Interpersonal, Interpretive, Presentational
- Cultures: Products
- Connections: Making Connections
- Comparisons: Language, Cultural

Read about these standards at the end of this lesson.

Key Terms

- authentic materials
- heritage speaker
- native speaker
- proficiency level
- thematic units

Definitions for these terms can be found in the Glossary located in the Appendix.

Class Context

“Creative activities make the language the students’ own. It’s not the teacher’s language or the textbook language; it becomes the students’ own creation, something that they’ve put themselves into. And you can tell. They want to present these stories once they’ve worked on them. They consider them theirs and they’re invested in them.” — Jane Shuffelton

School Profile

Jane Shuffelton teaches grades 9–12 Russian at Brighton High School in Rochester, New York. The school’s 1,240 students come from Brighton, a culturally diverse Rochester suburb that is part of the Brighton Central School District. The town’s 34,000 residents are mostly professionals. The school curriculum emphasizes college preparation and offers five foreign language courses, including Latin, French, Spanish, and German.

Lesson Design

When designing her lessons, Ms. Shuffelton draws on the Standards and the New York State Learning Standards (see Resources). For her Russian I class, she selects topics that would interest high school students. She asks herself, What would students want to say if they talked with a Russian teenager? Students begin by talking about themselves, and then move on to broader, more worldly topics. Ms. Shuffelton likes to include issues that are important to the Russian people, such as geography and transportation.

Year at a Glance

Russian I

Background on Russia and the Russian Language

Basic Introductions;

Alphabet

Personal Interests; Verbs and Activities

Family

School (Comparative Traditions, Subjects, Grades)

Descriptive Phrases

Numbers

Your City

Going Places

Geography (United States, Russian Federation)

Weather and Nature

Time and Calendar

Russian IV

Literature

Russian History

Class Context, cont'd.

Ms. Shuffelton also designs her Russian IV class based on student interests. At the end of the year, she gives her Russian III students an interest inventory that includes Russian history, geography, music, art, literature, and political life. The students select several topics that become the themes for Russian IV the following year.

The Lesson

The videotaped lesson occurred on a day when the Russian I and Russian IV students met together. Among the eleven Russian I students, five were heritage speakers and six were traditional learners. Among the nine Russian IV students, eight were native speakers and one was a heritage speaker. Ms. Shuffelton chose to focus on geography for this merged class because it was a subject that many students at both levels did not already know.

In addition to the geography content, the students learned language skills from one another. Russian I students had the opportunity to listen to native speakers, while Russian IV students were careful to speak and write accurately in order to make themselves understood. The conversations also gave traditional learners insights into Russian culture from classmates who were heritage students. Ms. Shuffelton addressed the different language levels of the students by varying the pace of her speech, as well as by paraphrasing and restating student responses. When the language became too difficult for beginning students, Ms. Shuffelton restated the information in English to keep the conversation and exchange of information flowing.

Class Context, cont'd.

Key Teaching Strategies

- Differentiated Instruction: In a multilevel class, the teacher plans projects in which students work on some tasks according to their proficiencies then come together periodically for shared tasks.
- Multilevel Group Work: The teacher purposefully mixes students for group tasks, including students with stronger language skills in the mode required for the task and students with weaker language skills, and assigns roles and tasks appropriate to each student's strengths and level of proficiency. While heritage speakers are incorporated into group work as regular participants who may assist in maintaining the conversation, they are not called upon to act as "walking dictionaries."
- Reading to Write: The teacher has students interpret a text that can then be used as a model for their written work.

Analyze the Video

As you reflect on these questions, write down your responses or discuss them as a group.

Before You Watch

Respond to the following questions:

- What are the challenges and benefits of differentiating instruction for heritage speakers and native speakers? What are the challenges and benefits of having them work with traditional learners?
- What kinds of tasks are best for grouping novice learners with advanced speakers?
- What guidelines help you determine when it is appropriate to use English in the classroom?

Analyze the Video, cont'd.

Watch the Video

As you watch “Russian Cities, Russian Stories,” take notes on Ms. Shuffelton’s instructional strategies, particularly how she differentiates instruction for different levels of learners. Write down what you find interesting, surprising, or especially important about the teaching and learning in this lesson.

Reflect on the Video

Review your notes, and then respond to the following questions:

- When does Ms. Shuffelton use English to mediate between students with different levels of proficiency?
- How does Ms. Shuffelton acknowledge the Russian-speaking background of her students?
- What do you observe about how the students collaborate during the group work?
- The course level gap in most dual-level courses is one year, not three. What are some effective strategies that Ms. Shuffelton uses to handle this disparity?
- The Russian IV students read an article from the *New York Times* as background for a discussion on President Putin’s call for improving public health through exercise. How does this article stimulate their thinking, and what linguistic tasks does it promote?

Analyze the Video, cont'd.

Look Closer

Take a second look at Ms. Shuffelton's class to focus on specific teaching strategies. Use the video images below to locate where to begin viewing.



Video Segment: Exploring City Names

You'll find this segment approximately 4 minutes after the video starts. Watch for about 5 minutes.

The class discusses the origins of several Russian city names.

- What insights into language patterns do the students gain?
- What are some of the historical and cultural facts that Ms. Shuffelton brings to light by using cities as a focal point?
- How does Ms. Shuffelton keep the dialogue going between Russian IV students, Russian I students, and herself?
- In what ways did the segment on city names provide new learning to both levels of students?
- How does Ms. Shuffelton draw on the cultural knowledge of the native/heritage students?

Analyze the Video, cont'd.



Video Segment: Reading to Write

You'll find this segment approximately 9 minutes after the video starts. Watch for about 5 minutes.

Working in small groups, Russian IV students help Russian I students read and interpret a story.

- What is the role of the advanced students in the groups?
- How do the Russian I students benefit from working with the Russian IV students? How do the Russian IV students benefit from working with the Russian I students?
- What is the purpose of the worksheet activity (see Resources)?

Analyze the Video, cont'd.



Video Segment: Creating Folktales

You'll find this segment approximately 14 minutes after the video starts. Watch for about 5 minutes and 30 seconds.

Working in groups, students use authentic materials to write an original story based on Ms. Shuffelton's model.

- What does Ms. Shuffelton expect for the final written product? How does she share these expectations with her students?
- How does the previous reading become a prewriting activity?
- What is the purpose of the postcards and the doll?
- When students work in groups, what interactions occur in Russian? In English?
- What illustrates the diverse cultural backgrounds of the native/heritage students?

Connect to Your Teaching

Reflect on Your Practice

As you reflect on these questions, write down your responses or discuss them as a group.

- Do you teach dual-level courses? If so, what are some of the strategies you've developed to teach them? If not, how might you plan for such a class?
- What are some characteristics of "reading to write" activities?
- How might you incorporate cultural information into a communicative lesson?
- How do you foster a positive learning environment in a class that includes a mix of traditional learners, heritage speakers, and native speakers?

Watch Other Videos

Watch other videos in the *Teaching Foreign Languages K–12* library for more examples of teaching methodologies like those you've just seen. Note: All videos in this series are subtitled in English.

- "A Cajun Folktale and Zydeco" (French) and "Happy New Year!" (Japanese) illustrate rich cultural lessons and make connections to other disciplines.
- "Comparing the Weather" (Arabic) emphasizes interpersonal and presentational communications in the context of learning about weather in the Arab world.

Connect to Your Teaching, cont'd.

Put It Into Practice

Try these ideas in your classroom.

- Introduce geography and history into language activities. Names of countries, cities, provinces, and more can be expanded into cultural minilessons. For example, in her combined class, Ms. Shuffelton included an activity that taught the beginners city names and locations, while the more advanced students conversed about historical references in city names. The focus on regions also brought out the various backgrounds of her native speakers. Ms. Shuffelton's students read and wrote stories using these locations. By having students work with "place," you expand their language into the larger world.
- Provide students with a writing sample to analyze for content and outline for form. This approach, common in language arts classes, can be especially helpful for students writing in a second language because it provides parameters that focus the writing. Then, when they begin to write, students can use the writing sample and outline as a model for their own text. Ms. Shuffelton's students read a folktale and identified its key people, places, and events. Then they outlined a list of key people, places, and events to include in their own folktales. Poetry that has a set format, such as the haiku or cinquaine, also allows students to be expressive without reaching far beyond their language competency.

Connect to Your Teaching, cont'd.

- Select articles or readings that will inspire lively debate. For lower-/mid-level learners, reading an article in the target language will help them acquire the necessary vocabulary to express their viewpoints. However, strong heritage/native speakers or students with a high level of proficiency can read an article in English and discuss it in the target language. Ms. Shuffelton gave her Russian IV students (all native/heritage speakers) a *New York Times* article about Vladimir Putin mandating exercise for better health. Students discussed in Russian whether a leader can order a lifestyle change in today's Russia. You can adapt this activity by giving students two articles on the same issue (one in English and one in the target language) and having them compare the different cultural perspectives of the authors.

Resources

Lesson Materials

Read-to-Write Activity: Student Work*

Sample worksheet completed by a student during the read-to-write group activity (includes English translation)

Travel Story*

Instructions that students used to write and present an original folktale

* These lesson materials can be found in the Appendix.

Curriculum References

New York State Education Department: World Languages

<http://www.nysed.gov/world-languages>

Jane Shuffelton’s Recommendations

Web Resources:

Bucknell University’s Russian Studies Materials

<http://www.departments.bucknell.edu/russian/material.html>

An annotated list of links to Web sites about Russian culture, government, religion, and more

CIA—The World Factbook—Russia

<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/rs.html>

A general overview of Russia’s history, economy, and political system, including population statistics and economic indicators

Olympiada of Spoken Russian

<http://www.russnet.org/olympiada/home.html>

Information about the national competition for high school students of Russian, including contest rules and preparatory materials

Russnet

<http://www.russnet.org>

A vast collection of Russian-language resources, including thematic learning modules

Standards

World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages

The *World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages* create a roadmap to guide learners to develop competence to communicate effectively and interact with cultural understanding. This lesson correlates to the following Standards:

Communication

Communicate effectively in more than one language in order to function in a variety of situations and for multiple purposes

Standard: Interpersonal Communication

Learners interact and negotiate meaning in spoken, signed, or written conversations to share information, reactions, feelings, and opinions.

Standard: Interpretive Communication

Learners understand, interpret, and analyze what is heard, read, or viewed on a variety of topics.

Standard: Presentational Communication

Learners present information, concepts, and ideas to inform, explain, persuade, and narrate on a variety of topics using appropriate media and adapting to various audiences of listeners, readers, or viewers.

Cultures

Interact with cultural competence and understanding

Standard: Relating Cultural Products to Perspectives

Learners use the language to investigate, explain, and reflect on the relationship between the products and perspectives of the cultures studied.

Connections

Connect with other disciplines and acquire information and diverse perspectives in order to use the language to function in academic and career-related situations

Standards, cont'd.

Standard: Making Connections

Learners build, reinforce, and expand their knowledge of other disciplines while using the language to develop critical thinking and to solve problems creatively.

Comparisons

Develop insight into the nature of language and culture in order to interact with cultural competence

Standard: Language Comparisons

Learners use the language to investigate, explain, and reflect on the nature of language through comparisons of the language studied and their own.

Standard: Cultural Comparisons

Learners use the language to investigate, explain, and reflect on the concept of culture through comparisons of the cultures studied and their own.

Notes
