

UNCLE VANYA

EdPuzzle Pre-Lesson Inputs

These EdPuzzles are designed for students to complete on their own as a quick pre-lesson leading up to the full lessons on Chekhov's short stories and the role of his works in developing the Stanislavski Method. They could be assigned ahead of time to establish context, or they could be used as supplemental lessons. Feel free to use either or both as you please.

EDPUZZLE #1: Chekhov and the Moscow Art Theater



Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uMzuxuA1POU>

Video length: 12:28

Teachers, make a copy of this EdPuzzle preview for yourself before you assign it to students:

<https://edpuzzle.com/media/66102cd2af6ffa749ea9dbd1>

This first video is produced by PBS and is an excellent, fast-paced lesson on the history and relevance of Chekhov's theatrical work.

It mentions UNCLE VANYA briefly, but does a deeper dive into THE CHERRY ORCHARD, so students will become familiar with an additional work that typifies Chekhov's oeuvre.

With this knowledge, they can make comparisons between the plays and better analyze and appreciate UNCLE VANYA when they see it.

2:24 OPEN-ENDED QUESTION: They've mentioned several playwrights whose plays had to wait decades before they could be produced on stage. What was the reason their works couldn't be seen by audiences for all that time?

A: State censorship

FOLLOW UP QUESTION: How would you react as a writer if you knew your work wouldn't be allowed to be seen for ten or more years?

2:33 NOTE: What is a samovar? <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Samovar>

2:54 MULTIPLE-CHOICE QUESTION: What life-threatening disease did Chekov acquire at a young age?

CHOICES: Tuberculosis, Syphilis, Gout, Dropsy

A: Tuberculosis

BTW, I just threw anything that sounded Victorian in there... feel free to change the options.

3:38 MULTIPLE-CHOICE QUESTION: What play did Chekhov write that was a major flop (at first...)?

CHOICES: IVANOV, THREE SISTERS, THE SEAGULL, THE WOOD DEMON

A: THE SEAGULL

Lest THE WOOD DEMON sound like I made it up, that was the title of the play that he later reworked and turned into UNCLE VANYA.

4:05 OPEN-ENDED QUESTION: Chekhov's plays stood out because "they were the first plays to feel like life." Realism in theater and film is something we're very used to today. But imagine you were in one of the first audiences to ever see a realist play performed live. You were used to melodramas, musical song & dance performances, and over-the-top acting styles. Do you think you would have enjoyed seeing realistic acting on stage, or would you have thought it strange and off-putting?

5:02 NOTE: Please note - this example is based on THE CHERRY ORCHARD, a different play than the one you are seeing at Lincoln Center Theater, UNCLE VANYA.

It has some similar themes and characters so now you'll know TWO plays by Chekhov!

8:53 MULTIPLE-CHOICE QUESTION: What was the name of the theater with which Chekhov is most associated?

CHOICES: The Meiningen Ensemble, The Moscow Art Theater, The Ballets Russes, The Bolshoi Opera

A: Moscow Art Theater

11:00 OPEN-ENDED QUESTION: What is the name of the director (and the acting method) who is most closely associated with Chekhov's work? How were his actors expected to make their characters 'psychologically real'?

A: Stanislavski.

from the video: Actors we expected to examine the character's given circumstances. Actors should try to live in the moment and react with emotional spontaneity, giving the illusion of 'the first time.' Actors must always keep working towards greater proficiency and skill.

EDPUZZLE #2: On Setup, Suspense, and Certainty: Chekhov's Gun Explained



Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GNTdtpzjfE>

Video length: 4:36

Teachers, make a copy of this EdPuzzle preview for yourself before you assign it to students:

<https://edpuzzle.com/media/661050cc743ae51de0e31000>

Chekhov's gun is a famous literary trope used to explain the mechanics of foreshadowing in storytelling, whether written, staged or filmed. In short, Chekhov wrote that if you show the audience a rifle in Chapter One, it better go off in Chapter Two or Three, otherwise there was no reason to mention the rifle and it should be removed in your next draft.

This video explains this concept and shows examples of films that follow this convention very strictly, those that break it intentionally, and those that break it unintentionally through sloppy storytelling. This is an excellent mini-lesson to get students thinking about the craft of storytelling.

- 1:30 OPEN-ENDED QUESTION: Can you explain what is meant by “setup” and “payoff” as they relate to storytelling?
- A: In the analogy of the gun – the gun is ‘loaded’ in the setup (the loose nail; no epipen) and the gun is ‘fired’ in the payoff (stepping on the nail: allergic reaction).
- 2:59 OPEN-ENDED QUESTION: Can you explain why the setup of the pink unicorn did not lead to a payoff in the scenes from *The Suicide Squad*?
- A: The pink unicorn had a lot of significance, but it did not stop the knife. Instead, it was a wad of money the audience had never seen before.
- 4:30 OPEN-ENDED QUESTION: How did the video itself utilize Chekhov's gun? (Hint: What was the first image they showed us, and what was the last?)
- A: Bruce Wayne examines new weaponry at the beginning of the video; at the end, he uses it against the Joker.