

## “A BLUNDER” BY ANTON CHEKHOV

### 1. Uwagi ogólne

Tekst *A Blunder...* jest adresowany do studentów polonistyki, rosjoznawstwa i innych kierunków humanistycznych.

### 2. Poziom zaawansowania: B2

### 3. Czas trwania opisanych ćwiczeń: przynajmniej dwa zajęcia po 90 minut każde

### 4. Cele dydaktyczne

Studenci poznają opowiadanie Antona Czechowa oraz fragmenty jego biografii, dokonują analizy postaci, poszerzają słownictwo, doskonalą wypowiedzi ustne.

### 5. Uwagi i sugestie

Sposób prowadzenia zajęć:

- Ćwiczenie typu *pair work*: fragmenty biografii z brakującymi elementami (Anton Chekhov's – Biography; student A/B). Studenci dysponują listą pojęć związanych z życiorysem pisarza. Mają zdobyć informację na temat tych pojęć od drugiego studenta. Wymieniają się faktami. Można poprosić o przygotowanie miniprezentacji na podstawie fragmentów biografii.
- Czytanie tekstu na głos.
- Analiza postaci (*adjective chart*).
- Ćwiczenia leksykalne (*vocabulary exercise*: part I, part II).

Warto zadać przeczytanie tekstu i sprawdzenie nowych słówek jako zadanie domowe. Czytanie tekstu na głos sprawdza się najlepiej, jeśli da się studentom role (narrator + cztery postaci). Analiza postaci na podstawie podanych przymiotników (*adjective chart*) stwarza szansę na poznanie wielu przymiotników opisujących charakter. Jest to też kolejna okazja do dyskusji w parach lub małych grupach.

Opcjonalnie można przepytąć studentów z poszczególnych pojęć. Można też zadać przygotowanie ustnej krótkiej wypowiedzi dotyczącej fragmentów biografii Czechowa. W ramach powtórki słownictwa na następnych zajęciach można jeszcze raz dać te same ćwiczenia językowe (*vocabulary exercise*).

Source: <http://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/13414/pg13414.html>, access: 11 March, 2016.

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ILYA SERGEITCH PEPOV and his wife Kleopatra Petrovna were standing at the door, listening greedily. On the other side in the little drawing-room a love scene was apparently taking place between two persons: their daughter Natashenka and a teacher of the district school, called Shchupkin.

“He’s rising!” whispered Peplov, quivering with impatience and rubbing his hands. “Now, Kleopatra, mind; as soon as they begin talking of their feelings, take down the ikon from the wall and we’ll go in and bless them. (...) We’ll catch him. (...) A blessing with an ikon is sacred and binding (...). He couldn’t get out of it, if he brought it into court.”

On the other side of the door this was the conversation:

“Don’t go on like that!” said Shchupkin, striking a match against his checked trousers. “I never wrote you any letters!”

“I like that! As though I didn’t know your writing!” giggled the girl with an affected shriek, continually peeping at herself in the glass. “I knew it at once! And what a queer man you are! You are a writing master, and you write like a spider! How can you teach writing if you write so badly yourself?”

“H’m! (...) That means nothing. The great thing in writing lessons is not the hand one writes, but keeping the boys in order. You hit one on the head with a ruler, make another kneel down. (...) Besides, there’s nothing in handwriting! Nekrassov was an author, but his handwriting’s a disgrace, there’s a specimen of it in his collected works.”

“You are not Nekrassov. (...)” (A sigh). “I should love to marry an author. He’d always be writing poems to me.”

“I can write you a poem, too, if you like.”

“What can you write about?”

“Love -- passion -- your eyes. You’ll be crazy when you read it. It would draw a tear from a stone! And if I write you a real poem, will you let me kiss your hand?”

“That’s nothing much! You can kiss it now if you like.”

Shchupkin jumped up, and making sheepish eyes, bent over the fat little hand that smelt of egg soap.

“Take down the ikon,” Peplov whispered in a flutter, pale with excitement, and buttoning his coat as he prodded his wife with his elbow. “Come along, now!”

And without a second’s delay Peplov flung open the door.

“Children,” he muttered, lifting up his arms and blinking tearfully, “the Lord bless you, my children. May you live -- be fruitful -- and multiply.”

“And -- and I bless you, too,” the mamma brought out, crying with happiness. “May you be happy, my dear ones! Oh, you are taking from me my only treasure!” she said to Shchupkin. “Love my girl, be good to her. (...)”

Shchupkin’s mouth fell open with amazement and alarm. The parents’ attack was so bold and unexpected that he could not utter a single word.

“I’m in for it! I’m spliced!” he thought, going limp with horror. “It’s all over with you now, my boy! There’s no escape!”

And he bowed his head submissively, as though to say, “Take me, I’m vanquished.”

“Ble-blessings on you,” the papa went on, and he, too, shed tears. “Natashenka, my daughter, stand by his side. Kleopatra, give me the ikon.”

But at this point the father suddenly left off weeping, and his face was contorted with anger.

“You ninny!” he said angrily to his wife. “You are an idiot! Is that the ikon?”

“Ach, saints alive!”

What had happened? The writing master raised himself and saw that he was saved; in her flutter the mamma had snatched from the wall the portrait of Lazhetchnikov, the author, in mistake for the ikon. Old Peplov and his wife stood disconcerted in the middle of the room, holding the portrait aloft, not knowing what to do or what to say. The writing master took advantage of the general confusion and slipped away.

## STUDENT A

**1860 complex plots haunting go bankrupt 1884***1000 words*

In 1888, Chekhov published his first work in a leading literary review, “Severny Vestnik” (“Northern Herald”). *Steppe*, an autobiographical work describing a journey in the Ukraine as seen through the eyes of a child, is the first among more than 50 stories published in a variety of journals and selections between 1888 and his death in 1904.

Although the year 1888 first saw Chekhov concentrating almost exclusively on short stories that were serious in conception, humour — now underlying — nearly always remained an important ingredient. There was also a concentration on quality at the expense of quantity. Besides *Steppe*, Chekhov also wrote several profoundly tragic studies at this time, the most notable of which was *A Dreary Story* (1889), a penetrating study into the mind of an elderly and dying professor of medicine. The play *Ivanov* (1887-89) culminates in the suicide of a young man nearer to the author’s own age. Together with *A Dreary Story*, this belongs to a group among Chekhov’s works that have been called clinical studies. They explore the experiences of the mentally or physically ill.

By the late 1880s many critics had begun to reprimand Chekhov, now that he was sufficiently well known to attract their attention, for holding no firm political and social views. Such expectations annoyed Chekhov, who was non-political and philosophically uncommitted. In early 1890 he suddenly sought relief from the irritations of urban intellectual life by undertaking a one-man sociological expedition to a remote island, Sakhalin. This is situated on the other side of Siberia, and was notorious as an imperial Russian penal settlement. Chekhov’s journey there was a long and hazardous ordeal by carriage and riverboat. After studying local conditions, he returned to publish his findings as a research thesis.

After helping, both as doctor and as medical administrator, to relieve the disastrous famine of 1891-92, Chekhov bought a country estate in the village of Melikhovo, about 50 miles (80 km) south of Moscow.

*Chayka (The Seagull)* is Chekhov’s only dramatic work dating with certainty from the Melikhovo period. First performed in St. Petersburg on Oct. 17, 1896, this four-act drama, misnamed a comedy, was badly received; indeed, it was almost hissed off the stage. Chekhov was greatly distressed and left the auditorium during the second act, having suffered one of the most traumatic experiences of his life and vowing never to write for the stage again.

Source: based on [http://all-history.org/world\\_literature/chekhov1.htm](http://all-history.org/world_literature/chekhov1.htm), access: 4 April, 2015.

**STUDENT B****1888 A Dreary Story Suicide Sakhalin Hissed off the stage***1904*

**Anton Chekhov**, in full Anton Pavlovich Chekhov (born Jan. 29, 1860, Taganrog, Russia), major Russian playwright and master of the modern short story. He was a literary artist of laconic precision who probed below the surface of life, laying bare the secret motives of his characters. Chekhov's best plays and short stories lack complex plots and neat solutions. Concentrating on apparent trivialities, they create a special kind of atmosphere, sometimes termed haunting or lyrical. Chekhov described the Russian life of his time using simple techniques. He is regarded as the outstanding representative of the late 19th-century Russian realist school.

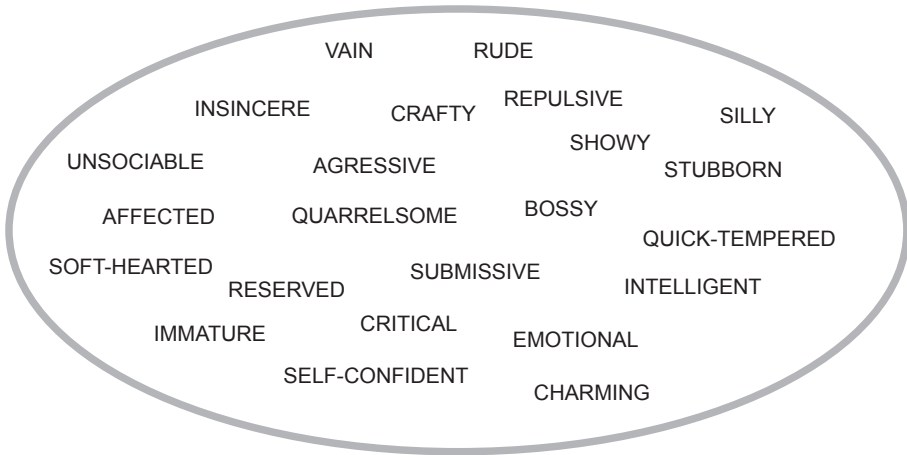
Chekhov's education involved a local school for Greek boys, and later the town gimnaziya (high school), where he remained for 10 years. There he received the best standard education then available — thorough but unimaginative and based on the Greek and Latin classics. During his last three years at school Chekhov lived alone and supported himself by coaching younger boys; his father, having gone bankrupt, had moved with the rest of his family to Moscow to make a fresh start.

In the autumn of 1879 Chekhov joined his family in Moscow, which was to be his main base until 1892. He at once enrolled in the university's medical faculty, graduating in 1884 as a doctor. By this time he was already the economic support of his family, for his father could obtain only poorly paid employment.

Chekhov began his writing career as the author of anecdotes for humorous journals, signing his early work pseudonymously. By 1888 he had become widely popular with a “lowbrow” public and had already produced a body of work more voluminous than all his later writings put together. And he had, in the process, turned the short comic sketch of about 1,000 words into a minor art form. He had also experimented in serious writing, providing studies of human misery and despair. Gradually this serious mood absorbed him and soon predominated over the comic.

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### STUDENT'S COPY: ADJECTIVE CHART



Study these character traits and choose those words which can describe:

ILLYA PEPLOV .....

.....

.....

.....

KLEOPATRA PETROVNA .....

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.....

.....

NATASCHENKA .....

.....

.....

.....

TEACHER SHCHUPKIN .....

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.....

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## TEACHER'S COPY: VOCABULARY EXERCISE

1. Pair work: give students adjective chart and ask them to explain the words to their partners. Later check if they know how to explain each word.
2. Give them about 10 minutes to analyse the text "A Blunder" with their partners and match the words to the characters of the story.
3. Analyse each character with the students. Ask them to support their answers with appropriate fragment from the text.

### ADJECTIVE CHART

The Adjective Chart includes the following words:

quarrelsome    bossy    unsociable    aggressive    insincere    submissive  
 crafty    showy    vain    inventive    affected    silly    rude  
 sentimental    immature    critical    soft-hearted    emotional    quick-tempered  
 self-confident    thoughtful    kitschy    charming    reserved

### Suggested answers:

ILLYA PEPLOV: bossy (Now, Kleopatra, mind ... etc.), emotional (...quivering with impatience / blinking tearfully, pale with excitement, etc.), quick-tempered and rude (flung open the door / prodded his wife with his elbow / you ninny / you are an idiot etc.), crafty (he had planned everything carefully)

KLEOPATRA PETROVNA: submissive (follows her husband's order obediently), sentimental (you are taking from me my only treasure / crying with happiness)

NATASCHENKA: immature, silly vain (I should love to marry an author / peeping at herself in the glass etc.), critical (You are not Nekrassov / you write like a spider), emotional and showy (you can kiss it [my hand] now if you like)

TEACHER SHCHUPKIN: kitschy (love-passion – your eyes / showy (I can write you a poem, too, if you like / It would draw a tear from a stone / sheepish eyes etc.), self-confident (in presence of Nataschenka) but submissive and obedient to her parents [and tradition] (he bowed his head submissively, as though to say, "take me, I'm vanquished"), immature (he doesn't realize what outcome his flirting with Nataschenka may bring about).

## STUDENT'S COPY

## 1. Match the definition to the words given:

*vanquish*   *disgrace*   *apparently*   *quiver*   *fling*   *submissive*   *shriek*  
*queer*   *peep*   *prod*   *contort*   *rub*   *mutter*   *disconcert*

1. to shake slightly, often because of strong emotion: .....
2. to make someone feel suddenly uncertain and worried: .....
3. twist or bend violently and unnaturally into a different shape or form: .....
4. to defeat an opponent, especially in war: .....
5. to speak quietly and in a low voice that is not easy to hear: .....
6. to push something or someone with your finger or with a pointed object: .....
7. a short, loud, high cry: .....
8. embarrassment and the loss of other people's respect: .....
9. describes someone who allows themselves to be controlled by other people:  
 .....
10. to move or do something quickly and energetically: .....
11. strange; odd: .....
12. look quickly at something, especially through a narrow opening: .....
13. as far as one knows or can see: .....
14. move (one's hand, a cloth, or another object) back and forth against a surface:  
 .....

## 2. Now put these words in the sentences below:

1. His door was ajar and she couldn't resist ..... in.
2. Napoleon was ..... at the battle of Waterloo in 1815.
3. Lennie's bottom lip ..... and tears started in his eyes.
4. The child nodded, ..... content with the promise.
5. She had a ..... feeling that they were being watched.
6. He was looking for a quiet ..... wife who would obey his every word.
7. He brought ..... on the whole team by falsifying the results.
8. He ..... a finger round the rim of his mug.
9. The door was ..... open by the wind.
10. His face ..... with bitterness and rage.
11. He suddenly let out a piercing .....
12. I ..... her in the back to get her attention.



13. Stop ..... and speak up!  
 14. The abrupt change of subject ..... her.

3. Put back these words in the right sentences. You may need to change the form of some words.

<i>contort</i>	<i>submissive</i>	<i>prod</i>	<i>rub</i>	<i>diconcert</i>
<i>quiver</i>	(2x: noun/verb)	<i>vanquish</i>	<i>shriek</i>	<i>disgrace</i>

1. Will you give the little maiden a potion, that she may possess the strength of twelve men, and ..... the Snow Queen? (Ch. Andersen)
2. When she heard the dreadful news her face ..... with anger.
3. Her naughty son ..... her in the ribs to draw her attention.
4. Thrasymachus, I said, with a ....., don't be hard upon us. (from Plato's *The Republic*)
5. "Sir," said the voice, "you must ..... these leaves upon the soles of all your feet, and then you will be able to walk upon the water without sinking below the surface. (from *Dorothy and the Wizard in Oz* by L.F. Baum)
6. She ....., not looking at him, as though this ..... were called up by physical pain. [the same word twice] (from *Anna Karenina* by L. Tolstoy)
7. But to his great surprise he could say no more, for tears came to his eyes and his lower jaw.
8. Began to ..... rapidly. (from *Master and Man* by L. Tolstoy)
9. No-one seemed to have any idea of what was going on; it was a total .....
10. It is slightly ..... to be greeted by the sight of soldiers coming toward us carrying rifles.
11. Harriet kissed her hand in silent and ..... gratitude (*Emma* by J. Austin)

## TEACHER'S COPY

**1.** 1. quiver, 2. disconcert, 3. contort, 4. vanquish, 5. mutter, 6. prod, 7. shriek, 8. disgrace, 9. submissive, 10. fling, 11. queer, 12. peep, 13. apparently, 14. rub

**2.** 1. peeping, 2. vanquished, 3. quivered, 4. apparently, 5. queer, 6. submissive, 7. disgrace, 8. rubbed, 9. flung, 10. contorted, 11. shriek, 12. prodded, 13. muttering, 14. disconcerted

**3.** 1. vanquish, 2. contorted, 3. prodded, 4. quiver, 5. rub, 6. shrieked/shriek, 7. quiver, 8. disgrace, 9. disconcerting, 10. submissive