

triumphlearning<sup>™</sup>

# Common Core Coach

for World Literature and  
Informational Texts **I**

DIVINA COMMEDIA  
DI DANTE  
ALIGHIERI  
FLORENTINO  
dotto a miglior lezione dagli Accademici della Crusca  
SECONDA IMPRESSIONE



"So long I had been like a small river at the border of a village. My rhythm and my language were different from what they are now."



First Edition

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Common Core  
State Standards

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# Reading Fiction



**W**e often read fiction that takes place in familiar settings. When we read about a world we're familiar with, it's easy to relate to what the characters are experiencing.

Reading fiction from other periods, countries, and cultures can teach us about ways of life different from our own. Even if the author's intention is not to explain his or her culture, the thoughts, feelings, and experiences of the characters give us a

glimpse of other ways of living. By reading fiction from other cultures, you might find you have more in common with someone from another time and place than you thought.

Nikolai Gogol is a Russian writer from the mid-nineteenth century. Rabindranath Tagore is an Indian writer from the early twentieth century. Let's find out just how different or familiar these settings are.

## Whole Class

**Consider** ► What are the dangers of leaving your comfort zone?

How can you be defined by the way you treat others?

abridged from

# The Cloak

by Nikolai Gogol

### CULTURAL EXPERIENCE

In Russian society in the 1800s, a person's social status depended entirely on his or her job, and most jobs were very bureaucratic and impersonal. In this introduction, the narrator explains that he's not going to name the department being discussed because he does not wish to cause any unpleasantness. Do you think the narrator is trying to protect the department or criticize it?

### CULTURAL EXPERIENCE

You can use context clues to help you understand unfamiliar references to a culture. Akakiy is a "titular councilor," which refers to his rank in society. Circle words in paragraphs 2 and 4 that help you understand his work and rank in society.

1 In the department of—but it is better not to mention the department. There is nothing more irritable than departments, regiments, courts of justice, and, in a word, every branch of public service. Each individual attached to them nowadays thinks all society insulted in his person. . . . Therefore, in order to avoid all unpleasantness, it will be better to describe the department in question only as a certain department.

So, in a certain department there was a certain official—not a very high one, it must be allowed—short of stature, somewhat pock-marked, red-haired, and short-sighted, with a bald forehead, wrinkled cheeks, and a complexion of the kind known as sanguine. The St. Petersburg climate was responsible for this. As for his official status, he was what is called a perpetual titular councilor<sup>1</sup>, over which, as is well known, some writers make merry, and crack their jokes, obeying the praiseworthy custom of attacking those who cannot bite back.

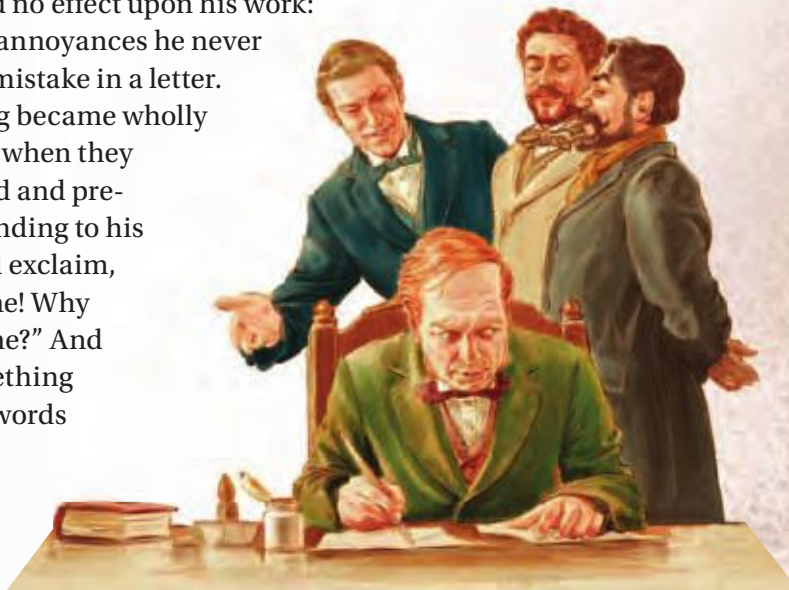
<sup>1</sup>**titular councilor** the lowest rank in Tsarist Russia



... His name was Akakiy Akakievitch. It may strike the reader as rather singular and far-fetched, but he may rest assured that it was by no means far-fetched, and that the circumstances were such that it would have been impossible to give him any other. ...

No respect was shown him in the department. The porter not only did not rise from his seat when he passed, but never even glanced at him, any more than if a fly had flown through the reception-room. His superiors treated him in coolly **despotic** fashion. Some sub-chief would thrust a paper under his nose without so much as saying, "Copy," or "Here's a nice interesting affair," or anything else agreeable, as is customary amongst well-bred officials. And he took it, looking only at the paper and not observing who handed it to him, or whether he had the right to do so; simply took it, and set about copying it.

- 5 The young officials laughed at and made fun of him, so far as their official wit permitted; told in his presence various stories concocted about him, and about his landlady, an old woman of seventy; declared that she beat him; asked when the wedding was to be; and strewed bits of paper over his head, calling them snow. But Akakiy Akakievitch answered not a word, anymore than if there had been no one there besides himself. It even had no effect upon his work: amid all these annoyances he never made a single mistake in a letter. But if the joking became wholly unbearable, as when they jogged his hand and prevented his attending to his work, he would exclaim, "Leave me alone! Why do you insult me?" And there was something strange in the words



### COMPLEX CHARACTERS

The most satisfying and engaging stories have complex characters, which are characters with distinct traits who often change throughout the story. What are your impressions of Akakiy based on his interactions with his coworkers?

**INFERENCE** An author usually expects the reader to make inferences, or educated guesses, about the text based on the details provided. What inferences can you make about Akakiy's coworkers?

## Vocabulary Strategy

### Context Clues

Use the words, phrases, and sentences before or after an unfamiliar word to help you figure out its meaning.

**despotic**

**resounded**

**exalted**

**malady**

**pretext**

**THEME** The theme of a story is the message that the author is trying to communicate. As Akakiy's coworkers make fun of him, one of them suddenly feels great pity for him. Based on his intense reaction, what do you think the theme of this story might be?

**SETTING** Authors use a change in setting, or the location in which a story takes place, to move the action along, to create an emotional effect, or to give the reader a more complete picture of a character. What further information about Akakiy's character is revealed through the description of his typical activities at home?

and the voice in which they were uttered. There was in it something which moved to pity; so much that one young man, a new-comer, who, taking pattern by the others, had permitted himself to make sport of Akakiy, suddenly stopped short, as though all about him had undergone a transformation, and presented itself in a different aspect. Some unseen force repelled him from the comrades whose acquaintance he had made, on the supposition that they were well-bred and polite men. Long afterwards, in his gayest moments, there recurred to his mind the little official with the bald forehead, with his heart-rending words, "Leave me alone! Why do you insult me?" In these moving words, other words **resounded**—"I am thy brother." And the young man covered his face with his hand; and many a time afterwards, in the course of his life, shuddered at seeing how much inhumanity there is in man, how much savage coarseness is concealed beneath delicate, refined worldliness, and even, O God! in that man whom the world acknowledges as honourable and noble.

It would be difficult to find another man who lived so entirely for his duties. It is not enough to say that Akakiy laboured with zeal: no, he laboured with love. In his copying, he found a varied and agreeable employment. Enjoyment was written on his face: some letters were even favourites with him; and when he encountered these, he smiled, winked, and worked with his lips, till it seemed as though each letter might be read in his face, as his pen traced it. . . .

On reaching home, he sat down at once at the table, supped his cabbage soup up quickly, and swallowed a bit of beef with onions, never noticing their taste, and gulping down everything with flies and anything else which the Lord happened to send at the moment. His stomach filled, he rose from the table, and copied papers which he had brought home. If there happened to be none, he took copies for himself, for his own gratification, especially if the document was noteworthy, not on account of its style, but of its being addressed to some distinguished person.



Even at the hour when the grey St. Petersburg sky had quite dispersed, and all the official world had eaten or dined, each as he could, in accordance with the salary he received and his own fancy; when all were resting from the departmental jar of pens, running to and fro from their own and other people's indispensable occupations, and from all the work that an uneasy man makes willingly for himself, rather than what is necessary; . . . in a word, at the hour when all officials disperse among the contracted quarters of their friends, to play whist<sup>2</sup>, as they sip their tea from glasses with a kopek's worth of sugar, smoke long pipes, relate at times some bits of gossip which a Russian man can never, under any circumstances, refrain from, and, when there is nothing else to talk of, repeat eternal anecdotes about the commandant to whom they had sent word that the tails of the horses on the Falconet Monument had been cut off, when all strive to divert themselves, Akakiy Akakievitch indulged in no kind of diversion. No one could ever say that he had seen him at any kind of evening party. Having written to his heart's content, he lay down to sleep, smiling at the thought of the coming day—of what God might send him to copy on the morrow. . . .

There exists in St. Petersburg a powerful foe of all who receive a salary of four hundred rubles a year, or thereabouts. This foe is no other than the Northern cold, although it is said to be very healthy. At nine o'clock in the morning, at the very hour when the streets are filled with men bound for the various official departments, it begins to bestow such powerful and piercing nips on all noses impartially that the poor officials really do not know what to do with them. At an hour when the foreheads of even those who occupy **exalted** positions ache with the cold, and tears start to their eyes, the poor titular councillors are sometimes quite unprotected. Their only salvation lies in traversing as quickly as possible, in their thin little cloaks, five or six streets, and then warming their feet in the porter's room, and so thawing all their talents and qualifications for official service, which had become frozen on the way.

<sup>2</sup>**whist** a popular card game in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries

**CHECK IN** Make sure you understand what you have read so far by answering the following questions: Why does Gogol provide so much detail? How might this be important to the plot?

**STRUCTURE** The way an author structures a story can greatly impact many aspects of it, including the theme. In paragraph 8, the author spends a lengthy paragraph describing what most Russians are doing, just to show Akakiy's solitary nature. What effect does this structure have on your understanding of the story's theme?

**POINT OF VIEW** The author uses a narrator who is not a character in the story to describe the action and activities of all the characters. This is an example of third-person point of view. First-person point of view, on the other hand, is told by one of the characters in the story. How does using a third-person point of view in paragraph 9 allow the writer to provide information in a manner that a first-person point of view would not?





**INFERENCE** Authors do not always explicitly state all of their ideas. Instead, they provide clues in the text for the reader to interpret. Paragraph 10 describes Akakiy trying to figure out why his back and shoulders are so cold. What can you infer about Akakiy based on this paragraph?

10 Akakiy Akakievitch had felt for some time that his back and shoulders suffered with peculiar poignancy, in spite of the fact that he tried to traverse the distance with all possible speed. He began finally to wonder whether the fault did not lie in his cloak. He examined it thoroughly at home, and discovered that in two places, namely, on the back and shoulders, it had become thin as gauze: the cloth was worn to such a degree that he could see through it, and the lining had fallen into pieces. You must know that Akakiy Akakievitch's cloak served as an object of ridicule to the officials: they even refused it the noble name of cloak, and called it a cape. . . . Seeing how the matter stood, Akakiy Akakievitch decided that it would be necessary to take the cloak to Petrovitch, the tailor. . . .

Ascending the staircase which led to Petrovitch's room . . . Akakiy Akakievitch pondered how much Petrovitch would ask, and mentally resolved not to give more than two rubles. . . .

"I wish you a good morning, sir," said Petrovitch, squinting at Akakiy Akakievitch's hands to see what sort of booty he had brought.

"Ah! I—to you, Petrovitch, this—" It must be known that Akakiy Akakievitch expressed himself chiefly by prepositions, adverbs, and scraps of phrases which had no meaning whatever. If the matter was a very difficult one, he had a habit of never completing his sentences; so that frequently, having begun a phrase with the words, "This, in fact, is quite—" he forgot to go on, thinking that he had already finished it. . . .

"But I, here, this—Petrovitch—a cloak, cloth—here you see, everywhere, in different places, it is quite strong—it is a little dusty, and looks old, but it is new, only here in one place it is a little—on the back, and here on one of the shoulders, it is a little worn, yes, here on this shoulder it is a little—do you see? that is all. And a little work—"

15 . . . "No, it is impossible to mend it; it's a wretched garment!"

**DIALOGUE** An author can reveal a lot about a character's traits, personality, and motivations by using dialogue. Dialogue helps readers understand how a character reacts to other characters and how he or she deals with confrontations. What does the manner in which Akakiy speaks to Petrovitch in paragraph 14 reveal about his character?



Akakiy Akakievitch's heart sank at these words.

"Why is it impossible, Petrovitch?" he said, almost in the pleading voice of a child; "all that ails it is that it is worn on the shoulders. You must have some pieces—"

"No," said Petrovitch decisively, "there is nothing to be done with it. It's a thoroughly bad job. . . . It is plain you must have a new cloak."

At the word "new," all grew dark before Akakiy Akakievitch's eyes, and everything in the room began to whirl round. . . . "A new one?" said he, as if still in a dream. "why, I have no money for that. . . ."

20 "Well, you would have to lay out a hundred and fifty or more," said Petrovitch and pursed up his lips significantly. He liked to produce powerful effects, liked to stun utterly and suddenly, and then to glance sideways to see what face the stunned person would put on the matter.

"A hundred and fifty rubles for a cloak!" shrieked poor Akakiy Akakievitch, perhaps for the first time in his life, for his voice had always been distinguished for softness. . . .

Akakiy Akakievitch was still for mending it; but Petrovitch would not hear of it and said, "I shall certainly have to make you a new one, and you may depend upon it that I shall do my best."

Then Akakiy Akakievitch saw that it was impossible to get along without a new cloak, and his spirit sank utterly. . . .

But although he knew that Petrovitch would undertake to make a cloak for eighty rubles, still, where was he to get the eighty rubles from? . . .

25 Akakiy Akakievitch thought and thought, and decided that it would be necessary to curtail his ordinary expenses, for the space of one year at least, to dispense with tea in the evening; to burn no candles, and, if there was anything which he must do, to go into his landlady's room, and work by her light. When he went into the street, he must walk as lightly as he could, and as cautiously, upon the stones, almost upon tiptoe, in order not to wear his heels down in too short a time; he must give the laundress as little to wash as possible; and, in order not to wear out his clothes, he must take them off, as soon as he got home, and wear only his cotton dressing-gown, which had been long and carefully saved. . . .

### FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE

Writers use figurative language to describe characters, settings, and situations in imaginative ways. Figurative words and phrases have meanings beyond their literal definitions. Circle the figurative language the author uses to describe Akakiy's reaction in paragraph 19. What is Akakiy literally feeling?



**SUMMARY** One way to help you understand the story is to summarize in your own words what you have read so far. Summarize what happens in paragraphs 25–27. Why does Gogol give so much detail about the events in these paragraphs?



**TEXT EVIDENCE** Writers provide specific details for a reason. Pay close attention to these details and consider the overall impression they create. Study how Akakiy's coworkers react to his new cloak in paragraph 28. Is their admiration of the cloak genuine? Circle the words and phrases that support this inference.

The affair progressed more briskly than he had expected. Far beyond all his hopes, the director awarded neither forty nor forty-five rubles for Akakiy Akakievitch's bonus, but sixty. Whether he suspected that Akakiy Akakievitch needed a cloak or whether it was merely chance, at all events, twenty extra rubles were by this means provided. This circumstance hastened matters. Two or three months more of hunger and Akakiy Akakievitch had accumulated about eighty rubles. . . .

It was—it is difficult to say precisely on what day, but probably the most glorious one in Akakiy Akakievitch's life, when Petrovitch at length brought home the cloak. He brought it in the morning, before the hour when it was necessary to start for the department. Never did a cloak arrive so exactly in the nick of time; for the severe cold had set in, and it seemed to threaten to increase. Petrovitch brought the cloak himself as befits a good tailor. . . . Taking out the cloak, he gazed proudly at it, held it up with both hands, and flung it skilfully over the shoulders of Akakiy Akakievitch. Then he pulled it and fitted it down behind with his hand, and he draped it around Akakiy Akakievitch without buttoning it. Akakiy Akakievitch, like an experienced man, wished to try the sleeves. Petrovitch helped him on with them, and it turned out that the sleeves were satisfactory also. In short, the cloak appeared to be perfect, and most seasonable. . . .

Meantime Akakiy Akakievitch went on in holiday mood. He was conscious every second of the time that he had a new cloak on his shoulders; and several times he laughed with internal satisfaction. In fact, there were two advantages: one was its warmth, the other its beauty. He saw nothing of the road, but suddenly found himself at the department. He took off his cloak in the ante-room, looked it over carefully, and confided it to the especial care of the attendant. It is impossible to say precisely how it was that every one in the department knew at once that Akakiy Akakievitch had a new cloak, and that the "cape" no longer existed. All rushed at the same moment into the ante-room to inspect it. They congratulated him and said pleasant things to him, so that he began at first to smile and then to grow ashamed. When all surrounded him, and said that the new cloak must be "christened," and that he must give a whole evening at least to this, Akakiy Akakievitch lost his head completely, and did not know where he stood, what to answer, or how to get out of it. . . .

**CHECK IN** Make sure you understand what you have read so far by answering the following questions: How does Akakiy feel about his new cloak? Why?



At length one of the officials, a sub-chief probably, in order to show that he was not at all proud, and on good terms with his inferiors, said, “So be it, only I will give the party instead of Akakiy Akakievitch; I invite you all to tea with me to-night; it happens quite a propos, as it is my name-day.” The officials naturally at once offered the sub-chief their congratulations and accepted the invitations with pleasure. . . .

- 30 He dined cheerfully, and after dinner wrote nothing, but took his ease for a while on the bed, until it got dark. Then he dressed himself leisurely, put on his cloak, and stepped out into the street. . . . This much is certain, that the official lived in the best part of the city; and therefore it must have been anything but near to Akakiy Akakievitch’s residence. Akakiy Akakievitch was first obliged to traverse a kind of wilderness of deserted, dimly-lighted streets; but in proportion as he approached the official’s quarter of the city, the streets became more lively, more populous, and more brilliantly illuminated. Pedestrians began to appear; handsomely dressed ladies were more frequently encountered; the men had otter skin collars to their coats; peasant waggoners, with their grate-like sledges stuck over with brass-headed nails, became rarer; whilst on the other hand, more and more drivers in red velvet caps, lacquered sledges and bear-skin coats began to appear, and carriages with rich hammer-cloths flew swiftly through the streets, their wheels scrunching the snow. Akakiy Akakievitch gazed upon all this as upon a novel sight. He had not been in the streets during the evening for years. . . .

Akakiy Akakievitch at length reached the house in which the sub-chief lodged. The sub-chief lived in fine style: the staircase was lit by a lamp; his apartment being on the second floor. . . .

**CENTRAL IDEA** The central idea is the most important idea, or topic, of a story. In paragraph 30, Akakiy walks from his apartment to the home of an official from his department. How does the description of his walk support the central idea of the story?

Akakiy Akakievitch, having hung up his own cloak, entered the inner room. Before him all at once appeared lights, officials, pipes, and card-tables; and he was bewildered by the sound of rapid conversation rising from all the tables, and the noise of moving chairs. He halted very awkwardly in the middle of the room, wondering what he ought to do. But they had seen him. They received him with a shout, and all thronged at once into the ante-room, and there took another look at his cloak. Akakiy Akakievitch, although somewhat confused, was frank-hearted, and could not refrain from rejoicing when he saw how they praised his cloak. Then, of course, they all dropped him and his cloak, and returned, as was proper, to the tables set out for whist.

All this, the noise, the talk, and the throng of people was rather overwhelming to Akakiy Akakievitch. He simply did not know where he stood, or where to put his hands, his feet, and his whole body. Finally, he sat down by the players, looked at the cards, gazed at the face of one and another, and after a while began to gape, and to feel that it was wearisome, the more so as the hour was already long past when he usually went to bed. He wanted to take leave of the host; but they would not let him go, saying that he must not fail to drink a glass of champagne in honour of his new garment. . . .

Still, he could not forget that it was twelve o'clock, and that he should have been at home long ago. In order that the host might not think of some excuse for detaining him, he stole out of the room quickly, sought out, in the ante-room, his cloak, which, to his sorrow, he found lying on the floor, brushed it, picked off every speck upon it, put it on his shoulders, and descended the stairs to the street.

35 In the street all was still bright. Some petty shops, those permanent clubs of servants and all sorts of folk, were open. . . . Soon there spread before him those deserted streets, which are not cheerful in the daytime, to say nothing of the evening. . . . He approached the spot where the street crossed a vast square with houses barely visible on its farther side, a square which seemed a fearful desert.



**TONE** An author's tone is his or her attitude toward the subject. It can change throughout the story, and it often affects the reader and the plot. Based on the descriptions of the sub-chief's party in paragraphs 32–34, what do you think is Gogol's opinion of these people? Circle words or phrases in the text that lead you to this conclusion.

**DESCRIPTIVE DETAILS** Authors create vivid scenes by using sensory details, or details that appeal to one or more of the reader's five senses. Gogol's description of Akakiy's surroundings changes drastically in paragraph 35 as Akakiy gets closer to his home and farther from the residence of the sub-chief. How do the descriptive details in paragraph 35 let you know that the square seems menacing to Akakiy?



Afar, a tiny spark glimmered from some watchman's box, which seemed to stand on the edge of the world. Akakiy Akakievitch's cheerfulness diminished at this point in a marked degree. He entered the square, not without an involuntary sensation of fear, as though his heart warned him of some evil.

He glanced back and on both sides, it was like a sea about him. "No, it is better not to look," he thought, and went on, closing his eyes. When he opened them, to see whether he was near the end of the square, he suddenly beheld, standing just before his very nose, some bearded individuals of precisely what sort he could not make out. All grew dark before his eyes, and his heart throbbed.

"But, of course, the cloak is mine!" said one of them in a loud voice, seizing hold of his collar. Akakiy Akakievitch was about to shout "watch!," when the second man thrust a fist, about the size of a man's head, into his mouth, muttering, "Now scream!"

Akakiy Akakievitch felt them strip off his cloak and give him a push with a knee: he fell headlong upon the snow, and felt no more. In a few minutes he recovered consciousness and rose to his feet; but no one was there. He felt that it was cold in the square, and that his cloak was gone; he began to shout, but his voice did not appear to reach to the outskirts of the square. . . .

40 Akakiy Akakievitch ran home in complete disorder; his hair, which grew very thinly upon his temples and the back of his head, wholly disordered; his body, arms, and legs covered with snow. . . .

#### FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE

Gogol uses figurative language, or text that is not meant to be taken literally, to create a particular effect in paragraph 37. Circle the example of figurative language in paragraph 37, and explain how it helps the reader visualize the scene.

## COMPLEX CHARACTERS

Authors create complex characters by describing their traits and actions in-depth. These characters change as the plot progresses. Complex characters are more interesting and relatable than static characters, and they move the story along. What changes can you see in Akakiy's character in paragraph 41? How does this make his character more complex?



**THEME** Most authors do not directly state their theme. Instead, they hint at it through the plot elements and character actions and motivations. The narrator keeps referring to one character as the “prominent personage,” which simply means “important person.” In referring to important people in very general ways, how does Gogol emphasize the theme?

Early in the morning, he presented himself at the district chief's; but was told that this official was asleep. He went again at ten and was again informed that he was asleep; at eleven, and they said: “The superintendent is not at home;” at dinner time, and the clerks in the ante-room would not admit him on any terms, and insisted upon knowing his business. So that at last, for once in his life, Akakiy Akakievitch felt an inclination to show some spirit, and said curtly that he must see the chief in person; that they ought not to presume to refuse him entrance; that he came from the department of justice, and that when he complained of them, they would see.

The clerks dared make no reply to this, and one of them went to call the chief, who listened to the strange story of the theft of the coat. Instead of directing his attention to the principal points of the matter, he began to question Akakiy Akakievitch: Why was he going home so late? Was he in the habit of doing so, or had he been to some disorderly house? Akakiy Akakievitch got thoroughly confused and left without knowing whether the affair of his cloak was in proper train or not.

The news of the robbery of the cloak touched many; although there were some officials present who never lost an opportunity, even such a one as the present, of ridiculing Akakiy Akakievitch. . . .

One of them, moved by pity, resolved to help Akakiy Akakievitch with some good advice at least, and told him that he ought not to go to the police. . . . The best thing for him . . . would be to apply to a certain prominent personage; since this prominent personage, by entering into relations with the proper persons, could greatly expedite the matter.

**CHECK IN** Make sure you understand what you have read so far by answering the following questions: What happens during Akakiy's meeting with the district chief? What does an official tell him to do after the meeting? Why?

45 As there was nothing else to be done, Akakiy Akakievitch decided to go to the prominent personage. What was the exact official position of the prominent personage remains unknown to this day. . . .

To this prominent personage Akakiy Akakievitch presented himself, and this at the most unfavourable time for himself though opportune for the prominent personage. The prominent personage was in his cabinet conversing gaily with an old acquaintance and companion of his childhood whom he had not seen for several years and who had just arrived when it was announced to him that a person . . . had come. He asked abruptly, “Who is he?”—“Some

official,” he was informed. “Ah, he can wait! This is no time for him to call,” said the important man. . . .

At length, having talked himself completely out, . . . he suddenly seemed to recollect, and said to the secretary, who stood by the door with papers of reports, “So it seems that there is a tchinovnik<sup>3</sup> waiting to see me. Tell him that he may come in.” On perceiving Akakiy Akakievitch’s modest mien and his worn undress uniform, he turned abruptly to him and said, “What do you want?” in a curt hard voice, which he had practised in his room in private, and before the looking-glass, for a whole week before being raised to his present rank.

Akakiy Akakievitch, who was already imbued with a due amount of fear, became somewhat confused: and as well as his tongue would permit, explained, with a rather more frequent addition than usual of the word “that,” that his cloak was quite new, and had been stolen in the most inhuman manner; that he had applied to him in order that he might, in some way, by his inter-mediation—that he might enter into correspondence with the chief of police, and find the cloak.

For some inexplicable reason this conduct seemed familiar to the prominent personage. “What, my dear sir!” he said abruptly, “are you not acquainted with etiquette? Where have you come from? Don’t you know how such matters are managed . . . ?”

50 “But, your excellency,” said Akakiy Akakievitch, trying to collect his small handful of wits, and conscious at the same time that he was perspiring terribly, “I, your excellency, presumed to trouble you because secretaries—are an untrustworthy race.”

“What, what, what!” said the important personage. “Where did you get such courage? Where did you get such ideas? . . . Do you know to whom you speak? Do you realize who stands before you? Do you realize it? I ask you!” Then he stamped his foot and raised his voice to such a pitch that it would have frightened even a different man from Akakiy Akakievitch.

<sup>3</sup>tchinovnik minor official



**POINT OF VIEW** The point of view in a story is the position of the narrator in relation to the story. Because the author uses third-person point of view, what information is he able to share in paragraph 48 about Akakiy that Akakiy would probably not share himself?

**INFERENCE** Even when an author provides information to further the plot, the reader is often able to infer more about the characters and society based on details in the text. Look at paragraph 51. What can you infer about the prominent personage, based on his treatment of Akakiy?



Akakiy Akakievitch's senses failed him; he staggered, trembled in every limb, and, if the porters had not run to support him, would have fallen to the floor. . . .

Akakiy Akakievitch could not remember how he descended the stairs and got into the street. He felt neither his hands nor feet. Never in his life had he been so rated by any high official, let alone a strange one. He went staggering on through the snow-storm, which was blowing in the streets, with his mouth wide open; the wind, in St. Petersburg fashion, darted upon him from all quarters, and down every cross-street. In a twinkling it had blown a quinsy<sup>4</sup> into his throat, and he reached home unable to utter a word. His throat was swollen, and he lay down on his bed. So powerful is sometimes a good scolding!

The next day a violent fever showed itself. Thanks to the generous assistance of the St. Petersburg climate, the **malady** progressed more rapidly than could have been expected: and when the doctor arrived, he found, on feeling the sick man's pulse, that there was nothing to be done, except to prescribe a fomentation, so that the patient might not be left entirely without the beneficent aid of medicine; but at the same time, he predicted his end in thirty-six hours. After this he turned to the landlady, and said, "And as for you, don't waste your time on him: order his pine coffin now, for an oak one will be too expensive for him. . . ."

55 At length poor Akakiy Akakievitch breathed his last. They sealed up neither his room nor his effects, because, in the first place, there were no heirs, and, in the second, there was very little to inherit beyond a bundle of goose-quills, a quire of white official paper, three pairs of socks, two or three buttons which had burst off his trousers, and the mantle already known to the reader. To whom all this fell, God knows. I confess that the person who told me this tale took no interest in the matter. They carried Akakiy Akakievitch out and buried him. . . .

<sup>4</sup>quinsy an abscess near the tonsils

**SUMMARY** Summarizing sections of the text can help you keep track of complex plots and characters. Briefly summarize what happens in paragraphs 54 and 55. How do these paragraphs express the theme of the story?





But who could have imagined that this was not really the end of Akakiy Akakievitch, that he was destined to raise a commotion after death, as if in compensation for his utterly insignificant life? But so it happened, and our poor story unexpectedly gains a fantastic ending.

A rumour suddenly spread through St. Petersburg that a dead man had taken to appearing on the Kalinkin Bridge and its vicinity at night in the form of a tchinovnik seeking a stolen cloak, and that, under the **pretext** of its being the stolen cloak, he dragged, without regard to rank or calling, every one's cloak from his shoulders, be it cat-skin, beaver, fox, bear, sable; in a word, every sort of fur and skin which men adopted for their covering. One of the department officials saw the dead man with his own eyes and immediately recognised in him Akakiy Akakievitch. This, however, inspired him with such terror that he ran off with all his might, and therefore did not scan the dead man closely, but only saw how the latter threatened him from afar with his finger. . . .

But we have totally neglected that certain prominent personage who may really be considered as the cause of the fantastic turn taken by this true history. First of all, justice compels us to say that after the departure of poor, annihilated Akakiy Akakievitch, he felt something like remorse. . . . As soon as his friend had left his cabinet, he began to think about poor Akakiy Akakievitch. And

**STRUCTURE** An author must make choices about how to organize a story so that the reader will want to continue reading. How does the story take a new twist in its organization, starting with the text in paragraph 56?



from that day forth, poor Akakiy Akakievitch, who could not bear up under an official reprimand, recurred to his mind almost every day . . . and when it was reported to him that Akakiy Akakievitch had died suddenly of fever, he was startled, hearkened to the reproaches of his conscience, and was out of sorts for the whole day.

Wishing to divert his mind in some way, and drive away the disagreeable impression, he set out that evening for one of his friends' houses, where he found quite a large party assembled. What was better, nearly every one was of the same rank as himself, so that he need not feel in the least constrained. This had a marvellous effect upon his mental state. . . .

60 So the important personage descended the stairs, stepped into his sledge. . . .

Suddenly the important personage felt some one clutch him firmly by the collar. Turning round, he perceived a man of short stature, in an old, worn uniform, and recognised, not without terror, Akakiy Akakievitch. The official's face was white as snow, and looked just like a corpse's. But the horror of the important personage transcended all bounds when he saw the dead man's mouth open, and, with a terrible odour of the grave, gave vent to the following remarks: "Ah, here you are at last! I have you, that—by the collar! I need your cloak; you took no trouble about mine, but reprimanded me; so now give up your own."

### FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE

Authors use figurative language to help readers visualize the action or characters, or to emphasize important ideas. Circle three examples of figurative language in paragraphs 61 and 62. How does the author's use of figurative language affect the story at this point?

The pallid prominent personage almost died of fright. . . . He flung his cloak hastily from his shoulders and shouted to his coachman in an unnatural voice, “Home at full speed . . . !”

This occurrence made a deep impression upon him. He even began to say: “How dare you? Do you realize who stands before you?” less frequently to the under-officials, and if he did utter the words, it was only after having first learned the bearings of the matter. But the most noteworthy point was, that from that day forward, the apparition of the dead tchinovnik ceased to be seen. Evidently, the prominent personage’s cloak just fitted his shoulders; at all events, no more instances of his dragging cloaks from people’s shoulders were heard of. But many active and apprehensive persons could by no means reassure themselves, and asserted that the dead tchinovnik still showed himself in distant parts of the city.

In fact, one watchman in Kolomna saw with his own eyes the apparition come from behind a house. But being rather weak of body, he dared not arrest him, but followed him in the dark, until, at length, the apparition looked round, paused, and inquired, “What do you want?” at the same time showing a fist such as is never seen on living men. The watchman said, “It’s of no consequence,” and turned back instantly. But the apparition was much too tall, wore huge moustaches, and, directing its steps apparently toward the Obukhoff bridge, disappeared in the darkness of the night.

**THEME** A story’s resolution can reveal important information about the theme, or help clarify it. At the end of this story, people who were unkind to Akakiy think they see him as a ghost. Why do you think they see the ghost of Akakiy, and how does this clarify the theme of the story for you?



## Author's Craft

### Plot Devices

Authors use plot devices—such as parallel plots, pacing, foreshadowing, and flashbacks—to create mystery, tension, suspense, or surprise. In “The Cloak,” Gogol employs the plot device of a surprise ending, or an unexpected plot twist at the end of the story. Here, Gogol announces that the ending is not what the reader expected.

But who could have imagined that this was not really the end of Akakiy Akakievitch, that he was destined to raise a commotion after death, as if in compensation for his utterly insignificant life? But so it happened, and our poor story unexpectedly gains a fantastic ending.

### Try It

Review the story and look for examples of foreshadowing. In the graphic organizer below, write each example from the text, the event or events it foreshadows, and the mood it creates, such as tension or suspense.

#### Example of Foreshadowing

↓	↓
<b>Event it Foreshadows</b>	
↓	↓
<b>Mood it Creates</b>	

## Vocabulary Strategy

### Context Clues

Consider how context clues can help you find the meaning of an unfamiliar word. Read each sentence below. Then write a second sentence to provide additional context that would help a reader determine the meaning of the boldface vocabulary word from the selection.

1. That teacher is so **despotic** no one wants to be in her class.

---

2. The field **resounded** with the sound of fireworks.

---

3. My parents **exalted** me when I won the writing contest.

---

4. I still can't go out because I can't shake this **malady**.

---

5. I need to think up a **pretext** for calling her.

---

## Comprehension Check

Answer these questions about the selection you have just read. Use details from the selection to support your responses.

1. At the beginning of the story, Akakiy is a quiet, simple man who doesn't stand up for himself. How has he changed by the end of the story? What is the effect of this change?
2. How does Akakiy help express the story's theme?
3. What effect does the prominent personage's experience at the end of the story have on him?
4. How is the setting—both time and place—reflected in the story?