

**“Zhili-byli...”:
Russian Folklore in the Intermediate Language Classroom**

Cluster Overview:

*These four clusters are intended to be used by the Russian 3 instructor over the course of the semester as a supplement to standard textbook materials. The clusters should be implemented in order, beginning with cluster 1 and ending with cluster 4.

(1) Cluster 1: 3 Богатыри // The 3 Bogatyr

Learning goals:

- a. Introduce students to the genre of the *bylina* (East Slavic heroic epic), as well as later re-castings of the *bogatyr*s (Slavic epic heroes) in Modernist and Post-Soviet art
- b. Increase students’ sensitivity to register and tone in Russian texts
- c. Familiarize students with the process of approaching and understanding Russian texts that are highly allusive or intertextual, and which may therefore present a particular challenge to L2 learners

Texts:

- 1) Excerpt from the *bylina Solovei-razboinik (Nightingale the Robber)*
- 2) Three paintings of bogatyr by prominent Russian Modernist artists
- 3) The song *Drevnerusskaia toska (Ancient Russian Blues)* by the Soviet/Post-Soviet alternative rock band Akvarium (1996)

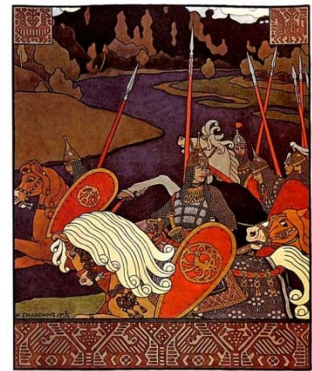
Cluster length: 3 days



Mikhail Vrubel',
Bogatyr (1899)



Viktor Vasnetsov, *Bogatyr* (1898)



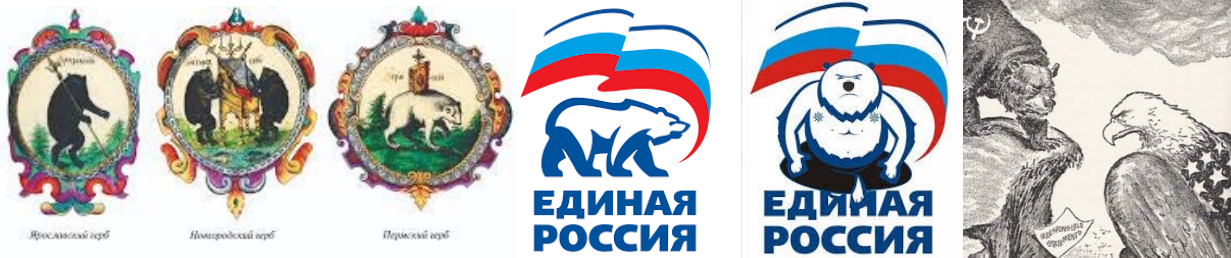
Ivan Bilbin,
Illustration for the
bylina Vol'ga (1903)

(2) Cluster 2: Маша и Медведь // Masha and the BearLearning goals:

- Build students' comfort level with reading short narratives in Russian
- Familiarize students with key aspects of folkloric tone and register in Russian fairytales
- Encourage a critical consideration of what "culture" means, and how a national culture develops or is constructed over time, both domestically and from a foreign perspective

Texts:

- Political emblems and cartoons that feature the bear as a symbol for Russia
- "Masha and the Bear," retold by M.A. Bulatov (text and recording)
- Clip from the popular animated children's series "Masha and the Bear"
- Short excerpt from Alexander Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin* (Chapter 5, Stanzas XII-XV)

Cluster length: 4 days**(3) Cluster 3: Шурале // The Shurale (Tatar Folklore)**Learning goals:

- Familiarize students with Russia's cultural and ethnic diversity
- Have students consider the specific role that folklore might play in constructing national identity
- Introduce students to the Soviet policy of nation building among ethnic minorities in Russia and encourage a critical consideration of why folklore played a key role in that policy

Texts:

- 1) Short prose version of *Shurale and Byltyr*
- 2) Excerpt from the narrative poem *Shurale* (1907) by Gabdullah Tukai (1886-1913), Tatarstan's national poet
- 3) Clip from the Soviet ballet *Shurale* (1945)

Cluster length: 3 days**(4) Cluster 4: Жар-Птица // The Firebird**Learning goals:

- a. Build students' comfort level with reading longer texts in Russian
- b. Increase students' familiarity with Russian fairytale tropes, register, and linguistic patterns
- c. Conclude with a critical consideration of the role that 19th and 20th century nation-building movements have played in constructing notions of national identity and culture

Texts:

- 1) "The Tale of Ivan-Tsarevich, the Fire-Bird and the Gray Wolf" (collected and edited by Alexander Afanasyev)
- 2) Russian Modernist and Soviet paintings of the Firebird
- 3) Soviet greeting cards, packaging, and advertisements that feature the image of the Firebird
- 4) Clip from Igor Stravinsky's ballet *The Firebird* (1910)

Cluster length: 6 days

Ivan Bilibin,
illustration for "Ivan-
Tsarevich..." (1901)



Elena
Polenova
(1897)



Elena Gorokhova. "The
Firebird's Feather" / "Pero
zhar-ptitsy" (1979)



Léon Bakst,
drawing for the
ballet (1915)

“Ancient Russian Blues,” Akvarium (*Snow Lion*, 1996)¹

Where are you rushing, troika? Where are you headed now?
The coachman is drunk again or just drowsed away,
The wheels were given to a museum; the museum was hauled away,
In every home you hear either a song or a groan.
Just as the saints have augured, everything hangs by a thread,
And I am watching all this in my ancient Russian blues.

In the ancient battlefield there are no more spears and bones,
They were all given away as souvenirs for tourists and guests.
Dobrynya has given up on Russia and is fixing gas in Milan,
Alyosha the priest's son sold off the Iconostasis.
Only Ilya keeps scaring girls, galloping around in one sock,
And I am watching all this in my ancient Russian blues.

Yaroslavna is in trouble; she's got no time for weeping.
She's in the office from 6:30; at 5 she's got a briefing.
All the boyars in Toyotas publishing Playboy and Vogue,
They sold timber and oil to the West and SS-20s to the East,
Prince Vladimir, cursing loudly, is heading out to sea on a surfboard,
And I am watching all this in my ancient Russian blues.

At the monastery walls, there's panic going on again,
Along a shallow river there swims a fourteen-armed God.
The monks wave their stakes and curse, as they try to save him.
While God looks at all this mess and just shouts, 'Let go!'
The abbot is jumping in the sand in a woman's dress,
And I am watching all this in my ancient Russian blues.

In the meantime scaffolds climb into the sky over the stoned Moscow;
Turks are building replicas of Holy Russia in half an hour.
The guardians of holy sites have their fingers on the trigger.
The sign of a 10-roubles bill appears on icons,
Where the saints' faces used to be.
Hare Krishnas march around the Arbat and Tverskaya,
I fear that I am fed up with the ancient Russian blues...

¹ Trans. Sergei Prozorov, *The Ethics of Postcommunism: History and Social Praxis in Russia* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 183-184.