Anton Chekhov was born in Tanarog, Ukraine on January 17, 1860. He was one of six children. A year after he was born, Alexander II liberated the serfs (indentured servants living on the land of the nobles) in his Emancipation Manifesto. Chekhov’s grandfather was a former serf who had bought the family’s freedom right before the emancipation. As a child, Anton was playful and witty and enjoyed attending the theater. At 16, his father went bankrupt and moved the family to Moscow. Chekhov stayed behind, and supported himself and his education by tutoring. He moved to Moscow to rejoin his family after passing his exams, and enrolled in the Moscow University Medical School. Chekhov paid his tuition by writing short stories for newspapers and magazines. By the time he was 20 years old, he was hired by the Spectator to write comedy stories. By 1886, after being published in several Russian magazines, he had gained fame as a writer. After the failure of his 1889 play, The Wood Demon, he took a sabbatical from writing and went to Siberia, South East Asia, the Indian Subcontinent, and the Middle East for doctoral research and travel. When he returned in 1892, he stopped his medical practice and recommitted himself to writing. The four plays for which he is best known combine the elements of tragedy and dark comedy: Seagull in 1896, Uncle Vanya in 1896, Three Sisters in 1901, and Cherry Orchard in 1904. He enjoyed a rich collaboration with the Moscow Art Theater, and in 1901 he married Olga Knipper, an actress who appeared in each of the four major plays. Cherry Orchard premiered on Chekhov’s birthday in Moscow on January 17, 1904. Chekhov died six months later, of tuberculosis, which had plagued him for most of his adult life.
Living in Russia has never been easy. From the harsh, frozen climate, to the usually moribund economic policies, to Russia’s proclivity for maniacal tyrants (or is that tyrannical maniacs?), Russia and its people have seen their share of hardship and turmoil. However, arguably the most tumultuous period in the country’s history was the years between the emancipation of the serfs in 1861 and the first Russian Revolution, which occurred in 1905. During this time, an incredibly large number of former serfs (nearly 23 million, or forty thousand times the population of Providence) were at once liberated...and disenfranchised. They were allowed the right to own land, but left without the means to do so, and without any representation in Russia’s monarchical government. This growing sense of disenchantment would eventually evolve into full blown revolution by 1917.

During the 1800’s, Russia’s population doubled in size while the country maintained an agrarian, serf based economy, resisting the tide of industrialization which was sweeping through Europe. The gap between a burgeoning Europe and a decaying Russia was exposed during the Crimean War (1853-1856), which saw Britain, France, assorted Italian kingdoms and the Ottoman Empire rout Russia, mostly due to their technological superiority. Tsar Alexander II (1818-1881, picture below) saw the writing on the wall (and heard the growing whispers of discontent from his people) and decided to abolish serfdom throughout his country, hoping the freed serfs would evolve into a prosperous middle class, which would in turn help revitalize the economy. Alexander also worried that if he didn’t act soon, the decision might not be his to make. “It is better to abolish serfdom from above than to wait for the time when it will begin to abolish itself from below,” he reasoned to a group of Moscow nobles who protested the emancipation.

His Emancipation Manifesto, which was written two years before Abraham Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation, allowed serfs to buy land from their noble landowners. However, part of the emancipation required the serfs to make redemptive payments and taxes back to the government (sometimes for as long as fifty years), which left many of the recently freed serfs back at square one: without money, without land, and hopelessly in debt to the noble landowners. Additionally, the serfs still had no say in the government.
Although serfdom was abolished, since its abolition was achieved on terms unfavorable to the peasants, revolutionary tensions were not abated.

Hoping to stem the revolutionary tide, the government enacted several different reforms. *Zemstvos* were created, which were local governments made up of representatives of various social classes to delegate and discuss important local issues. Dissatisfaction among the people continued, however, reaching its acme when, after several attempts on his life, Alexander II was assassinated by a group of nihilists.

Alexander III (1845-1894) ruled very differently from his progressive father. He set about imposing harsh punishments for all revolutionaries, decreed that only the Russian language and religion would be taught in schools (despite his German, Finnish, and Polish subjects) and railed against freedom of speech, democracy, constitutions and the parliamentary system. Many of Alexander II’s reforms were eradicated or marginalized. After Alexander III’s death, his eldest son, Nicholas II, assumed the throne. He would be the last tsar of Russia.

Nicholas II (1868-1919) was a man uncomfortable with leadership, and was not fully prepared to steward Russia away from revolution and toward unity. In an effort to boost national pride and morale, he unsuccessfully waged war with Japan in 1904. Although the Russian navy was larger, it was no match for Japan’s sleek naval ships, and Nicholas was forced to surrender in humiliating fashion. Shortly after the defeat, in 1905, the people of Russia marched to the Tsar’s palace in a peaceful demonstration. Led by Father Gapon, a Russian Orthodox priest, the march was meant to as a non-violent petition for rights, including the right for representation in the government and the right to vote. The palace guards, confused by the crowds walking toward them, opened fire, killing over one thousand people (*portrait, directly above*). Nicholas was not even in the country at the time.

This marked the beginning of the Russian Revolution of 1905. Soviets (councils of workers) appeared in most cities to direct revolutionary activity. Russia was paralyzed, and the government was desperate. In October 1905, Nicholas reluctantly issued the famous October Manifesto, which conceded the creation of a national Duma (legislature or parliament) to be called without delay. The right to vote was extended and no law was to go into force without confirmation by the Duma. The moderate groups were satisfied; but the socialists rejected the concessions as insufficient and tried to organize new strikes.

These reforms sated the population for the time being, but many problems still existed: the weaknesses of the Russian economy, an inefficient military and a wobbly semi-parliamentary government confused about its own power and purpose. Russia teetered on the edge of revolution, and World War I pushed it right over.

**DISCUSSION:** How does the freedom of the serfs compare to the freedom of the slaves during the Civil War? In small groups compare and contrast the two emancipations. Do you think everyone was truly free?
TIMELINE: Important Events Surrounding Anton Chekhov’s Life

1859 – Darwin’s *Origin of the Species*;
1859 -- Marx’s *Critique of Political Economy*

1860 – Chekhov is born

1861 – Alexander II emancipates the serfs (Chekhov’s grandfather is liberated)

1861 -- Civil War in America

1863 – Emancipation Proclamation

1864 – Alexander II creates limited self-governments (*zemstvos*)

1865 – Lincoln is assassinated

1867 – Ibsen’s *Peer Gynt*;
1867 -- Marx’s *Das Kapital*

1875 – Chekhov begins magazine “The Stammerer” for family circulation;
1875 -- Tolstoy’s *Anna Karenina*;
1875 -- Alexander Graham Bell invents the telephone

1876 – Chekhov’s family evicted; father leaves

1879 – Chekhov enrolls in University to study medicine;
1879 -- Ibsen’s *Doll’s House*;
1879 – Edison invents the light bulb

1880 – Zolas’ *Naturalism in the Theater*

1881 – Alexander II assassinated; Alexander III takes over;
1881 -- James Garfield is assassinated

1884 – Chekhov begins practicing medicine;
1884 -- Mark Twain’s *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*

1887 – Chekhov’s *Ivanov*;
1888 – Chekhov begins publishing his stories; *The Bear, The Wood Demon, The Swan Song* are performed, he meets Stanislavsky;
1888 -- Strindberg’s *Miss Julie*
1890 – Ibsen’s *Hedda Gabler*

1894 – Alexander III dies suddenly; Nicholas II assumes the throne;
1894 – Shaw’s *Arms and the Man*

1895 – Moscow Art Theater opens, Chekhov begins writing *Seagull*, he meets Tolstoy;
1895 – *Importance of Being Earnest* opens

1896 – *Seagull* opens, closes after five performances;
1896 – *Plessy v. Ferguson* “Separate but Equal” doctrine

1898 – *Seagull* opens at the MAT;
1898 – HG Wells writes *War of the Worlds*

1899 – *Uncle Vanya* opens at the MAT; Chekhov sells his estate in Melikhovo to a timber merchant who chops down all the cherry trees

1901 – *Three Sisters* opens at the MAT, Chekhov marries Olga Knipper;
1901 – President McKinley is assassinated

1903 – Wright brothers fly

1904 – *Cherry Orchard* opens at MAT; Chekhov dies;
1904 – Nicholas II leads Russia into Russo-Japanese War

1905 -- Russia surrenders to Japan; “Bloody Sunday”;
Revolution of 1905 results in October Manifesto, guaranteeing rights (assembly, free speech, etc) and a parliament (*Duma*) all of which leads to Revolution of 1917

**ACTIVITY**

Have your students design a timeline for themselves. What important events have happened during their life time? What do they consider important? Examples include the invention of the internet, Sept. 11th, 2001 and *American Idol*. Ask them to explain why they included the events they did. You could post the timelines around the room.
THE MOSCOW ART THEATER

Founded in 1897 in Moscow by Konstantin Stanislavsky and Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko, the Moscow Art Theater was created as the foundation for naturalistic theater in Russia, marking the beginning of modern theater in the country. At the time, melodramas, which emphasized heightened emotions and situations, were the most dominant form of theater. Naturalism aimed to hold a mirror up to the audience, to provide a slice of everyday life with detailed sets and everyday language. Nemirovitch Danchenko and Stanislavsky banded together in a sort of revolt against the conservatism of the existing Russian theaters.

The theater achieved great fame thanks to Stanislavsky’s productions of Chekhov’s four major works, beginning with *The Sea Gull* and ending with *Cherry Orchard*. Some other famous productions include Tolstoy’s *Czar Fyodor Ivanovitch*, Dostoyevsky’s *Brothers Karamazov*, and Gorky’s *Lower Depths*.

Chekhov certainly left his mark on the Moscow Art Theater: still in existence today, the theater’s mascot is a seagull, and the MAT is often referred to as The Sea Gull Theater. It has been run by Oleg Tabakov since 2000.
Introducing Cherry Orchard

Making it Modern:

Students may at first be put off with Chekhov, considering him not only old, white and Russian – but BORING to boot. Since most students seem more attuned to pop culture than the socio-economic reasons for the Russian Revolution, it may be easier to relate “Cherry Orchard” to what’s going on today. Here is an exercise to help with this.

1. Ask your students to think of the richest people in America, those fabulous people who never have a care in the world and have no concept of how the rest of world lives. You may get several answers, but we will use Paris Hilton as an example. Give them time to come up with more answers if they have them.

2. Now ask the students, once you’ve written down a name or two, “What would happen if the government suddenly changed and all of the privileges Paris Hilton has in her life were suddenly taken away, and she was left with nothing. How would she react? Is it Paris’s fault if she loses everything because the government changed the laws? Is it her fault if she can't understand that working, (which is something no one in her family has ever done) is her only resort? Would you feel sorry for her? Would you laugh at her? Would you try and help her? Would you consider her foolish for resisting change?”

3. Chances are the students will get a little silly, imagining an impoverished Paris Hilton. You could let their responses be verbal, or have them write out a monologue from her perspective in a journal entry. This journal can be assigned for homework.

4. Discuss your students' responses. Then inform your students that the ‘Fall of Paris Hilton’ is a 2006 version of what was happening to Lovey and her estate in Cherry Orchard.
Cherry Orchard: The Characters

Russians have three names. Using Madame Raneveskaya’s name as an example, here is the explanation of the three names.

A Given name: Lyubov
A patronymic name (male name) identifying one’s father: Andreyevna (daughter of Andrey).
A surname (a family name): Ranevskaya

In Chekhov’s time, decorum prescribed several proper uses of names.

Title and surname used for formal relationships. Madame Ranevskaya.
Given names and patronymic were slightly less formal. Lyubov Andreyevna.
Given name alone for family: Lyubov.

Diminutive of the given name for affection (nickname): Lyuba Andreyevna Ranevskaya.

Madame Lyuba Ranevskaya: Lyuba is the middle-aged owner of the estate and the cherry orchard. She is no stranger to tragedy. She is foolish and loveable. She is generous to the point that it hurts both herself and her family. She comes from an aristocratic family, but married beneath her.

Anya: Anya is the 17 year old biological, sheltered daughter of Lubya, constantly doted upon by members of the family. She takes a liking to Trofimov and they become quite close, but not romantically involved.

Varya: Varya is Lubya’s oldest and adopted daughter, and the manager of the estate. She is quick to go into bouts of tears or anger, and is in love with Lopakin.

Leonid Andreyitch Gaev:
Leonid is Lubya’s 51 year old unmarried brother, but he certainly doesn’t act his age. He is continuously being hushed by his young nieces when he goes on rants or mutters difficult billiards shots, he needlessly insults those he disagrees with, and he loves candy.

Yermolai Alexevitch Lopakhin:
Lopakin used to be the son of serfs that lived on Lubya’s estate before their emancipation. He is involved with Varya but will not propose. He and Lubya cannot seem to understand one another, as she will not listen to his business proposals regarding the cherry orchard. Although her was born into a family of serfs, he is now a wealthy landowner and shrewd businessman.

Peter Trofimov: Trofimov is the “eternal student,” for he is still at university at 28 years old. He clashes with Lubya because of her romantic nature versus his claim to be “above love.”

Boris Semyonov-Pischik: Like Lubya, Pischik is also an impoverished landowner, nonchalant about his debts, assuming it will somehow work itself out.
Charlotta Ivanovna: Charlotta, Anya’s governess, is somewhat of a clown, but still a significant character, always amusing everyone with her magic tricks, and subtly teasing the servants.

Semyon Panteleyitch Yepihodov: Yepihodov is a bookkeeper who loves Dunyasha, and has proposed. He is endlessly teased by the other characters for his follies.

Dunyasha: Dunyasha is a maid in Lubya’s estate and is hopelessly in love with Yasha, but gets very little affection in return.

Firs: Firs is the 87 year old, mumbling servant who stayed at the estate even after the serfs were freed and misses those good old days.

Yasha: Yasha takes advantage of Lubya and Dunyasha, hates Russia, and is always talking about how much better France is.

**ACTIVITY:** What would your name be in Russian Society? Share your new Russian name with friends and make a name tag for yourself. Try to spend a whole day being called only by your new Russian name.

**Glossary of terms:**
Allez: French-go
Basta: Italian-enough
Dachas: a Russian country villa
Illusory: deceptive, unreal
Intelligentsia: people regarded themselves as the educated or intellectual elite.
Kopeck: 100 kopecks equals 1 ruble *Russian currency; equals roughly $ 77.52 US dollars.
Kvass: a Russian drink distilled from barley or rye.
Livery: a uniform worn by male servants.
Muzhik: a male Russian peasant.
Nietzsche: Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche (1844-1900) a German philosopher.
Patchouli: a small mint-like shrub used in perfumes.
Samovar: a metal urn used to boil tea in Russia.
Versts: a former Russian unit of length (0.663 mile).

**ACTIVITY:** There are many other terms in THE CHERRY ORCHARD that are important to understanding the play. Some of them include: mitigating, palpable, vagrant, patchouli and lout. Knowing what the play is about, come up with your own definitions for these words in small groups. After you do this, look up the words in the dictionary and see if you were right. Find other words in the script you might not know and do the same activity.
Cherry Orchard: A Summary

*Cherry Orchard* opens at Lyuba’s estate, where servants and friends are anxiously awaiting the arrival of Lyuba and her daughter Anya, who have been living in Paris for five years to escape the tragic deaths of both Lyuba’s husband (to illness) and son (to drowning). In France, Lyuba took a lover who treated her poorly and robbed her of her riches. Because of this and her tremendous generosity, she has fallen into great debt and is in danger of losing her famous cherry orchard. While we wait, we learn a bit about the servants and Lopakin, a serf-turned-merchant after the emancipation. He tells the story of his harsh childhood and his rise to the life of a businessman, while the servants prepare. We learn that Firs stays at the estate voluntarily even though she could be free, and that Dunyasha has been proposed to by Yepihodov.

Lyuba and her daughters’ long awaited return brings up happy and sad memories, and we are introduced to all of the other characters and their stories. We learn of the love triangle between the two servants, and the incomplete love affairs between Varya (Lyuba’s other daughter) and Lopakin, and Anya and the “eternal student,” Trofimov. We see the governess Charlotta in her isolation, and the debt that Pischik has fallen into. We also see the effects of the liberation of the serfs on former serfs, Lopakin and Firs. But everything revolves around the pending date of August 22, when, if Lyuba cannot pay off her debts, the cherry orchard estate will be sold. While everyone is aware of this, no one seems to be doing anything about it. Aside from Lopakin, who insists that Lyuba cut down the orchard and build villas in their stead to be rented out to pay off the debts, but she does not take his advice.

While Lyuba’s money is dwindling, she continues to frivolously give it away to passersby, peasants, and even in loans to Pischik. She also begins receiving daily telegrams from her abusive, but ailing lover in France, imploring that he return to her. Firs begins to fall ill, and all of the romances continue, save Lopakin and Varya’s, to Varya’s disappointment.

By August 22, there has still been nothing done, and the orchard is sold. However, Lyuba and her friends and family are not there, because she has thrown a ball. While the guests dance and Charlotta performs magic tricks, Trofimov urges Lyuba to stay away from her lover and Lyuba does not take it well. When Lopakin and Gaev return to the auction, Gaev is not happy but Lopakin is overjoyed; he has bought the orchard! He feels fulfilled to have risen to a place where he can purchase the orchard his parents were once slaves in, his happiness strongly contrasting the dropped mood of the rest of the guests.

The play ends on a slightly optimistic note; as we see everyone moving out of the house and saying their goodbyes. Lyuba is going back to France, along with the delighted Yasha, to Dunyasha’s dismay. We learn that Firs is in the hospital, and Varya is still livid over the way things turned out, so things end poorly between her and Lopakin. Gaev has caved and accepted a job at the bank, Yepihodov is to work for Lopakin, Trofimov is to go back to university, and Charlotta doesn’t know where to go. The play closes with all of the characters offstage having said goodbye and left, and Firs waddling onto the stage in slippers and her uniform, having been forgotten by the rest of them. To the sound of the orchard being chopped down, she lies down to rest.
**Character Outline**

- **Lovey**
  - **Anya** (daughter)
    - (tutored Lovey’s son Before his death)
  - **Varya** (adopted daughter)
    - (was the son of serfs on estate)
  - **Trofimov**
  - **Lopakin**
  - **Gaev** (Lovey’s brother)

---

**The Estate Servants:**

- **Yasha** - A young servant
- **Dunyasha** - A maid
- **Yepihodov** - A bookkeeper
- **Firs** - A servant, 87 years old!

---

**Other Various Characters**

- **Boris Semyonov-Pischik** - A neighboring landowner
- **Charlotta** - Anya’s governess

- **A Passerby, the Stationmaster, the Postman, Guests**

---

**The LOVE Connection**

- Lovey $<$s her lover, Her lover $<$s Lovey’s money
- Anya $<$s Trofimov,
  - Trofimov is “BEYOND LOVE”
- Varya $<$s Lopakin
- Lopakin $<$s Varya, but will not propose
- Yepihodov $<$s Dunyasha
- Dunyasha $<$s Yasha
- Yasha $<$s himself
Anton Pavlovich Chekhov once remarked that wise men love to learn, while fools love to teach. Perhaps that is why it is so daunting to write anything about Chekhov the dramatist, because one runs the risk of… well, “teaching.” The risk of implying that there is a single interpretive gesture with which one can capture the sweep of Chekhov’s plays.

The Chekhovian play text is a score, which gives us information about the characters and plot, but does not provide us with the instrument to play it. Here Chekhov’s genius as a playwright is fully understood. The Chekhovian actor must learn to reveal herself utterly in the given role. Chekhov provides a well described character, in well observed situations, but it is the actor who must finally fill in the rest. It’s the opposite of what one understands to be the actor’s job when one is young, when “acting” seems to be putting on the character like a costume, applying the mask that becomes someone outside of one’s self. This may be why

Chekhov is such a contemporary writer, as this is an utterly 20th century conception of acting – that of the actor uncovering or revealing his true self in the role. At least, it is possible for an actor to find this kind of open-ended interpretation in Chekhov.

What usually stands in their way is the translation. Many translations that are still performed broadly were written at the beginning of the twentieth century, filled with outdated colloquialisms and brittle prose. A British sensibility prevails in these early texts, further distancing the American actor from the character they are playing. Worst of all, the plays are treated as literary texts, intended to be read, never to be performed by an actor for an audience. Chekhov’s prose ends up sounding stilted, precious, forced, and humorless. To anyone who has read him in the Russian, this is the farthest from the description of the simple country doctor’s good prose as anyone could imagine. In Russian, Chekhov is blunt, muscular, even coarse. More Nelson Algren or Mark Twain than Oscar Wilde or Edith Wharton, Chekhov is simultaneously funny and sad because he is so uncomplicated. I hope that my American translations recapture that open-ended simplicity, which is at once colloquial and accurate.

Georgy Tovstonogov, the great, late 20th century Russian director said “Chekhov was ahead of his time, and productions of his plays must not look to the past, and perhaps not even to the theater of the present; Chekhov is a man of the future, and it is there that he must be sought.” He was not suggesting that productions of these rural Russian plays be set in some far-flung space colony or reinterpreted as underwater ballet. He was simply pointing out that even though the characters may be dressed in structured bodices and long, full skirts, or in heavy suits and stiff shirts with vests, the significance of their desires and needs must be rediscovered as contemporary with each passing moment in each new production. In this way, interpreters can discover what is truly universal, what is truly transcendent about Chekhov.
Themes

THE CHERRY ORCHARD has many themes that weave in and out of the plot. While many writers of the time used these themes in their writing, Chekhov was the only to view them in a new light. His interesting sense of humor and view on life helps his plays stand out among others. Even more important is the fact that these underlying themes are still important today.

The Struggle Over Memory

In THE CHERRY ORCHARD, each character is involved in a struggle to remember or forget aspects of his or her past. Ranevskaya wants to remember the past and forget the present because the estate contains awful memories of the death of her son. She is reminded of these memories when she sees Trofimov, her son's tutor. Lopakhin’s memories are oppressive. His memories are of a brutal, uncultured peasant upbringing that he wishes to forget. They conflict with his identity as a well-heeled businessman, with fancy clothes and allusions to Shakespeare. Trofimov is concerned more with Russia's historical memory. He wishes Russia to forget the beautiful and redeeming aspects of the past, which he views as oppressive and need of renunciation if Russia is to move forward. Firs lives solely in memory. Most of his speeches in the play relate to what life was like before the serfs were freed, telling of the recipe for making cherry jam, which now even he can't remember. At the end of the play, he is forgotten by the other characters, symbolizing the forgotten era he represents.

ACTIVITY: By yourself, write down some memories, either good or bad. Do you think that these memories help dictate how you act now? Do they influence the decisions that you make today? Have you ever tried to forget something that happened in the past? If so, why? Jot down your ideas to these questions. Share some of your ideas with small groups.

Modernity vs. The Old Russia

A recurrent theme throughout Russian literature is the clash between the values of modernity and the values of “old Russia”. Modernity signifies rationalism, secularism and materialism. Much of late nineteenth -century Russian literature was written in reaction to the change from old Russia to modernity and in praise of Russia's history and folklore. In THE CHERRY ORCHARD, the conflict between Gayev and Ranevskaya on the one hand and Lopakhin and Trofimov on the other can be seen as emblematic of the disputes between the old feudal order and Westernization. The conflict is made most explicit in the speeches of Trofimov, who views Russia's historical legacy as oppressive, something to be abandoned instead of exalted.

DISCUSSION: In small groups discuss the idea of modernity today. What new technologies have come about in the past 10 years? Do you think that people of the older generations are having a more difficult time adapting to the new, modern world? Where have you seen conflicts of interest in your own life? Do you think that this new technology will help or hinder us?
Social Change and Progress

Several characters address the difference between social change and social progress. Firs and Trofimov are two of them. Both question the utility of the Liberation. As Firs notes, it made everyone happy but they did not know what they were happy for. Firs himself is living proof of this discrepancy: society has changed, but his life has not progressed. Both characters agree that the Liberation is not enough to constitute progress; while it was a necessary change it was not enough to bring mankind to the idealized future Trofimov imagines. The play leaves the impression that while change has come, there is more work to be done.

DISCUSSION: THE CHERRY ORCHARD is seen as a social commentary on life in Russia in the early 1900s. Find modern examples of TV, movies, plays and books that comment on our society. What social problems can you identify in our world? Are any of these problems similar to issues in THE CHERRY ORCHARD? What differences do you see?

Independence, Liberation and Freedom

Much of THE CHERRY ORCHARD deals with the theme of independence. Fundamentally, it demands that we ask what it means to be free. In the play, Russia has been liberated but most of the population was not free. Lopakhin has been able to take advantage of his liberation to make himself independent. However, Firs, though he is technically free, has not changed his position at all and is still subject to the family he serves. Madame Ranevskaya is not free either, but in a very different way from Firs. She has enough assets to be able to control her own destiny but she is a slave to her passions, spends extravagantly and makes poor decisions. The difference in these situations demonstrates the observations of many Russians of the time: officially liberating a group of people is not the same as making them free. If you do not also equip them with the tools they need to become independent, such as education and land, they never will be truly independent. Trofimov, the play's idealist, offers an interesting definition of freedom for the audience to consider. According to Trofimov, he is a free man because he is beholden to no one, which is why he refuses the offer of Lopakhin's money.

ACTIVITY: With your class, make a chart of freedoms we have today. Rank these freedoms in order of importance. Why have you chosen these freedoms over others? Do you think that freedoms vary depending on who you are? Why is this so? Does freedom make us independent? Discuss these questions as a class. Try to relate your answers to your own life.
Activity: LOOKING AT THE TRANSLATIONS

On the following page you will find three different scenes from Cherry Orchard. Each scene is broken down into four different translations.

1. Pick a scene or scenes, and break the students into four groups, assigning them each one of the four stanzas.
2. Have students read their translation as group and answer the following questions:
   - Does the language feel elevated to you? Accessible? Modern?
   - What is your initial opinion of characters you’re reading for?
   - What does his language or choice of words tell you about the character?
3. Ask each group to give a dramatic reading of their stanza. Each person must have at least one line of the stanza.
   - Did the groups perform a similar or a different characterization of Cherry Orchard each time?
   - What were some of the similarities of their characterizations? Some of the differences?
4. Hand out a copy of all four translations to each of the students.
5. Have them read each translation to themselves. Give them a few minutes to study and compare each text.
   - Does one translation seem to be more fluid or poetic than the others?
   - Does one translation create a better mental image in your head?
   - Does one translation seem more easily accessible to a student?
   - Which translation do you prefer and why?

Reflection

Were you surprised at how different each translation was? Which translation did you particularly like and why? What are some things a poet and author must keep in mind when translating a piece of work?
**Four Translations**

**Gaev:** Yes … this … this thing (he touches the bookcase) Dear, respected bookcase! We celebrate your existence, that has now for over a hundred years been dedicated to the ideals of good deeds and social justice. Your silent call to fruitful endeavor has not faltered in the course of that century, encouraging (through tears) generations of this family to find courage and to believe in a better future, and teaching us all the ideals of good deeds and social consciousness.

Pause.

**Lopakin:** Yes …

**Lovey:** That is just so like you, Leon.

**Gaev** (A bit confused): Ball in the right pocket! Straight shot down the center!¹

**Gayev:** Yes, yes it is. (he caresses the bookcase) Dear old bookcase! Wonderful old bookcase! I rejoice in your existence. For a hundred years now you have borne the shining ideals of goodness and justice, a hundred years have not dimmed your silent summons to useful labor. To generations of our family (almost in tears) you have offered courage, a belief in a better future, you have instructed us in ideals of goodness and social awareness …

Pause

**Lopakhin:** Right. Well …

**Liubov Andreyevna:** Oh, Lonya, you’re still the same as ever!

**Gayev** (somewhat embarrassed): Cannon off the right into the pocket!³

**Gaev:** Yes … It is a thing … (feeling the bookcase). Dear, honoured, bookcase! Hail to thee who for more than a hundred years has served the pure ideals of good and justice; their silent call to fruitful labour has never flagged in those hundred years, maintaining (in tears) in the generations of man, courage and faith in a brighter future and fostering in us ideals of good and social consciousness (a pause).

**Lopakhin:** Yes …

**Lyubov:** You are just the same as ever, Leonid.

**Gaev** (a little embarrassed): Cannon off the right into the pocket!³

---


Lopakin: I tell you every day. Every day, I tell you the same thing. Both the cherry orchard and your other land must be rented out for summer cottages, you need to do it now, today — the auction is very soon! Do you understand? Just decide once and for all, that you will build the summer cottages, and you’ll get as much money as you want, and you’ll be saved.

Lovey: Summer cottages, summer people — it’s all so vulgar, forgive me.

Gaev: I am in complete agreement with you.

Lopakin: I’m either going to scream, or yell, or have a fit. I can’t take it! You’re killing me! (to Gaev) You old woman!

Lopakin: I do tell you every day. Every day I say the same thing. You absolutely must sell the cherry orchard and the land on building leases; and do it at once, as quick as may be — the auction’s close upon us! Do understand! Once make up your mind to build villas, and you can raise as much money as you like, and then you are saved.

Lyubov: Villas and summer visitors — forgive me saying so — it’s so vulgar.

Gaev: There I perfectly agree with you.

Lopakhin: I shall sob, or scream, or fall into a fit. I can’t stand it! You drive me mad! (to Gaev) You’re an old woman!

Lopakhin: I tell you every day what you should do! Every day I come out here and say the same thing. The cherry orchard and the rest of the land has to be subdivided and developed for leisure homes, and it has to be done right away. The auction date is getting closer! Can’t you understand? All you have to do is make up your mind to subdivide, you’ll have more money than every you can spend! Your troubles will be over!

Liubov Andreyevna: Subdivide, leisure homes … excuse me, but It’s all so helplessly vulgar.

Gayev: I couldn’t agree more.

Lopakhin: You people drive me crazy! Another minute, I’ll be shouting my head off! Oh I give up, I give up! Why do I even bother? (to Gayev) You’re worse than an old lady!

Lopakhin: I tell you every day. Every day I say the same thing. You absolutely must sell the cherry orchard and the land on building leases; and do it at once, as quick as may be — the auction’s close upon us! Do understand! Once make up your mind to build villas, and you can raise as much money as you like, and then you are saved.

Lyubov Andreyevna: Cottages, summer people – forgive me, but it’s so vulgar.

Gayev: I agree with you, absolutely.

Lopakhin: I’ll either burst into tears, start shouting, or fall into a faint! I can’t stand it! You’ve worn me out! (to Gayev): You’re an old woman!


Yepikhodov: You may not, if I express myself, call me to account.
Varya: I am not calling you to account, I’m speaking to you. But you know very well that you wander from here to there, and you do absolutely nothing. We keep a bookkeeper, but it’s beyond me why.
Yepikhodov (offended): Whether I work, whether I wander, whether I eat, whether I play billiards, that is for others much wiser and older to decide.
Postman (offstage): They’re on their way.
Varya: How dare you talk to me like that! (flying into a rage) How dare you? So I’m not wise, am I? Get the hell out of here! This instant!  

Yepikhodov: You cannot, if I may so express myself, penalize me.
Varya: I am not penalizing you, I’m telling you! All you do here is wander around and bump into furniture. You’re supposed to be working for us, and you don’t do a thing. I don’t know why we hired you in the first place.
Yepikhodov (offended): Whether I work or not or wander around or not or play billiards or not is none of your business! You do not have the know-it-all to make my estimation!
Varya: How dare you talk to me like that! (In a rage) How dare you! What do you mean, I don’t have the know-it-all? You get yourself out of here this minute! Right this minute!  

Yepikhodov: You really cannot, if I may so express myself, call me to account like this.
Varya: I’m not calling you to account, I’m speaking to you. You do nothing but wander from place to place and don’t do your work. We keep you as a counting-house clerk, but what use you are I can’t say.
Yepikhodov (offended): Whether I work or whether I walk, whether I eat or whether I play billiards, is a matter to be judged by persons of understanding and my elders.
Varya: You dare to tell me that! (Firing up) You dare! You mean to say I’ve no understanding. Begone from here! This minute!  

Yepikhodov: Excuse my expressivity, but you have no right to penalize me.
Varya: I’m not penalizing you, I’m telling you! All you do here is wander and bump into furniture. You’re supposed to be working for us, and you don’t do a thing. I don’t know why we hired you in the first place.
Yepikhodov (offended): Whether I work or not or wander around or not or play billiards or not is none of your business! You do not have the know-it-all to make my estimation!
Varya: How dare you talk to me like that! (In a rage) How dare you! What do you mean, I don’t have the know-it-all? You get yourself out of here this minute! Right this minute!  

Yepikhodov: You cannot, if I may so express myself, penalize me.
Varya: I am not penalizing you, I’m telling you! You do nothing but wander from one place to another, and you don’t do your work. We keep a clerk, but for what, I don’t know.
Yepikhodov (offended): Whether I work, or wander about, or eat, or play billiards, these are matters to be discussed only by persons of discernment, and my elders.
Varya: You dare say that to me! (Flaring up) You dare? You mean to say I have no discernment? Get out of here! This instant!  

---

Anton Chekhov had a lot to say. Here are some quotes taken from his letters, short stories, and plays.

**On love**
Perhaps the feelings that we experience when we are in love represent a normal state. Being in love shows a person who he should be.

Love is a scandal of the personal sort. (from *The Piano Player*)

Nothing better forges a bond of love, friendship or respect than common hatred toward something.

There is something beautiful, touching and poetic when one person loves more than the other, and the other is indifferent. (From *Nadya In After the Theater*)

I promise to be an excellent husband, but give me a wife who, like the moon, will not appear every day in my sky.

**On Russia**
The government is not God. It does not have the right to take away that which it can't return even if it wants to. (From *The Bet*)

I've thought about how, were we to suddenly receive the freedom about which we talk so much when we spar with one another, we would not know what to do with it at first. We would expend it on denouncing one another in the newspapers for spying, for love of the ruble, we would frighten society with protestations that we have no people, no science, no literature, nothing at all!

In general, Russia suffers from a frightening poverty in the sphere of facts and a frightening wealth of all types of arguments.

**On writing**
The person who wants nothing, hopes for nothing, and fears nothing can never be an artist.

Everyone judges plays as if they were very easy to write. They don't know that it is hard to write a good play, and twice as hard and tortuous to write a bad one.

It is a poor thing for the writer to take on that which he doesn't understand.

**On wealth**
Nothing lulls and inebriates like money; when you have a lot, the world seems a better place than it actually is.

Money, like vodka, turns a person into an eccentric. (From *Gooseberries*)

**On life**
The world is a fine place. The only thing wrong with it is us.
When a person is born, he can embark on only one of three roads of life: if you go right, the wolves will eat you; if you go left, you'll eat the wolves; if you go straight, you'll eat yourself. (From *Petrin the Fatherless*)

We learn about life not from plusses alone, but from minuses as well.

You ask "What is life?" That is the same as asking "What is a carrot?" A carrot is a carrot and we know nothing more.

**On death ...**

They say that in the end truth will triumph, but it's a lie.

The world perishes not from bandits and fires, but from hatred, hostility, and all these petty squabbles. (From *Uncle Vanya*)

After us they'll fly in hot air balloons, coat styles will change, perhaps they'll discover a sixth sense and cultivate it, but life will remain the same, a hard life full of secrets, but happy. And a thousand years from now man will still be sighing, "Oh! Life is so hard!" and will still, like now, be afraid of death and not want to die. (From *Three Sisters*)

**Inspiration/Entering the Text**

**SCENARIO**

This exercise serves to introduce the students to dramatic storytelling by creating one-page dialogues based on themes from *Cherry Orchard*. Divide the class into smaller groups and ask them to create a short, two-minute improvisation based on one of the scenarios provided below. Ask students to write a short, one-page dialogue between the characters, and, if time allows, ask the students to share their work in an informal performance.

1. Character A is meeting Character B for the first time in years, and seeing B reminds A of the son that A lost years ago
2. Character A is in love with Character B, but Character B loves someone else
3. Character A just bought the house of Character B, leaving Character B homeless
4. Character A is trying to convince Character B to stay away from someone who has stolen from them
5. Character A and Character B are close relatives and are seeing each other for the first time in five years
101 WAYS TO READ A MONOLOGUE: An Activity

A monologue is a long speech or soliloquy made by one person. Sometimes it can be tough for a young actor to take on a piece of text and perform it on their own, so this activity is a way to get your students to forget their inhibitions and have fun with it.

1. Pick one or more of the monologues below, and hand them out to your students. You can assign or let them choose which monologue they want to do, and give them a few minutes to read it over a few times and familiarize themselves with it.
2. In partners, let them read it out loud to one another a few times in whichever way they want to.
3. Pick a few brave souls to come up and read/perform their own interpretation of the monologue for the rest of the group.
4. After this, by your own, and using your students’ suggestions, throw out different ways to read the monologue. Feel free to be as wacky as you want -- this is supposed to be fun. You can filter the suggestions, and pick one that you think would work and let them do it that way. Let each volunteer perform the monologue, or part of the monologue, three different ways before moving on. Some examples of different ways to read it include (but are definitely not limited to): an aerobics instructor, a drunk, someone who desperately has to go to the bathroom, a big fat Persian cat, singing it, whispering it, telling it like it’s a scary story, like an opera singer, like they are in a musical, like a Star Wars character…you can even use celebrity names and have them imitate them using the monologue.
5. After every willing student has performed, take some time to talk about what they got from it. Did it help them understand the monologue better? If so, how? Did they find that any of the interpretations, as silly as they may have been, actually worked and made some sense? Which ones, and why? Can they understand the comedy of Chekhov more clearly now? How does this help them as actors?
FEMALE MONOLOGUES

Anya: We made it to Paris, it was cold there, too, snowing. My French is terrible. Mama was living on the sixth floor, we went up, there are all of these French people there, men, women, an old priest with some book, it’s smoky, it’s crowded. Suddenly I felt so bad for Mama, so bad, I held her so tight, I squeezed her hands, I couldn’t let go. Mama just melted, she started to cry… Her house near Menton, she’d already sold it by then, she had nothing left, nothing. I didn’t have a single kopeck either, we barely made it back. And Mama doesn’t get it! We’re sitting in the station, having dinner, and she orders the most expensive things, then tips the waiters a whole ruble. Charlotta, too. Yasha demands his own meal, it’s just awful. You know she has her servant, that Yasha, we brought him back with us.

Charlotta (thoughtfully): I don’t have an actual passport, I don’t know how old I am, although it seems to me that I’m quite young. When I was a tiny girl, my father and mother traveled around to the county fairs and put on shows. They were quite good. I performed the salto mortale and other tricks. And when papa and mama died, a German lady took me in and educated me. Which was good. I grew up, and then I became a governess. But where I’m from, who I am – I don’t know… Who were my parents, maybe they weren’t even married… I don’t know. (takes a pickle from her pocket and eats it) I don’t know anything. (pause) I want someone to talk to, but there’s no one… I don’t have anyone.

Lovey (looks in her purse): I had so much money yesterday, and now there’s so little. My poor Varya economizes and feeds everybody milk soup, they only give the old servants dried peas, and I waste it all so stupidly… (drops her purse, gold pieces fall out) Well, that’s gone everywhere… (she becomes frustrated) … Thank you so much, Yasha. Why did I go to town for breakfast… That horrible restaurant of yours, the tablecloths smelled like soap… Why did we drink so much, Leo? Why did we eat so much? Why did we talk so much? You kept talking so much today about nothing. About the seventies, about decadent art forms. Who was listening? Talking to the waiters about decadent art!

Lovey: Then say something else, you have to say something else… (adjusts her dress, a telegram falls out) My heart is heavy today, you can’t imagine. I’m so upset in here, every sound makes me jump, I’m shaking all over. But I can’t go to my room, to be by myself, in silence is just as frightening. Don’t judge me. Peter… I love you, like my own child. I would gladly give Anya to you, I swear, my dear, but you have to study, you have to finish university. You don’t do anything, you just go from place to place, it’s very strange… Right? Yes? And we have to do something about your beard, it’s grown all funny… (laughs) You are funny looking!
MALE MONOLOGUES

Gaev: Yes… This… this thing… (he touches the bookcase) Dear, respected bookcase! We celebrate your existence, that has now for over a hundred years been dedicated to the ideals of good deeds and social justice. Your silent call to fruitful endeavor has not faltered in the course of that century, encouraging (through tears) generations of this family to find courage and to believe in a better future, and teaching us all the ideals of good deeds and social consciousness.

Gaev: Yes… (pause) If you’re fighting some kind of terrible disease, and they offer you all different kinds of treatments, you know that only means it’s incurable. I keep thinking, wracking my brains, and I come up with all kinds of solutions, all kinds of treatments, but that only means there isn’t a single one. It would all be fine if we could just get our Anya engaged to a very rich man, or if we could go to Yaroslavl and try our luck with that aunt, the countess. That aunt is very, very rich. … Don’t whine. That aunt is very rich, but she doesn’t have any great love for us. First, my sister goes and marries an attorney, not a member of her own class… (Anya appears at the door) Marries beneath her station, and proceeds to carry on, hard to say how, well, in a not very virtuous fashion. She’s good, she’s kind, sweet, I truly love her, but there’s no easy way around this, best to just say it: she’s a loose woman. You can see it in her every gesture.

Trofimov: We talked a long time last night, but we couldn’t agree on anything. Humanity’s reason to be proud is something slightly mystical, according to all of you. That may be, you could be right, in your way. But if we consider it straight on, without pretension, what is there to be proud about? What reason is there to feel proud? Man, as a physical specimen, is not particularly well constructed. What reason is there, when the vast majority of human beings are crude, ignorant, and profoundly unhappy? We should stop thinking so highly of ourselves. We should just get down to work.

Pischik: I have high blood pressure, I’ve already had two strokes. It’s hard for me to dance, but you have to run with the pack, as they say, bark and wag your tail. Anyway, I’m as strong as a horse. My dear departed father was quite the comedian, he used to say that all the Semyonov-Pischiks were descended from the very same horse that Caligula rode into the Roman senate… (sits) The trouble is, we have no money! The hungry dog looks only for meat… (snores, then wakes up suddenly) That’s me… can only think about money…

Yasha: Why are you crying? (drinks his champagne) In six days, I’ll be in Paris again. Tomorrow we’ll be on the express train and rolling along, if you could see us. I can hardly believe it. Vive la France!… This place isn’t for me, I can’t live here… there’s nothing you can do about that. I can’t stand all the ignorance, everywhere I look. (drinks his champagne) Why are you crying? If you had behaved yourself, you wouldn’t have anything to cry about.