

On Home and the Future: Extending *The Namesake*

Tyriese James Holloway

“This art of this epoch will be entirely under the influence of revolution. This art needs a new self-consciousness. It is above all, incompatible with mysticism...pessimism, with skepticism, and with all the other forms of spiritual collapse. It is realistic, active, vitally collectivist, and filled with a limitless creative faith in the Future” - Leon Trotsky, *Literature and Revolution*

Abstract: This unit is created as enrichment to *The Namesake*, by Jhumpa Lahiri, with Black students in mind. This unit covers personal pedagogical issues that I have encountered while teaching *The Namesake* over the span of three years and seeks to make the text more thematically meaningful for students. *The Namesake* has strong roots in Russian Literature and this unit uses Black literature and Soviet Literature in order to explore themes of home, identity, and purpose.

Keywords: USSR, bi-culturalism, African-American literature, Soviet Literature, poetry

Introduction and Teaching Situation

There is power in the living word. In this case, a grandfather supine on his bed, his grandson listening to the worlds created by Russian authors. It was an experience that had never left the child, who surreptitiously devoured the words of many Russian authors throughout the rest of his days in Kolkata. The child, luckily, but inevitably, grows up living “three lives by thirty” --his life dramatically changed by a train accident miles away from his homestead. Even upon holding his first son, he doesn’t thank God, he obeys Marx, and honors Russian author Nikolai Gogol by making him the namesake for his first born son. In *The Namesake*, Jhumpa Lahiri masterfully sets the stage for the essential drama of “bi-cultural” identity politics set in the individualistic American cultural framework that identifies as free, yet, often enough, bewilders and challenges any sense of choice and agency. This tension between freedom and choice seems like a universal experience, even if it is particularized within the confines of American cultural politics and the Bengali-immigrant experience, right? The pressures of growing up, naming one’s “home,” falling in love, and creating (or controversially, following) one’s destiny are common themes in many bildungsroman throughout cultures. The bildungsroman is a literary staple for adolescent children, who are searching for their physical and interior homes, so why are my (mostly) Black students having trouble connecting to this novel?

Over the past three years, I have taught *The Namesake* to high school Juniors, and I always felt like I was missing something, or perhaps doing something terribly wrong. At times, I felt like I

was failing the hard-work of the author and my students. In that failure, I often resigned to play the “blame game,” an easy out in the face of what feels like a personal defeat. It is easy to blame the ornate, and frankly, at times staid writing of Lahiri. My first year teaching the novel, I approached the reading with my “tried and true” pedagogical technique of emphasizing the relationship of “text to self” and leading with themes (that I assumed that would be most relevant with the students) in order to help build anticipation with students to engage with the text. However, when I would stand tall, play the audiobook and allow the soft and cajoling voice of the narrator whisper my students to sleep, I couldn’t help but to wonder whether this text is truly accessible for high school students. However, two things are true. First, I am not one to be defeated easily. Second, the lessons in *The Namesake* are far too valuable for students to miss out on. In order to resist the habit of students’ necks falling like weeping willows, I tried to read the story out loud, in hopes of eliciting some engagement with the text. Even then I faced the challenge of unpacking the theme in the midst of a winding, disconnected narrative that approaches a level of intimacy more appropriate for a private reading than a public one.

In the face of consistent defeat, for a time, I blamed cultural differences and the lack of a “culturally relevant” curriculum for Black students. Over the few years I have taught this novel, teaching the cultural nuances of an immigrant Bengali family to an uninitiated student seemed like a demanding gap to bridge. However, while initially there was a personal impulse for me to demand that students read something that is more “culturally relevant,” I never wanted the demand for “culturally relevant pedagogy” to enable “cultural myopia,” which occurs when we treat “culturally relevant” curriculum as a means (access) to an end (to literacy). Humans are destined to interact with people that are different from them, and the earlier we encourage and build the framework of understanding across cultural differences, the sooner students will be able to extend empathy to political circumstances that threaten the livelihood of others. Immigration is a major theme in the novel, and the discussion around immigration is a particularly timely point of contention.

Compared to other years, teaching this novel has been even more difficult this year, considering the Republican Party’s coordinated attack on undocumented people. On January 20th, 2025, the White House released the Presidential Action, “Protecting the American People Against Invasion,” declaring that many immigrants (read: “aliens”) “unlawfully within the United States present significant threats to national security and public safety, committing vile and heinous acts against innocent Americans. Others are engaged in hostile activities, including espionage, economic espionage, and preparations for terror-related activities. Many have abused the generosity of the American people, and their presence in the United States has cost taxpayers billions of dollars at the Federal, State, and local levels.”¹ This Presidential Action hardly comes

¹ “Protecting The American People Against Invasion – The White House.” *The White House*, 20 January 2025, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/01/protecting-the-american-people-against-invasion/>. Accessed 1 May 2025.

as a surprise, given that years beforehand, Trump and the Republican administration had denied a bipartisan agreement that would protect and extend the rights of those who were facing deportation, threatening a government shutdown.² Over the years, when studying the role of immigration in American society, it felt like my students were reticent in order to discuss immigration in a way that felt purposeful and meaningful to them. At times it felt like they were “going through the motions” for the sake of instruction, and it was hard to facilitate conversations without feeling like I am “over prodding” for answers. This curriculum unit will seek to help guide important and authentic conversations around the politics of immigration as well as the important themes of death, love, and choice that are present in the novel.

Rationale and Content Objectives

As listed by the School District of Philadelphia, the Unit Goals of *The Namesake* are as follows:

- Rather than being static or stable, the roles of parent and child can be fluid as individuals adapt and grow; family can be created through community as well as birth and roles within a family can also change.
- Choosing a new name (for oneself or for another person) can be a revolutionary act, a way to claim or celebrate a new self and identity.
- The feeling of being an “outsider” in American culture is far more widespread than just cultural differences. One can feel like an outsider of society, community, and other areas of life for a multitude of reasons.
- The internal struggle of biculturalism and the impact of popular culture on the individual is an ever-changing process.
- Family bonds ultimately supersede external factors, even when there is conflict involved.
- The quest for love and other emotions are uniquely relative and universal to the human experience, regardless of culture.³

This particular curriculum unit will serve to address these goals, however, it will use Russian literature as a guide for success and thematic support. I want my students to be able to engage with the presented conversations in meaningful ways. The structure will use a “sandwich” approach to support the reading, that is: “media-text-media” or “supplement-text-media.” These pursuits will be supported by the following teaching strategies:

1. Journaling
2. Text Rendering

² Fram, Alan, and Jonathan Lemire. “Trump: Why allow immigrants from 'shithole countries'?” *AP News*, 11 January 2018, <https://apnews.com/article/immigration-north-america-donald-trump-ap-top-news-international-news-fdda2ff0b877416c8ae1c1a77a3cc425>. Accessed 1 May 2025.

³ “Grade 11 Unit 1.” *ELA Units K-12*, The School District of Philadelphia, <https://sites.google.com/philasd.org/ela-4-12/home/grade-11/grade-11-unit-1?authuser=0>.

3. Poetry Writing
4. Close Reading
5. Post-card writing

Texts

Anticipation Guide Activities (supplemented by “Home is Where The Hatred Is” by Gil Scott Heron and additional texts)

Essential Question (s): How do one’s personal values and external social forces shape the decisions one makes in life?

Students will start off Day 1 with an anticipation guide in order to explore the themes present in *The Namesake*. In my classroom, I have historically allowed students to have ten minutes to complete the anticipation guide questions independently or in pairs. Then, I have students move from one side of the room to the other based on whether or not they agree with the provided statements. This allows students to discuss and clarify their positions, as I serve as a facilitator. After students have completed the group activity, students are to listen to “Home is Where The Hatred Is” by Gil Scott Heron. This legendary track might be rooted in a culturally specific (Black American) experience, however, the “soul sickness” that Heron details extends to the feelings of alienation that Nikhil faces throughout a good portion of the text.

After completing the anticipation guide, students will do a jigsaw for background information that situates the political, social and thematic elements present in the *Namesake*. It is important to note that students will be responsible for reading “Love and Family in Soviet Literature” beforehand as a homework assignment. Students will have the choice to pick two of the three readings and are expected to write a two-page journal entry for each selected reading. As this curriculum unit is created with block periods in mind, this shouldn’t be a tall task. Students are to report back their findings on chart paper and present to the class.

It is important to note that many of the following activities do not come with “Check for Understanding Questions” as “The Overcoat” by Nikolai Gogol and *The Namesake* have “Think” Questions on the StudySync platform. Many of these activities are enrichment activities in order to support student learning.

“*The Overcoat*” by Nikolai Gogol (supplemented by “*The Work You Do, The Person You Are*” by Toni Morrison)

Essential Question (s): What gives people the power to claim who they are in times of trial and powerlessness?

The protagonist of the story is a low-level bureaucrat, Akakiy, who is surrounded by the complications and contradictions of a burgeoning Russian society. Although told through humorous means, a major theme in the story is status and the protagonist is foiled by a cast of hypocritical and irresponsible higher-level professional administrators. Through hard work and adopting an ascetic lifestyle, Akakiy is able to afford a new overcoat to survive the cold Russian winter. This leads to a significant change in his life. The protagonist gains a new sense of pride, and for a moment, newfound admiration and attention from his coworkers, who had previously looked down on him and his personal appearance. That is, until Akakiy is forgotten after his death and his overcoat is a weight on the conscience of the prominent personage.

It was famously said by Dostoyevsky that Russian authors “came out from Gogol’s ‘Overcoat.’” In the context of *The Namesake*, Gogol’s “The Overcoat” served as a lynchpin for Nikhil’s father’s (Ashoke) intellectual growth and personal development. The depth of social complexity in the Russian Empire mirrors the class-oriented US culture that Ashima (Nikhil’s mother) and Ashoke had to survive before Nikhil had to. In the context of adolescent students, the short story seems to be appropriate for students who will enter the world of labor for the first time, often in entry, lower-level positions. On one hand, while Akakiy was competent and content in his low-status position, students are motivated by the opportunity to earn money on their own terms. The throughline between Akakiy and my students goes beyond the purpose of meaningful labor but the need for respect within the context of their working environments and society at large.

Pedagogically, it is important to note that “The Overcoat” is a very long short story. It is advised that it should be “chunked” with check for understanding (CFU) questions and/or with strong annotations on a physical copy. Instructors could read half in class and assign the rest for homework or take two days to read in class.

To extend this reading, Toni Morrison’s famous short essay, “The Work You Do, The Person You Are” will help close the gap between respect, responsibility and status. In the short essay, Morrison details the labor of her first job that she had as a housekeeper and the anxieties that she had maintaining her job and her role as a child in a household that was desperate for her financial support. What makes this particular short essay so appropriate as a supplement to “The Overcoat” as a preliminary reading for *The Namesake* is that it centers the role of Black children as an extension of the productive forces in the context of Black nuclear families. Throughout Lahiri’s novel, students are challenged to think about Nikhil’s and his sister Sonia’s roles in their family and the choices that they have to make in American culture. Morrison, through the voice of her father, says plain and simple that “Your real life is with your family,” which is a

reassuring message for a child who is struggling to find comfort with her work.⁴ In the context of *The Namesake*, this message rings more unevenly, given that Nikhil's influences are largely outside of the locus of control of his parents and his Bengali culture. In order to increase engagement with this activity, students will write down three pieces of advice for Akakiy in pairs and put it in an envelope. Students should then walk around and read the advice provided by each of their classmates and provide a short reflection on their favorite pieces of advice.

"Chapter 7" of The Namesake by Jhumpa Lahiri (supplemented by "A List of My Own Deaths" by Dmitri Prigov)

Essential Question (s): What does it mean to mourn on your "own terms"? How does culture affect how one mourns?

In Chapter 7 of *The Namesake*, Nikhil's family is turned upside down. Ashoke's death had shaken the foundations of the family and left Nikhil and his mother to clean up the aftermath. Nikhil distances himself from his partner in order to identify his father's body after his heart attack. During his period of mourning, he chooses to mourn in the spirit of his Bengali culture and shaves his head and stays in close community with his immediate family. This chapter strongly parallels the second chapter of the novel, when Nikhil is a child, and Ashoke has to mourn his own father. A common theme in *The Namesake* is the disconnection and confusion that Nikhil has with the way of life that was presented to him; however, by Chapter 7, it is evident that Nikhil is able to accept his culture on his own terms.

Dmitri Prigov's "A List of My Own Death" is an excellent companion piece for this chapter. As a "category poem" it is extremely accessible, and the tone at times balances between solemn and humorous. By the end of Chapter 7, Nikhil is remembering his relationship with his father and their trip to Cape Cod. Through the use of a "category poem" students will be able to recall important events in Ashoke's life and his relationship with American culture and how it helped shape the theme of assimilation in the novel. As an extension, students will be able to reflect on critical milestones in Ashoke's and Nikhil's relationship throughout the years and make critical questions about how culture informs child-parent relationships. My goal for this particular unit is for students to write a category poem about their relationship with someone that they grew up with and cared about. At this point of the novel, it is easy to make judgments about Nikhil's decisions and his way of life. Prigov's "A List of My Own Death" challenges readers to come to a charge of awareness about the meaning of life and the circumstances (not so much the choices) they encounter.

Classroom Activities

⁴ Morrison, Toni. "The Work You Do, the Person You Are." *The New Yorker*, 29 May 2017, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2017/06/05/toni-morrison-the-work-you-do-the-person-you-are>. Accessed 22 June 2025.

This unit is created to support four 90 minute classes over the course of six weeks in A/B block scheduling. Due to the flipped classroom structure, it is expected that students will work on this unit inside and outside of the classroom.

Lesson 1: Anticipation Guide and Background (Theme, Day 1)

CCCS (Common Core Curriculum Standard): CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.7, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.10

Objective(s): I can determine themes and big ideas present in *The Namesake* by completing the anticipation guide for *The Namesake*

Materials:

- Powerpoint Presentation

Time: 90 minutes

Classroom Set-Up: Students could work in rows, however, in my personal classroom set-up, students are in groups of six. Students may modify seating to work with pairs as they see necessary.

Vocabulary to Know for Anticipation Guide

- **assimilate:** absorb and integrate (people, ideas, or culture) into a wider society or culture.
- **priority:** a thing that is regarded as more important than another.
- **dynamic:** characterized by constant change, activity, or progress

Anticipation Guide: Read the following statements and check the box if you agree or disagree with the statement.

Statement	Agree	Disagree
Your name defines who you are.		
It is possible to fully assimilate into another culture.		
Family and cultural tradition should take priority over individual needs.		
Identity is dynamic and changes often throughout one's life.		

Writing Response: In five to ten sentences, explain your rationale for the choices in the statements above.

Post-Anticipation Guide Reflection: You are going to listen to Gil Scott Heron’s “Home is Where the Hatred Is”⁵.

Lyrics

A junkie walking through the twilight
I'm on my way home
I left three days ago, but no one seems to know
I'm gone
Home is where the hatred is
Home is filled with pain and it,
Might not be such a bad idea if I never, never
went home again

Stand as far away from me as you can and ask me
why
Hang on to your rosary beads
Close your eyes to watch me die
You keep saying, kick it, quit it, kick it, quit it
God, but did you ever try
To turn your sick soul inside out
So that the world, so that the world
Can watch you die

Questions:

1. Annotate critical literary devices present in this poem. List two examples below.
2. List three adjectives that define the tone of this poem. Write them below.

⁵ “Gil Scott-Heron - Home Is Where the Hatred Is (Official Audio).” *YouTube*, 19 August 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nSpBs1ghyoo>. Accessed 1 May 2025.

Home is where I live inside my white powder
dreams
Home was once an empty vacuum that's filled
now with my silent screams
Home is where the needle marks
Try to heal my broken heart
And it might not be such a bad idea if I never, if I
never went home again
Home again
Home again
Home again
Kick it, quit it
Kick it, quit it
Kick it, quit it
Kick it, can't go home again

3. How does this poem tie into the themes present in the Anticipation Guide for the Namesake?

Writing Prompt: How does Heron's feeling of home connect with you? How does it differ? How does home and setting shape the expectations of a protagonist?

Lesson 2: Background Information Jigsaw (Immigration, Assimilation, and Soviet Literature, Day 2)

OBJ: I can demonstrate engagement of major themes in *The Namesake* IOT provide background information BY completing a jigsaw

STANDARDS: RL.11-12.1, RL.11-12.6, W.11-12.3

Materials:

- Powerpoint Presentation

Time: 90 minutes

Classroom Set-Up: Students could work in rows, however, in my personal classroom set-up, students are in groups of six. Students may modify seating to work with pairs as they see necessary.

Directions: Use the links below to research your topic. The links are a starting point for research; you may choose additional sources of information. Read each resource. Identify key information about the topic and make at least five relevant connections and at least three questions that you want to explore in *The Namesake*.

<p>1. Love and Family in Soviet Literature</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Girl in the Library by Stepan Zoryan (provided by instructor) • "I Loved You" by Alexander Pushkin • Siberian Wood by Lara Vapnyar 	<p>2. Name Choice Across Cultures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Naming Traditions Across Cultures and Languages" by US Languages Services LLC • "A brief history of black names, from Perlie to Latasha" by Trevon Logan • A Guide to Names and Naming Practices by Financial Banking Information Infrastructure Committee
<p>3. Othering/Assimilation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "The Other America" by Dr. Martin Luther King • "Yet Another Call for Assimilation in America, but Assimilation to What?" By Glenn Lomis • Other Encyclopedia MDPI 	<p>4. Bi-culturalism</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "From Calcutta to Suburbia: A Family's Perplexing Journey" by Michiko Kakutani • "The Hindu American Identity: A Melting Pot Within A Melting Pot" by Purnita Howlader • Exploring Bicultural Ambivalence in Jhumpa Lahiri's The Namesake by Hassan Bin Zubair and Nighat Ahmed (Introduction Only)
<p>5. Current U.S Immigration Policy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Trump: Why allow immigrants from 'shithole countries'?" • "Protecting The American People Against Invasion – The White House." • Trump's deportation crackdown is "beyond not normal" • "What the New Republican Party Platform Says About Immigration" by Alison Moodie 	

Guided Instruction: Jigsaw (Informational Articles)

Directions: Work in groups in order to complete the worksheet provided in your station.

Everyone is expected to annotate the article, identify key vocabulary words in the article (on the sticky note) and to then transfer the notes in the bolded box on chart paper. You will share your results with the class.

My Name:

Group Name:

STEP ONE: Take notes on your own article. Become an expert!

Title & Author:

Main Problem:

The main problem in the article is....

Main Solution:

The author's main solution in the article is...

Evidence (Summarize three key details in the article):

Key Quote:

1. Describe what you learned about the author and their point of view on the issue described in the article.

2. Think backwards. What question do you imagine that the author was trying to answer by writing this article?

--

STEP THREE: Reflection

Two new learnings:

- 1.
- 2.

One question you still have about this topic:

STEP TWO: In each of these boxes, please take notes on what you learn from your Teaching Group. Please label the boxes with the title and author of the article:

--	--

Exit Ticket: Jhumpa Lahiri describes the immigrant experience as allowing her to see a window into the condition of the human soul. After watching the video, what do you think she means by this? How might the immigrant experience take a toll on one's life?⁶ What challenges do immigrants face? Please answer the questions in five to ten sentences.

⁶ National Geographic. "After Decades of Brownface, South Asians Fight for Better Representation." *YouTube*, YouTube, 7 October 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vcz2lQaKz3M&t=125s>. Accessed 21 June 2025.

Lesson 3: “The Overcoat” and “The Work You Do, The Person You Are”

CCCS (Common Core Curriculum Standard): CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.7, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.10

Objective(s): After engaging in a close reading and discussion of “The Overcoat” by Nikolai Gogol, I can write a short response that explains how the themes of “The Overcoat” overlap with those of *The Namesake* by Jhumpa Lahiri

Materials:

- Powerpoint Presentation
- Postcards
- Envelopes
- Pens and colored pencils

Time: 90 minutes

Classroom Set-Up: Students could work in rows, however, in my personal classroom set-up, students are in groups of six. Students may modify seating to work with pairs as they see necessary.

Do Now (Part I): Write down two **adjectives** that describe the character traits of the following characters.

Character	Description
Petrovich	
Akakiy	
The Important Person	
The Assistant Head Clerk	
The Prominent Personage	

Close Reading Excerpt: Read the following excerpt of the short story. **Highlight** imagery and hyperbole, underline personification, *circle* metaphors and similes. Then answer the questions that follow.

To tell the truth, it was a little hard for him at first to accustom himself to these deprivations; but he got used to them at length, after a fashion, and all went smoothly. He even got used to being hungry in the evening, but he made up for it by treating himself, so to say, in spirit, by bearing ever in mind the idea of his future cloak. From that time forth his existence seemed to become, in some way, fuller, as if he were married, or as if some other man lived in him, as if, in fact, he were not alone, and some pleasant friend had consented to travel along life's path with him, the friend being no other than the cloak, with thick wadding and a strong lining incapable of wearing out. He became more lively, and even his character grew firmer, like that of a man who has made up his mind, and set himself a goal. From his face and gait, doubt and indecision, all hesitating and wavering traits disappeared of themselves. Fire gleamed in his eyes, and occasionally the boldest and most daring ideas flitted through his mind; why not, for instance, have marten fur on the collar? The thought of this almost made him absent-minded. Once, in copying a letter, he nearly made a mistake, so that he exclaimed almost aloud, "Ugh!" and crossed himself. Once, in the course of every month, he had a conference with Petrovitch on the subject of the cloak, where it would be better to buy the cloth, and the colour, and the price. He always returned home satisfied, though troubled, reflecting that the time would come at last when it could all be bought, and then the cloak made.

Journal Entry: In *The Namesake*, the protagonist goes through many transformations to reconcile his identity. In "The Overcoat," the new garment gave the protagonist a new sense of power. In 8-10 sentences, make a prediction about what strengthens the resolve of the protagonist in the novel, and how that may develop the theme of transformation.

Extension (Postcard Activity):

1. Read "The Work You Do, The Person You Are" by Toni Morrison. Write down three points of advice to Akakiy based on the advice that Toni's father gave to her.
2. Compare the advice that you received with another partner. Between you and your partner, choose your favorite three.
3. Write your top three advice points on a postcard and put it in an envelope. Leave it on your desk.

4. Students will walk around the room and read the postcards created.

Lesson 4: Chapter 7 of *The Namesake* and “A List of My Own Deaths”

CCCS (Common Core Curriculum Standard): CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.7, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.10

Objective(s): After engaging in a close reading and discussion of Chapter 6 of *The Namesake*, I can write a category poem that explains how the themes of “A List of My Own Deaths” overlaps with *The Namesake* by Jhumpa Lahiri

Materials:

- Powerpoint Presentation

Time: 90 minutes

Classroom Set-Up: Students could work in rows, however, in my personal classroom set-up, students are in groups of six. Students may modify seating to work with pairs as they see necessary.

Do Now (Character Sketch): You will review your notes about Ashoke. Feel free to use your copy of *The Namesake* in order to complete these frames.

- What I find most important about Ashoke is...
- You can see this when he...
- Another trait the reader can see is how he is _____. This is most obvious when_____.
- One final important thing about Ashoke is _____. You can see this when the character is _____.
- What I'll remember most about Ashoke is_____.

Close Reading Excerpt: Read the following excerpt of Chapter 7 of *The Namesake*. **Highlight** figurative language, underline representations of Bengali culture, *circle* representations of American culture. Then answer the questions that follow.

For ten days following his father's death, he and his mother and Sonia eat a mourner's diet, forgoing meat and fish. They eat only rice and dal and vegetables, plainly prepared. Gogol remembers having to do the same thing when he was younger, when his grandparents died, his mother yelling at him when he forgot one day and had a hamburger at school. He remembers,

back then, being bored by it, annoyed at having to observe a ritual no one else he knew followed, in honor of people he had seen only a few times in his life. He remembers his father sitting unshaven on a chair, staring through them, speaking to no one. He remembers those meals eaten in complete silence, the television turned off. Now, sitting together at the kitchen table at six-thirty every evening, the hour feeling more like midnight through the window, his father's chair empty, this meatless meal is the only thing that seems to make sense. There is no question of skipping this meal; on the contrary, for ten evenings the three of them are strangely hungry, eager to taste the blandness on their plates. It is the one thing that structures their days: the sound of the food being warmed in the microwave, three plates lowered from the cupboard, three glasses filled. The rest of it—the calls, the flowers that are everywhere, the visitors, the hours they spend sitting together in the living room unable to say a word, mean nothing. Without articulating it to one another, they draw comfort from the fact that it is the only time in the day that they are alone, isolated, as a family; even if there are visitors lingering in the house, only the three of them partake of this meal. And only for its duration is their grief slightly abated, the enforced absence of certain foods on their plates conjuring his father's presence somehow.

Part II: “A List of My Own Deaths” by Dmitri Prigov

Directions: Please read the provided poem below and answer the questions on the right hand side.

<u>Text</u>	<u>Questions:</u>
<p>I might have died at age 1 from chickenpox, but didn't At 2 I might have died from measles At 3 I might have died from lupus, hunger and war In my 4th year I could have died from measles, many did Oh, and at 6 months I could have died from dyspepsia I also might have died before my birth, from the unspeakable difficulties of life to come I could have died while being born, these things happen I could have died at 5 from scarlet fever — a terrible thing At 6, 7, 8 and 9 I could have died from polio At 10 I could have died from fear — it was very</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. List three adjectives that define the tone of this poem. Write them below. 2. What do you think is the purpose of the author repeating “I could’ve died” multiple times? What is the literary device being used? How does it define the theme of the poem?

scary

At 11 and 12 I could have died of boredom at school, but I overcame it

At 13 and 14 I could have died while crossing the street, in someone else's garden stealing apples or in a courtyard fight -- those were brutal fights

At 15, I could have died from encephalitis from a tick bite in a forest outside Moscow

At 16, I could have just died

I could have just died at 17

I could have just died at 18

I could have died at 19 or 20 when bathing in the Black or Baltic Sea

At 24, I could have died from the police

At 25 years I could have died from food poisoning

I could have died at the ages of 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, or 41 in prisons, camps, from torture, on a prisoners' bunk, during interrogations, in the logging camps, on a criminal's knife, at the North Pole, eaten up by gnats, in the desert, on a cross, thrust under the ice, thrown into the furnace, on the wheel, from a bullet, in a dungeon, in manacles, from exhaustion in the cattle wagon, in a gas chamber, thrown from a cliff, doused in acid, from scurvy, without making it to the location of my second prison term, of a heart attack in front of the camp gates flung open in the days of rehabilitation

At 41 I could have also died from a twisted intestine

Or, at 40, for example, if I hadn't died before that in prison, I could have died from being bitten by a rabid dog -- they were running around Moscow in those days

And at 39 I might have died from malaria in Asia

But at age 42 I could already die of tuberculosis

I could have died at 43 from a traumatic head injury, for example, from a blow with an ax

I could have died at 44, 45 and 46 from something or other, literally just some nonsense

3. In the poem, the author mentions a lot of different diseases that he could have died from. What do you think is the role of sickness in the poem? How does it define the mood of the poem?

4. This is a "catalogue poem" which is a poem that is defined by the listing of items, people, places, or ideas. There are many ages in the poem that are not defined by a cause of death or a "meaningful" death. Do you think that this makes the poem better or worse? Explain why in three to five sentences below.

I could have died at 47 from serious worries
 I could have died at 48 from a possible cancer
 At 49, 50, 51 I could have died from a heart attack,
 and indeed died, but I snapped out of it
 At 52 I could still die from a heart attack
 At 53 I could die from anything, for example, from
 an irregular life
 I could have died at 54 just about anything
 I could have died at 55 from anything
 I could have died at 56 from anything
 I could have died at 57 from anything
 I could have died at 58 from anything
 And at my present 59 years I could die from
 anything, for example from these compositions
 And in all the years, times and sentences to come, I
 can, can, can die, die, die from what, from what,
 from what? — from just about anything

Writing Prompt: You will reflect on the relationship between Ashoke and Gogol in the novel thus far. You will write a catalogue poem based on the milestones in Gogol's life based on his relationship with his father. You are to use at least three of the five literary devices in your poem in order to complete the assignment. The poem must be at least 20-35 lines. You are to write this poem on a separate sheet of paper.

1. Repetition
2. Rhyme
3. Metaphor
4. Symbolism
5. Imagery

Appendix

The presented standards are Common Core 11th and 12th Language Arts for Reading Literature, Speaking and Writing and Informational Text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1- Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 11-12 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.2- Determine two or more central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to provide a complex analysis; provide an objective summary of the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.7- Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in different media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively) as well as in words in order to address a question or solve a problem.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.8- Gather relevant information from multiple authoritative print and digital sources, using advanced searches effectively; assess the strengths and limitations of each source in terms of the task, purpose, and audience; integrate information into the text selectively to maintain the flow of ideas, avoiding plagiarism and overreliance on any one source and following a standard format for citation.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.10- Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.1-Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.

Bibliography

- n.d. A GUIDE TO NAMES AND NAMING PRACTICES. Accessed June 22, 2025. https://www.fbiic.gov/public/2008/nov/Naming_practice_guide_UK_2006.pdf.
- Benton, Justin. 2024. "Naming Traditions Across Cultures and Languages - U.S. Language Services." U.S. Language Services LLC. <https://www.uslanguageservices.com/blog/naming-traditions-across-cultures-and-languages/>.
- Bin Zubair, Hassan, and Nighat Ahmed. 2022. "Exploring Bicultural Ambivalence in Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake*: Representational Diasporic Identities in Indian Anglophone Fiction | Zubair | International Journal of English Linguistics | CCSE." Canadian Center of Science and Education. <https://ccsenet.org/journal/index.php/ijel/article/view/76703>.
- Fram, Alan, and Jonathan Lemire. 2018. "Trump: Why allow immigrants from 'shithole countries'?" AP News. <https://apnews.com/article/immigration-north-america-donald-trump-ap-top-news-international-news-fdda2ff0b877416c8ae1c1a77a3cc425>.
- "Gil Scott-Heron - Home Is Where the Hatred Is (Official Audio)." 2014. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nSpBs1ghyoo>.
- Gogol, Nikolai. n.d. "The Overcoat." Fountainhead Press. Accessed May 1, 2025. <https://www.fountainheadpress.com/expandingthearc/assets/gogolovercoat.pdf>.
- "Grade 11 Unit 1." n.d. ELA Units K-12. <https://sites.google.com/philasd.org/ela-4-12/home/grade-11/grade-11-unit-1?authuser=0>.
- Howlader, Purnita. 2009. "The Hindu American Identity: A Melting Pot Within A Melting Pot." Lokvani. https://www.lokvani.com/lokvani/article.php?article_id=6021.
- Kakutani, Michiko. 2003. "BOOKS OF THE TIMES; From Calcutta to Suburbia: A Family's Perplexing Journey (Published 2003)." The New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/2003/09/02/books/books-of-the-times-from-calcutta-to-suburbia-a-family-s-perplexing-journey.html>.
- Llopis, Glenn. 2019. "Yet Another Call For Assimilation in America, But Assimilation To What?" Forbes. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/glennllopis/2019/01/29/yet-another-call-for-assimilation-in-america-but-assimilation-to-what/#36bc563a3e07>.
- Logan, Trevon. 2020. "A brief history of black names, from Perlie to Latasha." The Conversation. <https://theconversation.com/a-brief-history-of-black-names-from-perlie-to-latasha-130102>.
- Moodie, Alison. 2024. "What the New Republican Party Platform Says About Immigration." Boundless Immigration. <https://www.boundless.com/blog/what-the-new-republican-party-platform-says-about-immigration/>.
- Morrison, Toni. 2017. "The Work You Do, the Person You Are." The New Yorker. <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2017/06/05/toni-morrison-the-work-you-do-the-person-you-are>.
- MSNBC. 2025. "Trump's deportation crackdown is 'beyond not normal.'" YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tb5_3BunbrY.
- National Geographic. 2018. "After Decades of Brownface, South Asians Fight for Better Representation." YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vcz2IQaKz3M&t=125s>.

“Protecting The American People Against Invasion – The White House.” 2025. The White House. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/01/protecting-the-american-people-against-invasion/>.

Pushkin, Alexander. 1830. “Я вас любил (I Loved You), by Alexander Pushkin: translation and commentary — The Cambridge Language Collective.” The Cambridge Language Collective. <https://www.thecambridgelanguagecollective.com/europe/-i-loved-you-georgio-konstandi>

Trotsky, Leon. 1960. *Literature and Revolution*. N.p.: University of Michigan Press.

Vapnyar, Lara. 2023. “‘Siberian Wood,’ by Lara Vapnyar.” The New Yorker. <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2023/09/11/siberian-wood-fiction-lara-vapnyar>.

“Veterans of the Civil Rights Movement -- The Other America.” n.d. Civil Rights Movement Archive. Accessed June 21, 2025. <https://www.crmvet.org/docs/otheram.htm>.

Xu, Camila, and Sebastian Münster. 2022. “Other.” Encyclopedia.pub. <https://encyclopedia.pub/entry/33674>.

Zoryan, Stepan. 1972. “A Girl in the Library.” In *We of the Mountains: Armenian Short Stories*, translated by Fainna Glagoleva, 63-100. N.p.: Progress Publishers.