

## **Creativity in a Time of Crisis: The Story of Russian Literature**

**Tuesday, January 11 to March 15 – 10am to 12 noon**  
**Zoom Session**

**[www.learningunlimitedetobicoke.com](http://www.learningunlimitedetobicoke.com)**

**Coordinator and Presenter: Dr. Julia Zarankin**

**Course Overview** - Russian literature can be an intimidating proposition: enormous novels, depressing content. *This course does not assume any prior knowledge of Russian literature and does not require any reading*; instead the course will help you understand the tempestuous and deeply fascinating history of Russian literature. An unusually late bloomer, Russian literature appeared on the European literary scene in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century and, within a mere hundred years, managed to take the world by storm. The course will present literary texts in a historical and cultural context, by examining how Russian literature responds to the changing socio-political climate of its day, including autocracy, imperialism, terrorism, revolution, Stalinism. (You'll also understand why it is that the Russians never managed to write anything "cheerful.") Significant attention will be paid to Pushkin, Gogol, Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Chekhov, Akhmatova, Mandelstam, Solzhenitsyn and contemporary authors. *Warning: at the end of the course you may well want to pick up one of those enormous, depressing novels and start reading, without delay!*

### **Tuesday, January 11: Peculiarities of Russian literature**

Why did it take until the late 1700s for Russian Literature to be born?

### **Tuesday, January 18: Alexander Pushkin**

The Tsar's Worst Nightmare: How Alexander Pushkin resisted and rebelled against autocracy "The Bronze Horseman")

### **Tuesday, January 25: Nikolai Gogol**

How Nikolai Gogol's characters in "The Overcoat" expose the horrors that underpin Russia's Imperial bureaucracy.

### **Tuesday, February 1: Fyodor Dostoevsky**

How Fyodor Dostoevsky rebelled against autocracy, social injustice, serfdom, and attempted to arrive at a definition of what it means to be Russian.

### **Tuesday, February 8: Leo Tolstoy**

How Leo Tolstoy's novels rebelled against war, famine, serfdom, autocratic passivity, political dogma, history, religion, the aristocracy, and, later, even himself.

### **Tuesday, February 15: Anton Chekhov**

How Anton Chekhov rebelled against all forms of (political, religious, societal) smugness and apathy in his stories and plays.

### **Tuesday, February 22: Vladimir Mayakovsky**

How the prophet of the Revolution, Vladimir Mayakovsky, rebelled against the Tsarist regime and bourgeois literary forms and opted for a new poetic language that embraced the spirit of the Revolution.

**Tuesday, March 1: Anna Akhmatova**

How Russia's most famous 20<sup>th</sup> century poet Anna Akhmatova rebelled against Stalinism and political repression in all of its forms; instead of succumbing to threats from the Soviet regime, in her poetry she fought for the preservation of historical memory.

**Tuesday, March 8: Bulgakov**

How Mikhail Bulgakov—author of the cult-classic *Master and Margarita*—rebelled against the idiocy of government-mandated artistic unions under Stalin and how he fought for creative freedom.

**Tuesday, March 15: From Solzhenitsyn to the present**

How Alexandr Solzhenitsyn influenced a new generation of authors by rebelled against the rewriting of history and the desperate desire to forget the crimes against humanity perpetrated by the Soviet regime.

**Dr. Julia Zarankin**

Recently awarded an Excellence in Teaching Award from the University of Toronto School of Continuing Studies, Dr. Julia Zarankin holds a PhD in Comparative Literature from Princeton University. She enjoys teaching lifelong learners in venues across the GTA, including HotDocs Curious Minds, Innis College, George Brown Seniors and the Royal Conservatory, and was a featured guest on Michael Enright's *Sunday Edition*. Julia is also the author of the bestselling memoir, *Field Notes from an Unintentional Birder*, which has garnered praise from Margaret Atwood. Dr. Zarankin's writing—published in outlets across Canada and the US—is supported by grants from the Ontario Arts Council and the Canada Council for the Arts.

**Committee Contact and Chair: Loretta Fines**