**Rutherford County Schools – Individual Learning Modules**

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| **Grade** | **Course** |
| High School | English IV |
| **Unit Focus** | |
| Students analyze an excerpt from the short story “The Overcoat” by Nikolai Gogol. Students read and analyze paragraphs 1-13 in which Gogol introduces the setting and the character Akaky Akakievich. Student analysis focuses on the development of Akaky Akakievich’s character, paying particular attention to Akaky Akakievich’s physical description, explanations of his work, and the way in which he relates to the world around him. | |
| **Week of 4/27 – 5/1** | |
| **Standard(s)** | |
| **RL.3 -** Analyze how an author’s choices regarding the development and interaction of characters, events, and ideas over the course of a text impact meaning. | **RL.4 -** Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including words with multiple meanings and language that is stylistically poignant and engaging. |
| **Resource(s)** | |
| [***CommonLit* Activity**](https://www.commonlit.org/en/texts/excerpt-from-the-overcoat)[**Possible Paired Texts (*CommonLit*)**](https://www.commonlit.org/en/texts/excerpt-from-the-overcoat/paired-texts) | [**Explanatory Essay Rubric**](https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/education/documents/rubric_writing_g9-12_explanatory.pdf)  [**"The Overcoat" - Full Text**](https://www.berfrois.com/2018/11/the-overcoat-by-nikolai-gogol/) |
| **Task(s)** | |
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| **Expected Outcomes** | |
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**Excerpt from “The Overcoat” – Nikolai Gogol**

1 In the department of. . . but it would be better not to say in which department. There is nothing more irascible than all these departments, regiments, offices—in short, all this officialdom. Nowadays every private individual considers the whole of society insulted in his person. They say a petition came quite recently from some police chief, I don't remember of what town, in which he states clearly that the government's decrees are perishing and his own sacred name is decidedly being taken in vain. And as proof he attached to his petition a most enormous tome of some novelistic work in which a police chief appears on every tenth page, in some places even in a totally drunken state. And so, to avoid any unpleasantness, it would be better to call the department in question a certain department.

2 And so, in a certain department there served a certain clerk; a not very remarkable clerk, one might say—short, somewhat pockmarked, somewhat red-haired, even with a somewhat nearsighted look, slightly bald in front, with wrinkles on both cheeks and a complexion that is known as hemorrhoidal. . . No help for it! the Petersburg climate is to blame. As for his rank (for with us rank must be announced first of all), he was what is called an eternal titular councillor, at whom, as is known, all sorts of writers have abundantly sneered and jeered, having the praiseworthy custom of exerting themselves against those who can't bite.

3 The clerk's last name was Bashmachkin. From the name itself one can already see that it once came from bashmak, or "shoe"; but when, at what time, and in what way it came from bashmak—none of that is known. His father, his grandfather, even his brother-in-law, and absolutely all the Bashmachkins, went around in boots, merely having them resoled three times a year. His name was Akaky Akakievich. The reader will perhaps find that somewhat strange and farfetched, but he can be assured that it was not fetched at all, but that such circumstances occurred of themselves as made it quite impossible to give him any other name, and here is precisely how it came about.

4 Akaky Akakievich was born, if memory serves me, during the night of the twenty-third of March. His late mother, a clerk's widow and a very good woman, decided, as was fitting, to have the baby baptized. The mother was still lying in bed opposite the door, and to her right stood the godfather, a most excellent man, Ivan Ivanovich Yeroshkin, who served as a chief clerk in the Senate, and the godmother, the wife of a police officer, a woman of rare virtue, Arina Semyonovna Belobriushkova. The new mother was offered a choice of any of three names, whichever she wished to choose: Mokky, Sossy, or to name the baby after the martyr Khozdazat. "No," thought the late woman, "what sort of names are those?" To please her, they opened the calendar to another place; again three names came out: Trifily, Dula, and Varakhasy. "What a punishment," the old woman said. "Such names, really, I've never heard the like. If only it were Varadat or Varukh, not Trifily and Varakhasy." They turned another page: out came Pavsikakhy and Vakhtisy. "Well, I see now," the old woman said, "it's evidently his fate. If so, better let him be named after his father. His father was Akaky, so let the son also be Akaky." Thus it was that Akaky Akakievich came about. As the child was being baptized, he cried and made such a face as if he anticipated that he would be a titular councilor.

5 And so, that is how it all came about. We have told it so that the reader could see for himself that it happened entirely from necessity and that to give him any other name was quite impossible. When and at what time he entered the department and who appointed him, no one could recall. However many directors and other superiors came and went, he was always to be seen in one and the same place, in the same position, in the same capacity, as the same copying clerk, so that after a while they became convinced that he must simply have been born into the world ready-made, in a uniform, and with a balding head. In the department he was shown no respect at all. The caretakers not only did not rise from their places when he passed, but did not even look at him, as if a mere fly had flown through the reception room. His superiors treated him somehow with cold despotism. Some chief clerk's assistant simply shoved papers under his nose without even saying "Copy them," or "Here's a nice, interesting little case," or something pleasant, as is customary in well-bred offices. And he took them, looking only at the papers, without regarding the one who put them there or whether he had the right to do so. He took them and immediately settled down to copying them.

6 The young clerks poked fun at him and cracked jokes, to the extent that office wit allowed; told right in front of him various stories they had made up about him, about his landlady, a seventy-year-old crone, saying that she beat him, asking when their wedding was to be, dumping torn-up paper over his head and calling it snow. But not one word of response came from Akaky Akakievich, as if no one was there; it did not even affect the work he did: amidst all this pestering, he made not a single error in his copy. Only when the joke was really unbearable, when they jostled his arm, interfering with what he was doing, would he say, "Let me be. Why do you offend me?"

7 And there was something strange in the words and in the voice in which they were uttered. Something sounded in it so conducive to pity that one recently appointed young man who, following the example of the others, had first allowed himself to make fun of him, suddenly stopped as if transfixed, and from then on everything seemed changed before him and acquired a different look. Some unnatural power pushed him away from his comrades, whose acquaintance he had made thinking them decent, well-mannered men. And long afterwards, in moments of the greatest merriment, there would rise before him the figure of the little clerk with the balding brow, uttering his penetrating words: "Let me be. Why do you offend me?"— and in these penetrating words rang other words: "I am your brother." And the poor young man would bury his face in his hands, and many a time in his life he shuddered to see how much inhumanity there is in man, how much savage coarseness is concealed in refined, cultivated manners, and God! even in a man the world regards as noble and honorable.

8 It would hardly be possible to find a man who lived so much in his work. It is not enough to say he served zealously—no, he served with love. There, in that copying, he saw some varied and pleasant world of his own. Delight showed in his face; certain letters were his favorites, and when he came to one of them, he was beside himself: he chuckled and winked and helped out with his lips, so that it seemed one could read on his face every letter his pen traced. If his zeal had been rewarded correspondingly, he might, to his own amazement, have gone as far as state councillor; yet his reward, as his witty comrades put it, was a feather in his hat and hemorrhoids where he sat.

9 However, it was impossible to say he went entirely unnoticed. One director, being a kindly man and wishing to reward him for long service, ordered that he be given something more important than the usual copying—namely, he was told to change an already existing document into a letter to another institution; the matter consisted merely in changing the heading and changing some verbs from first to third person. This was such a task for him that he got all in a sweat, rubbed his forehead, and finally said, "No, better let me copy something." After that he was left copying forever.

10 Outside this copying nothing seemed to exist for him. He gave no thought to his clothes at all: his uniform was not green but of some mealy orange. The collar he wore was narrow, low, so that though his neck was not long, it looked extraordinarily long protruding from this collar, as with those head-wagging plaster kittens that foreign peddlers carry about by the dozen on their heads. And there was always something stuck to his uniform: a wisp of straw or a bit of thread; moreover, he had a special knack, as he walked in the street, of getting under a window at the precise moment when some sort of trash was being thrown out of it, and, as a result, he was eternally carrying around melon or watermelon rinds and other such rubbish on his hat. Not once in his life did he ever pay attention to what was going on or happening every day in the street, which, as is known, his young fellow clerk always looks at, his pert gaze so keen that he even notices when someone on the other side of the street has the footstrap of his trousers come undone—which always provokes a sly smile on his face. But Akaky Akakievich, even if he looked at something, saw in everything his own neat lines, written in an even hand, and only when a horse's muzzle, coming out of nowhere, placed itself on his shoulder and blew real wind from its nostrils onto his cheek— only then would he notice that he was not in the middle of a line, but rather in the middle of the street.

11 Coming home, he would sit down straight away at the table, hastily slurp up his cabbage soup and eat a piece of beef with onions, without ever noticing their taste, and he would eat it all with flies and whatever else God sent him at the time. Noticing that his stomach was full, he would get up from the table, take out a bottle of ink, and copy documents he had brought home. If there chanced to be none, he made copies especially for his own pleasure, particularly if the document was distinguished not by the beauty of its style but by its being addressed to some new or important person.

12 Even in those hours when the gray Petersburg sky fades completely and all clerical folk have eaten their fill and finished dinner, each as he could, according to his salary and his personal fancy— when all have rested after the departmental scratching of pens, the rushing about seeing to their own and other people's needful occupations, and all that irrepressible man heaps voluntarily on himself even more than is necessary—when clerks hasten to give the remaining time to pleasure: the more ambitious rushing to the theater; another going out to devote it to gazing at silly hats; another to a party, to spend it paying compliments to some pretty girl, the star of a small clerical circle; still another, and this happens most often, simply going to his own kind, to some fourth or third floor, two small rooms with a front hall and a kitchen, with some claim to fashion, a lamp or other object that cost great sacrifices, the giving up of dinners, outings—in short, even at that time when all clerks disperse to their friends' small apartments to play cutthroat whist, sipping tea from glasses, with one-kopeck rusks, puffing smoke through long chibouks, repeating while the cards are being dealt some gossip blown over from high society, something a Russian man can never give up under any circumstances, or even, when there is nothing to talk about, retelling the eternal joke about the commandant who was brought word that the horse of Falconet's monument had had its tail docked—in short, even when everything strives for diversion—Akaky Akakievich did not give himself up to any diversion. No one could say he had ever been seen at any party. When he had written his fill, he would go to bed, smiling beforehand at the thought of the next day: What would God send him to copy tomorrow?

13 So flowed the peaceful life of this man who, with a salary of four hundred, was able to content himself with his lot, and so it might have flowed on into extreme old age, had it not been for the various calamities strewn along the path of life, not only of titular, but even of privy, actual, court, and other councillors, even of those who neither give counsel nor take any themselves.