

ДАРЬЯ НИКУЛЬЦЕВА

GREAT 20 ИСТОРИЙ О ГЕНИЯХ РУССКОЙ КУЛЬТУРЫ RUSSIANS

ЧИТАЕМ
И ГОВОРим
НА АНГЛИЙСКОМ



БОМБОРА
ИЗДАТЕЛЬСТВО

УДК 811.111(075)
ББК 81.2Англ-9
Н65

Никульцева, Дарья Александровна.

Н65 Great Russians. 20 историй о гениях русской культуры : читаем и говорим на английском / Дарья Никульцева. — Москва : Эксмо, 2026. — 256 с.: цв. ил. — (Расскази миру о России. Учимся говорить о своей стране на английском).

ISBN 978-5-04-235040-5

«Great Russians. 20 историй о гениях русской культуры» — книга для изучающих английский язык на уровнях А2—В1 от опытного преподавателя университета МГИМО Дарьи Никульцевой.

В книге собраны адаптированные тексты о выдающихся деятелях русской культуры — композиторах, писателях, художниках, режиссёрах и артистах, чьё творчество стало частью мирового культурного наследия. Вы узнаете, как создавались великие музыкальные произведения, рождались литературные шедевры и формировались театральные традиции, повлиявшие на искусство во всём мире.

Книга помогает не только совершенствовать английский, но и уверенно рассказывать о культуре и творческих достижениях своей страны. Каждая история сопровождается упражнениями для расширения словарного запаса, а красочные акварельные иллюстрации делают процесс обучения увлекательным.

УДК 811.111(075)
ББК 81.2Англ-9

ISBN 978-5-04-235040-5

© Никульцева, Д.А., текст, 2026
© Наталья Байкова, иллюстрации, 2026
© Оформление. ООО «Издательство «Эксмо», 2026

Оглавление

Вступление.	4
1. Alexander Pushkin.	6
2. Sergei Rachmaninoff.	21
3. Fyodor Dostoevsky.	32
4. Vladimir Nabokov	43
5. Anton Chekhov.	52
6. Igor Stravinsky.	63
7. Marc Chagall.	77
8. Leo Tolstoy	90
9. Mikhail Vrubel	101
10. Viktor Vasnetsov.	113
11. Maya Plisetskaya.	124
12. Mikhail Bulgakov.	135
13. Kazimir Malevich.	150
14. Sergey Yesenin.	162
15. Ilya Repin	176
16. Dmitri Shostakovich	188
17. Boris Pasternak.	197
18. Samuil Marshak	209
19. Alexander Solzhenitsyn	218
20. Anna Akhmatova	230
Ключи к упражнениям.	237

Вступление

Я связана с английским языком больше 15 лет, и ещё в далеком 2009 году мои преподаватели в МГЛУ (известном всем инязе Мориса Тереза) говорили: «Если хочешь улучшить свой иностранный язык — читай». Я запомнила эти слова, и уже как 11 лет со студентами в МГИМО мы ежедневно много читаем, и на основе прочитанного мы пополняем запас лексики, улучшаем грамматику и много говорим. Эта книга, как вы уже догадались, построена по такому же принципу.

В этой книге вы прочитаете 20 историй о жизнях всемирно известных русских писателей и артистов, в том числе художников.

С творчеством большинства из выбранных мною личностей я знакома лично. Когда писала про С.Я. Маршака, вспоминала, как я множество раз читала повесть о маленьком глупом мышонке своим детям, Софье и Льву. Творчество Л.Н. Толстого также близко моему литературному интересу, а вот В.В. Набокова мне было всегда сложно понять, именно поэтому я с интересом описывала его видение своей спорной «Лолиты».

Когда и вы, дорогой читатель, будете читать эти главы, вам будут встречаться уже знакомые со школьных лет произведения литературы и искусства, и я буду рада, если эта книга поможет вам взглянуть на привычные вещи по-новому и, конечно, узнать много интересного о любимых героях.

В начале каждой главы есть список новых слов и текст о герое. После текста вам предстоит самостоятельное выполнение упражнений для закрепления слов и грамматических правил, которые я объясняла простым языком.

В этой книге вы узнаете много неизвестных фактов из жизни известных деятелей литературы и искусства, выучите новые слова и научитесь их применять в речи.

Обратите внимание, что в конце каждой главы есть раздел Let's Talk, который содержит вопросы для размышления. Не стесняйтесь их обсуждать, выражайте своё мнение, спорьте с друзьями и говорите на английском.

Я хочу поблагодарить мою маму за то, что она внесла огромный вклад в создание этой книги, что кропотливо составляла и проверяла достоверность информации в биографиях и помогала мне с деталями. Мамуля, спасибо.

Я желаю вам приятного чтения и неугасаемого интереса к языку.

1. Alexander Pushkin



Russia's most beloved poet and father
of modern Russian literary language

ALEXANDER PUSHKIN

to earn a living	зарабатывать на жизнь
creative output	творческое наследие/творческая продуктивность
remarkably	поразительно
diverse	разнообразный
encompassing	охватывающий
works in support of revolutionary causes	произведения в поддержку революционных идей
led to him being sent into exile	привело к его ссылке
unruly	непослушный
an impoverished noble family	обедневшая дворянская семья
godson	крёстный сын
sedentary	спокойный (малоподвижный)
his lack of diligence	отсутствие прилежания
and yet	и всё же
rarely submitting his lessons properly	редко как следует выполняющий уроки
stir	расшевелить
restrain	удержать
to try his own hand at writing	попробовать себя в писательстве
imitating	подражая
fables	басни
found himself	оказался
similarly	подобно
rigorously structured	строго распланированный
stretching into	растягивающийся до
far from a model student	далеко не примерный ученик
despaired over	отчаивались из-за
lack of perseverance	отсутствие прилежания
the mocking nickname	насмешливое прозвище
recited	декламировал
I ran off to	я убежал
in raptures	в восторге
to embrace	обнять
developed a fondness for	пристрастился к

was later immortalized	был позднее увековечен
was assigned to	был определён в
held little appeal	мало привлекала
accomplished	признанный
propagated	пропагандировали
statesmen	государственные деятели
drew the ire of Emperor Alexander I	навлекли на себя гнев императора Александра I
to exile	сослать
interceded on the poet's behalf	вступился за поэта
novel in verse	роман в стихах
meanwhile	тем временем
solely by his pen	исключительно пером (писательским трудом)
intercepted	перехватили
atheistic teachings	атеистические учения
mere dismissal	простое увольнение
was stripped of his modest salary	был лишён своего скромного жалованья
surveillance	надзор
given no indication of	не указав
a reclusive life	затворническая жизнь
Decembrists	декабристы
did not belong to	не принадлежал к
execution	казнь
exile of his comrades	ссылка его товарищей
destructive	губительный
a pivotal point	переломный момент
a realistic portrayal of characters	реалистичное изображение персонажей
contemporary life	современная жизнь
was published to great success	был опубликован с большим успехом
the remaining chapters	оставшиеся главы
was in no hurry	не спешил

ALEXANDER PUSHKIN

sharply retorted	резко возразил
to be freed	быть освобождённым
except	кроме
censor	цензор
was to become	должен был стать
a court poet	придворный поэт
tightened	ужесточилась
to champion liberal ideas	отстаивать вольнолюбивые идеи
captivated	очаровала
citing her young age	ссылаясь на её юный возраст
consent	согласие
raging	бушевала
blessed the union	благословили союз
set off to settle the legal matters	отправился уладить юридические вопросы
outbreak of cholera	вспышка холеры
unprecedented creative productivity	невиданная творческая продуктивность
seclusion	удединение
gossip	сплетни
admirers	поклонники
remain cool-headed	сохранять хладнокровие
endure the offensive rumors	терпеть обидные слухи
sullying	порочащий
reputation	репутация
mortally wounded	смертельно ранен

Alexander Pushkin began writing at the age of seven. He was the first Russian writer **to earn a living** through his literary work. His **creative output** was **remarkably diverse, encompassing** not only lyric poetry but also fairy tales. Pushkin wrote historical prose and **works in support of**

revolutionary causes, the latter even **led to him being sent into exile**.

Clever but Unruly

Alexander Pushkin was born in Moscow on June 6, 1799, into **an impoverished no-**

ble family. He was the son of State Councillor Sergei Lvovich Pushkin and Nadezhda Osipovna Gannibal – the granddaughter of Abram Petrovich Gannibal, “*the Moor of Peter the Great*” and the **godson** of Emperor Peter I.

In early childhood, he was a quiet and **sedentary** boy. Pushkin received his primary education at home, a system typical for noble families of the time: his parents hired tutors and teachers from France, Germany, England, and Russia. Studying wasn’t easy for Pushkin, and his tutors noted **his lack of diligence**. Soon, however, the boy discovered a passion for reading.

*“I do not know what will become of my eldest grandson. The boy is clever and a lover of books, **and yet** he studies poorly, **rarely submitting his lessons properly**. One moment you cannot **stir** him, nor can you drive him out to play with the other children; the next, he suddenly bursts out and becomes so unruly that nothing can **restrain** him. Truly, he throws himself from one extreme to the other, with no middle ground.”*

*His grandmother,
Maria Gannibal*

This passion for reading soon inspired Pushkin **to try his own hand at writing**.

By seven, Pushkin was composing small comedies in French, **imitating** Molière. Later, after reading the works of La Fontaine, the young author was inspired to try his hand at **fables**.

“The Frenchman” at the Tsarskoye Selo Lyceum

In 1811, Pushkin’s parents decided to send their 12-year-old son to the Lyceum in Tsarskoye Selo. Pushkin **found himself** in a privileged, closed institution, but among peers from **similarly** impoverished noble families. The days were long and **rigorously structured**, with classes beginning at seven in the morning and **stretching into** the late evening. Alexander Pushkin regarded his alma mater as a “monastery” and dreamed of the freedom that would come with graduation.

Academically, Pushkin was **far from a model student**. He particularly struggled with logic and mathematics, and though he possessed a brilliant memory, his teachers **despaired over** his **lack of perseverance** and attention, but noted his erudition.

One of his fellow students recalled that this passion for French earned Pushkin **the mocking nickname** “the Frenchman.”

In Russian, Alexander Pushkin composed small epigrams and wrote poetry. His

first major success came in 1815 during a winter exam — the 15-year-old lyceum student **recited** his poem “*Recollections in Tsarskoye Selo*.”

Pushkin later wrote:

*“I don’t remember how I finished my recitation; I don’t remember where I **ran off to**. Derzhavin was **in raptures**; he demanded me, wanted **to embrace** me... They looked for me, but did not find me.”*

It was also during his Lyceum years that the writer **developed a fondness for** card games. The most popular game of the time — *shtoss* — **was later immortalized** in his story “*The Queen of Spades*.”

Service or Literary Career

After graduating from the Lyceum, Pushkin **was assigned to** the College of Foreign Affairs as a low-ranking official. But state service **held little appeal** for the young man. And soon a recognized and **accomplished** author was welcomed into literary circles.

In 1819, Pushkin joined the literary-theatrical society “*The Green Lamp*.” Its members **propagated** liberal ideas. At their meetings they read poetry, discussed the-

atrical premieres, and critiqued journalistic articles. These gatherings involved not only social debates but also political conversations, all of which influenced Pushkin’s work. He wrote several epigrams on **statesmen** of the era, the ode “*Liberty*,” and the poems “*To Chaadaev*” and “*The Village*.”

These sharp political works **drew the ire of Emperor Alexander I**, who decided **to exile** Pushkin to Siberia or the Solovetsky Monastery. However, the historian Nikolai Karamzin **interceded on the poet’s behalf**, and Pushkin was transferred from the capital to the South. Before his departure in 1820, the poet completed his narrative poem “*Ruslan and Lyudmila*.”

First Exile

From 1820 to 1824, Alexander Pushkin lived in exile in Kishinev, Odessa, the Crimea, and the Caucasus. During this time, he wrote the poems “*The Prisoner of the Caucasus*” and “*The Fountain of Bakhchisaray*,” composed over 40 other poems, began his **novel in verse** “*Eugene Onegin*.” During his exile, Pushkin studied foreign languages and traveled through the Caucasus and Crimea.

Meanwhile, the poet’s books began to be published in St. Petersburg, and he became the first writer in Russia to earn his living **solely by his pen**.

However, in Moscow in 1824, the police **intercepted** a letter from Pushkin to his former lyceum friend Küchelbecker, in which he wrote of his fascination with **“atheistic teachings.”** For such statements, the poet faced more than **mere dismissal**. Pushkin was sent into genuine exile at his family’s estate in the village of Mikhailovskoye, in the Pskov province. The writer **was stripped of his modest salary**, placed under **surveillance**, and **given no indication of** when his punishment would end.

“Pushkin is an extraordinary phenomenon, and perhaps the unique manifestation of the Russian spirit: he is a Russian man in his development, as he will appear, perhaps, in two hundred years. In him, Russian nature, Russian soul, Russian language, Russian character are reflected in the same purity, in such purified beauty, as a landscape is reflected on the convex surface of a lens.”

From the memoirs of N.V. Gogol

Reclusive Life

Pushkin lived **a reclusive life**. While in exile at his mother’s estate, the poet was friendly with many **Decembrists**, though he **did not belong to** their secret society himself. He was deeply affected by the ar-

rest, **execution**, and **exile of his comrades**. Yet, this reclusive life was not **destructive** for Pushkin; on the contrary, the writer read, worked, and reflected extensively. In Mikhailovskoye, Pushkin wrote *“The Gypsies,”* and the first chapter of *“Eugene Onegin.”* His tragedy *“Boris Godunov”* became **a pivotal point** in his career, marking his transition from the heroics of Romanticism to **a realistic portrayal of characters**.

The exotic and the abstract faded from his work, replaced by the realities of **contemporary life**.

“I Wish to Publish Myself, or to Be Released into the World”

In 1826, his first collection, *“Poems by Alexander Pushkin,”* **was published to great success**. Pushkin wrote **the remaining chapters** of *“Eugene Onegin”* but **was in no hurry** to publish them. To a publisher, the poet **sharply retorted**: *“I wish to publish myself, or to be released into the world”* — meaning he wanted **to be freed** from exile.

Following the coronation, Emperor Nicholas I expressed a desire to meet with Alexander Pushkin. He was brought to the Tsar and received permission to live anywhere **except** St. Petersburg. During this meeting, the Tsar also proposed that Pushkin become his personal **censor**.

After his conversation with Nicholas I, the writer hoped for complete creative freedom. However, the Tsar had other plans: Pushkin **was to become a court poet**. Censorship **tightened**, his personal correspondence was monitored, and his every move was reported. Pushkin was even forbidden from traveling freely around the country and reading his works in public. Despite the strict control, he continued **to champion liberal ideas**, dedicating his poem *"The Poet and the Crowd"* to this theme.

Personal Life

In 1829, at a ball, Alexander Pushkin met Natalya Goncharova. The girl was 16 at the time, the poet was nearly 30. The most celebrated beauty of Moscow immediately **captivated** Pushkin, and a few months later, he proposed. Her mother, **citing her young age**, did not give her immediate **consent**. The writer left Moscow for the Caucasus, where a war was **raging**, to visit his brother. In the Caucasus, Pushkin wrote a cycle of poems dedicated to the region, including *"The Caucasus"* and *"On Georgia's Hills, the Night Lies Deep..."* A year later, her parents finally **blessed the union**. However, the wedding was complicated by the fact that Pushkin had no property. His father then gave him a portion of the family estate, Boldino, in the Nizhny Novgorod province, and Pushkin **set off to settle the legal matters**.

"Boldino Autumn"

The writer expected to stay in Boldino for no more than a month, but **an outbreak of cholera** forced him to remain there for three months. This *"Boldino Autumn"* became a period of **unprecedented creative productivity**. In Boldino, Pushkin wrote his *"Little Tragedies,"* the drama *"The Mermaid,"* the narrative poem *"The Little House in Kolomna,"* and numerous lyric poems. The poet dreamed of **seclusion**, a quiet family life, and peaceful work on his books. Yet, these desires were not destined to be fulfilled.

Dying for Pride



Natalia Goncharova is the woman who played a fatal role in the life of Alexander Pushkin. Her personality has always been very controversial: she was called the evil genius that destroyed the great poet, and a victim.

In St. Petersburg, there was a lot of **gossip** about Pushkin's wife and her **admirers**; the poet received anonymous letters. He could not **remain cool-headed** and **endure the offensive rumors**. On February 8, 1837, a duel took place between Alexander Pushkin and

Georges d'Anthès, the main intriguer **sully-ing** Natalya Pushkina's **reputation**. During the duel, the poet was **mortally wounded** and died two days later. Alexander Pushkin was buried in the grounds of the Svya-togorsky Monastery in the Pskov province.

Упражнение 1. Ответьте на вопросы.

1. Who were Alexander Pushkin's parents?
2. How did Pushkin's grandmother, Maria Gannibal, describe his character in early childhood?
3. Was Pushkin a diligent student? What subjects did he find hard to learn?
4. What made Pushkin's literary work so remarkable?
5. Which work marked Pushkin's turn to realism?
6. How did Pushkin's period of reclusive exile impact his literary work?
7. What was the writer's famous reply about publishing his work?
8. Why was Pushkin exiled if he wasn't a Decembrist?
9. Why do you think some people blame Natalya Goncharova for Pushkin's death?

Упражнение 2. Are these statements true or false? If false, why? Disprove them.

1. Alexander Pushkin started writing at an early age.
2. Pushkin could hardly earn a living through his literary work and throughout life struggled to make ends meet.
3. The writer's family was wealthy and influential during his childhood.
4. The young writer was an exemplary student at the Tsarskoye Selo Lyceum.
5. Pushkin earned the nickname "the Frenchman" because of his love for French literature.
6. The Russian writer was exiled to Siberia.
7. Pushkin was a member of the Decembrist secret society.

8. Pushkin's tragedy "Boris Godunov" marked his shift to realism.
9. Emperor Nicholas I allowed Pushkin to live anywhere, including St. Petersburg.
10. Pushkin's wife, Natalya Goncharova, was 10 years old when they met.
11. The "Boldino Autumn" was a period of low creativity for Pushkin.
12. Pushkin challenged Georges d'Anthès to a duel because of rumors about his wife.

Упражнение 3. Соедините слова с их значениями.

1. impoverished	a. a sudden occurrence of something, like a disease or violence
2. rigorously	b. the act of carrying out a death sentence
3. in raptures	c. showing a lack of discipline; disobedient
4. unruly	d. the state of being alone, away from others
5. fondness	e. a liking or affection for something
6. ire	f. calm and not easily upset, especially in a difficult situation
7. execution	g. filled with great joy and delight
8. consent	h. permission or agreement
9. outbreak	i. intense anger
10. gossip	j. in an extremely strict, thorough, and precise manner
11. seclusion	k. poor; having lost wealth and possessions
12. cool-headed	l. casual talk about other people, often involving rumors

Упражнение 4. Заполните таблицу подходящими глаголами из списка. Их перевод вы можете найти в списке слов перед текстом.

to sully, to tighten, to imitate, to intercede, to encompass, to captivate, to recite, to stretch into, to propagate, to retort