

# 2. The Overcoat

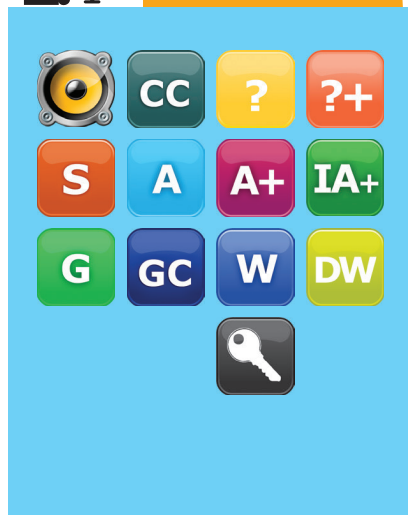
Neighbourhood and Community at Large

## Learning Outcomes

- ▶ read the extract aloud with expressions and comprehend its central idea
- ▶ learn new words and infer their meanings
- ▶ draw from personal experiences or real-life situations
- ▶ learn binomial pairs
- ▶ learn about transitive and intransitive verbs
- ▶ learn about double-consonant sounds
- ▶ write an alternate ending to a story



### Digital Desk



### Warm up



Have you ever saved up for something special? Tell your class what it was and why you wanted it. Have you ever worn an overcoat? When is it usually worn? Also, talk about the differences between an overcoat and other winter garments.



Oymyakon, a settlement of some 500 people in the Sakha Republic of Russia, has earned the reputation as the coldest permanently occupied human settlement in the world with reports as extreme as minus -88 degrees Fahrenheit. In the winter, the town observes dark 21 hours a day. The town is remote, located closer to the Arctic Circle than to the nearest major city. Since the soil is permanently frozen, most buildings are built on stilts. Those that aren't are slowly sinking because the heat produced inside the buildings is melting the permafrost. In January 2018, it was reported that the public thermometer started to malfunction after temperatures dropped to -67°C after consistently hanging below -60°C for a week.

### Cross-curricular Connection

*A government servant on a budget finds that he needs to spend some of his money on an essential item.*

In a certain department there was a certain official—not a very high one, it must be allowed—short of stature, somewhat **pock-marked**, red-haired, and short-sighted, with a bald forehead, wrinkled cheeks, and a complexion of the kind known as **sanguine**. The St Petersburg climate was responsible for this. As for his official status, he was what is called a **perpetual titular** councillor, over which, as is well known, some writers make merry, and crack their jokes, obeying the praiseworthy custom of attacking those who cannot bite back. His name was Akaky Akakievich.



When and how he entered the department, and who appointed him, no one could remember. His superiors treated him in coolly **despotic** fashion. Some sub-chief would thrust a paper under his nose without so much as saying, 'Copy,' or 'Here's a nice interesting affair,' or anything else agreeable, as is customary amongst well-bred officials. And he took it, looking only at the paper and not observing who handed it to him, or whether he had the right to do so; simply took it, and set about copying it.

The young officials laughed at and made fun of him and strewed bits of paper over his head, calling them snow. But Akaky Akakievich answered not a word, any more than if there had been no one there besides himself. It even had no effect upon his work: amid all these annoyances he never made a single mistake in a letter. But if the joking became wholly unbearable, as when they jogged his hand and prevented his attending to his work, he would exclaim, 'Leave me alone! Why do you insult me?' And there was something strange in the words and the voice in which they were uttered.

It would be difficult to find another man who lived so entirely for his duties. It is not enough to say that Akaky laboured with **zeal**: no, he laboured with love. In his copying, he found a varied and agreeable employment.

Outside this copying, it appeared that nothing existed for him. He gave no thought to his clothes: his **undress** uniform was not green, but a sort of rusty, muddy colour.

**pock-marked:** covered with marks or scars  
**sanguine:** (*here*) reddish-brown colour  
**perpetual:** never-ending  
**titular:** holding a purely formal position without real power

**despotic:** associated with or typical of a leader with great power  
**zeal:** enthusiasm  
**undress:** (*here*) casual or informal



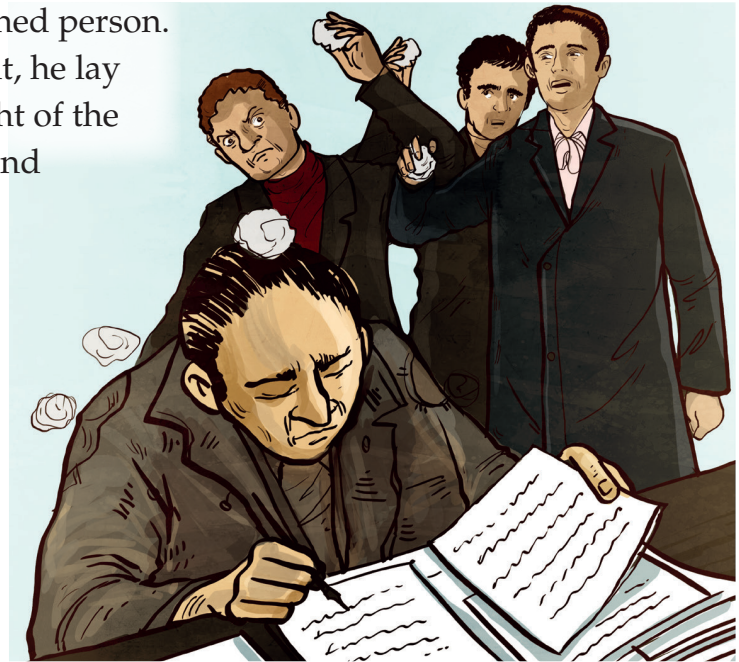


The collar was low, so that his neck, in spite of the fact that it was not long, seemed **inordinately** so as it emerged from it, like the necks of those plaster kittens which wag their heads, and are carried about upon the heads of scores of Russian foreigners.

On reaching home, he sat down at once at the table, supped his cabbage soup up quickly, he rose from the table, and copied papers which he had brought home. If there happened to be none, he took copies for himself, for his own **gratification**, especially if the document was noteworthy, not on account of its style, but of its being addressed to some distinguished person.

Having written to his heart's content, he lay down to sleep, smiling at the thought of the coming day—of what God might send him to copy on the morrow.

There exists in St Petersburg a powerful foe of all who receive a salary of four hundred roubles a year, or thereabouts. This foe is no other than the Northern cold, although it is said to be very healthy. At an hour when the foreheads of even those who occupy exalted positions ache with the cold, and tears start to



their eyes, the poor titular councillors are sometimes quite unprotected. Their only salvation lies in traversing as quickly as possible, in their thin little overcoats, five or six streets, and then warming their feet in the porter's room, and so thawing all their talents and qualifications for official service, which had become frozen on the way.

You must know that Akaky Akakievich's overcoat served as an object of ridicule to the officials: they even refused it the noble name of overcoat, and called it a 'dressing jacket'. Seeing how the matter stood, Akaky Akakievich decided that it would be necessary to take the overcoat to Petrovich, the tailor, who lived somewhere on the fourth floor up a dark staircase, and who, in spite of his having but one eye, and pock-marks all over his face, busied himself with considerable success in repairing the trousers and coats of officials and others; that is to say, when he was sober and not nursing some other scheme in his head.



'No, it is impossible to mend it; it's a wretched garment! You must have a new overcoat!' said the tailor.

At the word 'new,' all grew dark before Akaky Akakievich's eyes, and everything in the room began to whirl round. 'A new one?' said he, as if still in a dream: 'Why, I have no money for that.'

'Yes, a new one,' said Petrovich, with **barbarous** composure.

'Well, if it came to a new one, how much would it cost?'

'Well, you would have to **lay out** a hundred and fifty or more,' said Petrovich, and pursed up his lips significantly.

'A hundred and fifty roubles for an overcoat!' shrieked poor Akaky Akakievich, perhaps for the first time in his life, for his voice had always been distinguished for softness.

'Yes,' said Petrovich.

'Petrovich, please, do repair it somehow, so that it will serve a little, longer,' said Akaky Akakievich.

'No, it would only be a waste of time and money,' said Petrovich; and Akaky Akakievich went away after these words, utterly discouraged.

Akaky Akakievich was still for mending it, but Petrovich would not hear of it, and said, 'I shall certainly have to make you a new one, and you may depend upon it that I shall do my best. It may even be, as the fashion goes, that the collar can be fastened by silver hooks under a flap.'

Then Akaky Akakievich saw that it was impossible to get along without a new overcoat, and his spirit sank utterly.

But although he knew that Petrovich would undertake to make a cloak for eighty roubles, still, where was he to get the eighty roubles from? He might possibly manage half, yes, half might be procured, but where was the other half to come from? Akaky Akakievich thought and thought, and decided that it would be necessary to curtail his ordinary expenses, for the space of one year at least, to dispense with tea in the evening; to burn no candles, and, if there was anything which he must do, to go into his landlady's room, and work by her light. When he went into the street, he must walk as lightly as he could, and as cautiously, upon the stones, almost upon tiptoe, in order not to wear his heels down in too short a time; he must give the laundress as little to wash as possible; and, in order not to wear out

**barbarous:** (*here*) unfeeling

**lay out:** spend



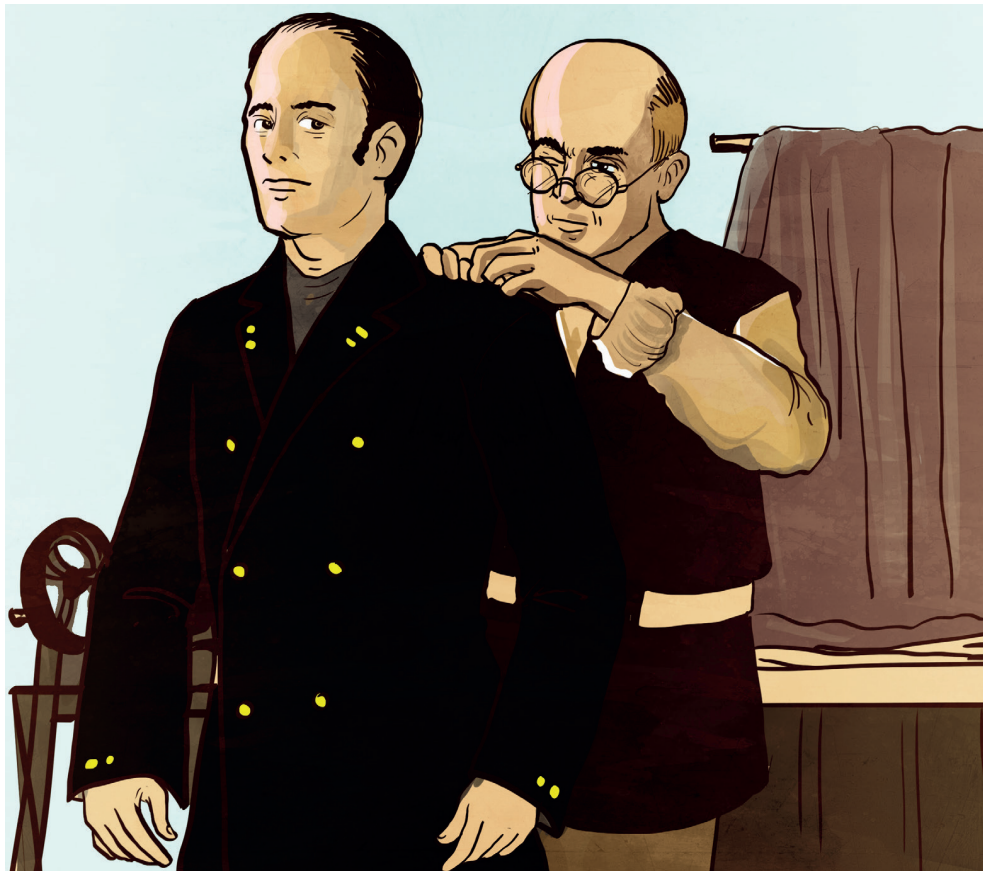
his clothes, he must take them off, as soon as he got home, and wear only his cotton dressing-gown, which had been long and carefully saved.

At least once every month he went to Petrovich to talk about the overcoat, where it would be best to buy the cloth, what colour it should be and what price.

Another two or three months of partial fasting and Akaky Akakievich had actually saved up nearly eighty roubles. The very first day he set off in company with Petrovich to the shop. They bought some very good cloth.

Petrovich worked at the overcoat for two whole weeks, for there was a great deal of quilting: otherwise it would have been finished sooner. He charged twelve roubles for the job, it could not possibly have been done for less. It was all sewed with silk, in small, double seams; and Petrovich went over each seam afterwards with his own teeth, stamping in various patterns.

It was—it is difficult to say precisely on what day, but probably the most glorious one in Akaky Akakievich's life, when Petrovich at length brought home the overcoat. He brought it in the morning, before the hour when it was necessary to start for the department. Never did an overcoat arrive so exactly in the nick of





time; for the severe cold had set in, and it seemed to threaten to increase. Petrovich brought the overcoat himself as befits a good tailor. On his countenance was a significant expression, such as Akaky Akakievich had never beheld there. He seemed fully sensible that he had done no small deed, and crossed a gulf separating tailors who only put in linings, and execute repairs, from those who make new things. Taking out the overcoat, he gazed proudly at it, held it up with both hands, and flung it skillfully over the shoulders of Akaky Akakievich. Then he pulled it and fitted it down behind with his hand, and he draped it around Akaky Akakievich without buttoning it. Akaky Akakievich, like an experienced man, wished to try the sleeves. Petrovich helped him on with them, and it turned out that the sleeves were satisfactory also. In short, the overcoat appeared to be perfect, and most seasonable. He paid him, thanked him, and set out at once in his new cloak for the department. Petrovich followed him, and, pausing in the street, gazed long at the overcoat in the distance, after which he went to one side expressly to run through a crooked alley, and emerge again into the street beyond to gaze once more upon the overcoat from another point, namely, directly in front.

*Nikolai Gogol*

*(translated from Russian by Isabel P Hapgood)*



### About the Author

**Nikolai Gogol** (1809–1852) was a Russian writer of Ukrainian origin. He is famous for writing several short stories as well as novels and plays. He flourished during the Golden Era of Russian literature and is considered to be one of its brightest stars. He began writing while still in school and harboured dreams of being a literary success. His first collection of short stories, *Evenings on a Farm Near Dikanka*, was published in 1831; it met with a great success. Some of his other notable works include the novel *Taras Bulba* and short stories such as 'Diary of a Madman', 'The Portrait' and 'The Carriage'.



## Comprehension

### A. Answer these questions.

1. What was Akaky Akakievich employed as?
2. What was Akakievich good at doing?
3. How did the young officials treat Akaky Akakievich?
4. Why did Akaky Akakievich take the overcoat to the tailor?





5. Who was Petrovich? How did he help Akaky Akakievich?
6. How did Akaky Akakievich save money for the overcoat?

**B. Answer these questions with reference to the context.**

1. *It would be difficult to find another man who lived so entirely for his duties.*
  - a. What were Akakievich's duties?
  - b. What was the man's attitude to his work?
  - c. What was the speaker's tone in those lines?
2. *When he went into the street, he must walk as lightly as he could ...*
  - a. Who was being talked about here?
  - b. Why did 'he' need to be careful in this way?
  - c. How did 'he' save up?

**C. Think and answer.**

1. Are you careful about how you spend your pocket money? Why is it important to save money? Choose three different people in your life and ask them why it is important to save money. Write a report on this and be sure to include your own opinion.
2. Just like Akaky Akakievich, sometimes we too are ridiculed by our friends, relatives and neighbours for the way we look or dress. Discuss ways on how the narrator dealt with the situation and how you can face such situations.



## Word Wonder

Read these sets of words.

step by step    rock and roll    more or less

You have probably come across these phrases in sentences and noticed that they always appear in this order. These phrases are called **binomial pairs**.

A **binomial pair** is a combination of two words usually joined by a conjunction.

**Complete these binomial pairs using the words from the box.**

tidy	sweet	forth	pepper	large
leave it	shine	less	sound	wide

1. neat and \_\_\_\_\_
2. far and \_\_\_\_\_



3. short and \_\_\_\_\_
4. take it or \_\_\_\_\_
5. salt and \_\_\_\_\_
6. back and \_\_\_\_\_
7. safe and \_\_\_\_\_
8. rain or \_\_\_\_\_



The word order of a binomial pair is usually fixed. For example, **hustle and bustle**. You don't say **bustle and hustle**.



## Learn About Language

Read this sentence.

- ▶ Gina **broke** the vase.

In this sentence, the action expressed by the verb **broke** passes over from the subject, Gina, to the object, **vase**. The sentence will not make complete sense without the object.

A verb which requires an object to complete its sense is called a **transitive verb**.

Now, read these sentences.

- ▶ The cup **broke**.
- ▶ The child **smiled**.

In each of these sentences, the action stops with the subject. The verb, in itself, makes complete sense.

A verb which does not require an object to complete its sense is called an **intransitive verb**.

**A. Identify the verbs in these sentences and say whether they are transitive (T) or intransitive (I). Also circle the subject of each verb and underline the object of each transitive verb.**

1. The sun rises in the east.
2. She went to the market yesterday.
3. He is reading a book.
4. I cut the apple with a knife.
5. Lara bought a pair of jeans for her son.



**B. Fill in the blanks with appropriate objects for the verbs.**

1. My brother has polished his \_\_\_\_\_.
2. I brought \_\_\_\_\_ for my sister.
3. The farmer grows \_\_\_\_\_ in these fields.
4. The student guessed the \_\_\_\_\_ correctly.
5. Tina cleaned the \_\_\_\_\_ thoroughly.
6. The robber stole the \_\_\_\_\_ with ease.



**Language Lab**

Look at these words and the pronunciation of the highlighted letters.

bottle   pillow   traffic   hills   little

Notice the sound when the same consonant is used twice in a word.

**A. Say the words given in the box aloud. Circle the words that contain double consonant sounds. There may be some words without double-consonant sounds.**

bedsheet	middle	brilliant	meet
wallet	chair	beginning	mirror
abstract	difficult	police	daffodils

**B. Listen to this story. Now, think of three things or issues in the story that intrigued you or made you think. Write them down. Then, discuss them in the class.**

You may discuss about:

- ▶ the moral of the story.   ▶ the character of Akbar.
- ▶ the other characters.   ▶ the deviousness of the man who sold the well.



**C. Once you have completed the above activity, choose a partner and follow the instructions given below.**

- ▶ Frame questions and statements around the story to ask your partner.
- ▶ You must give your opinion, rather than just stating facts from the story.
- ▶ Have a discussion with your partner about the three issues you have identified.



## Composition

Read this short story and the alternate endings given below it.

Two friends were travelling through a forest. Suddenly a big bear appeared in front of them. One of the friends quickly climbed up a tree, leaving the other friend to fend for himself. The other friend, who did not know how to climb a tree, lay down on the ground and pretended to be dead. The bear came near him, smelt him and went away. The friend on the tree climbed down and asked his friend about what the bear had told him. The friend replied, 'He advised me to beware of friends who desert you in times of need.'



### Suggestions for alternate endings:

1. The bear saw a beehive full of honey on the tree, and shook the tree...
2. The friend on the tree sneezed, lost his balance and fell off the tree...
3. The friend on the tree made a loud noise to distract the bear...

Giving an alternate ending to a story needs creativity and imagination. The original ending may be changed from happy to tragic, expected to unexpected or unusual and serious to funny. Changing the ending of the story changes the reader's view about the characters and the events in the story.

Steps to consider while writing an alternate ending:

1. Study the characters and plot of the story carefully.
2. Think about the different ways in which the story could have ended.
3. Choose an ending that has a link with the main story.

### Outlines of two stories are given below. Give each an alternate ending.

1. Ant and grasshopper are friends—grasshopper is lazy—sings and enjoys himself all through summer—ant works hard to collect food for winter—warns the grasshopper, who doesn't listen—in winter, the ant is comfortable in his house—grasshopper starves and freezes in the cold
2. Rich lady! living alone—becomes blind—calls doctor—doctor comes every day—removes—a piece of furniture—finally, the lady is cured—refuses to pay the doctor—the doctor goes to a court—the lady tells the judge she is not fully cured as she cannot see her furniture—the judge realises what had happened—the judge punishes the doctor





## Activity

Do you know that a sari can be tied in many different ways? Or that every community in every state in India has a different traditional regional costume? There is so much amazing variety in the kinds of clothes people in India wear. Here is one way you can learn more about them.



**Choose a traditional costume of any Indian state. Make a paper model of this type of costume to show your class.**



**Further Reading:** 'The Nose' by Nikolai Gogol

