

Before Reading

A Marriage Proposal

Drama by Anton Chekhov

Why do people argue over **SILLY THINGS?**

KEY IDEA When two stubborn people have different opinions about something unimportant, a silly argument is likely to erupt. Such **pettiness** is displayed by the characters in *A Marriage Proposal*, who can't seem to agree on anything, even when they share the same goal.

ROLE-PLAY With a partner, brainstorm a scenario in which you have a difference of opinion about something of little importance. Then role-play an argument. Afterward, discuss any patterns that you noticed during the argument.



LITERARY ANALYSIS: CHARACTERS IN A FARCE

A farce is a humorous play that provokes laughter through ridiculous situations and dialogue. Characters in a farce are usually comical stereotypes who conform to a fixed pattern or are defined by a single trait. Notice in this speech from *A Marriage Proposal* how a character's trait is exaggerated for comic effect:

I have a weak heart, continual palpitation, and I am very sensitive and always getting excited.

As you read the play, create a chart for each character. Record details that help you identify the character's main trait or pattern of behavior.



READING SKILL: READING A PLAY

To understand a play, you will need to read **stage directions** that describe the scenery and props, the actions of characters, or the tone in which dialogue should be delivered. Sometimes a stage direction will indicate one of the following:

- an **aside**—a short speech directed to the audience or a character but not heard by the other characters onstage
- a **monologue**—a long speech that is usually delivered by a character who is alone onstage

Asides and monologues can be used to reveal a character's private thoughts and feelings. As you read *A Marriage Proposal*, notice what each stage direction tells you about the characters' words and actions.

VOCABULARY IN CONTEXT

Complete each sentence with a word from the list.

WORD LIST contrary glutton meditate usurper

1. The scheming _____ tried to seize the king's throne.
2. I need to _____ on this issue awhile before deciding.
3. You insist on being _____ just to be different.
4. Please don't be a _____ at the dinner table.

Author Online

Literary Detour

Anton Chekhov (chĕk'ōf) was a master of the short story as well as one of the most important modern playwrights. Born in southern Russia, he moved to Moscow as a young man and planned to become a doctor. While in medical school, he published many literary sketches to support his family. Although he received his medical degree in 1884, he never practiced medicine on a regular basis. Instead, he chose to pursue a writing career.



Anton Chekhov
1860–1904

Early Success Chekhov quickly won fame for his comical stories and farces, such as *A Marriage Proposal*. He considered humor to be an essential ingredient in all his work, but his writing grew more serious over time. Most of his full-length plays, including *Uncle Vanya*, *The Three Sisters*, and *The Cherry Orchard*, combine elements of tragedy and farce. Chekhov died from tuberculosis at age 44, when he was at the height of his career.



MORE ABOUT THE AUTHOR

For more on Anton Chekhov, visit the Literature Center at ClassZone.com.

Background

The Russian Gentry *A Marriage Proposal* takes place on a country estate in late-19th-century Russia. The characters are members of the privileged class known as the gentry. These wealthy landowners employed peasants to work their fields, which allowed them to enjoy a life of leisure. Writers of farces often poked fun at the habits of the gentry, including their tendency to marry for economic gain rather than affection.

A Marriage Proposal

ANTON CHEKHOV

CHARACTERS

Stepan Stepanovitch Tschubukov

(styĭ-pān' styĭ-pān'ev-yĭch chū-bū'kof), a country farmer

Natalia Stepanovna (nə-tāl'ya styĭ-pā-nōv'nə), his daughter (aged 25)

Ivan Vassiliyitch Lomov (ĭ-vān' vās-yēl'yĭch lō'məf), Tschubukov's neighbor

SCENE

The reception room in Tschubukov's country home in Russia. Tschubukov discovered as the curtain rises. Enter Lomov, wearing a dress suit. **A**

TIME

The present [1890s]

A READING A PLAY

What information in the **stage directions** helps you visualize the **setting** of the play?

Tschubukov (*going toward him and greeting him*). Who is this I see? My dear fellow! Ivan Vassiliyitch! I'm so glad to see you! (*shakes hands*) But this is a surprise! How are you?

Lomov. Thank you! And how are you?

Tschubukov. Oh, so-so, my friend. Please sit down. It isn't right to forget one's neighbor. But tell me, why all this ceremony? Dress clothes, white gloves, and all? Are you on your way to some engagement, my good fellow?

Lomov. No, I have no engagement except with you, Stepan Stepanovitch.

Tschubukov. But why in evening clothes, my friend? This isn't New Year's!

1 Targeted Passage

ANALYZE VISUALS

What **mood** is suggested by this painting?



10 **Lomov.** You see, it's simply this, that— (*composing himself*) I have come to you, Stepan Stepanovitch, to trouble you with a request. It is not the first time I have had the honor of turning to you for assistance, and you have always, that is—I beg your pardon, I am a bit excited! I'll take a drink of water first, dear Stepan Stepanovitch. (*He drinks.*)

Tschubukov (*aside*). He's come to borrow money! I won't give him any! (*to Lomov*) What is it, then, dear Lomov? **Q**

Lomov. You see—dear—Stepanovitch, pardon me, Stepan—Stepan—dear-vitch—I mean—I am terribly nervous, as you will be so good as to see—! What I mean to say—you are the only one who can help me, though I don't
20 deserve it, and—and I have no right whatever to make this request of you.

Tschubukov. Oh, don't beat about the bush, my dear fellow. Tell me!

Lomov. Immediately—in a moment. Here it is, then: I have come to ask for the hand of your daughter, Natalia Stepanovna.

Q READING A PLAY
What does Tschubukov's
aside reveal about him?



The Window at the Country House (1915), Marc Chagall. Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow, Russia.
© 2008 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris.

Tschubukov (*joyfully*). Angel! Ivan Vassiliyitch! Say that once again! I didn't quite hear it!

Lomov. I have the honor to beg—

Tschubukov (*interrupting*). My dear, dear man. I am so happy that everything is so—everything! (*embraces and kisses him*) I have wanted this to happen for so long. It has been my dearest wish! (*He represses a tear.*) And I have always loved
30 you, my dear fellow, as my own son! May God give you his blessings and his grace and—I always wanted it to happen. But why am I standing here like a blockhead? I am completely dumbfounded with pleasure, completely dumbfounded. My whole being—! I'll call Natalia—

Lomov. Dear Stepan Stepanovitch, what do you think? May I hope for Natalia Stepanovna's acceptance?

Tschubukov. Really! A fine boy like you— and you think she won't accept on the minute? Lovesick as a cat and all that—! (*He goes out, right.*)

Lomov. I'm cold. My whole body is trembling as though I was going to take my examination! But the chief thing is to settle matters! If a person **meditates**
40 too much, or hesitates, or talks about it, waits for an ideal or for true love, he never gets it. Brrr! It's cold! Natalia is an excellent housekeeper, not at all bad looking, well educated—what more could I ask? I'm so excited my ears are roaring! (*He drinks water.*) And not to marry, that won't do! In the first place, I'm thirty-five—a critical age, you might say. In the second place, I must live a well-regulated life. I have a weak heart, continual palpitation, and I am very sensitive and always getting excited. My lips begin to tremble and the pulse in my right temple throbs terribly. But the worst of all is sleep! I hardly lie down and begin to doze before something in my left side begins to pull and tug, and something begins to hammer in my left shoulder—and in my head, too! I
50 jump up like a madman, walk about a little, lie down again, but the moment I fall asleep I have a terrible cramp in the side. And so it is all night long! (*Enter Natalia Stepanovna.*)

Natalia. Ah! It's you. Papa said to go in: there was a dealer in there who'd come to buy something. Good afternoon, Ivan Vassiliyitch.

Lomov. Good day, my dear Natalia Stepanovna.

Natalia. You must pardon me for wearing my apron and this old dress: we are working today. Why haven't you come to see us oftener? You've not been here for so long! Sit down (*They sit down.*) Won't you have something to eat?

Lomov. Thank you, I have just had lunch.

60 **Natalia**. Smoke, do, there are the matches. Today it is beautiful, and only yesterday it rained so hard that the workmen couldn't do a stroke of work. How many bricks have you cut? Think of it! I was so anxious that I had the whole field mowed, and now I'm sorry I did it, because I'm afraid the hay will rot. It would have been better if I had waited. But what on earth is this? You are in evening clothes! The latest cut! Are you on your way to a ball? And you seem to be looking better, too—really. Why are you dressed up so gorgeously?

meditate (mēd'Y-tāt') v. to consider for a long time

C CHARACTERS IN A FARCE

What main trait does Lomov exhibit in his monologue?

D GRAMMAR AND STYLE

Reread lines 60–66. Chekhov uses declarative, interrogative, imperative, and exclamatory sentences to reflect Natalia's scattered thoughts.

Lomov (*excited*). You see, my dear Natalia Stepanovna—it's simply this: I have decided to ask you to listen to me—of course it will be a surprise, and indeed you'll be angry, but!— (*aside*) How fearfully cold it is!

70 **Natalia**. What is it? (*a pause*) Well?

Lomov. I'll try to be brief. My dear Natalia Stepanovna, as you know, for many years, since my childhood, I have had the honor to know your family. My poor aunt and her husband, from whom, as you know, I inherited the estate, always had the greatest respect for your father and your poor mother. The Lomovs and the Tschubukovs have been for decades on the friendliest, indeed the closest, terms with each other, and furthermore my property, as you know, adjoins your own. If you will be so good as to remember, my meadows touch your birch woods.

Natalia. Pardon the interruption. You said "my meadows"—but are they yours?

80 **Lomov**. Yes, they belong to me.

Natalia. What nonsense! The meadows belong to us—not to you!

Lomov. No, to me! Now, my dear Natalia Stepanovna!

Natalia. Well, that is certainly news to me. How do they belong to you?

Lomov. How? I am speaking of the meadows lying between your birch woods and my brick earth.¹

Natalia. Yes, exactly. They belong to us.

Lomov. No, you are mistaken, my dear Natalia Stepanovna, they belong to me.

Natalia. Try to remember exactly, Ivan Vassiliyitch. Is it so long ago that you inherited them?

90 **Lomov**. Long ago! As far back as I can remember they have always belonged to us.

Natalia. But that isn't true! You'll pardon my saying so.

Lomov. It is all a matter of record, my dear Natalia Stepanovna. It is true that at one time the title to the meadows was disputed, but now everyone knows they belong to me. There is no room for discussion. Be so good as to listen: my aunt's grandmother put these meadows, free from all costs, into the hands of your father's grandfather's peasants for a certain time while they were making bricks for my grandmother. These people used the meadows free of cost for about forty years, living there as they would on their own property. Later, however, when—

100 **Natalia**. There's not a word of truth in that! My grandfather, and my great grandfather, too, knew that their estate reached back to the swamp, so that the meadows belong to us. What further discussion can there be? I can't understand it. It is really most annoying.

Lomov. I'll show you the papers, Natalia Stepanovna.

Natalia. No, either you are joking or trying to lead me into a discussion. That's not at all nice! We have owned this property for nearly three hundred years, and

1. brick earth: clay suitable for making bricks.

now all at once we hear that it doesn't belong to us. Ivan Vassilyitch, you will pardon me, but I really can't believe my ears. So far as I'm concerned, the meadows are worth very little. In all they don't contain more than five acres, and they are worth only a few hundred rubles,² say three hundred, but the injustice of the thing is what affects me. Say what you will, I can't bear injustice.

Lomov. Only listen until I have finished, please! The peasants of your respected father's grandfather, as I have already had the honor to tell you, baked bricks for my grandmother. My aunt's grandmother wished to do them a favor—

Natalia. Grandfather! Grandmother! Aunt! I know nothing of them. All I know is that the meadows belong to us, and that ends the matter.

Lomov. No, they belong to me!

Natalia. And if you keep on explaining it for two days and put on five suits of evening clothes, the meadows are still ours, ours, ours! I don't want to take your property, but I refuse to give up what belongs to us!

Lomov. Natalia Stepanovna, I don't need the meadows, I am only concerned with the principle. If you are agreeable, I beg of you, accept them as a gift from me!

Natalia. But I can give them to you, because they belong to me! That is very peculiar, Ivan Vassilyitch! Until now we have considered you as a good neighbor and a good friend; only last year we lent you our threshing machine so that we couldn't thresh until November, and you treat us like thieves! You offer to give me my own land. Excuse me, but neighbors don't treat each other that way. In my opinion, it's a very low trick—to speak frankly—

Lomov. According to you I'm a **usurper**, then, am I? My dear lady, I have never appropriated other people's property, and I shall permit no one to accuse me of such a thing! (*He goes quickly to the bottle and drinks water.*) The meadows are mine!

Natalia. That's not the truth! They are mine!

Lomov. Mine!

Natalia. Eh? I'll prove it to you! This afternoon I'll send my reapers into the meadows.

Lomov. W—h—a—t?

Natalia. My reapers will be there today!

Lomov. And I'll chase them off!

Natalia. If you dare!

Lomov. The meadows are mine, you understand? Mine!

Natalia. Really, you don't need to scream so! If you want to scream and snort and rage you may do it at home, but here please keep yourself within the limits of common decency.

2. rubles (ròb'balz): units of Russian money.

2 Targeted Passage

3 CHARACTERS IN A FARCE

Reread lines 104–120. What pattern of behavior appears evident in Natalia's responses to Lomov's claims?

usurper (yòò-sùrp'eri) *n.*
someone who wrongfully takes possession of something



Woman Reaping (before 1930), Marc Chagall. National Gallery, Prague, Czech Republic. © 2008 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris. Photo © Nimatallah/Art Resource, New York.



The Harvest, Natalia Goncharova, Russian State Museum, St. Petersburg, Russia. © 2008 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris. Photo © Scala/Art Resource, New York.

ANALYZE VISUALS

Which details in this painting suggest activities or locations that are discussed in the play?

Lomov. My dear lady, if it weren't that I were suffering from palpitation of the heart and hammering of the arteries in my temples, I would deal with you very differently! *(in a loud voice)* The meadows belong to me!

Natalia. Us!

Lomov. Me! *(Enter Tschubukov, right.)*

Tschubukov. What's going on here? What is he yelling about?

Natalia. Papa, please tell this gentleman to whom the meadows belong, to us or to him?

Tschubukov *(to Lomov)*. My dear fellow, the meadows are ours.

Lomov. But, merciful heavens, Stepan Stepanovitch, how do you make that out? You at least must be reasonable. My aunt's grandmother gave the use of the meadows free of cost to your grandfather's peasants; the peasants lived on the land for forty years and used it as their own, but later when—

Tschubukov. Permit me, my dear friend. You forget that your grandfather's peasants never paid, because there had been a lawsuit over the meadows, and everyone knows that the meadows belong to us. You haven't looked at the map.

Lomov. I'll prove to you that they belong to me!

Tschubukov. Don't try to prove it, my dear fellow.

Lomov. I will!

Tschubukov. My good fellow, what are you shrieking about? You can't prove anything by yelling, you know. I don't ask for anything that belongs to you, nor do I intend to give up anything of my own. Why should I? If it has gone
170 so far, my dear man, that you really intend to claim the meadows, I'd rather give them to the peasants than you, and I certainly shall!

Lomov. I can't believe it! By what right can you give away property that doesn't belong to you?

Tschubukov. Really, you must allow me to decide what I am to do with my own land! I'm not accustomed, young man, to have people address me in that tone of voice. I, young man, am twice your age, and I beg you to address me respectfully.

Lomov. No! No! You think I'm a fool! You're making fun of me! You call my property yours and then you expect me to stand quietly by and talk to you
180 like a human being. That isn't the way a good neighbor behaves, Stepan Stepanovitch! You are no neighbor, you're no better than a land grabber. That's what you are!

Tschubukov. Wh—at? What did he say?

Natalia. Papa, send the reapers into the meadows this minute!

Tschubukov (*to Lomov*). What was that you said, sir?

Natalia. The meadows belong to us, and I won't give them up! I won't give them up! I won't give them up!

Lomov. We'll see about that! I'll prove in court that they belong to me.

Tschubukov. In court! You may sue in court, sir, if you like! Oh, I know you, you
190 are only waiting to find an excuse to go to law! You're an intriguer,³ that's what you are! Your whole family were always looking for quarrels. The whole lot!

Lomov. Kindly refrain from insulting my family. The entire race of Lomov has always been honorable! And never has one been brought to trial for embezzlement, as your dear uncle was!

Tschubukov. And the whole Lomov family were insane!

Natalia. Every one of them!

Tschubukov. Your grandmother was a dipsomaniac,⁴ and the younger aunt, Nastasia Michailovna, ran off with an architect. **P**

Lomov. And your mother limped. (*He puts his hand over his heart.*) Oh, my side
200 pains! My temples are bursting! Lord in heaven! Water!!

Tschubukov. And your dear father was a gambler—and a **glutton!**

Natalia. And your aunt was a gossip like few others.

Lomov. And you are an intriguer. Oh, my heart! And it's an open secret that you cheated at the elections—my eyes are blurred! Where is my hat?

Natalia. Oh, how low! Liar! Disgusting thing!

3. *intriguer* (in-tré'ger): a schemer.

4. *dipsomaniac* (dí'p'so-má'ně-ěk'): an alcoholic.

P **CHARACTERS
IN A FARCE**

Reread lines 189–198. How does Chekhov use exaggeration to create humor in this exchange of dialogue?

glutton (glüt'n) *n.* a person who eats too much

Lomov. Where's my hat? My heart! Where shall I go? Where is the door? Oh—it seems—as though I were dying! I can't—my legs won't hold me— (*goes to the door*)

Tschubukov (*following him*). May you never darken my door again!

210 **Natalia.** Bring your suit to court! We'll see! (*Lomov staggers out, center.*)

Tschubukov (*angrily*). The devil!

Natalia. Such a good-for-nothing! And then they talk about being good neighbors!

Tschubukov. Loafer! Scarecrow! Monster!

Natalia. A swindler like that takes over a piece of property that doesn't belong to him and then dares to argue about it!

Tschubukov. And to think that this fool dares to make a proposal of marriage!

Natalia. What? A proposal of marriage?

Tschubukov. Why, yes! He came here to make you a proposal of marriage.

220 **Natalia.** Why didn't you tell me that before?

Tschubukov. That's why he had on his evening clothes! The poor fool!

Natalia. Proposal for me? (*falls into an armchair and groans*) Bring him back! Bring him back!

Tschubukov. Bring whom back!

Natalia. Faster, faster, I'm sinking! Bring him back! (*She becomes hysterical.*)

Tschubukov. What is it? What's wrong with you? (*his hands to his head*) I'm cursed with bad luck! I'll shoot myself! I'll hang myself!

Natalia. I'm dying! Bring him back!

Tschubukov. Bah! In a minute! Don't bawl! (*He rushes out, center.*)

230 **Natalia** (*groaning*). What have they done to me? Bring him back! Bring him back!

Tschubukov (*comes running in*). He's coming at once! The devil take him! Ugh! Talk to him yourself, I can't!

Natalia (*groaning*). Bring him back!

Tschubukov. He's coming, I tell you! "Oh, Lord! What a task it is to be the father of a grown daughter!" I'll cut my throat! I really will cut my throat! We've argued with the fellow, insulted him, and now you've thrown him out!—and you did it all, you!

Natalia. No, you! You haven't any manners, you are brutal! If it weren't for you, he wouldn't have gone!

240 **Tschubukov.** Oh, yes, I'm to blame! If I shoot or hang myself, remember *you'll* be to blame. You forced me to do it! (*Lomov appears in the doorway.*) There, talk to him yourself! (*He goes out.*)

Lomov. Terrible palpitation! My leg is lamed! My side hurts me—

Natalia. Pardon us, we were angry, Ivan Vassiliyitch. I remember now—the meadows really belong to you.

E Targeted Passage

Lomov. My heart is beating terribly! My meadows—my eyelids tremble—
(*They sit down.*) We were wrong. It was only the principle of the thing—the
property isn't worth much to me, but the principle is worth a great deal.

Natalia. Exactly, the principle! Let us talk about something else. **G**

250 **Lomov.** Because I have proofs that my aunt's grandmother had, with the peasants of your good father—

Natalia. Enough, enough. (*aside*) I don't know how to begin. (*to Lomov*) Are you going hunting soon?

Lomov. Yes, heath cock shooting, respected Natalia Stepanovna. I expect to begin after the harvest. Oh, did you hear? My dog, Ugadi, you know him—limps!

Natalia. What a shame! How did that happen?

Lomov. I don't know. Perhaps it's a dislocation, or maybe he was bitten by some other dog. (*He sighs.*) The best dog I ever had—to say nothing of the price! I paid Mironov a hundred and twenty-five rubles for him.

260 **Natalia.** That was too much to pay, Ivan Vassiliyitch.

Lomov. In my opinion it was very cheap. A wonderful dog!

Natalia. Papa paid eighty-five rubles for his Otkatai, and Otkatai is much better than your Ugadi!

Lomov. Really? Otkatai is better than Ugadi? What an idea! (*He laughs.*) Otkatai better than Ugadi!

Natalia. Of course he is better. It is true Otkatai is still young; he isn't full grown yet, but in the pack or on the leash with two or three, there is no better than he, even—

270 **Lomov.** I really beg your pardon, Natalia Stepanovna, but you quite overlooked the fact that he has a short lower jaw, and a dog with a short lower jaw can't snap.

Natalia. Short lower jaw? That's the first I ever heard that!

Lomov. I assure you, his lower jaw is shorter than the upper.

Natalia. Have you measured it?

Lomov. I have measured it. He is good at running though.

Natalia. In the first place, our Otkatai is pure-bred, a full-blooded son of Sapravavas and Stameskis, and as for your mongrel, nobody could ever figure out his pedigree; he's old and ugly and skinny as an old hag.

280 **Lomov.** Old, certainly! I wouldn't take five of your Otkatais for him! Ugadi is a dog, and Otkatai is—it is laughable to argue about it! Dogs like your Otkatai can be found by the dozens at any dog dealer's, a whole pound full!

Natalia. Ivan Vassiliyitch, you are very **contrary** today. First our meadows belong to you, and then Ugadi is better than Otkatai. I don't like it when a person doesn't say what he really thinks. You know perfectly well that Otkatai is a hundred times better than your silly Ugadi. What makes you keep on saying he isn't?

**G CHARACTERS
IN A FARCE**

How serious is Natalia's
commitment to principle?

contrary (kõn'trě'è) *adj.*
stubbornly uncooperative
or contradictory



Dog Lying in the Snow (1910–1911), Franz Marc. Oil on canvas, 62.5 cm × 105 cm. Städtisches Kunstinstitut und Städtische Galerie, Frankfurt am Main, Germany.

Lomov. I can see, Natalia Stepanovna, that you consider me either a blind man or a fool. But at least you may as well admit that Otkatai has a short lower jaw!

Natalia. It isn't so!

290 **Lomov.** Yes, a short lower jaw!

Natalia (*loudly*). It's not so!

Lomov. What makes you scream, my dear lady?

Natalia. What makes you talk such nonsense? It's disgusting! It is high time that Ugadi was shot, and you compare him with Otkatai!

Lomov. Pardon me, but I can't carry on this argument any longer. I have palpitation of the heart!

Natalia. I have always noticed that the hunters who do the most talking know the least about hunting.

Lomov. My dear lady, I beg of you to be still. My heart is bursting! (*He shouts.*)
300 Be still!

Natalia. I won't be still until you admit that Otkatai is better! (*Enter Tschubukov.*)

Tschubukov. Well, has it begun again?

Natalia. Papa, say frankly, on your honor, which dog is better: Otkatai or Ugadi?

Lomov. Stepan Stepanovitch, I beg of you, just answer this: has your dog a short lower jaw or not? Yes or no?

Tschubukov. And what if he has? Is it of such importance? There is no better dog in the whole country.

310 **Lomov.** My Ugadi is better. Tell the truth now!

Tschubukov. Don't get so excited, my dear fellow! Permit me. Your Ugadi certainly has his good points. He is from a good breed, has a good stride, strong haunches, and so forth. But the dog, if you really want to know, has two faults; he is old and he has a short lower jaw.

Lomov. Pardon me, I have a palpitation of the heart!—Let us keep to facts—just remember in Maruskins's meadows, my Ugadi kept ear to ear with Count Rasvachai and your dog was left behind.

Tschubukov. He was behind, because the count struck him with his whip.

Lomov. Quite right. All the other dogs were on the fox's scent, but Otkatai
320 found it necessary to bite a sheep.

Tschubukov. That isn't so!—I am sensitive about that and beg you to stop this argument. He struck him because everybody looks on a strange dog of good blood with envy. Even you, sir, aren't free from sin. No sooner do you find a dog better than Ugadi than you begin to—this, that—his, mine—and so forth! I remember distinctly.

Lomov. I remember something, too!

Tschubukov (*mimicking him*). I remember something, too! What do you remember? **H**

Lomov. Palpitation! My leg is lame—I can't—

330 **Natalia.** Palpitation! What kind of hunter are you? You ought to stay in the kitchen by the stove and wrestle with the potato peelings and not go fox hunting! Palpitation!

Tschubukov. And what kind of hunter are you? A man with your disease ought to stay at home and not jolt around in the saddle. If you were a hunter! But you only ride round in order to find out about other people's dogs and make trouble for everyone. I am sensitive! Let's drop the subject. Besides, you're no hunter.

Lomov. You only ride around to flatter the count! My heart! You intriguer! Swindler!

Tschubukov. And what of it? (*shouting*) Be still!

340 **Lomov.** Intriguer!

Tschubukov. Baby! Puppy! Walking drugstore!

Lomov. Old rat! Jesuit⁵ Oh, I know you!

Tschubukov. Be still! Or I'll shoot you—with my worst gun, like a partridge! Fool! Loafer!

Lomov. Everyone knows that—oh, my heart!—that your poor late wife beat you. My leg—my temples—heavens—I'm dying—I—

Tschubukov. And your housekeeper wears the pants in your house!

H READING A PLAY

How does the stage direction clarify this speech?

5. Jesuit (jəzɪt' ʊ-ɪt): a member of a Roman Catholic religious order that was suppressed in Russia because of its resistance to the authority of the czar, the ruler of Russia. At the time, the term had the negative meaning of "one who schemes or plots."

Lomov. Here—here—there—there—my heart has burst! My shoulder is torn apart. Where is my shoulder? I'm dying! (*He falls into a chair.*) The doctor!
350 (*faints*)

Tschubukov. Baby! Half-baked clam! Fool!

Natalia. Nice sort of hunter you are! You can't even sit on a horse. (*to Tschubukov*) Papa, what's the matter with him? (*She screams.*) Ivan Vassiliyitch! He is dead!

Lomov. I'm ill! I can't breathe! Air!

Natalia. He is dead! (*She shakes Lomov in the chair.*) Ivan Vassiliyitch! What have we done! He is dead! (*She sinks into a chair.*) The doctor—doctor! (*She goes into hysterics.*) ❶

Tschubukov. Ahh! What is it? What's the matter with you?

360 **Natalia** (*groaning*). He's dead! Dead!

Tschubukov. Who is dead? Who? (*looking at Lomov*) Yes, he is dead! Good God! Water! The doctor! (*holding the glass to Lomov's lips*) Drink! No, he won't drink! He's dead! What a terrible situation! Why didn't I shoot myself? Why have I never cut my throat? What am I waiting for now? Only give me a knife! Give me a pistol! (*Lomov moves.*) He's coming to! Drink some water—there!

Lomov. Sparks! Mists! Where am I?

Tschubukov. Get married! Quick, and then go to the devil! She's willing! (*He joins the hands of Lomov and Natalia.*) She's agreed! Only leave me in peace!

Lomov. Wh—what? (*getting up*) Whom?

370 **Tschubukov.** She's willing! Well? Kiss each other and—the devil take you both!

Natalia (*groans*). He lives! Yes, yes, I'm willing!

Tschubukov. Kiss each other!

Lomov. Eh? Whom? (*Natalia and Lomov kiss.*) Very nice! Pardon me, but what is this for? Oh, yes, I understand! My heart—sparks—I am happy. Natalia Stepanovna. (*He kisses her hand.*) My leg is lame!

Natalia. I'm happy too!

Tschubukov. Ahhh! A load off my shoulders! Ahh!

Natalia. And now at least you'll admit that Ugadi is worse than Otkatai!

Lomov. Better!

380 **Natalia.** Worse!

Tschubukov. Now the domestic joys have begun. Champagne!

Lomov. Better!

Natalia. Worse, worse, worse!

Tschubukov (*trying to drown them out*). Champagne, champagne!

❶ **CHARACTERS
IN A FARCE**

What is ridiculous about Natalia's reaction?

❷ **Targeted Passage**

*Translated from the Russian by
Hilmer Baukhage and Barrett H. Clark*

Comprehension

1. **Recall** Why does Lomov go to Tschubukov's home dressed in formal clothing?
2. **Recall** What two topics lead to petty arguments between Lomov and Natalia?
3. **Summarize** How does Tschubukov bring Lomov and Natalia together at the end of the play?

Literary Analysis

4. **Reading a Play** Reread lines 38–52. Why might Chekhov have chosen to have Lomov express his thoughts alone onstage in a monologue instead of in dialogue with other characters?
5. **Examine Characters in a Farce** Review the chart you created as you read. How does Natalia cause Lomov's main trait or pattern of behavior to become even more exaggerated in the course of the play?
6. **Interpret Character Motivation** What seems to motivate Lomov's and Natalia's desire to marry each other? Cite evidence from the play to support your answer.
7. **Analyze Irony** One important literary element that Chekhov uses in the play is irony, or the contrast between expectations and reality. Analyze the irony of the actions listed in the chart shown here.
8. **Identify Author's Perspective** The characters in *A Marriage Proposal* are members of the gentry. What does the play suggest about Chekhov's attitude toward this class of landowners? Cite evidence to support your answer.
9. **Evaluate Characters** Are Lomov and Natalia equally responsible for their arguments, or is one character more to blame? Explain your answer.

Action	Expectation	Reality
Tschubukov sends Natalia to talk with Lomov. (line 53)		
Lomov and Natalia agree to get married. (lines 367–375)		

Literary Criticism

10. **Critical Interpretations** The Russian writer Maxim Gorky said that there was always an element of sadness to Chekhov's humor: "One has only to read his 'humorous' stories with attention to see what a lot of cruel and disgusting things, behind the humorous words and situations, had been observed by the author with sorrow and were concealed by him." What sad realities underlie the humor in *A Marriage Proposal*?

Reading-Writing Connection

Enhance your understanding of *A Marriage Proposal* by responding to these prompts. Then use Revision: Grammar and Style to improve your writing.

WRITING PROMPTS

A. Short Response: Write a Dialogue

Suppose that Lomov and Natalia have just gotten married. Write a half-page dialogue in which they discuss the behavior of their relatives at the wedding.

B. Extended Response: Analyze an Argument

Write a three-to-five-paragraph analysis of how each of the characters in *A Marriage Proposal* could have prevented petty argument or at least stopped it from escalating. Include examples of inflammatory comments and then rewrite them in a less argumentative way.

SELF-CHECK

A successful dialogue will . . .

- resemble the style of speech used in the play
- reflect the characters' personalities

A strong analysis will . . .

- clearly state an opinion about each character's role
- provide three examples and revisions of inflammatory statements

REVISION: GRAMMAR AND STYLE

VARY SENTENCE TYPES Review the Grammar and Style note on page 247. When writing dialogue, use a mixture of sentence types to reflect characters' thoughts and emotions. A **declarative sentence** makes a statement. An **interrogative sentence** asks a question. An **exclamatory sentence** expresses strong emotion. An **imperative sentence** gives a command, request, or direction. Here is an example of how Chekhov uses a mixture of interrogative, declarative, and imperative sentences to convey his characters' emotions.

Lomov. Stepan Stepanovitch, I beg of you, just answer this: has your dog a short lower jaw or not? Yes or no?

Tschubukov. And what if he has? Is it of such importance? There is no better dog in the whole country.

Lomov. My Ugadi is better. Tell the truth now! (lines 306–310)

Notice how the revisions in red use a mixture of sentence types to better reflect the characters' emotions in this first draft. Revise your response to Prompt A by using similar techniques.

STUDENT MODEL

Natalia. Your uncle gobbled up the whole wedding cake! Who can eat so much?

Lomov. Stop. You're lying. He only took one piece.

WRITING TOOLS

For prewriting, revision, and editing tools, visit the Writing Center at ClassZone.com.

Vocabulary in Context

VOCABULARY PRACTICE

Decide if each statement is true or false.

1. If you meditate on something, you give it a lot of thought.
2. A usurper respects other people's property.
3. You might be called a glutton if you eat a whole pie quickly.
4. A contrary friend seldom agrees with you.

WORD LIST

contrary
glutton
meditate
usurper

VOCABULARY IN WRITING

Using at least three vocabulary words, describe a silly argument you had recently. You might begin as follows:

EXAMPLE SENTENCE

My mother always insists on being contrary. For example, the other day ...

VOCABULARY STRATEGY: THE LATIN ROOT *contra*

The word *contrary* contains the Latin root *contra*, which means "against." When *contra* is used as a prefix with English base words, as in *contrafactual*, you can easily figure out meanings. To understand other words containing *contra*, you may need to use context clues as well as your knowledge of the root.

PRACTICE Write the word from the word web that best completes each sentence. Use context clues to help you or, if necessary, consult a dictionary.



1. When you _____ yourself, you make inconsistent statements.
2. To _____ two things is to emphasize the difference between them.
3. _____ goods cannot be imported or exported abroad.
4. A _____ of international law is a serious violation.
5. He enjoys being _____ just to stir up debate.

VOCABULARY PRACTICE
For more practice, go to the Vocabulary Center at ClassZone.com.