

Write Revealing Dialogue

LEARN HOW TO PAINT COMPLEX CHARACTERS THROUGH DIALOGUE FROM THE SHORT STORY MASTER AND DRAMATIST **ANTON CHEKHOV**. READ THE PASSAGE, FOLLOW THE PROMPTS, AND BUILD A DRAMATIC SCENE OF YOUR OWN.

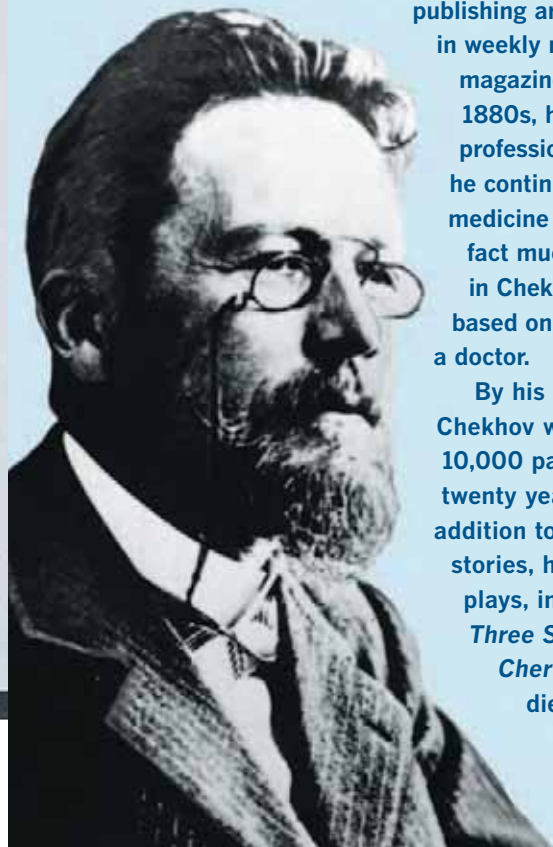
Who was Anton Chekhov?

Well for one thing, he was the guy who invented the short story. He got started by writing stories for newspapers, where space was at a premium. His stories relied on his observations of the people around him. He commented on all aspects of society, from human foibles to contemporary political issues and intellectual debates.

Chekhov was born on January 29, 1860, in Taganrog, Russia. He excelled in school and entered the faculty of medicine at Moscow University in 1879. Within his first year of medical school, he began

publishing articles and stories in weekly newspapers and magazines. By the early 1880s, he had become a professional writer, though he continued to practice medicine on the side. In fact much of the material in Chekhov's stories is based on his experience as a doctor.

By his own estimation, Chekhov wrote more than 10,000 pages during twenty years of writing. In addition to numerous stories, he wrote several plays, including *The Three Sisters* and *The Cherry Orchard*. He died in 1904.



How to write from models

>>Read the excerpt once through without reading the notes.

>>Read it a second time, with the notes.

>>Think about how you would write a similar passage.

>>Use the notes and writing prompts at the end to get started.

1. From the moment he enters the scene, Ochumelov assumes a position of authority, demanding answers to his questions and taking control of the investigation.

Chameleon

“What’s all this about?” asked Ochumelov, shouldering his way through the crowd. “What are you doing here? Why are you holding up your finger? Who shouted?”

“I was walking along, Your Honor, as quiet as a lamb,” began Khryukin, coughing into his fist. “I had business about some wood with Mitri Mitrich here, and suddenly, for no reason whatever, that nuisance bit my finger. Excuse me, but I’m a working man. . . . Mine is a very intricate trade. Make them pay me compensation—perhaps I won’t be able to move this finger for a week. It doesn’t say in the law, Your Honor, that we have to put up with ferocious animals. If everyone’s to start biting, life won’t be worth living. . . .”

“H’m . . . well, well,” said Ochumelov severely, coughing and twitching his eyebrows. “Well, well . . . whose dog is it? I shan’t leave it at this. I’ll teach people to let dogs run about! It’s time something was done about gentlemen who are not willing to obey the regulations! He’ll get such a fine, the scoundrel—I’ll teach him what it means to let dogs and cattle of all sorts rove about! I’ll show him what’s what! Eldirin,” he continued, turning to the constable, “find out whose dog it is, and draw up a statement. And the dog must be exterminated without delay. It’s probably mad . . . whose dog is it, I ask?”

“I think it belongs to General Zhigalov,” said a voice from the crowd.

“General Zhigalov! H’m. Help me off with my coat, Eldirin

2. You can tell from the way Khryukin describes the dog as “that nuisance” that he dislikes it and blames it for his injured finger.

3. Ochumelov’s ticks and stutters are as much a part of his character as his actual speech. Here, Chekhov conveys that Ochumelov is stalling as he tries to assess the situation.

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... Phew, how hot it is! It must be going to rain.” He turned to Khryukin: “One thing I don’t understand—how did it happen to bite you? How could it have got at your finger? Such a little dog, and you such a strapping fellow! You must have scratched your finger with a nail, and then taken it into your head to get paid for it. I know you fellows! **A set of devils!**”

4. Perplexed by the suggestion that the dog belongs to the General, an important authority figure, Ochumelov asserts his own importance by making the constable take his coat and then declaring that Khryukin is lying.

WRITE YOUR OWN REVEALING DIALOGUE

USE THESE PROMPTS TO BUILD YOUR CHARACTERS THROUGH SPEECH AND ACTION

Reread note #1. What position does your character take in a scene? Is he controlling, passive, or neutral?

Review note #2. The words your characters use to describe things reveal how they feel. How would your character describe his house or his best friend? Would he use slang or three-syllable words?

Note #3 shows that how a character speaks is as important as what he says. Does he play with the zipper on his jacket when he's nervous?

Note #4 points out how the characters in this scene relate to one another. In this case, one character asserts his superiority, but maybe your character's gestures show his affection or his generosity.

>>Your Turn! Now take your character and put him in a scene with another character where some action is taking place. Write their reaction to the situation and their interaction with each other.