

Question: How was your understanding of cultural and contextual considerations of the work developed through the interactive oral?

Work used: *Fathers and Sons* by Ivan Turgenev

During the discussion, several articles were presented to the class. The subjects brought to light were the Russian economy during the 1850s, serfdom, and the question of whether Turgenev was obsolete or not. The articles on the Russian economy explained the state of transition the Russian economy was in during the mid-1850s. Prior to this period, there were members of the society called serfs. These were essentially slaves who worked on the fields of rich peasants, or the upper class. However, at this time Russia began to move away from serfdom.

After this discussion, it would appear Turgenev places great importance on the time, place, and culture of his novel, as serfdom and the existence of social classes are a predominant feature in *Fathers and Sons*. I found this discussion interesting, as it clarified some aspects of the novel. For example, in *Fathers and Sons*, Nikolai is a relatively well off land owner, and he 'owns' many serfs. However, as the system begins to evolve, the serfs and their owners have some trouble adjusting to the new system of land ownership. The serfs are misbehaved and irresponsible, and these aspects of the culture and context form the setting of the novel.

The article on the 'Turgenev Question' was interesting as well, because it highlighted some of Turgenev's techniques, and what he's famous for. According to the article, the art of Turgenev is in understatement: he manages to capture large philosophical, social, and historical movements as manifested in everyday life.

This can indeed be seen in *Fathers and Sons*. Turgenev paints a picture of commonplace Russian life with characters like Nikolai Arkady, Pavel, Bazarov and Fenichka, using barely any overly dramatic devices. Yet, through the characters' thoughts and interactions with each other Turgenev explores ideas such as familial relationships. Furthermore, he portrays other aspects of Russian life, including the wide gap between social classes and the idea of young people rejecting all authorities.