

Study Guide for Pushkin and *The Queen of Spades*

Aleksandr (Alexander) Pushkin 1799-1837:

1. Pushkin is Russia's greatest poet, known as the greatest influence of Russian literature in the 19th and 20th centuries. He is known as a poet, playwright, and novelist.
2. He had a difficult childhood, often abandoned by his mother because of her social obligations, and his father was domineering and easily irritated. His first language was French because he was raised almost entirely by his French nursemaids.
3. He wrote approximately 130 poems while at school. Most of his poems were not published because his topics were considered inappropriate. In 1817, he recited his controversial poem, "Ode to Liberty" upon his graduation from the Lyceum. (Later, in 1825, this same poem would be found among the belongings of rebels against the Tsar, Nicholas I) This poem and others he had written in his youth led to his exile.
4. From **1820-1823**, he was **exiled** to the south of Russia because of the political humor expressed in his writings.
5. Following his exile, he married Nathalie Goncharova. Their marriage produced three children (four children are documented in some biographies), but they were not happy. Nathalie was very beautiful and had many admirers, including her brother-in-law and the Tsar.
6. Pushkin died dueling one of his wife's lovers. He was shot in the abdomen on January 26, 1837 and died three days later.
7. He is most famous for his novel *Eugene Onegin*. Many of his works have been used to inspire Russian composers. *The Queen of Spades* was used to inspire an opera by Tchaikovsky. The story has also been produced in film many times.
8. *The Queen of Spades* is sometimes called a short story, but it is considered a novella because it is written in chapters.

Study Questions from *The Queen of Spades*

1. Who has a gambling debt that her husband refuses to pay?
2. Why does Countess Anna Fedorovna go to see the Count St. Germain?
3. What secret has the Countess's grandson, Tomsy, never learned from her?
4. Why did the Countess reveal the secret to Chaplitzky?
5. Who is Lizaveta Ivanovna?

6. Lizaveta is called the “martyr of the household.” What are some of the hardships Lizaveta tolerates as the Countess’s ward?
7. Why does Hermann refrain from gambling?
8. Who becomes obsessed with learning the secret of the cards trick?
9. Why does Hermann begin writing letters to Lizaveta?
10. Who does Tomsy say Hermann resembles?
11. What does Tomsy tell Lizaveta about Hermann that foreshadows his true personality?
12. How does Hermann try to make the Countess give him the secret?
13. How does the Countess die?
14. What does Lizaveta realize about Hermann?
15. How does Hermann get out of the Countess’s home unseen?
16. Why does Hermann go to the Countess’s funeral?
17. What makes Hermann fall down at the funeral?
18. Who does the queen of spades resemble?
19. Who looks into Hermann’s window?
20. What are the three conditions that the Countess gives Hermann before she will give him the secret of the cards?
21. Why does Hermann go to Chekalinsky’s residence?
22. How does Hermann lose all his money to Chekalinsky?
23. How does the story end for Hermann?
24. How does the story end for Lizaveta?
25. Who becomes the husband of Princess Pauline?