QUESTIONS ON “THE NOSE” (all classes)

1. Why does Gogol choose to start the short story by informing the reader of the nose’s location, rather than establishing the primary conflict with the Major who had lost his nose first? Does this choice help add to or detract from the overall theme of “The Nose?” Why or why not is the first section of “The Nose,” important to the meaning of the work as a whole? Why does the nose appear in Ivan’s bread at the beginning of the story, and how does Ivan’s reaction to finding the nose provide social commentary on the treatment of the “average person” in Russia during this time period? After the first section, the focus of the third person narrator shifts to Kovaloff himself. How does this shift mirror the disorientation of the two men involved so far in the plot? What is the significance of Kovaloff’s description given directly after the shift by the narrator? Consider and discuss how Kovaloff’s nose being detached contributes to the themes of identity and the paranormal.
2. How could the fact that people often forget they have a nose or that people look down their noses at others be interpreted as part of the underlying themes regarding appearance and status? The nose could also be interpreted to represent a man’s masculinity and how broken their identity can become when that is taken away from them. Why do you think Gogol decided to have the nose impersonate an officer? In Gogol’s story, Kovaloff’s nose is heavily personified. Analyze how this use of personification furthers the social commentary made throughout the story. Consider Gogol’s purpose for using personification rather than leaving the nose as just a nose; how does this contribute to the symbolism of the nose? What do you think could be the greater purpose of the casual attitude the characters have towards the absurd and surreal events in the story? Consider people’s reactions to a human sized nose going about and living its own life as an accredited official, as well as their reactions to Kovaloff having no nose.
3. Kovaloff himself places a huge importance on his nose in his practical and social success. How does the imparted significance of a nose show a social commentary on how outer appearances are used as a measurement of worth and character? What could Gogol be commenting about the validity of the construct of social rank and class? How is this commentary explored further through gender roles with Kovaloff’s actions toward women after he loses his nose as opposed to after he regains it? To a businessman during this time of trying to achieve a higher social status, money was everything. When Kovaloff wants to put an ad in the paper for a missing nose, the official refuses to do so because he fears how his newspaper will be viewed in the public’s eye. Is this saying that the higher class can’t buy everything they lose? What is the significance of having the official care more about his reputation than gaining more money?
4. How does metafiction function within the short story? How does it impact the story’s satirical tone? Could this be Gogol’s attempt to literally “suspend” his readers from stereotypical societal expectations? Why do you think Gogol chose certain times to interfere in the story, and what affect does it have on the meaning of the story? How do many “loose ends” and omissions (especially regarding characters who seem important, then disappear, as well as the unexplained disappearance and reappearance of the nose) affect the reader’s understanding of the work and its thematic meaning as a whole? At the very end, the narrator questions the reality of the tale’s improbable occurrences while displaying frustration regarding the absurdity of the entire story itself. What is the purpose of the authorial intrusion at the end of the short story and why does Gogol choose to end his short story with a section solely consisting of narration outside of the story’s plot? Dissect and discuss the true tone of the narrator at the close of “The Nose” as well as how the last two sentences contribute to the message of the entire work.
5. By the end of the story there is no significant change in Major Kovaloff’s personality. Even after what should have been such a humbling and teaching experience, he sticks to his old ways. What does this say about Kovaloff and people like him? How much has this entire experience affected Kovaloff? Why wouldn’t Gogol provide a clearer resolution for this character? What is Gogol stating with Kovaloff’s return to routine? It is also after Kovaloff awakens from his slumber two weeks later that his nose returns. Is it possible that Gogol was trying to imply that the entire ordeal was a dream, a figment of an aristocrat’s imagination? How does this implication define the Russian aristocracy?