Pushkin was born in Moscow in a wealthy family. His father had a huge library, and the little boy spent a lot of time reading. Pushkin was raised by a serf woman, Arina Rodionovna, who taught him old proverbs, songs and tales, and had a tremendous impact on his sensitive imagination. Young Alexander was taught by tutors to read and write in French, but thanks to his beloved nurse and other servants in the house, he also grew up surrounded with Russian fairy tales and folklore. For six years (1811-17), Alexander attended a special lycee created in the Catherine Palace in Tsarskoe Selo for the sons of the best families. At the age of 14, he drew a caricature of tzar Alexander. Young Pushkin depicted the Tzar, stuffed with too many state dinners, stuck in the Triumphal Arch, whose gate was too narrow to receive him. At the same time, panic-stricken generals of the Russian army rushed ahead to help him out by trying to enlarge the gate with their swords. Pushkin's friends were delighted with his wicked wit. By the time he was 18, Pushkin was already famous for his poetry.
Main

Later, he was hailed as "the Byron of Russia"
Married Natalia Goncharova, in 1831. Because of her, the poet was forced to challenge a French officer, Danthes, to a duel over his honor. At the age of 36, the Russian genius was killed in the duel.

Personality
Pushkin wanted to see everything, know everybody; loved women and was captivating, there were few who could resist him; dressed eccentrically; was proud both of his "platonic" and "sexual" conquests; gambled, was on friendly terms with tavern owners, and fought duels almost every day.

Ideas and Hopes
The early decades of the 19th century were a time when Russian intellectual society was inspired with ideas of liberty. Revolutionary ideas were in the air; Pushkin's poems on liberty circulated everywhere. His epigrams on the church and the Tzar where quoted with delight and admiration. For his provocative writings, Pushkin was exiled by tzar Alexander to Ukraine and Moldavia (at that time, provinces of the Russian Empire). Later, after Alexander's death, tzar Nicholas I recalled Pushkin to Moscow, and became personally editing his poetry. Pushkin's ambiguous position in court turned out to be impossible.

Major Themes: love lyrics; nature; visual images of his own age; criticism of monarchy; witty comments about Russian upper-class society; history of Russia; tales.

Style: Realism. Pushkin developed not only a new content, but a new literary style, modernizing the Russian language and bringing it to perfection that has never been matched before. Pushkin has retained the grace of the classical poetical form of the 18th century, and introduced a language which was closer to real speech.

Poems: Eugene Onegin - "an encyclopedia of Russian life";
The Gypsies - a long poetic tale based on his experiences in Moldavia.
Ruslan and Ludmila - a witty fairy tale based on stories learned from his nyanya;

Prose: Queen of Spades - mixture of reality and supernatural forces;
The Tales of Belkin - employ irony and unexpected endings;
Captain's Daughter - a novel, which describes the Pugachev uprising against Catherine the Great;
**Plays:**  *Boris Godunov* - a historical drama, written in a verse/prose style.
   Plot: transition of power from Rurik dynasty to the Romanovs.

**Tales:**  Six tales for children. *The Fisherman and the Goldfish.*

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**Nikolai Gogol (1808-1852)**

Gogol was born in the Ukraine; attended a gymnasia (a school); moved to St. Petersburg; tried many professions; worked as a private tutor, taught at a university, wanted to become an actor. Was unsuccessful. Met with Pushkin in 1831. Began writing narrative poems. was influenced by Homer's *Iliad.* The majority of his work-- in Russian. Died from an acute depression

**Major Themes:**  Ukrainian folk motives; the battle of good and evil; history of Ukraine; St. Petersburg; corruption and misuse of power in provincial Russia;

**Style:**  realism, symbolism, surrealism, naturalism, social criticism, satire.
   Gogol was one of the greatest humorists; is known for brilliant descriptions and dialogues; "real" language; funny portrayal of life; "glorifies those who have no glory to them."

**Major Works:**  *Evenings on a Farm NEar Dikanka*-- stories based on Ukrainian legends;
   *Taras Bulba*-- Ukrainian Cassacks battling the Poles;
   *Arabesques*-- collection of stories about St. Petersburg, including *Nevsky Prospect, The Nose* and *The Overcoat.*
   *Inspector General*-- a famous play, based on comedy of errors. The Tzar recognized himself in the play.
   *Dead Souls*-- memorable comic characters.