

E-Content

“The Bet” by Anton Chekhov

Introduction to the Author

Anton Chekhov (1860–1904)

Anton Chekhov was one of Russia's greatest short story writers and playwrights. He was also a medical doctor. His stories are admired for their realism, psychological depth, and subtle humor. Instead of dramatic events, Chekhov often focused on ordinary people and their emotions.

Introduction to the Story

The Bet is a philosophical short story that explores the value of human life, freedom, wealth, knowledge, and happiness.

The story begins with a discussion at a party about capital punishment and life imprisonment. During the discussion, a wealthy banker and a young lawyer make a strange bet. The lawyer agrees to stay alone in complete isolation for fifteen years in exchange for two million rubles.

The story examines how a person's ideas and values can change over time.

Characters

1. The Banker

- Wealthy and proud
- Emotional and impulsive
- Believes death penalty is better than life imprisonment
- Later becomes selfish and fearful of losing his fortune
- Represents materialism and greed

Character Development

At the beginning:

- Rich
- Confident
- Proud

After fifteen years:

- Financially ruined
 - Afraid
 - Morally weak
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2. The Lawyer

- Young and intelligent
- Idealistic
- Loves knowledge
- Accepts the challenge to prove his point
- Undergoes spiritual transformation

Character Development

Initially:

- Interested in money
- Wants to prove his argument

Finally:

- Rejects wealth
 - Values wisdom over material success
 - Renounces worldly pleasures
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Plot Summary

Beginning

One evening, a group of educated people gather at the banker's house. They discuss whether capital punishment or life imprisonment is more humane.

The banker argues that death is better because lifelong imprisonment destroys a person slowly.

The young lawyer disagrees. He says that life, even in prison, is better than death.

To prove their opinions, they make a bet.

The lawyer agrees to remain in solitary confinement for fifteen years.

If he succeeds, he will receive two million rubles.

During the Fifteen Years

The lawyer is completely isolated.

He is allowed:

- Books
- Music
- Food
- Wine
- Writing materials

But he cannot communicate with anyone.

His Reading Journey

First Year

- Reads light novels
- Plays piano
- Feels lonely

Second to Fourth Years

- Studies literature
- Reads classics

Fifth Year

- Drinks wine
- Feels depressed
- Stops reading for some time

Sixth to Tenth Years

- Learns foreign languages
- Studies history
- Reads philosophy
- Studies science

Last Five Years

- Reads religion

- Studies theology
- Reads almost every kind of book

He gains immense knowledge.

Climax

As the end of the bet approaches, the banker realizes he has become poor.

Paying two million rubles would ruin him.

He secretly decides to kill the lawyer before the bet ends.

He enters the prison room at night.

There he finds the lawyer asleep.

He also discovers a letter.

Resolution

The lawyer's letter reveals that years of study have changed his outlook on life.

He now believes:

- Wealth is meaningless.
- Luxury is temporary.
- Human desires are foolish.
- Knowledge is greater than money.

To prove his beliefs, he decides to leave the room five minutes before the completion of the bet.

Therefore, he loses the money voluntarily.

The banker is shocked and ashamed.

Themes

1. Materialism versus Wisdom

Money cannot buy true happiness.

The lawyer gains wisdom instead of wealth.

2. Freedom

Physical freedom is important.

However, mental freedom is even more valuable.

3. Power of Knowledge

Books transform the lawyer's personality.

Education changes his understanding of life.

4. Greed

The banker is controlled by greed.

His desire to save money nearly makes him commit murder.

5. Human Nature

People's beliefs and priorities change with experience.

6. Meaning of Life

The story encourages readers to think about:

- What is success?
 - What is happiness?
 - What is truly valuable?
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Symbolism

The Bet

Represents human pride and ego.

The Prison Room

Represents both physical imprisonment and spiritual awakening.

Books

Represent knowledge, education, and self-discovery.

Two Million Rubles

Represent worldly temptation.

Important Literary Devices

Irony

The banker wanted to win the bet but nearly became a murderer.

The lawyer wanted money but finally rejected it.

Contrast

Banker	Lawyer
Wealth	Knowledge
Greed	Wisdom
Fear	Peace
Materialism	Spirituality

Foreshadowing

The banker's financial decline prepares readers for the dramatic ending.

Title Justification

The title *The Bet* is appropriate because the entire story revolves around a wager between the banker and the lawyer.

However, the real bet is not about money.

It is about:

- Human values
 - Freedom
 - Knowledge
 - Wealth
 - Life itself
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Moral Values

Students learn that:

- Knowledge is more valuable than wealth.
 - Greed destroys peace of mind.
 - True happiness comes from inner satisfaction.
 - Education transforms personality.
 - Material possessions are temporary.
 - Wisdom is the greatest wealth.
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Vocabulary

Word	Meaning
Solitary	Alone
Confinement	Being kept in one place
Capital Punishment	Death sentence
Imprisonment	Being kept in prison
Philosophy	Study of life's meaning
Materialism	Love of wealth and possessions

Renounce	Give up willingly
Temptation	Strong desire for something
Wisdom	Good judgment gained through experience
Isolation	Separation from others

Key Quotations

1. "Life is better than death."
2. "I despise freedom and life and health."
3. "I reject the two million."

These statements reflect the lawyer's transformation from valuing material rewards to embracing spiritual and intellectual fulfillment.

Critical Appreciation

The Bet is a timeless psychological and philosophical story.

Chekhov demonstrates that external success does not guarantee happiness.

The banker loses his moral strength despite his wealth, while the lawyer gains inner peace despite years of isolation.

The unexpected ending makes readers question their own understanding of success, knowledge, and happiness.

Classroom Activities

Activity 1: Think and Discuss

1. Would you stay alone for fifteen years for money? Why or why not?
 2. Is knowledge more valuable than wealth?
 3. Was the banker a victim of greed?
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Activity 2: Group Discussion

Debate:

"Money brings happiness."

Group A: In Favor

Group B: Against

Activity 3: Vocabulary Match

Match the words with their meanings.

- Solitary
 - Wisdom
 - Greed
 - Philosophy
 - Temptation
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Activity 4: Role Play

Students perform:

- The debate between the banker and lawyer
 - The final meeting after fifteen years
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Assignment

Short Answer Questions

1. Why did the banker and lawyer make the bet?
 2. Why did the lawyer accept solitary confinement?
 3. What did the lawyer study during imprisonment?
 4. Why did the banker decide to kill the lawyer?
 5. Why did the lawyer reject the money?
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Long Answer Questions

1. Explain the transformation of the lawyer's character.
 2. Discuss the themes of knowledge and materialism in *The Bet*.
 3. Compare the banker and the lawyer.
 4. Justify the title *The Bet*.
 5. Explain the moral lessons of the story.
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Multiple Choice Questions (MCQs)

1. Who wrote *The Bet*?

- a) Leo Tolstoy
- b) Anton Chekhov
- c) Charles Dickens
- d) O. Henry

Answer: b

2. The lawyer agrees to remain in isolation for:

- a) 5 years
- b) 10 years
- c) 15 years
- d) 20 years

Answer: c

3. The banker promises:

- a) One million rubles
- b) Two million rubles
- c) Five million rubles
- d) Ten million rubles

Answer: b

4. What changes the lawyer most?

- a) Money
- b) Books

c) Friends

d) Travel

Answer: b

5. Why does the lawyer leave before the time ends?

a) He becomes ill.

b) He fears the banker.

c) He rejects material wealth.

d) He forgets the date.

Answer: c

Key Takeaways

- Wealth alone cannot provide lasting happiness.
 - Continuous learning leads to wisdom and self-development.
 - Greed can corrupt even respectable individuals.
 - Freedom, knowledge, and inner peace are more valuable than material possessions.
 - Personal transformation is possible through reflection and education.
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Conclusion

Anton Chekhov's *The Bet* is much more than a story about a wager. It is a profound exploration of human values, morality, and the search for meaning in life. Through the contrasting journeys of the banker and the lawyer, readers discover that knowledge, wisdom, and inner contentment outweigh wealth and material success. The story remains relevant today, encouraging students to value education, ethical choices, and lifelong learning.