

# Not a nincompoop? essay



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NOT A NINCOMPOOP? A look at “ A Nincompoop” by Anton Chekhov In day-to-day life, there are often incidents or even common behaviours demonstrated by some that lead others to believe that the person is a nincompoop. Some of those who have been called a Nincompoop possess certain characteristics that a typical Nincompoop exhibits. However, the previous statement does not apply to Anton Chekhov’s real nincompoop in the short story “ A Nincompoop. ” This short story deals with an employer teaching the governess of his children a lesson about asserting herself when others are trying to exploit or abuse her. Chekhov chooses one of his two characters, the governess, to convincingly mislead one’s opinion about the real nincompoop, but surprisingly, it is the liberal and idealistic character, the employer, who truly embodies the nincompoop in this satire. The identity of the nincompoop can only be discovered through analyzing both characters’ backgrounds, reactions and way of thinking.

As mentioned above, there are typical characteristics that are usually related to a nincompoop and the governess represents most of those: a weak, defenseless and speechless fool. The question is, is she really a nincompoop or she pretends to be one as a survival technique to keep/save her job? If one pays enough attention to the story between the lines, the answer to that question will be an easy one to find. Although she is shocked and her reactions are weak and submissive, it is the harsh reality or the thought of losing her job that forces her to obey and not to oppose. On the other hand, the employer is a wealthy and powerful man. He is a liberal and idealistic thinker who tries to change the world of common men through his teachings.

In this short story, the employer takes on the role of a teacher and the governess is, to some extents, forced to become the student. However, this good-intentioned effort is jeopardized by making various mistakes from the employer's side in choosing and exercising his teaching method. First of all, he neglects one of the most important aspects of teaching, which is doing a background research on your future student. If he had done such thing, he would have known that a governess is usually from an educated yet impoverished family. She must be very well-educated as she might have to teach foreign languages like French and also be able to exemplify the moral lessons that are needed to be taught to children. However, the well-educated person within the governess's body has never had neither the power nor too many other choices to become someone else.

Back in 19th and even early 20th century, an educated female person who was in desperate need for money had only a few choices as to what kind of a job she could have. She could either become the companion of a wealthy lady, the mistress of a wealthy man or a governess. Granted that the governess in "A Nincompoop" comes from a poor family, it is most unlikely for her to have any sort of dowry which automatically excludes the option of getting married to a wealthy man. In other words, the governess cannot afford to lose her job, even if it means having to become a weak submissive person. The other mistake that the employer makes is choosing the wrong learning environment. He chooses an awfully intimidating room, his library, where he is sitting in the position of power.

Also, he uses the element of shock as his method of teaching which causes the governess to get caught completely off guard. In addition, the lesson

itself is way too unpractical for one to perform in the real society of that time. Taking all that into account, it is his inability to understand the essence of being a survivor in the real world that makes his ideas idiotic and himself a real nincompoop. There are a range of arguments about the identity of the real nincompoop in Anton Chekhov's short story "A Nincompoop" that can only be made through reading the story over and over again. However, through the analysis that is presented above, it is safe to conclude that the employer, despite his good intentions, is practicing an unpractical teaching method for an idealistic lesson. Therefore, his student, the governess, is not the character who is being represented as a nincompoop, but it is the employer who is being mocked as one.