

Key

THE BRIDGE

by Nicolai Chukovski

^{1900's}
This story's action is set in early-20th century Russia, but it deals with a situation that could happen anywhere in the world. If you have ever felt unsure of yourself or of your future, you'll see that the conflict in "The Bridge" is universal. As you read, think of how the story's title points directly to its theme. ← Theme?

"I just can't see him going," Gramma said, turning over the potato cake in the pan with a knife. "He's scared of everything." "He'll go," Aunt Nadya replied from the depth of the kitchen. "He has to go. He'll be better off there." why? where?

Gramma sighed loudly. She wasn't at all convinced Kostya would be better off there.

Kostya had heard every word. He stood not far from the open window amid the currant shrubs, quickly picking the berries and shoving them into his mouth. Since it had been decided he would have to go away, Kostya was spending hours at a time in these shrubs, their luxurious, end-of-July growth serving as an excellent hiding place. He liked to be alone and not have to talk to anyone. Through the branches creeping over the windowsill into the shade-filled kitchen, he could see Gramma's hands moving over the kerosene burner and hear the sizzling of the frying pancakes.

"He's scared of everything . . . everything," Gramma repeated. "He's afraid to buy a stamp in the post office. How'll he go?" ! Characterization

Kostya's mouth was getting sour from the berries. He worked his way out of the shrubbery, found his bicycle on the dark porch, and he opened the kitchen door. Aunt Nadya was peeling potatoes—since it was Sunday she hadn't gone to work in the factory but was helping Gramma. The peels coiled like spirals over Aunt Nadya's thick, manlike fingers. Gramma, a squat, little woman, had just turned over another sizzling pancake. She looked up at the boy. Kostya knew that the mountain of potato cakes piled up in a plate at the burner was being baked for him—one more sign that his going-away was final.

"I'm going for a little ride," he said glumly, hoisting the small bicycle over his shoulder. depressed

Gramma sighed, stepping heavily from foot to foot. "Go on, have your last ride," Aunt Nadya told him without lifting her face from the potatoes. "You won't be doing it there."

Kostya walked the bicycle through the open wicket¹ and threw his long leg over the frame. The bike, a juvenile size bought a long time ago, had become too small for him. This year he had shot up to almost twice his previous height, though otherwise he remained the same: narrow shoulders, a thin neck with a protruding Adam's apple, and slightly protuberant², translucent ears. Mechanically Kostya rode out into the alley, hedged by dusty elder thickets. His sharp knees almost touched his chin but he didn't mind—

¹ wicket: *n.* small gate

² protuberant: *adj.* sticking out.

Grown up physically, but still a child emotionally and mentally. ! Characterization

Why is he hiding? From what?

Where are his parents?

Why is he riding a small bike?

deep-fried mashed potato shaped like a pancake

a berry

Not his choice. He didn't decide himself. It was decided for him.

oil for lighting fires, used for light + cooking.

Won't be returning home

! symbol: used to go forward

He doesn't care that he's childish