

Our first show on Stage I this season is *Vladimir*, which is about an independent journalist in Putin's Russia who is on the brink of breaking a major story. As the reporter gets closer to exposing the truth, she and her sources find themselves in serious danger and have to make choices about how far they are willing to go to do what is right. Playwright Erika Sheffer did a lot of research on Russian history, culture, and real-life free speech conflicts involving the Russian government as she crafted her fictional piece. She has put together the following list of books, stories and films that provide further context for those who are interested in exploring the issues raised in the play.

Books:

***The Man Without a Face* by Masha Gessen**

Charts Putin's rise to power. Wonderful context of a country sliding toward the abyss.

***Words Will Break Cement: The Passion of Pussy Riot* by Mahsa Gessen**

An incredible insight into Russian activist punk musicians, Pussy Riot. The trio was imprisoned for their work and continued their activism in exile.

***The Future is History: How Totalitarianism Reclaimed Russia* by Masha Gessen**

Gessen's book follows four people who were born at what was meant to be the birth of Russian democracy. The book is an epic story of how it became a totalitarian society instead.

***Other Russias* by Victoria Lamasko**

Journalist and artist Lamasko travels through Russia capturing ordinary life through illustrations and interviews. Sort of a journalistic graphic novel.

***Winter Is Coming* by Gary Kasparov**

Russian chess Grandmaster Gary Kasparov attempted to challenge Putin in a presidential run in 2008. His campaign was thwarted. He is a vocal anti-Putin activist who has been living in exile since 2013.

Fiction:

A few short stories to get into the Russian psyche by some masters.

“The Death of Ivan Ilyich” by Leo Tolstoy

“The Overcoat” by Nikolai Gogol

Films:

Navalny

The Oscar-winning documentary follows Russian activist and opposition leader Alexey Navalny as he investigates his own attempted murder. Navalny died in prison in Russia in 2024.

Endangered

A searing documentary on the state of journalism in the world today. The film follows several journalists, who put their personal safety on the line around the world, as their profession becomes increasingly perilous.