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# Meeting with winners of 2021 Presidential Prize for young cultural professionals and for writing and art for children and young people

6-8 minutes

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**President of Russia Vladimir Putin:** Good afternoon, friends.

First of all, I would like to congratulate you and all your colleagues on Cultural Workers' Day. This holiday was established to honour an enormous cohort of people, true enthusiasts who dedicated their lives to Russian culture. Magnificent and inexhaustible, our culture reflects the entire diversity of the spiritual and historical legacy and traditions of our multiethnic country. It is one of the most essential foundations of the Russian state and society that strengthens our unity and develops a sense and understanding of the Motherland in our young citizens.

Russia's cultural space was created by the hard work and talent of many generations of artists, authors and composers, actors and musicians. It is represented by a unique network of museums, libraries, cultural centres, concert venues and folk centres. In addition to the iconic Hermitage, the Bolshoi Theatre and the Mariinsky Theatre, there are thousands of local cultural facilities across Russia. Children's theatres and libraries are another entirely Russian achievement of cultural education,

available all over the country.

## **See also**

Russian culture has made an invaluable contribution to the development of world civilisation. For centuries, Russian masters of literature, music and fine arts have given humankind new aesthetic traditions and, more importantly, ideals and meanings that have become moral and spiritual guidelines for millions of people and entire generations.

Russian culture is human-centric. The best classical works are focused on the inner life, personal quests and emotional experiences of human beings. They ask relevant questions, help people to think, understand and draw conclusions.

It is not surprising that the Russian mentality is known for taking things to heart. We feel very strongly about other people's pain and injustice. We are capable of feeling sincere joy about others' success and helping those who truly need our help.

Russian culture always protected Russia's national identity. While readily taking in all the best and constructive, it patently rejected anything false or momentary, anything that would disrupt the continuity of our spiritual values, moral principles, and historical memory.

This unique quality reliably protects the Russian people even today, when seemingly eternal concepts and norms are being eroded and undermined in different countries, history is being distorted, and the laws of nature itself are being violated.

In a number of countries – mainly the so-called Western countries – these processes have not just permeated politics, society, sports and education, but they often run the show in these areas, they are being aggressively imposed.

Suffice it to mention the notion of cancel culture, which generally refers to public ostracism, boycotting, and sometimes withholding, even oblivion of certain obvious facts, books, names of historical and modern public figures, writers or anyone who does not fit into modern patterns, no matter how absurd they actually are.

This did not begin yesterday. For example, as we are well aware, Hollywood has regularly released films that declared the United States the sole defeater of Nazism. Those films effectively “cancelled” the courage and heroism, and the victory achieved by the Red Army, which made a decisive contribution – suffice it to consider the numbers of military units that fought on the Eastern Front, near Germany – that decisive contribution has been cancelled as well.

When Japan annually commemorates the victims of the nuclear bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August, they either bashfully keep silent about who dropped the bombs on their cities, or they write flagrant nonsense, that some abstract allies did it. This is what their textbooks say. They simply prefer not to talk about the fact that it was the United States that committed such as a terrible and unjustified massacre at the end of World War II. They have cynically decided to “cancel” this truth as well.

Children's writer J. K. Rowling, the author of books that have sold hundreds of millions of copies around the world, has recently been cancelled in much the same way for displeasing supporters of so-called gender freedoms.

Today, they are trying to cancel an entire millennium-old country, our people. I am referring to the mounting discrimination against everything related to Russia, about the trend that is gaining

momentum in a number of Western states – with the complete connivance and sometimes with encouragement from the ruling elite.

This notorious cancel culture has turned into the cancellation of culture. The names Tchaikovsky, Shostakovich and Rachmaninoff are blacked out on concert posters. Russian writers and their books are banned. The last time a campaign like this happened, it was the Nazis who began destroying objectionable literature in Germany. We know well and remember from documentaries the burning of books right on public squares.

It is impossible to imagine this in our country. We are insured against this largely owing to domestic culture. For us, this is inseparable from our Motherland, from Russia where there is no room for ethnic intolerance and where representatives of dozens of nationalities and ethnic groups have lived, worked and brought up children for centuries. Our society is proud of its cultural diversity – the strength and advantage of our state.

I think many people know, have seen how a street artist painted Fyodor Dostoyevsky on a wall of a building. The West has now “cancelled” or “is cancelling” this Russian writer. This still gives us the hope that mutual sympathy and culture, which link and unite all of us, will pave the way for truth, that art and education will only promote wisdom, kindness and other time-tested values, as they should.

I am confident that it will not be otherwise in Russia. One of the confirmations of this is the creativity of the participants in our meeting – the winners of prizes for young cultural figures and for works for children.

Friends, you belong to different generations and serve

in different areas of Russian culture and education. Yet, you are equally loyal to them. You are striving to multiply their rich traditions and bring up new generations of thinking and spiritually rich people who are able to perceive and pass on traditional values, who know and respect the past and present of their homeland, who are the true citizens of Russia.

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