

Stuck-Up, High Maintenance and Oh So Demanding

The Word's Worth

[Michele A. Berdy's The Word's Worth](#)

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Вообразать: to imagine; to be conceited

When I looked at Russian words for snobs and snooty people, I was looking primarily at words for adults and found lots of men. But children, young people and women are all capable of being stuck-up show-offs with ridiculous demands, too.

Let's start with the verb *вообразать*, a word that can be used for both genders. In most circumstances this verb means to imagine: *Она вообразала себя кинозвездой* (She imagined she was a movie star). But sometimes your imagination gets the best of you, and you begin to act like you are a movie star, that is, you start thinking that you are more important than you really are.

When that happens, you're called *воображала* (a smarty pants). This is not exclusively a child's word, but you do tend to hear it more in and about the teen-and-under set. Руслан называл Ванечку козлом, а я утверждала, что Танька **✘** воображала (Ruslan called Vanya a goat and I made it clear that Tanya was a smarty-pants).

Another form of this damning word is *воображуля*. Sometimes people with high opinions of themselves also have extremely high demands, even when they are children: У неё дочка Юля, модница и воображуля; в садик не ходит, дома ей до смерти скучно, она изводит отца и мать, требуя то розовое платьице, то помаду, то маленькую мягкую зебру (She has a little girl named Julia who is a fashion plate and very high maintenance. She won't go to nursery school, is bored to death at home, and drives her father and mother crazy demanding a pink dress or lipstick or maybe a little stuffed zebra).

But you can find big brats, too: Из лимузина вылезла, сияя нарядами, красавица манекенщица, воображуля-капризница по имени Нелли (Out of the limousine stepped a gorgeous model, all dolled up, a very high-maintenance and demanding woman named Nellie).

In my set, *воображуля* is also used for dogs who are артисты (actors) and pretend they are starving, misunderstood, and generally not accorded the attention (and treats) they deserve. Here Russian really shines, for example, as someone describes a high-strung pup: Он невероятно общительный и ласковый, а на следующий день – капризуля, воображуля и ничего-не-хочуля (One day he's unbelievably friendly and sweet, and the next day he's all picky, snotty, and don't-want-no-nothing). Ah, Russian diminutives...

Kids have their own way of dealing with stuck-up peers: they make up обзывалки (taunts). Here's one: “Воображуля номер 5, Разреши по морде дать!” (loosely translated as “Stinky stuck-up No. 5, Run before we tan your hide!”)

You can use the phrase *задирать нос* (to look down one's nose) to describe someone who acts superior or to praise someone who doesn't: Саня — сын миллионера, воспитанный и умный парень, который не задирает нос (Sanya is a millionaire's son, but he is smart and nicely brought up, and he doesn't act like a bigshot).

There are several words that are almost exclusively used to describe women who are conceited and demanding. One is the verb *зазнаваться* (to act superior, haughty): Давно не звонишь, важная стала, что ли? Зазналась? (You haven't called in a while. You all important now or something? Look down your nose at me?) Someone who behaves like this is *зазнайка*. You hear this when your kids are going through the terrible teens: Я не люблю Маринку потому, что она зазнайка и считает себя самой красивой (I don't like Marina because she's stuck-up and thinks she the prettiest girl). Here's a double whammy: Терпеть не могу твою Вику, зазнайку и воображулю (I can't stand your Vika. She's a conceited little know-it-all).

I'm so glad I'm not in high school.

Then there are the Ф-words. My theory – completely off the top of my head and totally untested — is that Ф-words sound bad in association with the little word *фу*, that all-purpose burst of sound that expresses disgust. First, we have the old-fashioned but evocative *фря*: a woman who think she is very important. To be honest, I haven't heard this in day-to-day

speech, and most of the examples I've found just have it as an exclamation with other old-fashioned expletives, like: Экая фря! (Full of herself, that one!)

Then there are two words that I think of as subsets of фря. Фифа is woman or girl who is silly and only cares about having fun and nice things. She can be demanding, no matter where she is: Пусть мужики спят в палатках без пододеяльников, а женщинам, если они такие фифи, найдём пододеяльники (The guys can sleep in the tents without any sheets, and if some of the women are princesses, we'll find them sheets). Depending on your level of annoyance with them — and their level of demands — they can be called фифочки or even финтифлюшки. The later can be a trinket, a tasty little morsel, a treat or a flibbertigibbet: Жениться ему надо ☒ лишь бы не на какой-нибудь финтифлюшке (He needs to get married, just not to some tootsie).

Another Very Bad Sort of woman is недотрога (untouchable), someone who is not just modest but is prudish in an annoying, superior sort of way. Historically, Russians have not liked this sort of woman and often don't really believe she is as modest as she portrays herself: Обзовёт нахалом — не обращай внимания, она только притворяется недотрогой (If she calls you a lout, don't pay any attention. Being a prude is just an act).

In fact, this dislike for high-falutin' pure-as-snow, unfriendly women seems to be part of the culture from way back. One guy complained over a beer: Строит из себя недотрогу. Царевна-несмеяна, блин (Makes out like she's so pure. Yeah, right. The Princess Who Never Laughed, my ass).

Now if you think I've been unfair to women this week, not to worry. Men will get theirs, too...

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