

# *Escaping Oppressive Regimes*

## Lesson Plan

**Grade Level:** 6-8

**Curriculum Focus:** World History

**Lesson Duration:** Three class periods

### ***Student Objectives***

- Recall the 20th-century regimes highlighted in the program.
- Review stories from the program about people who escaped these regimes.
- Create a mock interview with people from each story.

### ***Materials***

- Video on *unitedstreaming: Fighting 20th Century Tyranny*

Search for this video by using the video title (or a portion of it) as the keyword.

Selected clips that support this lesson plan:

- Escape Stories
- Computer with Internet access
- Print and online resources about life during the Holocaust, in communist East Berlin, and in Cuba under Fidel Castro
- Paper and pencil

### ***Procedures***

1. After watching the program, ask students to define the word "regime." (An oppressive, often tyrannical, system of government) What regimes did these people escape? (Fidel Castro's socialist regime in Cuba, the communist regime of East Germany, and the Nazi regime during World War II)
2. Ask students to review the people whose stories were featured. You may want to write the following names and brief summaries on the board:
  - **Orestes Lorenzo Perez:** A Cuban Air Force pilot who illegally flew from Cuba to Florida in March 1991. In December 1992, he returned to pick up his wife, Victoria, and their two sons, Reyneil, 11, and Alejandro, six.

- **Heinz Meixner:** A 20-year-old Austrian who rescued his East German fiancée, Margit, and her mother from East Berlin. In May 1963, he drove a small convertible under the barrier, past the guards.
  - **Hartmut Richter:** A young man who escaped East Berlin in 1966 by swimming the canal that formed part of the border between East and West Berlin.
  - **Eric Ross:** A butcher in East Berlin who smuggled his wife and eight children into West Berlin in his refrigerated meat truck.
  - **Kristine Chiger:** An eight-year-old Polish girl who hid in a sewer with her family during the Holocaust. She lived in the Polish city of Lvov, then part of the Soviet Union. Leopold Socha, a Polish Catholic sewer worker, risked his life to help her family.
3. Divide students into five groups, assigning one of the above stories to each group. (Assign Hartmut Richter's story to the group with the fewest number of people.) Teams will work together to write and perform a mock interview with people from the story. The interview should include a discussion about the regime as well as the escape. Encourage teams to use what they learned in the program, outside research, and their own thoughts about how it must have felt to experience such ordeals. Provide the following guiding questions as students develop their interviews.
- What regime did you escape from?
  - Why did you want to leave?
  - What was life like?
  - Why couldn't you easily leave?
  - What country did you escape to?
  - How did you plan and prepare for your escape?
  - Can you describe your escape?
  - Did anyone help you?
  - What would have happened to anyone who helped you?
  - Were your family members involved in the escape?
  - What would have happened if you had been caught?
  - What was the most difficult or terrifying part of your escape?
  - What sacrifices did you make?
  - What did you leave behind?
  - Was your escape worth the risks you took?
4. Give teams two class periods to write their questions and answers and practice their interviews. (You may want to give teams a five-minute time limit for their interview.)

5. Have teams perform their interviews for the class. Afterwards, discuss the people in these stories. Ask students: What kinds of people were they? What qualities did they possess? Would you have attempted such escapes?

## Assessment

Use the following three-point rubric to evaluate students' work during this lesson.

- **3 points:** Students recalled several key details about the tyrannical regimes featured in the program and the escape stories; participated actively in class discussions; worked well in a team; wrote and performed a thoughtful, comprehensive interview that included several details about the regime, the escape, and personal thoughts about the experience.
- **2 points:** Students recalled some key details about the tyrannical regimes featured in the program and the escape stories; participated somewhat in class discussions; worked satisfactorily in a team; wrote and performed a satisfactory interview with some details about the regime, the escape, and personal thoughts about the experience.
- **1 point:** Students recalled few or no key details about the tyrannical regimes featured in the program and the escape stories; did not participate in class discussions; did not work well in a team; wrote and performed an incomplete interview with few details about the regime, the escape, and personal thoughts about the experience.

## Vocabulary

### communism

*Definition:* A classless society in which the state owns and controls all wealth; a system of government in which a single, usually totalitarian, party holds power and the state controls the economy

*Context:* During the Cold War, ordinary Germans went to extraordinary lengths to escape the oppression of communism.

### regime

*Definition:* An oppressive, often tyrannical, system of government

*Context:* Ever since the 1959 Cuban Revolution, some people have been prepared to risk their lives to escape Fidel Castro's regime.

### socialism

*Definition:* A political system in which there is no private property

*Context:* Many people have escaped Fidel Castro's brand of socialism for American capitalism and democracy.

### tyranny

*Definition:* Cruel, unjust, and oppressive government; a country or state ruled by an unjust and oppressive leader

*Context:* In World War II, many Jews took great risks to escape the tyranny of the Nazis.

## **Academic Standards**

### **Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL)**

McREL's Content Knowledge: A Compendium of Standards and Benchmarks for K-12 Education addresses 14 content areas. To view the standards and benchmarks, visit <http://www.mcrel.org/>.

This lesson plan addresses the following national standards:

- Geography – Human Systems: Understands the forces of cooperation and conflict that shape the divisions of Earth's surface
- History – World History: Understands the search for community, stability, and peace in an interdependent world
- Language Arts – Viewing: Uses viewing skills and strategies to understand and interpret visual media; Writing: Gathers and uses information for research purposes

### **The National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS)**

NCSS has developed national guidelines for teaching social studies. To become a member of NCSS, or to view the standards online, go to <http://www.socialstudies.org>

This lesson plan addresses the following thematic standards:

- Time, Continuity, and Change
  - Individuals, Groups, and Institutions
  - Power, Authority, and Governance
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## **Support Materials**

Develop custom worksheets, educational puzzles, online quizzes, and more with the free teaching tools offered on the [Discoveryschool.com](http://www.discoveryschool.com) Web site. Create and print support materials, or save them to a Custom Classroom account for future use. To learn more, visit

- <http://school.discovery.com/teachingtools/teachingtools.html>