

The Russian Revolution: The Fate of the Romanovs

Lesson Plan

Grade Level: 9-12

Curriculum Focus: World History

Lesson Duration: Two class periods

Student Objectives

- Examine some of the strong personalities involved in the Russian Revolution and the assassination of the royal family
- Write and perform a historical drama about these personalities and events

Materials

- Discovery School video on *unitedstreaming: Last of the Czars: Revolution*
Search for this video by using the video title (or a portion of it) as the keyword.

Selected clips that support this lesson plan:

- Rumors about Rasputin
 - Nicholas Flees to Alexandra's Arms
 - Alexandra Hears Bad News
 - Lenin Wants Romanov Family Dead
 - Lenin and the Bolsheviks
 - No Hope for the Romanovs
- Resources about important figures involved in the Russian Revolution (History textbooks, biographies, and other reference sources such as encyclopedias)

Procedures

1. Tell students that they are going to work in small groups to write a one-act play based on what they have learned about a figure associated with the Russian Revolution.
2. Discuss with students the people intimately involved with the Russian Revolution. Explain that each group will select one or more of those people on whom to base its drama. The list will probably include the following:
 - Rasputin
 - Nicholas

- Alexandra
 - One or more of the Romanov children: Alexis, Tatiana, Olga, Marie, and Anastasia
 - Lenin
 - Kerensky
3. Direct each group to review multiple reference sources (primary and secondary) to learn more about the individual or individuals it will focus on. In particular, explain that students can lend authenticity to their dramas by finding passages from their subjects' writings or reported conversations that they may want to include in the dialogue. If necessary, help groups to assign a reference source to each group member. All members should then report back to the group, which will, by consensus, pick one event from the person's life (or persons' lives) to dramatize.
 4. Go over with the class the important elements of a one-act play:
 - The script must contain both dialogue and stage directions.
 - A one-act play usually deals with a single conflict and occurs in a single setting.
 - As one or more characters try to solve the conflict, the act builds to a climax. Then the play shows the characters' reactions to the climax and moves on to a final outcome.
 - A play based on a historical event must stick to some historical facts but will also include fictional details, especially in the dialogue and actions.
 5. In a series of mini-lessons, as detailed here, review with students how to proceed from prewriting the act, through writing, to revising and editing. Give the groups time to apply each mini-lesson.

PREWRITING

- a) In addition to a main character (one of the individuals previously listed), the act needs at least one other character—a friend or foe of the main character. In this case, the other character may also be from the list above or may be another character, even an imaginary character.
- b) The characters need to have a conflict between themselves or with someone else or something else. Ask the characters to recall or imagine conflicts involving their characters—either real-life problems they faced or problems that the group decides the characters might have faced.
- c) Selecting one of those problems, each group should think about and prepare notes on how the characters will respond to the problem and how the problem will be solved.
- d) Each group should imagine how its characters look (including how they dress), sound, and act, and take notes for later use.
- e) Each group must also be clear on where and when the act takes place, so the students should jot down their thoughts on background scenery, furniture, and props.

WRITING

- a) When students in each group are ready to move on to the actual drafting stage, let them figure out how multiple authors can work together. Review with them, if necessary, the mechanics of listing characters and of writing stage directions and dialogue.
- b) Advise students to follow their prewriting notes to unfold the scene: introducing characters and the problem, building suspense, and winding up with a historically accurate or believable ending. Students should, however, be free to abandon prewriting notes that may take them to dead ends – and rethink their act.
- c) Remind students that, at the end of the act, the audience needs to know what each character is doing and feeling – or, at least, what each character’s situation is.
- d) If they have not done so earlier, students should now title their act.

REVISING AND EDITING

Share with students a checklist such as the following, giving them time to revise as necessary so that they can answer yes to all the questions:

- a) Content: Does the dialogue or stage directions clearly show the character(s) facing a conflict, lead up to a conclusion, and always include characters’ reactions?
 - b) Style: Is the dialogue realistic and easy for an actor to say?
 - c) Grammar, Usage, and Mechanics: Have you checked to make sure capitalization, spelling, and matters such as agreement, comparison, and pronoun references are correct?
6. Ask each group to perform, or at least read, its act for the rest of the class.

Discussion Questions

1. How did Rasputin gain such a strong influence over the czarina? What was his effect on the process of policy making within Russian government? What qualities do you think Rasputin had that made him a powerful character in Russia?
2. What was Rasputin’s role in the coming of the Russian Revolution?
3. Discuss the validity of the following statement: “For the first time in history, a revolution is being engineered not from below but from above, not by people against their government, but by the government against the welfare of the people.” How does this statement reflect the course of events that took place in the life of the czar?
4. What caused the Russian people to revolt against the czar in March 1917?
5. Discuss the reasons Lenin had for killing the Romanov family. Do you think he was right in ordering their death?
6. How did Lenin obtain the power base he needed to overthrow the provisional government of Alexander Kerensky? Why do you think Lenin received support from the Russian citizens? What methods did he use?

7. Describe the results of the Bolshevik ascension to power as the Kerensky government fell in November of 1917.
8. Why do you think Lenin felt it was important to hide the truth about the murder of the czar and his family?

Assessment

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

- 3 points: Student's historical drama includes historically accurate elements; well-formulated story line with conflict and outcome; smooth, realistic dialogue and clear stage directions.
- 2 points: Students' historical drama has some basis in historical fact; inadequately developed story line; some unrealistic dialogue and incomplete stage directions.
- 1 point: Students' historical drama lacks historical accuracy; inadequate outcome to conflict examined in the act; unrealistic dialogue and incomplete stage directions.

Vocabulary

abdicate

Definition: To step down from a high office, such as the throne, and formally relinquish power.

Context: Nicholas had given up; he had inwardly abdicated some six months before the actual abdication.

abyss

Definition: A huge chasm or gulf in the earth. Also, the dwelling place of evil spirits (hell).

Context: If the czar does not take steps to rid Russia of this evil man, he will send Russia into an abyss from which there is no way back.

asylum

Definition: Protection from arrest and extradition given to political refugees from a foreign country.

Context: The provisional government asked Great Britain to give political asylum to the czar.

autocracy

Definition: Government by a single ruler with unlimited power.

Context: We celebrated when the czar abdicated because we thought autocracy was over, replaced by a democratic republic.

coup d'état

Definition: A sudden overthrow of the government, usually by a small group of people in authority or in the military.

Context: The provisional government was swept from power in a coup d'état staged by the Bolsheviks.

debauchery

Definition: Extreme indulgence in worldly pleasures such as drinking alcohol.

Context: Rasputin was careful to act respectful in the czarina's presence as though all rumors of debauchery were only rumors.

depose

Definition: To remove a monarch from the throne, usually by way of revolution.

Context: The czar took on the life of a common citizen after he was deposed by the Revolutionary Guard.

monarchist

Definition: A political ally of the monarchy. One who supports the existence and policies of the reigning king or queen.

Context: One prominent monarchist in the Duma had the courage to say what others were thinking about Rasputin.

pariah

Definition: An outcast; someone who has been rejected by society.

Context: With no place to find asylum, the former czar was now an international pariah.

provisional government

Definition: A temporary government set up as a caretaker until a permanent leadership can be installed by way of democratic elections.

Context: Alexander Kerensky rapidly became the leader of the provisional government after the czar abdicated.

regime

Definition: A government in power or the period in which a certain government is in power.

Context: The new regime seized power in what was a coup d'etat.

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/compendium/browse.asp>.

This lesson plan addresses the following national standards:

- World History – Global Expansion and Encounter: Understands major global trends from 1450 to 1770.
- World History – An Age of Revolutions: Understands patterns of global change in the era of Western military and economic dominance from 1800 to 1914.



- World History – A Half-Century of Crisis and Achievement: Understands reform, revolution, and social change in the world economy of the early 20th century.
- World History – A Half-Century of Crisis and Achievement: Understands the causes and global consequences of World War I
- Language Arts - Uses the general skills and strategies of the writing process; uses the stylistic and rhetorical aspects of writing

The National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS)

The National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) has developed national standards to provide guidelines for teaching social studies. To view the standards online, go to <http://www.socialstudies.org/standards/strands/>.

This lesson plan addresses the following thematic standards:

- Time, Continuity, and Change
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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 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>