

THE LOCKE SOCIETY

LIFE, LIBERTY & EDUCATION



Unit

Topic

USSR/World War II

Stalin's Genocides

**The texts used for the lesson contain graphic details. Use your best judgment on whether to use these texts with your students.*

Lesson Plan

Aim

To commemorate the victims of Stalin's genocides by creating a memorial that will educate people today and in the future about Stalin's deadly regime.

Rationale

Most historians and history teachers agree that preserving history is of the utmost importance; as history gets lost to time, so do its lessons. The choice to nearly omit the horrific atrocities of Joseph Stalin from many curriculums is a dangerous one. Erasing Stalin's deadly acts from history and keeping his brutality a secret from future generations puts the world at risk. The history of Stalin's genocides is difficult to uncover as censorship, and his connection to socialism/communism, has caused a lack of available resources that reveal the truth. Many survivors of his evil regime have tried to develop memorials for their loved ones so that the world would not forget the pain and terror that Stalin inflicted on his own people in the name of communism; however, most of these memorials no longer exist. It is time for Joseph Stalin to take his rightful place in history among the most inhumane, evil, and ruthless tyrants whose merciless rule took the lives of millions of innocent people. This lesson focuses on Stalin's genocides, not as a question of whether or not it was genocide, as the answer to that is undoubtedly yes, even though the United Nations appeased Stalin's request to alter the definition of genocide so that his actions would not fall under that category, and educators have followed suit. (Stalin's position among the Allies of World War II is for a discussion in that context in which students come to understand the war against Nazi Germany.) This lesson does not question Stalin's brutality, like many others so wrongfully do, nor does it hide the suffering inflicted on people living under communism. This lesson will be one that changes the future as more and more generations learn the truth about Stalin and his murderous communist regime including the deadly gulag system and the Holodomor.

Student Learning Objectives

Students will be able to explore ways that they can help the world remember the victims of Stalin's genocides by creating a plan for a memorial.

Students will be able to collaborate with their peers to develop a plan by making decisions on content, context, style, and more.



Civics Connection

- Why is this topic one of particular importance for participation in a democratic society?
- How have people in power affected political, social, and economic developments regarding the freedom and protection of their people?

*See the *Civics Connection Through Questioning* guide in *Civics* for more ideas.

Vocabulary

Joseph Stalin	Oppression	Ukraine	Kulak	Collectivization
NKVD	Genocide	Siberia	Communism	Commune
Repression	Holodomor	Gulag	Socialism	Great Terror

Materials and Resources

*The texts used for the lesson contain graphic details. Use your best judgment on whether to use these texts with your students.

1. Text: *The Organization of Stalin's Oppressive Regime*

2. Text: *Gulags: Stalin's Deadly Prison Camps*

3. Text: *The Holodomor: Premeditated Famine*

Source: Shearer, David R. "Social Disorder, Mass Repression, and the NKVD during the 1930s." *Cahiers Du Monde Russe*, vol. 42, no. 2/4, 2001, pp. 505–534. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/20174643. Accessed 20 May 2020.

Source: Hosford, David, Pamela Kachurin, and Thomas Lamont. "Gulag: Soviet Prison Camps and Their Legacy." *Gulaghistory.org*, A Project of the National Park Service and the National Resource Center for Russian, East European and Central Asian Studies, Harvard University.

Source: Kul'chyts'kyi, Stanislav, et al. "The Holodomor and Its Consequences in the Ukrainian Countryside." *Harvard Ukrainian Studies*, vol. 30, no. 1/4, 2008, pp. 1–13. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/23611463. Accessed 20 May 2020.

Source: Ghosh, Palash. "How Many People Did Joseph Stalin Kill?" *International Business Times*. 2013.

Source: <https://www.loc.gov/exhibits/archives/gula.html>

4. Handout: Options for Memorial

5. Handout: Plan for the Memorial for the Victims of Stalin's Genocides

Procedure

Do Now:

Interpret the meaning of the following quote in the context of history by Winston Churchill:

"We occasionally stumble over the truth but most of us pick ourselves up and hurry off as if nothing had happened."



Lesson:

**The texts used for the lesson contain graphic details. Use your best judgment on whether to use these texts with your students.*

[Students should have background knowledge on communism.] The teacher will ask students what they know about Stalin to gauge their perception of him. Connect the lesson to the “do now” quote by explaining that many current historians debate Stalin’s intentions. The teacher may discuss possible reasons why this history is rarely discussed. Then, the teacher will review the readings with students including the main idea and essential details. (Suggestion: Students may be given time to read the texts prior to the lesson.)

Collaborative/Independent Work:

**The texts used for the lesson contain graphic details. Use your best judgment on whether to use these texts with your students.*

1. After reading about Stalin’s genocides and the terror that his regime brought to millions of people, students will independently brainstorm ideas of how they would ensure the memory of his victims is not lost to history. (Giving students time to think on their own allows them to explore their own ideas before the group discussion.)
2. Students will meet in their groups and share the ideas they came up with on their own. Every idea must be heard, and students should discuss which type of memorial they will choose to plan together as a group. All choices must be approved by the teacher. If groups need assistance, they may use the options provided which include guided questions.
3. Students will use the worksheet provided to create their plan and envision its development. *This lesson only requires that a plan be developed to get students thinking, not to construct an actual memorial. The lesson may be modified into a mini-project with appropriate construction at the teacher’s discretion for what it is appropriate for his/her class.*

Share:

Students will share their plans for a memorial with the class. Students may provide feedback to each group after they share their plan to include why they think it would be successful and suggestions for what to add or change.

Close:

Students will respond to the following question independently first, then discuss it with the class:

Why is this topic one of particular importance for participation in a democratic society?

Modifications

- The teacher may modify the text for the appropriate reading and/or maturity level of his/her students. If texts are modified it is important not to change meaning or message.
- The teacher may provide the memorial options to students prior to meeting with their group and allow them to choose from the list.
- The teacher may provide additional scaffolds or a specific planning sheet for each memorial choice.



Extension

Students may research current museums and exhibits that commemorate the victims of Stalin's genocides. Students should determine if the museum or exhibit is still running, as many have run out of funding. Students will research what information was included and excluded, as well as how the museum functions/functioned in telling this history to its visitors.

Notes

**Use discretion for activities according to what is appropriate for your class.*

****The texts used for the lesson contain graphic details. Use your best judgment on whether to use these texts with your students.***

****Research for this topic is limited due to discrepancies in accurate details, including statistics, which have been left out due to this issue. As more reliable research is revealed, these documents will be updated.***



The Organization of Stalin's Oppressive Regime: An Overview

Life in the Soviet Union under Stalin's rule was dictated by the surveillance of the secret police. Established at the beginning of the Bolshevik regime in 1917, the secret police sought to expel threats to the state by investigating "counterrevolutionary" activity. After a series of title changes, the secret police, known as the NKVD (People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs) became the deadly tool of Stalin's power. Eventually combining the duties of the police and state security, the NKVD served out the orders that eradicated the Soviet Union of anyone deemed an enemy of the state. The largest operations of mass repression and expulsion were those accused of political and economic sabotage of Stalin's communist order. Dekulakization, the arrest, deportation, and/or execution of prosperous peasants, was an effort to destroy the resistance of those whose success and livelihood threatened the legitimacy of communism. Through the confiscation of property, execution, imprisonment, and exile, the repression of peasants in the countryside was Stalin's ultimate tool of forcing the acceptance of communism. Still, peasants who submitted to Stalin's demands, but managed to find a slight advantage, were ultimately exterminated primarily through forced famine.

The NKVD was ordered to round up millions of people for "threatening" the supremacy of communism. Millions of innocent people were ripped away from their loved ones forever, many without being able to say goodbye. The NKVD's task to uncover "conspirators" brought with it breaches of security, privacy, and a massive amount of terror. Local officers were required to conduct surveillance of their neighborhoods, relying on information gathered from "doormen, shop keepers, shoe-shine men, waiters and other service personnel." Using the "passport" system, a scheme to deny "enemies of the state" entry into any socialist space, including major cities and border areas, the police tracked every individual entering and leaving the areas under their watch.

Stalin and the NKVD associated all criminal acts with class struggle and counterrevolutionary activity. In addition to arresting kulaks, prosperous peasants who were considered the greatest enemies of the state and were defeated by collectivization, the NKVD arrested criminals of all ranges of crimes suggesting that the kulaks would ally themselves with criminals to challenge Stalin's power. Nearly anyone could be arrested with the broad definition of "socially harmful elements". Mass repressions which brought either immediate death, deportation, or exile were constant.

Stalin's strategy for creating his "utopia" utilized every aspect of deceit possible. He unscrupulously used show trials to mislead his people into believing that justice dictated the horrific events. His scripted trials that showed high up members of the communist party admitting to crimes and sabotage led people to believe that if these



figures could be guilty, so could millions of Soviet citizens. The people were incentivized to turn each other in for acts against the state. Some denounced others out of the promise of a reward if they did so, such as getting part or all of the denounced person's property. Some even denounced others out of fear that if they did not, they may be accused of counterrevolutionary acts themselves.

Many people fell under the accusation of Article 58 which was used to charge and sentence political prisoners. The definition of what constituted a crime under this article was so vague that it could apply to nearly everyone. Smiling at the wrong time or in the wrong way could prompt arrest, as well as just being suspect of anti-Soviet sentiment. Most people arrested under Article 58 were forced to confess to a fake counterrevolutionary activity that they were innocent of, and some "crimes," such as a suspected person thought to be considering speaking out against the state, were simply assigned to people to warrant an inevitable arrest. Article 58 was most commonly used during the Great Terror (1937-1938) when Stalin sent millions of political prisoners to their deaths.

The Great Terror, although it could be argued that Stalin's entire rule was consumed by terror, began with Order 00447. Signed in 1937 by the head of the NKVD, Nikolai Ezhov, to swiftly increase the number of Soviet citizens sent to their deaths in what is also known as the Great Purge, this order widened the scope of who were considered criminals. Order 00447 unleashed an inconceivable amount of bloodshed and panic; families were ruthlessly torn apart in secret, torture and intimidation were at a new level, and human rights suffered under the most hostile of attacks.

During Stalin's rule, the population of the Soviet Union suffered significant decreases, even before the invasion during World War II. Stalin, with his ultimate power, ensured that information of his murderous regime did not make its way around the world. He stifled rumors by fixing records and announcing that the population of the Soviet Union had grown. This lie to his own people and the world set in motion the cover-up of the devastating forced famine and murderous gulag system, which is still difficult to research today due to a lack of reliable sources.

**Statistics are not used in this document as the numbers are widely disagreed upon by historians. It is argued that Stalin killed between 20 million to 60 million people.*

Sources:

Shearer, David R. "Social Disorder, Mass Repression, and the NKVD during the 1930s." *Cahiers Du Monde Russe*, vol. 42, no. 2/4, 2001, pp. 505–534. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/20174643. Accessed 20 May 2020.

Hosford, David, Pamela Kachurin, and Thomas Lamont. "Gulag: Soviet Prison Camps and Their Legacy." *Gulaghistory.org*, A Project of the National Park Service and the National Resource Center for Russian, East European and Central Asian Studies, Harvard University.

Kul'chyts'kyi, Stanislav, et al. "The Holodomor and Its Consequences in the Ukrainian Countryside." *Harvard Ukrainian Studies*, vol. 30, no. 1/4, 2008, pp. 1–13. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/23611463. Accessed 20 May 2020.



Gulags: Stalin's Deadly Prison Camps

The gulag provided Stalin with a way to organize and disguise his campaigns of terror. Gulags were forced labor camps, which were started soon after the revolution of 1917, but use of them significantly increased during Stalin's rule, and could better be described as death camps. In the gulag, death inevitably came from immediate execution, starvation, exposure to severe weather, exhaustion, or torture. Much of the truth about gulags is masked by Stalin's words and by historians who compare them to Nazi concentration camps, which are arguably more well-known. Both being centers of extreme suffering and death, the comparison is clear; however, not if one takes Stalin's word as truth. Some historians today, like Stalin did during his time, recognize gulags as labor camps, places that were used to push the country's industrialization to new heights. Still, gulags were used ultimately as a tool in Stalin's genocide.

Who were sent to gulags?

If those deemed "enemies of the state" were not exiled to Siberia, a region far north that is nearly inhabitable due to the severe and deadly cold, they were either killed or sent to a gulag. Many of the gulags were located in remote regions of Siberia and the Far North, with unbearable temperatures adding to the torture that the prisoners endured. Prisoners included criminals who committed acts of murder and robbery, criminals who committed minor acts that would go unpunished in most other countries, such as an unexcused absence from work, and the most "dangerous" criminal of all, political opponents. Although Stalin made it appear that justice was served through trials, the reality was that the "trial" lasted for no more than a few minutes, if there was a trial at all, as the outcome was predetermined.

The most common criminal code used, especially during the Great Terror, was Article 58, which charged and sentenced political prisoners. The language of this code was so vague and had such a broad interpretation that it could be applied to nearly everyone in almost every case. A person was guilty if they knowingly engaged in counter-revolutionary activity either directly or indirectly, and/or if they could have foreseen the dangerous consequences of their action or inaction to the well-being of the state. Most people arrested under Article 58 were forced to confess, through torture and intimidation, to a "crime" that they did not commit.

Arrests and Imprisonment

The procedure for arresting "criminals" *appeared* to follow legal processes; however, legality and justice was only a façade to cover up the abuses of human rights. People were arrested swiftly, at any time, although reports suggest that they were usually at night, and without given any particular reason at the time of arrest. Some even believed they would return home quickly since they were innocent of any crime;



however, authorities ensured that no one would be able to claim innocence or sometimes even see their family again. Newly accused were usually questioned on their way to prison, often in a disguised vehicle, such as a delivery truck, so that the public would not notice how often these arrests happened.

Prisoners experienced harsh and debilitating conditions while awaiting their sentencing. The cells were overcrowded, sometimes with hundreds to over a thousand more people than the cells were meant to hold. Lice ran rampant, feeding off the prisoners, disease spread easily, and foul odors and extreme temperatures made it difficult to breathe. Food was scarce, and if there was food it was nearly inedible. Still, political prisoners were forced to suffer even more inhumane conditions. These prisoners were forced into cramped solitary confinement cells, while suffering under other debilitating conditions.

Before the prisoners were “sentenced” they needed to confess to the “crime” for which they were accused, even though most were innocent. In order to force a confession, the prisoners were interrogated through brutal torture. Some of their tactics included more restrictions on sleep and food, being beaten, burned, and cut among other harmful acts. Some were placed in a “punishment cell” for up to 20 days. There were cells shaped like chimneys, which were standing cells, in which a prisoner could never sit, and if they collapsed, they would become painfully wedged in the cell forcing them to stand up again. Some prisoners were in these cells after or in congruence with other forms of torture. Among the most effective means of forcing a confession was to use personal information about the prisoner gathered through the intelligence work, or threatening to arrest the prisoner’s spouse and/or children.

In the end, most prisoners confessed to crimes they did not commit because they felt the outcome was inevitable, or they thought they were saving their loved ones. However, those left behind after a loved one was taken away experienced challenges in their communities, including ostracization, loss of jobs, and having to sell their possessions to keep themselves and their children alive. Most women did not know where their husbands were, and the restricted communication meant some never found out. Children were sometimes sent to a prison camp with both parents if both had to go, where they lived in special juvenile quarters, or children were sent to an orphanage, where they would be treated poorly as well.

Sentencing included either immediate execution, exile, or what the majority would receive - a number of years in a labor camp. Although some historians note that these were terms for a certain number of years, the reality was that a prisoner was likely to be re-sentenced for additional years if they survived the original sentence.



Living Conditions and Daily Life in the Gulag

If one survived the brutal deportation by train or boat, they made it to a pre-existing gulag, or were forced to build it themselves from the ground up. Survival was a never-ending struggle as back-breaking labor, starvation, criminals, and the climate all affected the health of the prisoners.

Hunger was a constant feeling, physically and psychologically. Prisoners were fed based on how much they worked. There were three cauldrons of food for which prisoners would be designated to stand in line: the first cauldron was for those who did not meet their quota, which was a small portion of bread for breakfast, about a liter of thin soup for lunch, and a spoonful of grain with a liter of thin soup for dinner. The second cauldron offered a sliver more of the same food, and the third cauldron offered a little more than the second but may have included a piece of spoiled fish. Those who fulfilled significantly more than their daily quota would receive the third cauldron, but most would suffer death if they did get this cauldron as the energy they expended would be compromised and quickly lead to starvation. Most prisoners were forced to stand in line for the first cauldron as it was nearly impossible to meet 100% of their quota for the second cauldron.

Daily life included a swift “breakfast” and immediately being escorted to work. The prisoners were told they would be killed if a foot was out of line on their march to work. At lunchtime, prisoners were allowed to rest and either eat the rest of the bread they had from breakfast or a meager bit of soup. Work then continued until dark when the prisoners would march back to their living quarters, exhausted, starving, and near collapse. Before “eating” and going to sleep, the prisoners would have to wait outside in the frigid cold for a slow roll call to confirm that everyone was accounted for. The work day reportedly lasted 10-12 hours, although other reports suggest that people worked much longer.

There were a variety of “jobs” in the labor camps of which most would inevitably lead to death, while others allowed prisoners to barely survive. The hardest jobs were those that were outdoors, exposing prisoners to extreme and deadly weather. For example, cutting trees was a job known as “green execution” because of the likelihood of the prisoners dying. Other harsh jobs included mining and construction. If one had a connection with a prison guard or something to bribe a guard with, one might work in the bathhouse or the kitchen, with the possibility of some power to control who could eat and rest.

The living conditions were severely challenging as frigid temperatures and a lack of hygiene added to the difficulty of survival. Watchtowers and watchmen were constantly monitoring the movements of the prisoners, ready to kill on the spot if one got too close to a fence. According to some reports, the camp was supposed to have buildings for laundry, a bathhouse, a kitchen, a shoemaker, and a tailor. Their



sleeping quarters may have been two-tiered beds along the walls; however, the influx of prisoners made most sleeping quarters long wooden shelves, which they would have to squeeze onto. Cleanliness was a constant issue as many would either be too exhausted to wait in lines for the bathhouse, or the bathhouse may not have been functioning.

Criminals who were imprisoned due to murder or assault were put in charge of the other prisoners. They were hostile and merciless, often stealing from the prisoners (i.e. the shoes or clothes they were wearing), and forcing them to carry out commands of the guards under the threat of violence and intimidation.

The frequency of death, illness, and injuries at the labor camps is nearly incalculable; however, reports suggest that the hospitals were largely sought after as a brief escape from the deadly working conditions. Doctors were only allowed to admit a limited number of patients, and the spaces were often taken up by criminals who were only allowed in because of bribes or threats. Still, prisoners went to great lengths to go to the hospital; some accounts include harming oneself with a tool they were working with, or other means, just to be admitted.

The atrocities committed in the gulags made them one of Stalin's machines of murder. The number of victims is strongly debated, but estimates are well above several million. While some historians argue that Stalin's industrialization efforts were necessary, let it not be forgotten that there are many industrialized nations that did not gain their wealth or growth through a system of gulags.

Sources:

Shearer, David R. "Social Disorder, Mass Repression, and the NKVD during the 1930s." *Cahiers Du Monde Russe*, vol. 42, no. 2/4, 2001, pp. 505–534. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/20174643. Accessed 20 May 2020.

Hosford, David, Pamela Kachurin, and Thomas Lamont. "Gulag: Soviet Prison Camps and Their Legacy." *Gulaghistory.org*, A Project of the National Park Service and the National Resource Center for Russian, East European and Central Asian Studies, Harvard University.



The Holodomor: Premeditated Famine

Karl Marx's outline of achieving a utopian state rested largely on collectivization and the seizure of private property. Peasants, who were considered to be part of the "petty bourgeoisie" along with tradesmen, craftsmen, and merchants, were thought to impede the goals of communism with their perception of wealth and profit. With this argument, Stalin set out to ensure that there would be no threats to the supremacy of communism.

Like Lenin, his predecessor, Stalin experienced opposition to his collectivization efforts. Despite initial public declarations of moderate policies, Stalin knew that any trace of private property would only be temporary as agriculture became an entity of the state. Although communism claims ownership is of the people, it is really the state that owns all property; this includes food, which is redistributed to the people after the government seizes its "grain procurement" from collectives. State ownership of the means of production meant that no one was permitted to profit from their hard work; the fruits of their labor would be equally distributed among all regardless of each person's contribution. In order to attain the status of this policy, Stalin began dekulakization in the countryside.

Stalin regarded the highest form of collectivization to be the establishment of a commune; a group of people who share responsibilities and all resources that are distributed equally amongst members. This consolidation of resources allowed the state to spend more time and money on rapid industrialization. In late 1929, Stalin made the order to intensify collectivization to reach the goal of having a majority of peasant households become part of the collective.

One of the greatest points of resistance facing Stalin was from Ukraine, which prospered from having the most productive agriculture. Stalin's determination to end the will of the Ukrainian people to resist communism led to catastrophic and deadly circumstances. Stalin raised the quota of grain procurement on Ukraine enough to leave them starving for food. He sent members of the NKVD to search houses for those keeping any bits of grain for themselves; even a handful was confiscated, and the household would be punished by deportation or execution. Eventually, these searches included confiscation of all food products from the household. At the same time, there was a blockade on Ukraine, and Kuban, another region suffering under the same conditions, that prevented starving peasants from escaping to other regions; the passport system and a heavy presence of NKVD guards contributed to the blockade as well. After the confiscations, the people were forced to depend on the state for food, which was scarce, guaranteeing the supremacy of communism in the Soviet Union.



By 1933, the population of Ukraine was decimated as a result of Stalin's manufactured famine; however, Stalin led the world to believe otherwise. Stalin stopped any rumor that millions had been dying in the USSR by announcing that the population had grown several million from 1930 to 1933, and his word was accepted as fact, then and often today. In order to maintain the cover-up of his murderous regime, Stalin ended publication of demographic data. All records from the time, including data from the famine, were processed only through secret channels and remain in the state archives.

The systematic murder of the Ukrainian peasants is indeed an example of genocide committed by Stalin. Disguised as "state grain procurements," this deliberate act of using forced famine as a weapon is undoubtedly one of Stalin's genocides in his efforts of establishing communism. The target of this particular genocide, prosperous peasants, were those who believed in capitalist principles, including the right to private property. Unfortunately, the history of the Holodomor is little known around the world. Those who suffered during this devastating period did not discuss it out of fear that themselves and their children would be accused of propagating anti-Soviet messages.

Source:

Kul'chyts'kyi, Stanislav, et al. "The Holodomor and Its Consequences in the Ukrainian Countryside." *Harvard Ukrainian Studies*, vol. 30, no. 1/4, 2008, pp. 1–13. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/23611463. Accessed 20 May 2020.



Options for Memorial

1

Museum

Develop plans for a museum that exposes Stalin's genocides and commemorates the victims who suffered under his regime. This option should include a floor plan explaining the rooms of the museum.

Guiding Questions: What are some exhibits that you would feature? How would you retrieve the information for them? How will you capture the emotion of the horrific events?

2

Monument

Design a structural monument that could be displayed to remember the victims of Stalin's genocides. This option should include a sketch of the monument and an explanation of symbols/style.

Guiding Questions: Will your monument be abstract? What symbols will you use and what do they mean? How will visitors know the meaning behind the monument? Where will you construct this monument?

3

Traveling Exhibit

Develop a plan for a portable exhibit to educate people about Stalin's genocides and to remember those who suffered under his regime. This option should include an explanation of objects (including media) and other formats of material that will be shown at the exhibit.

Guiding Questions: Where will you bring your exhibit? What are some portable exhibits that you would feature? How would you retrieve the information for them? How will you capture the emotion of the horrific events?

*All choices and ideas must be approved by the teacher.



Plan for the Memorial for Victims of Stalin's Genocides

Type of Memorial: **A monument must include a sketch.*

Explain why you selected this memorial format:

What historical content is being featured in the memorial?

How is this historical content being featured in the memorial? (visual)

How will you retrieve the information for your memorial?

What do you want your visitors to think about after viewing your memorial?

