NEW RESOURCES ON RUSSIA, EURASIA, AND EASTERN EUROPE

The Russian and East European Center is a US Department of Education-designated National Resource Center, committed to providing information and service to K-12 teachers. If you are interested in the Center’s workshops, onsite presentations, or curricular materials, please contact the Center or check its webpage: www.reec.uiuc.edu. The webpage features a special section for K-12 teachers, which includes an extensive annotated bibliography of resources, information on the Center’s multimedia lending library, annotated links to relevant web sites, and more.

BOOKS (reviewed by Elizabeth Talbot)

Auch, Alison. Welcome to Russia. Compass Point Books, 2002. (K-2)

The book begins with a child who welcomes the reader to the country and then shares a bit about family life under headings such as “At Home,” “At Work,” and “Let’s Eat.” After the description of the climate, there are two pages of “Fun Facts,” followed by a Russian folk tale. The writing is appropriate for the intended audience with no more than two sentences on each page or topic. Unfortunately, the map of the country incorrectly includes Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Armenia as part of Russia.


Starting with short introductions on Russia’s history, geography and natural resources, the book addresses and captures well the salient features of changes in Russian society over the last decade. The author does so without glossing over some very real challenges, yet the overall impression is that the Russian people are coming to grips with the problems. This impression is reinforced by thirty one-paragraph commentaries by Russians from many age groups and walks of life. The abundance of sharp, color photographs throughout the book, especially those of everyday life, also helps the reader relate to Russia and Russians. The book offers a more accessible presentation of changes and current conditions than most books for this age group.


This is a history of the Russian revolutions of 1905 and 1917 with an emphasis on Lenin’s life and his role in the formation, rise and triumph of the Bolsheviks. The writing in the text is uneven at times with many instances of well-articulated presentations but some confusing ones, especially in the chapter, “Groundwork for Revolution,” which includes a misquotation of historian W. Bruce Lincoln. Despite its shortcomings, the book would be useful for students writing reports on this period.


A brief history of the Soviet Union is sketched in the introduction to this book, which is part of the series presenting first-person narratives to convey the social textures underlying historical
periods. Five chapters focus on earning a living, making a home, getting an education, redefining morality, and making communism work. Many of the writers are from the political, intellectual or artistic fields, but more ordinary workers are included as well. The majority of the selections are accounts about the Stalinist years, which ended in 1953. It would have been helpful to have accounts from the post-Stalinist eras. Nonetheless, this book would be a valuable resource and should enhance classroom discussion on the topic.


This collection of speeches and excerpts spans the period of the Cold War from Churchill’s 1946 speech in which he introduced the term “iron curtain” through the comments of Wolfgang Thierese in 2002 when he presented pieces of the Berlin Wall to the Secretary General of the UN. Most are by political leaders addressing the US Senate or the UN. Each selection is preceded by a biographical sketch and an introduction to the political circumstances being addressed. In a few cases it would have been helpful to point out inflammatory language or misleading assertions made in the speeches. A well-written introduction covers the history of conflicts during the Cold War, yet it does not fail to note the cooperation of the US and USSR in space. The book should be a useful addition to Cold War collections because it provides access to speeches by Harry S. Truman, Joseph McCarthy, Margaret Chase Smith, Mao Tse-tung, Nikita Khrushchev, Albert Einstein, Mikhail Gorbachev and others in one volume.


This book is a compilation of excerpts from books and articles about Gorbachev and his time that were published from 1988 to 1998. The authors include prominent journalists who were often eye-witness observers, academics, a former ambassador to the Soviet Union and two well-known Russians, the physicist Andrei Sakharov and the writer Tatyana Tolstaya. While the selections are all extremely well written and clear, readers without a basic understanding of this period of history may find the numerous unfamiliar names and references to events of the time difficult to absorb. Therefore, the book might best serve as supplementary reading for highly motivated students.


The book covers the Russian revolution of 1917 and its legacy in the Soviet Union from Stalinism through perestroika, followed by a short section in which communism in other areas of the world and its demise are explored. This is a laudable attempt. However, in trying to do so much in only 72 pages, the author has to assume that the reader already has a background in history. On the other hand, a wealth of information is provided by historical photos and reproductions of posters and paintings. While this book has its strengths, the first two volumes of *The Rise and Fall of the Soviet Union* (21st Century Books, 2002) by Ted Gottfried are more comprehensive and clear.


The history of Russia from its origins to 2002 is presented in this anthology of excerpts from books by American and European historians and Russian political figures. It also includes selections from primary sources. With a short introductory survey, readers need a much more extensive knowledge of Russian history to comprehend the readings in this book. Out of the five chapters, the last chapter on “Current Challenges” would probably be the most interesting for high school students. Over all, good narrative histories of Russia would be a better choice for most students.

**CURRICULUM UNIT**

A History of Russia: From Peter the Great to Gorbachev. The Teaching Company – www.TEACH12.com

Thirty-six 30-min. lectures (in VHS/DVD/audio cassettes) by our own Prof. Mark Steinberg (director of REEC and professor of history, UIUC) examine more than 300 years of Russian history through the eyes of its people. Historical themes are made clear by examining the lives of the men and women who, in fact, were Russia.
Lots of visual images and a study guides for the lectures. A good addition to school libraries.

While not a curriculum unit, the magazine *Russian Life* is a useful source of information on Russian history, culture, and current events in short, digestible articles for students. There is also a section on Russian slang for language instruction. For more information see [www.russianlife.net](http://www.russianlife.net)

**VIDEOS**

**“Carpathi: 50 Miles, 50 Years”** 1996: 80 min. New Yorker Video.
In 1931 the Carpathian Mountains of the Ukraine were the home of over a quarter of a million Jews. Sixty-five years later, emigration, the Holocaust, and political turmoil have left less than 1,500. Director Yale Strom chronicles the decay of a culture preserved by the faith and fate of one of its survivors, Zev Godinger.

A well-researched, vibrant chronicle of this devastating conflict detailing the long-held antagonisms that presaged wars to follow. More than 1,600 illustrations, paintings and etchings from the period, bring to life this past conflict.

**“Frontline: The Crash”** 1999: 60 min. WGBH/PBS Production.
Examines the dynamics of the global economy. Ten days after Russia devalued its ruble and defaulted on its debts, the world's major markets tumbled and American investors saw the worth of their savings and retirement funds plummet. Fear spread that the global economy was unraveling and arguments arose over who was to blame.

**“Russian Trinity”** 2001: 84 min. WGBH/PBS Production.
The video charts the course of Stalin's Russia by weaving portraits of three of Russia's most important institutions: the Kremlin, the Lubyanka, and the Bolshoi Theater.

**The Silk Road: An Ancient World of Adventure** 2000: 200 min. NHK Enterprises.
12 episodes retrace the Silk Road (mostly in China). Episodes 9-12 are set in the Tian Shan Mountains. Episode 12 has wonderful images of children of various ethnic backgrounds – Uzbek, Kyrgyz, Uighur, etc.

**“The Stars’ Caravan”** 2001: 60 min.
Director: Arto Halomen
When Kyrgyzstan was granted its independence, its cinema program lost its funding and the people lost their beloved movies. This documentary is the story of a projectionist, who has continued to deliver, often on horseback, the wonder of cinema to his people. Beautiful images of Kyrgyzstan.

**“Children Underground”** 2001:104 min. HBO production.
In a style that is shocking, brutal, and deeply humanistic, filmmaker Edet Belzberg introduces a "family" of homeless children in Bucharest, Romania, begging on the streets, living in subway tunnels, drug addicted, and painfully unaware of the cruel horrors of their existence. As the children's story unfolds, the windows to their individual lives open up, revealing a day-to-day struggle for survival. While the documentary is about young children (as young as 6), it is inappropriate for young children.

**Websites on East-Central Europe**

[http://www.myczechrepublic.com/ My Czech Republic.](http://www.myczechrepublic.com/) is a useful site for history and culture. It covers a range of topics.

[http://www.praguepost.com/ The Prague Post](http://www.praguepost.com/) is an English language weekly that keeps track of current events in the Czech Republic.

Joseph Yanosik, *The Plastic People of the Universe.* A fascinating account of the intersection of rock music, youth culture, and political dissent in 1970s Czechoslovakia. High school students may be interested to read about an instance of young musicians very directly changing the world. Hear a sample of the Plastic’s music and an interview with their one-time lead singer (the Canadian Paul Wilson) at [http://radio.cbc.ca/programs/thismorning/sites/a&e/plastic_010112.html](http://radio.cbc.ca/programs/thismorning/sites/a&e/plastic_010112.html)
http://www.romove.cz/roma  Roma in the Czech Republic. Includes a general history of the Roma, Romani language and an essay on the current situation of the Roma since 1989. Excellent links to other sites and a photo gallery.

http://www.slovakia.org/  The Guide to the Slovak Republic is a wonderful source to find out more about Slovakia. The site covers history, culture, economy, and society.

http://www.slovakspectator.sk/  The Slovak Spectator is an English language weekly that keeps track of current events in the Slovak Republic.

http://hungary.org/hungary/  Hungarian Cultural and Information Center covers a broad range of topics from history and culture to geography and sport. This site contains a good mixture links leading to the Hungarian past and present.

http://www.hungarica.net/  Hungarica.net is a site dedicated to the dissemination of information about Hungarian Culture, Music, History, Cuisine & Tourism.

http://www.poland.pl/  Poland.pl is a good site to keep up with the current Poland. It covers many categories of current issues.

http://www.uvi.si/eng/  Republic of Slovenia, Public Relations and Media Office is a great site for almost everything you want to know about Slovenia.

http://www.ce-review.org  Central Europe Review. An online journal on central and east European politics, society, and culture. Has a section on resources with country files.

http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/  Library of Congress Country Studies. Excellent site for information on history. Not so useful for current information since many country studies have not been updated since the late 80s and early 90s.

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**Summer Curriculum Development Workshop on Russia for K-12 Educators at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign**

*June 16 - 20, 2004*

The Russian and East European Center at the University of Illinois invites K-12 educators to take part in this intensive workshop to develop a more effective curriculum in Russian studies. The workshop features sessions on Russian history, religion, language, literature, culture, politics, and economy by UI faculty and discussion of curriculum materials and design. Free housing for participants. Some travel assistance grant may be available.

- 25 CPDUs for Illinois teachers;
- 2.5 U of I CEUs for others.

U of I graduate credit also available.

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**Four-Week Study Seminar in Vladimir, St. Petersburg, & Moscow, Russia “Understanding Russia through Everyday Life”**

*June 21 - July 19, 2004*

(Fulbright-Hays GPA grant application pending)

Pending grant approval, we will take a maximum of 15 K-12 teachers to Russia for a four-week short-term seminar. This intensive seminar is structured to assist teachers in developing lesson plans on Russian history, politics, economy, culture, and language through understanding everyday life. Besides lectures by Russian specialists, numerous fieldtrips to relevant historical and cultural sites are planned. Russian language teachers are also encouraged to apply. All participants in the seminar must first take part in the workshop above.

- 100 CPDUs for Illinois teachers;
- 10 U of I CEUs for others.

ISU graduate credit also available.

(approval pending)

For more information, please contact Lynda Park at 217-333-6022 or lypark@uiuc.edu

Application and more info online.

[www.reec.uiuc.edu](http://www.reec.uiuc.edu)