

Conquerors: Peter the Great: Teacher's Guide

Grade Level: 9-12

Curriculum Focus: World History

Lesson Duration: Two class periods

Program Description

Peter the Great ripped Russia out of the Middle Ages and refashioned his country into a key player in military affairs by creating strategic political alliances to advance its economic might. Discover how this great Russian monarch's passion and perseverance spawned military victories, modern cities, and a renewed national pride.

Video Comprehension Questions

- In the years before 1682, why was Russia thought of as “a relic of the Dark Ages?” (*Before 1682, Russia was a nation of 8 million peasants, isolated from the outside world. It had a history of resisting reform and being dominated completely by the czars.*)
- How did Sophia Romanov take control of the Russian crown in 1682? (*Weaving a web of lies and promises, Sophia induced the palace guards to storm the Kremlin and seize control, butchering whatever enemies got in the way. However, Peter and Ivan, the sons of Sophia's stepmother, were the actual heirs to the throne. In 1682, Ivan was too feeble-minded and Peter was too young to assume full power, so they shared the crown, with Sophia as regent.*)
- Why did Sophia eventually lose power to Peter? (*Suspicious that 17-year-old Peter was plotting against her, in 1689 Sophia staged another coup to get rid of him. However, because the palace guards believed that Peter had divine rights to the throne, they abandoned Sophia, and Peter became czar. Peter banished Sophia to live out her days in a distant convent.*)
- What influence did the so-called “German suburb” have on Peter's aspirations for Russia? (*An oasis of culture and technology just three miles outside of Moscow, the “German suburb” both fascinated and frustrated Peter. He enlisted Franz Timmermann to explain the workings of complex European navigation tools such as the sextant, which would make it possible for Peter to build ships and expand his horizons beyond Russia. He combed Europe to find ideas, inventions, and great minds he could bring back to Russia.*)
- What were the most important lessons Peter learned in Amsterdam? (*Peter apprenticed himself with a master shipbuilder to learn all the secrets of the shipbuilding trade, but he had to do it under an assumed identity, as apprenticing a Russian czar would have been too intimidating to a commoner. Peter also hired hundreds of Dutch shipbuilders and captains and transplanted them to Russia so he could build a fleet.*)

- Why did Peter feel he had to challenge the authority of the Russian Orthodox Church, and how did he do it? (*Peter challenged the power of the Russian Orthodox Church because he resented the Church's opposition to change and progress. He forced nobles to shave and cut their hair in the European style and enforced a European dress code, in direct opposition to long-held Orthodox practices.*)
 - Why did Peter melt down the bells from Russia's churches? (*After his defeat by Charles of Sweden, Peter was left with the task of rebuilding his army. With no raw materials at hand, he used the bronze he melted from the church bells to build an array of new weapons.*)
 - What motivated Peter to build St. Petersburg? (*Peter wanted to build St. Petersburg to celebrate his eventual victory over Charles XII of Sweden and to have a new capital that would be both a window on the West and a naval outlet on the Baltic Sea.*)
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Lesson Plan

Student Objectives

Students will understand:

- Peter the Great modernized Russia, which had been left behind in the arts and sciences.
- Peter the Great was inspired by what he saw in Western Europe on his travels.

Materials

- *Conquerors: Peter the Great* video and VCR, or DVD and DVD player
- History textbooks and time lines, biographies of Peter the Great, and other reference materials about the late 17th and early 18th centuries
- Markers and other art supplies

Procedures

1. Invite students to demonstrate their knowledge of Peter the Great by adopting his persona—writing in the first person as if they were Peter the Great. As Peter the Great, they should write five or more entries in his travel journal or letters to his wife, Catherine. They can mix journal entries and letters or stick to one genre only. All the entries should be written as if Peter were traveling somewhere in Europe. Have students assume that Peter wrote the journal entries with the intention of keeping them private. Explain that, according to biographer Robert K. Massie, when Peter was away from home, he really did write to Catherine every three or four days.
2. Share a sample of correspondence from Peter to Catherine:

Berlin, October 2, 1712: Yesterday I arrived here and I went to see the King. Yesterday morning, he came to me and last night I went to the Queen. I send you as many oysters as I could find. I couldn't get any more because they say the plague has broken out in Hamburg and it is forbidden to bring anything from there.



3. Help students analyze how much hard information comes across in Peter's short letter from Berlin: where Peter wrote from and when; what he did in Berlin; what he sent along with the letter as a gift to his wife; what new development had occurred elsewhere in the country he was visiting. Point out to students that correspondence from a traveler often mixes small, personal details with larger-scale information about a journey. The letters and journal entries that your students write should contain not only the emotions students suspect Peter may have been feeling but also real news about the world he was exploring on his trips. Students can discover when Peter would have learned about specific events in Europe – events worth recording in his journal or letters – by reviewing printed and electronic history textbooks, biographies, and chronologies showing where Peter was when and what news he may have heard about or seen firsthand.
4. Brainstorm with the students to draw up a list of topics that Peter might have written about in his journal or letters to Catherine. A partial list would include the following:
 - Peter's thoughts as he traveled in disguise so that he could learn about the progress of the West without giving away his identity
 - Peter's thoughts about the Church in Russia
 - Peter's plans for the Russian military – especially the navy
 - Peter's thoughts about other monarchs in Europe – especially Charles XII of Sweden
 - Peter's interest in science – especially new instruments such as the microscope
5. Also challenge students to show in their made-up journal entries and letters the range of moods Peter, like most people, was capable of:
 - Love for Catherine and concern for their children
 - Misery over his son Alexis
 - Violent anger
 - Awe at the progress of the West
 - Competitiveness with other countries
6. Tell students that the journal entries and letters should reflect actual trips that Peter took – the dates he was away and the places he visited at those times.
7. You can have students decorate the paper they use for journal entries and correspondence with designs Peter may have seen in Russia or on his trips abroad.

Discussion Questions

1. Peter felt his country had been isolated from progress too long, and he looked to Europe as the center of culture and technology. If you felt isolated in your community today, where would you look for inspiration and ideas for advancement? Would you necessarily need to travel as far and wide as Peter did to find what you need? What other resources could you tap into?



2. Peter struggled to bring Russia out of the Dark Ages and into a more modern existence. Today, many (underdeveloped) developing countries are striving toward the same goal. Are the obstacles faced by such countries today the same ones faced by 17th century Russia? Analyze the similarities and differences you can identify in their situations.
3. Peter sensed a large gap in his background and knowledge and set out to fill that gap by learning everything he could about the world beyond Russia's borders. Select a current world leader whom you feel could stand to learn more about something important to his or her country's future. Name the leader, explain what he or she needs to learn, and suggest a strategy for attaining that knowledge.
4. Peter the Great seemed to be completely fascinated by cities. What fascinates you about cities? If Peter were to reappear today, what three cities would you show him? Explain your choices.
5. Peter the Great had his own son killed because of an act of treason. Do you think his son deserved this punishment? How do you think Peter felt about ordering the death of his own son? Do you think he should have done this or was there another option for punishment?
6. Although Peter brought many positive changes to Russia during his reign, he was still a dictator with absolute power. How would you feel if you had lived in Russia during his reign? Would you have been a supporter? Explain the reasons for your answer.

Assessment

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

- 3 points: Student's journal or letters include at least five entries; includes many historical facts appropriate to the time and place of the written piece; shows correct grammar, usage, and mechanics.
- 2 points: Student's journal or letters include five entries; includes some historical facts appropriate to the time and place of the written piece; shows mostly correct grammar, usage, and mechanics.
- 1 point: Student's journal or letters include fewer than five entries; does not include historical facts; shows significant errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics.

Vocabulary

decree

Definition: An order usually having the force of law.

Context: A European dress code was enforced by decree.

interrogation

Definition: A systematic and formal questioning.

Context: Suspecting a plot against him, Peter forced his guards to undergo cruel interrogation until the truth came out.



regent

Definition: One who governs a kingdom in the minority, absence, or disability of the sovereign.

Context: Ivan and Peter shared the crown, with Sophia as regent.

regime

Definition: A form of government.

Context: The clock was already ticking on Sophia's regime.

sacrilege

Definition: Gross irreverence toward a hallowed person, place, or thing.

Context: Many thought Peter's decision to melt down Russia's church bells to make weapons was sacrilege, but he thought it was progress.

serfs

Definition: Members of a servile feudal class subject to the will of their lord.

Context: The Russian serfs were enslaved to grinding poverty and harsh physical labor.

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 how European society experienced political, economic, and cultural transformations in an age of global intercommunication between 1450 and 1750.
- Geography – Human Systems: Understands the forces of cooperation and conflict that shape the divisions of Earth's surface.

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
- People, Places, and Environment



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>
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