

**Course of Study:**

European History, Western Civilization, or World History Course

**Unit:**

May be used during unit on Stalinism or the Impact of Totalitarianism in general

**Topic:**

*Crime and Punishment*

**Vital Theme(s):**

**Values, beliefs, political ideas, and institutions:** The basic principles of influential religions, philosophies, and ideologies. The interplay among ideas, moral values, and leadership, especially in the evolution of democratic institutions. The tensions between freedom and security, liberty and equality, diversity and commonality in human affairs.

**Comparative history of major developments:** The characteristics of revolutionary, reactionary, and reform periods across time and place. Imperialism, ancient and modern. Comparative instances of slavery and emancipation, feudalism and centralization, human success and failure, wisdom and folly. Comparative elites and aristocracies; the role of family, wealth, and merit.

“Vital Themes and Narratives,” *Building a United States History Curriculum*. Westlake, OH: National Council for History Education, 2005, pp. 10-11.

**Lesson:**

*Using primary sources to understand the definition of crime and the face of punishment in a totalitarian state such as the Stalinist Soviet Union*

**Rationale for lesson and the use of *Vital Themes*:**

Using the Theme of *Values, Beliefs, Political Ideas and Institutions*, the nature of totalitarianism as a modern ideology that demanded adherence to the state can be analyzed and discussed. Of particular study should be the impact that it had on the individuals involved.

This lesson allows students the opportunity to analyze and use several primary sources to gain a better understanding of crime, punishment, and the implementation of justice in a totalitarian state. Using the theme of *Comparative history of major developments*, teachers may use the broad range of documents in this lesson as a way to allow students to compare crime and punishment in other totalitarian states, as well as more modern instances of political repression.

**Student Objectives:**

Students will be able to:

- Identify and explain *History's Habits of Mind* used in their study
- Analyze primary sources to identify bias and relevant historical information
- Evaluate the relevant *Vital Theme*
- Draw and defend conclusions drawn from primary source information
- Evaluate supporting primary documents based on a crafted thesis

**Benefits for Teachers:**

- Examining a topic through NCHE's *Vital Themes*
- Document approach to history – using primary sources for the teaching of U.S. History
- Have students become historians by “doing history” and by practicing *History's Habits of Mind*
- Engaging students in active reading
- Having students create a thesis and support it with relevant primary documents

**History's Habits of the Mind:**

- Perceive past events as they were experienced by people at that time, develop historical empathy as opposed to present mindedness
- Acquire at one and the same time a comprehension of diverse cultures and of shared humanity

“History’s Habits of the Mind,” *Building a United States History Curriculum*. Westlake, OH: National Council for History Education, 2005, p. 9.

**Materials:**

- Documents from *Lapham's Quarterly* on crime and punishment
- First two are the documents to be used in part one of activity:
  - 1939: Siberia, *Going East*, Eugenia Semyonovna Ginzburg (page 178)
  - 1945: Moscow, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn Remembers a First Love (page 159)
- Additional documents:
  - 1978: Kenya, *Paper, Any Paper*, Ngugi Wa Thiong’o (page 169)
  - 1998: Kabul, Dexter Filkins Sees the World Made Flesh (page 129)
  - 1944: Auschwitz, Left or Right, Primo Levi (page 102)
  - 1937: Leningrad, No Sound, Anna Akhmatova (page 144)
- Written Document Analysis Sheet or A.D.A.P.T. sheet

**Lesson Activities:*****Prerequisites:***

- The establishment of the Soviet Union and the rise of a totalitarian state under Joseph Stalin.

***Motivation for Student Learning:***

- Initiate a class discussion based on either or both of the following quotes:
  - From Winston Churchill, “Nothing can be more abhorrent to democracy than to imprison a person or keep him in prison because he is unpopular. This is really the test of civilization.”
  - From Dostoyevsky: “The degree of civilization in a society can be judged by entering its prisons.”
- The prompt should draw a discussion of some of the Gulag writings of Soviet authors such as Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn

***Activity / Application:***

Divide students into small groups of 4 when the above “Motivation” activity is finished. Provide each group with two copies of each primary source (listed above in first set – teachers may select different documents found in this issue of *Lapham's Quarterly*.)

Each student should perform a document analysis. Students should then pair with the student in their group who has the same document. Finally, students should meet as a whole group and report their findings. Discussion should center on the nature of totalitarianism and its effects as evidenced in the documents, using the motivator quotes as a basis.

*Assessment:*

- Keeping in mind *History's Habits of Mind*, the following assessments are designed to allow students to “do history” and be historians in the truest sense – reflective, analytical, and knowledgeable.
1. **Comprehension** Student groups should summarize their conclusions in the form of a thesis about the nature of totalitarianism based on their study of prisons in Soviet history. The quotes from the motivation can be used to help formulate.
  2. **Analysis and Comprehension:** Students should analyze any of the other documents listed and compare Soviet prison camps to those in other cultures and/or time periods.
  3. **Further Research:** Have students research and analyze any other document related to the topic and explain how it supports their earlier assertion or refutes or modifies it.