

**IMPERIAL RUSSIA
(1721-1917): PETER THE
GREAT**



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Description

Through the use of various primary and secondary sources, students in this lesson will identify, understand and be able to explain how Peter the Great came to power in Russia, how he modernized different segments of Russian society such as the military, the church and the government, and finally how and why he built St. Petersburg as his new capital.

Subjects

European History
World History

Grade Level

11-12

Duration

90 minutes

Tour Links

- Peter the Great Statue, Moscow
- Bronze Horseman, St. Petersburg
- Peter & Paul Cathedral, St Petersburg
- Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg
- Peterhof Palace, St. Petersburg

Essential Questions

- Who was Peter the Great? How did he come to power as tsar in Russia?
- How and why did Peter reform many elements of Russian society?
- Why did Peter establish and build a new capital (St. Petersburg) on the Gulf of Finland?

Academic Summary

He is a man of very hot temper, soon inflamed and very brutal in his passion. He raises his natural heat by drinking much brandy, which he rectifies himself with great application. He is subject to convulsive motions all over his body, and his head seems to be affected with these. He wants not capacity, and has a larger measure of knowledge than might be expected from his education, which was very indifferent. A want of judgment, with an instability of temper, appear in him too often and too evidently.

He is mechanically turned, and seems designed by nature rather to be a ship carpenter than a great prince. This was his chief study and exercise while he stayed here. He wrought much with his own hands and made all about him work at the models of his ships. He told me he designed a great fleet at Azov and with it to attack the Turkish Empire. But he did not seem capable of conducting so great a design, though his conduct in his wars since this has discovered a greater genius in him than appeared at this time.

He was desirous to understand our doctrine, but he did not seem disposed to mend matters in Muscovy. He was, indeed, resolved to encourage learning and to polish his people by sending some of them to travel in other countries and to draw strangers to come and live among them. He seemed apprehensive still of his sister's intrigues. There was a mixture both of passion and severity in his temper. He is resolute, but understands little of war, and seemed not at all inquisitive that way.

Bishop Burnet (from England), "Peter the Great", 1698

It is known to His Majesty that not only many European Christian lands, but also Slavic nations which are in total accord with our Eastern Orthodox Church...agree to count their years from the eighth day after the birth of Christ, that is from the first day of January, and not from the creation of the world, because of the many difficulties and discrepancies of this reckoning. It is now the year 1699 from the birth of Christ, and from the first of January will begin both the new year 1700 and a new century; and so His Majesty has ordered, as a good and useful measure, that from now on time will be reckoned in government offices and dates be noted on documents and property deeds, starting from the first of January 1700. And to celebrate this good undertaking and the new century...in the sovereign city of Moscow...let the reputable citizens arrange decorations of pine, fir, and juniper trees and boughs along the busiest main streets and by the houses of eminent church and lay persons of rank.... Poorer persons should place at least one shrub or bough on their gates or on their house.... Also,...as a sign of rejoicing, wishes for the new year and century will be exchanged, and the following will be organized: when fireworks are lit and guns fired on the great Red Square, let the boyars,[2] the Lords of the Palace, of the Chamber, and the Council, and the eminent personages of Court, Army, and Merchant ranks, each in his own grounds, fire three times from small guns, if they have any, or from muskets and other small arms, and shoot some rockets into the air.

Tsar Peter I, Decree on the New Calendar, 1699

Western dress shall be worn by all the boyars, members of our councils and of our court...gentry of Moscow, secretaries...provincial gentry, gosti,

government officials, streltsy, members of the guilds purveying for our household, citizens of Moscow of all ranks, and residents of provincial cities...excepting the clergy and peasant tillers of the soil. The upper dress shall be of French or Saxon cut, and the lower dress...--waistcoat, trousers, boots, shoes, and hats--shall be of the German type. They shall also ride German saddles. Likewise the womenfolk of all ranks, including the priests', deacons', and church attendants' wives, the wives of the dragoons, the soldiers, and the streltsy, and their children, shall wear Western dresses, hats, jackets, and underwear--undervests and petticoats--and shoes. From now on no one of the abovementioned is to wear Russian dress or Circassian coats, sheepskin coats, or Russian peasant coats, trousers, boots, and shoes. It is also forbidden to ride Russian saddles, and the craftsmen shall not manufacture them or sell them at the marketplaces.

Tsar Peter I, Decree on Western Dress, 1701

On this 20th day of October, after a consultation of the Senate together with the Holy Synod accepted the intention, to his majesty, in the testimony of a proper gratitude for his high grace and paternalism and effort which he for the welfare of state in all his glorious time of ruling and especially during the past Swedish War, deigned to manifest, and all-Russian state in such a strong and good fortune, and his people subjected to such fame over the whole world through his unique ruling led, as that to all quite known, by the name of all the Russian people to ask, so graciously to accept, following the example of others, from them title: the Father of the Fatherland, the Emperor of All Russia, Peter the Great ...

Senate and Synod of the Russian Empire, 1721

Peter Alekseevich Romanov was born to Tsar Alexis Romanov and his second wife, Natalya at the Terem Palace in Moscow on 09 Jun 1672 (reformed date). He was the tsar's fourteenth child, but the first with his new wife (Maria, Alexis's first wife, died in childbirth). Only two of Tsar Alex's sons with his first wife survived infancy, however, leaving Peter only three steps from the throne. Still, the young man had no real expectations of ever ruling Russia with his older half-brothers, Feodor and Ivan, ahead of him. Both brothers, however had serious physical issues. Feodor, who had a superior intellect and was highly educated, was plagued from birth by a disfiguring and debilitating disease that baffled his doctors (now believed to be scurvy). Ivan never really had a chance, as he suffered from serious physical and mental disabilities which left him unable to walk on his own and in need of constant medical help. In 1676, when their father died suddenly of an illness, Feodor, as the oldest son, was elevated to Tsar. Four-year-old Peter didn't expect to see the throne, but his life would change only six years later, in 1682, when the ten-year-old was chosen by Russian nobles to assume the title of Tsar when Feodor died without leaving an heir. The decision to bypass Ivan, although probably practical given his disabilities, was probably the best one for Russia. Sophia, Ivan's sister, however, refused to accept the decision and she tried to stage a revolt. It ultimately failed, but the nobles, knowing their new Tsar was too young to rule, declared Peter and Ivan co-rulers, with Sophia as regent. Although he had little interest in ruling as a young child, as Peter grew up, he slowly matured into his position, and by the time he turned 17, he was strong enough to take power away from his half-sister. In 1689 Peter demanded that Sophia step down and give him full control. When she refused, he had her arrested and forced her into Novodevich Convent in Moscow, where she would be kept in seclusion for the remainder of her life. Ivan V would technically continue his co-rule with Peter for

another seven years until 1696, but he was rarely seen in public, being described by contemporaries as senile, paralytic and almost blind. In reality, Peter Alekseevich Romanov, the 17-year-old tsar of Russia, was on his own at last.

Peter, highly educated in the new doctrines of the enlightenment and scientific revolutions, would radically change Russia from a backwards, medieval state on Europe's periphery to a newly modernizing empire based on western ideas and sweeping reforms. In 1697, Peter traveled to Western Europe, spending time in such countries as England, France, Holland and Austria. Everywhere he went, he studied governmental structures, economic policies, math, science and culture, absorbing as much as possible, determined to bring these ideas back to his native land. When he came home, Peter proceeded to implement his new reforms. Over time, he created Russia's navy, modernized its military, reformed the Russian Orthodox Church, decreed that all noble children had to receive a formal education in the sciences, and restructured the tax code. He even changed the Russian calendar from the Julian calendar used by ancient Rome to the Gregorian calendar used by the western world since 1582. Make no mistake, Russia was still an autocracy with Peter in charge, but it was on its way to taking his place in the modern world.

Peter's greatest accomplishment was building a new capital. In 1703, while fighting a war with the Kingdom of Sweden (a regional power at the time), Peter decided he needed a new capital and a naval port warm enough to be used all year. Russia had recently taken some land away from Sweden on the Gulf of Finland. According to legend, Peter himself chose the spot for his new capital by grabbing an axe and proceeding to build his own cabin. The new city would be called St. Petersburg (after the apostle, of course, not the tsar). Using conscripted labor and prisoners of war, Peter literally drove construction to the point of exhaustion. Tens of thousands of serfs died building Peter's vision. In 1712, Peter was satisfied enough with the work to move the capital from Moscow. In 1714, work began on the new palace, now called Peterhof, based on Peter's architectural interpretations of Versailles. Later tsars would expand the complex to make it the grand palace it is today. With the exception of a 4 year stretch (1728-1732) where the capital was temporarily moved back to Moscow, St. Petersburg would remain the seat of Romanov power for over 200 years, until the family lost control of Russia in the Revolution of 1917.

Peter the Great died at the age of 52 in 1725. By the time he was gone, Russia was no longer the medieval backwoods society he found it. The empire had expanded to become the largest and most powerful in Eastern Europe. He had modernized and reformed many elements of Russian society while increasing his power at the expense of the nobles. He was, in many ways, the eastern version of France's "Sun King" Louis XIV (who ruled at the same time as Peter). It was a golden age for the empire. Today, Peter is known as the father of modern Russia.

Through the use of various primary and secondary sources, students in this lesson will identify, understand and be able to explain how Peter the Great came to power in Russia, how he modernized different segments of Russian society such as the military, the church and the government, and finally how and why he built St. Petersburg as his new capital.

Objectives

1. Students will identify, analyze, understand and be able to explain how Peter the Great came to power in Russia.
2. Students will identify, analyze, understand and be able to explain how Peter the Great modernized and reformed different elements of Russian society such as the military, the church and the government.
3. Students will identify, analyze, understand and be able to explain how and why Peter the Great founded and built his new capital, St. Petersburg.

Procedures

I. Anticipatory Set

- Writing / Question: What did it mean to be “Western”? What is “Western” culture? (5 min)
- Handouts – Copies of the primary sources and readings from the websites listed. (5 min)

II. Body of Lesson

- Lecture / PPT – Peter the Great (30 min)
- Independent Activity – Students read the sources and articles about Peter the Great and how he reformed Russian society. (30 min)
- Suggestion: Have the students read some of the articles for homework to prepare for class discussion.
- Suggestion: Break students into groups and assign different articles to each group.
- Suggestion: AP/Advanced students should concentrate on primary sources.
- Group Activity – Socratic Discussion: Peter the Great (20 min)

III. Closure

- Assessment – Essay / DBQ: Explain in detail how Peter the Great came to power in Russia, how he modernized different segments of Russian society such as the military, the church and the government, and finally how and why he built St. Petersburg as his new capital.
- Alternate DBQ Essay – Using selected primary sources from Peter the Great’s reign, analyze the methods and degrees of success of political and social reforms specifically designed to modernize and westernize the Russian Empire during Peter’s reign.

Extension

On tour: Peterhof Palace, St. Petersburg

While on tour, students in St Petersburg will visit Peterhof Palace where they can see for themselves Peter's crowning jewel. Begun in 1714 and based on Peter's own sketches, the palace was to be a tangible and visible personification of Peter's desire to make Russia into a "western" nation. Peter desperately wanted the palace to rival, and even surpass, the palaces of Western Europe. By 1725, the main portion of the palace was complete, although additions would continue well into the 19th century. During the Second World War, Peterhof was captured by German troops during their drive to capture Leningrad (St. Petersburg's name from 1924 to 1991) and much of the palace suffered severe damage during the occupation. As the German Army was in retreat, the High Command ordered that Peterhof be destroyed, and soldiers set off explosions and fires around the complex that left much of it in ruins. In 1944, when the Russians were able to retake the palace, its name was changed to "Petrodvorets" (Peter's Palace). In 1997, after the fall of the communist regime, the government in Moscow restored its original name. Restoration of the palace, begun almost immediately after Soviet troops recaptured it in 1944, continues to this day.

Web Links

Lesson Plan Websites

- college.cengage.com/history/primary_sources/world/edicts_and_decrees.htm
Peter the Great Edicts and Decrees (primary sources). Great primary sources on everything from adopting the Gregorian calendar to his policy forbidding Russians to have beards. Each decree is short enough to use in class and easy enough for students to be able to read and understand in a few minutes. Highly recommended for all students and teachers.
- washington.cr.k12.ia.us/content/files/30327-PetersReforms.pdf
Peter the Great's Reforms (primary sources / worksheet). Two primary sources with discussion questions, all put together on a one page worksheet applicable for all students studying Peter's reforms.
- www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/petergreat.asp
Peter the Great and the Rise of Russia, 1682-1725 (primary sources). Primary sources about Peter written by contemporaries. From the Modern History Sourcebook at Fordham University. Highly recommended for AP/Advanced students.
- personal.ashland.edu/~jmoser1/westernization.htm
Peter the Great's Efforts at Westernization (website) – from John Moser, Professor of History at Ashland College (OH)
- www.saint-petersburg.com/history/peter1st.asp
Peter the Great (website). From ZAO St. Petersburg, a joint stock company in St. Petersburg, Russia that specializes in travel to the city.
- www.isapwh.com/apwh2fallreadingpeterthegreat.doc
Russia and the West in the Eighteenth Century (study guide with sources). From E. Kent Webb at the International School (WA).
- russiapedia.rt.com/prominent-russians/the-romanov-dynasty/peter-i/
Prominent Russians: Peter the Great (website). Good basic information on the tsar and his reform programs.
- faculty.history.wisc.edu/sommerville/351/CMHPeter.html
Peter the Great and His Pupils, 1689-1730 (website). From JP Sommerville, History professor at the University of Wisconsin, Madison.
- blogs.bu.edu/guidedhistory/historians-craft/hudson-rowland/
Peter the Great and the Modernization of Russia (website / research guide) – from Boston University
- courses.ttu.edu/rusn3304-aqualin/notes/peter.htm
Peter the Great, 1682-1725 (outline notes). Outstanding notes on Peter the Great in outline/bullet form from Anthony Qualin, Professor of Russian History at Texas Tech University.
- www.slideshare.net/h8h8rr/peter-the-great-presentation
Peter the Great (powerpoint)
- www.teachingchannel.org/videos/choosing-primary-source-documents?fd=1
Reading Like a Historian: Primary Source Documents (video). Great 2-minute video on how to incorporate primary sources into the Common Core and history classes. From Shilpa Duvvor of Summit Preparatory Charter High School in Redwood City, CA. Highly recommended for teachers.
- www.youtube.com/watch?v=FIKcX3OeJhw
Peter the Great (video lecture). Lecture for HIS 202 at Yale University. This 45-minute lecture is probably too long to show in most classes, but is highly recommended for AP/Advanced students, even if it needs to be as an out-of-

- class showing. A great example of what to expect from college lectures.
- www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zfhe4BTp2-g
Russia – Land of the Tsars, Part 7 (video). Part of the History Channel’s multi-part series on Russia, this section details Peter’s life and reforms. This 10-minute film is appropriate for all classes.

Background Information

- en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peter_the_Great
Peter the Great – Wikipedia article
- en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Government_reform_of_Peter_the_Great
Government Reform of Peter the Great – Wikipedia article

Other Relevant Passports Lesson Plans

- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/austria/enlightenment-in-austria-reforms-under-josephii
Enlightenment in Austria – Joseph II
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/england/malthus-essay-on-population
Enlightenment in Britain – Malthus: Essay on Population
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/france/age-of-enlightenment-rousseau
Enlightenment in France – Rousseau
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/france/voltaire-candide
Enlightenment in France – Voltaire: Candide

Key Terms

- Moscow
- Peter the Great
- Reforms
- Russia
- St. Petersburg
- Tsar/Czar
- Westernization

