

# **RUSSIAN INVOLVEMENT IN UKRAINE: AN OVERVIEW**



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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 the basics behind Russian involvement in the Ukraine, how the region was incorporated into the Russian Empire before the Great War, how it was incorporated into the Soviet Union in 1922 and why the two countries continue to maintain an uneasy, yet symbiotic relationship since the fall of the USSR in 1991.

## Subjects

World History

## Grade Level

11-12

## Duration

90 minutes

## Tour Links

- Museum of the Great Patriotic War, Kiev
- Motherland Monument, Kiev
- Crimean War Monument, Sevastopol
- Lenin Monument, Kiev
- Friendship Arch, Kiev
- Lenin Statue, Kharkiv

## Essential Questions

- Why do the Russians and the Ukrainians have such an important, yet troubled relationship?
- What are Russia's interests in the Black Sea area?
- How was the relationship between Russia and the Ukraine during the Soviet Era (1922-1991)? How has it been since the break up of the USSR?
- Why did Russian President Putin feel justified in using troops to occupy the Crimea in February 2014?

## Academic Summary

In the former Soviet Union millions of men, women and children fell victims to the cruel actions and policies of the totalitarian regime. The Great Famine of 1932-1933 in Ukraine (Holodomor), which took from 7 million to 10 million innocent lives and became a national tragedy for the Ukrainian people. In this regard we note activities in observance of the seventieth anniversary of this Famine, in particular organized by the Government of Ukraine.

Honoring the seventieth anniversary of the Ukrainian tragedy, we also commemorate the memory of millions of Russians, Kazakhs and representatives of other nationalities who died of starvation in the Volga River region, Northern Caucasus, Kazakhstan and in other parts of the former Soviet Union, as a result of civil war and forced collectivization, leaving deep scars in the consciousness of future generations.

Expressing sympathy to the victims of the Great Famine, we call upon all Member States, the United Nations and its special agencies, international and regional organizations, as well as non-governmental organizations, foundations and associations to pay tribute to the memory of those who perished during that tragic period of history.

Recognizing the importance of raising public awareness on the tragic events in the history of mankind for their prevention in future, we deplore the acts and policies that brought about mass starvation and death of millions of people. We do not want to settle scores with the past. It could not be changed, but we are convinced that exposing violations of human rights, preserving historical records and restoring the dignity of victims through acknowledgement of their suffering, will guide future societies and help to avoid similar catastrophes in the future. We need that as many people as possible learn about this tragedy and consider that this knowledge will strengthen effectiveness of the rule of law and enhance respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.

UN Joint Statement on Holodomor, issued on the 70th Anniversary of the Great Famine of 1932-33, 10 Nov 2003  
(Signed by 25 countries - including Ukraine, Russia, and the US - adopted by the 58th General Assembly of the UN.)

On 27 February 2014, Russian military forces stationed in Crimea Province of the Ukraine seized a number of provincial government buildings and surrounded Ukrainian army and air bases on the peninsula. To many of the region's citizens, the Russians were seen as heroes and liberators. In today's high-tech information-driven world, events halfway across the world unfold live via satellite, Facebook and Twitter. Within minutes of the takeover, images of Russian troops confronting Ukrainian forces were streaming and being tweeted across the country and around the globe. Many Americans and Western Europeans were shocked at Russia's moves. News services scrambled to make sense of the events happening before their eyes, but an analysis of the region's history shows that Russian President Putin's moves should hardly be surprising. Russia and the Ukraine have been locked in a symbiotic relationship since the days before Peter the Great. Ukraine has been independent since 1991, but that is a relatively new development. Faded from memory are the days of the Iron Curtain and the Cold War.

What is now called modern Ukraine was for centuries a land caught between the great powers of Eastern and Southeastern Europe. With Poles (and later Germans) to the northwest, Austrians, Hungarians and Turks to the south and Russians to the east, Ukrainians were often pulled in different directions over time as the geopolitical landscape of Eastern Europe changed over time. Ukraine's rich agricultural lands, long making it the "breadbasket of Eastern Europe", made the region attractive to many different empires. As a Slavic nation, a natural bond with Russia formed through ancient (but common) linguistic, religious and ethnic lines. It was a bond solidified by a long and complicated history going back to the days of Peter the Great, when Russia received Ukrainian territory along the northern coast of the Black Sea as part of a peace settlement with Poland. Since that time, Russian leaders have sought to use their Ukrainian territories as both a buffer zone against attacks and to grant them access to a warm water port. When Poland was partitioned by the great powers in the later years of the 18th century, territory in what is now western Ukraine passed to Russian hands as well. During the Great War, Ukrainian lands temporarily passed to German control under the Treaty of Brest Litovsk in 1918, but was then incorporated into the Soviet Union under Bolshevik rule in 1922.

According to census figures published by the Ukrainian government in Kiev, over 70% of the people who live in the Crimea consider themselves to be of ethnic Russian descent. That figure is hardly surprising. During the Soviet Era (1922-1991), the Kremlin dominated Eastern Europe, including what was then called the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic. Soviet leaders like Nikita Khrushchev and Leonid Brezhnev had intimate knowledge of Ukrainian affairs during the period. Before the opening of the Second World War and subsequent German occupation of the Ukraine (1941-1943), Khrushchev had been the Soviet Chief in the Ukrainian republic. Brezhnev was from born and raised in Dnipodzerzhynsk, a town in modern Ukraine named after the founder of the Cheka (Soviet State Security Police – a forerunner to the KGB).

An analysis of Soviet Ukraine shows an especially complicated history, especially when assessing its relationship to its bigger and more dominant sister republic based in Moscow. Stalin's agricultural plans before the Second World War forced many rural Ukrainian citizens onto collective state farms, while most urban Ukrainians were forced to work in new factories. Russian officials often pointed to Ukraine as a model of their socialist reforms. Agricultural output increased to the point where Ukraine's breadbasket fed much of the Soviet Union. Industrial output in the Ukraine, almost non-existent in the days of the tsar, increased exponentially at the same time. Unfortunately, many Ukrainians suffered during the process. A great famine, arguably deliberately caused by Soviet mismanagement of food resources (and perhaps as a result of an attempted genocide) led to the death of millions of Ukrainians in the 1930s.

Nazi rule during World War II (1941-43) brought destruction, destitution and death to millions in Ukraine. In many ways, since Ukraine was on the front lines of the Eastern Front for most of the war, its citizens suffered like no other. After the establishment of the Iron Curtain, recovery began in earnest. By the 1950s, largely due to Soviet spending, the Ukrainian republic was once again meeting its pre-war levels in agricultural and industrial output. In 1954, in celebration of the 300th anniversary of Ukraine's merger with Tsarist Russia under the Treaty of Pereyaslav, then Soviet leader Khrushchev gave the mostly Russian province of Crimea to Ukraine, further solidifying the relationship. This trend would continue well into the 1980s to a point where Ukrainian reliance on Soviet Russia reached unprecedented levels.

In 1991, the Soviet Union collapsed and Ukraine declared its independence, but the symbiotic relationship continued. Over the years, however, a vocal majority of the Ukrainian public began to call for closer ties to the west, especially after struggles in Russian economy began to surface in the last few years. Over the last year, violence and civil unrest swept over Ukraine, as many citizens took to the streets in opposition to the government's close relationship with Russia. The protests escalated after Ukrainian president Yanukovich accepted Russian promises of an economic bailout over European promises for closer economic ties. In Jan 2014, violence erupted on the streets of Kiev, eventually forcing Yanukovich to flee the country. In Moscow, President Putin then sent troops into the Crimea to "protect" Russian interests and citizens. The international community has yet to respond. Citizens around the world now watch and wait, wondering what the next move by each side will be.

Through the use of various primary and secondary sources, students in this lesson will identify, understand and be able to explain the basics behind Russian involvement in the Ukraine, how the region was incorporated into the Russian Empire before the Great War, how it was incorporated into the Soviet Union in 1922 and why the two countries continue to maintain an uneasy, yet symbiotic relationship since the fall of the USSR in 1991.

## Objectives

1. Students will identify, analyze, understand and be able to explain the historical and cultural basics behind Russian involvement in the Ukraine.
2. Students will identify, analyze, understand and be able to explain how Russian expansionist tendencies between 1700 and 1914 brought the Ukrainian lands into the tsar's empire before the Great War.
3. Students will identify, analyze, understand and be able to explain how and why Ukraine was incorporated into the Soviet Union in 1922.
4. Students will identify, analyze, understand and be able to explain why Russia and Ukraine have continued to maintain an uneasy, yet symbiotic, relationship since the fall of the USSR in 1991.

## Procedures

### I. Anticipatory Set

- Writing / Question: Does any country have the right to a "sphere of influence"? (5 min)
- Handouts – Copies of the primary sources and readings from the websites listed. (5 min)

### II. Body of Lesson

- Lecture / PPT – History of the Ukraine (20 min)
- Video – The Crimean War – excerpts (15 min)
- Independent Activity – Students read the sources and articles on Ukrainian-Russian relations. (20 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: What are the basics of Ukrainian-Russian relations? How was the region incorporated into the Russian Empire before the Great War? Why did Ukraine become part of the Soviet Union in 1922? Why did the two countries continue to maintain an uneasy, yet symbiotic, relationship in the wake of the fall of the USSR? (20 min)

### III. Closure

- Assessment – Essay / DBQ: Explain in detail the basics behind Russian involvement in the Ukraine, how the region was incorporated into the Russian Empire before the Great War, how it was incorporated into the Soviet Union in 1922 and why the two countries continue to maintain an uneasy, yet symbiotic relationship since the fall of the USSR in 1991.
- Alternate Assessment – Debate: Did Putin have justification to occupy the Crimea in Feb 2014?

## Extension

### On tour: Crimean War Monument, Sevastopol, Ukraine

While on tour, students traveling the Black Sea can visit Sevastopol, where they can see for themselves the Crimean War Monument. It memorializes the defenders of Sevastopol, mostly Russian soldiers, who lost their lives during the siege of the city in 1854-55. The city is also home to the Russian Black Sea fleet. Crimea, traditionally a Russian province, was given to Ukraine in 1954 by then Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev.

### On tour: Friendship Arch, Kiev, Ukraine

While on tour, students in Kiev can visit the Friendship Arch where they can see for themselves a visible symbol of Russian and Ukrainian unification. Constructed in 1982 during the Soviet Era, the Arch is made of titanium and is 164 ft. in diameter. A bronze statue of Russian and Ukrainian workers sits under the arch, along with a granite monument depicting the Pereyaslav Council of 1654. The monument sits behind the National Philharmonic Society of Ukraine and on top of the right bank of the Dnieper River.

## Web Links

### Lesson Plan Websites

- [www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1917/dec/03.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1917/dec/03.htm)  
Manifesto to the Ukrainian People (primary source) – written by Vladimir Lenin in 1917
- [www.slate.com/blogs/the\\_world\\_/2014/02/25/separatism\\_in\\_ukraine\\_blame\\_nikita\\_khrushchev\\_for\\_ukraine\\_s\\_newest\\_crisis.html](http://www.slate.com/blogs/the_world_/2014/02/25/separatism_in_ukraine_blame_nikita_khrushchev_for_ukraine_s_newest_crisis.html)  
Khrushchev's Gift (website)
- [www.augb.co.uk/holodomor-the-history.php](http://www.augb.co.uk/holodomor-the-history.php)  
Holodomor (website) – from the Association of Ukrainians in Great Britain
- [http://english.pravda.ru/history/19-02-2009/107129-ussr\\_crimea\\_ukraine-0/](http://english.pravda.ru/history/19-02-2009/107129-ussr_crimea_ukraine-0/)  
USSR: Nikita and the Crimea (website). From Pravda, the Russian state newspaper.
- <http://centerforglobaled.org/sites/default/files/The%20History%20of%20the%20Ukraine.ppt>  
History of the Ukraine (PowerPoint) – from the Center for Global Education
- [www.teachingchannel.org/videos/choosing-primary-source-documents?fd=1](http://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 Duvor of Summit Preparatory Charter High School in Redwood City, CA. Highly recommended for teachers.
- [www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/why-russia-is-flexing-muscle-crimea/](http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/why-russia-is-flexing-muscle-crimea/)  
Why Russia is flexing its muscle in Crimea (video) – from PBS
- [www.youtube.com/watch?v=E4vPVjZNIzo](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E4vPVjZNIzo)  
Why the Ukraine Matters to the US and Russia (video) – from CNN
- [www.youtube.com/watch?v=dDhz2J7ieSw](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dDhz2J7ieSw)  
How Ukraine and Russia Arrived at the Brink (video) – from the Wall Street Journal
- [www.youtube.com/watch?v=nRr-nrJ7xvQ](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nRr-nrJ7xvQ)  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=tQp\\_9zGKNg4](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tQp_9zGKNg4)  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=eaCbRACVr8Y](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eaCbRACVr8Y)  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=x1ktGkGk7tl](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x1ktGkGk7tl)  
Ukraine – The Birth of a Nation (video)  
Part 1: From Rus to Ukraine  
Part 2: Ukraine or Little Russia  
Part 3: Together Forever  
Part 4: Independence  
This outstanding and in depth video series (each one approximately 1 hour), is too long for in-class showings, but is well worth assigning for at-home showings for students particularly interested in understanding Russian-Ukrainian relations. Highly recommended for AP/Advanced students and all teachers.

### Background Information

- <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ukraine>  
Ukraine – Wikipedia article
- [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ukrainian\\_SSR](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ukrainian_SSR)  
Ukrainian SSR – Wikipedia article
- [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ukrainian%E2%80%93Soviet\\_War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ukrainian%E2%80%93Soviet_War)  
Ukrainian Soviet War of 1917-1921 – Wikipedia article
- <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Holodomor>  
Holodomor – Wikipedia article
- [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History\\_of\\_Ukraine](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Ukraine)  
History of Ukraine – Wikipedia article

### Key Terms

- Crimea
- Expansionist
- Holodomor
- Russia
- Ukraine
- Ukrainian SSR
- USSR

