

**KARL MARX AND
FREDRICH ENGELS: THE
COMMUNIST
MANIFESTO (1848)**



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Description

Through an in-depth analysis of various primary and secondary sources, including a thorough examination of the Communist Manifesto itself, students in this lesson will identify, understand and be able to explain Marx's ideas behind history and class struggle, how the Manifesto seeks to explain changes in history through revolutionary activities, and finally how and why Marx and Engels called on the proletariat of their time to revolt against the bourgeoisie. Secure in the knowledge gained in this lesson, students will then be able to judge the effects of Marx's theories over the last 160 years and also to theorize as to whether the Manifesto is still relevant to the global society of the 21st century.

Subjects

European History
World History
Philosophy
Humanities
English / Language Arts
Economics
Civics and Government

Grade Level

11-12

Duration

180 minutes (2 x 90 min)

Tour Links

- Marx-Engels Statue, Berlin
- Museum Karl Marx Haus, Trier
- British Museum, London
- Highgate Cemetery, London

Essential Questions

- Who was Karl Marx? Who was Friedrich Engels?
- What was the *Communist Manifesto*?
- How did the *Manifesto* articulate Marx's view on history and the call for revolution?
- How has the *Manifesto* influenced decisions around the world over the last 160 years?
- Is the *Manifesto* still relevant in the global society of the 21st century?

Academic Summary

A SPECTRE is haunting Europe—the spectre of Communism. All the powers of old Europe have entered into a holy alliance to exorcise this spectre; Pope and Czar, Metternich and Guizot, French Radicals and German police-spies.

Where is the party in opposition that has not been decried as communistic by its opponents in power? Where the Opposition that has not hurled back the branding reproach of Communism, against the more advanced opposition parties, as well as against its reactionary adversaries?

Two things result from this fact.

I. Communism is already acknowledged by all European Powers to be itself a Power.

II. It is high time that Communists should openly, in the face of the whole world, publish their views, their aims, their tendencies, and meet this nursery tale of the Spectre of Communism with a Manifesto of the party itself.

To this end, Communists of various nationalities have assembled in London, and sketched the following manifesto, to be published in the English, French, German, Italian, Flemish and Danish languages.

The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles. Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guild-master and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, a fight that each time ended, either in a revolutionary re-constitution of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes.

In the earlier epochs of history, we find almost everywhere a complicated arrangement of society into various orders, a manifold gradation of social rank. In ancient Rome we have patricians, knights, plebeians, slaves; in the middle ages, feudal lords, vassals, guild-masters, journeymen, apprentices, serfs; in almost all of these classes, again, subordinate gradations.

The modern bourgeois society that has sprouted from the ruins of feudal society, has not done away with class antagonisms. It has but established new classes, new conditions of oppression, new forms of struggle in place of the old ones.

Our epoch, the epoch of the bourgeoisie, possesses, however, this distinctive feature; it has simplified the class antagonisms. Society as a whole is more and more splitting up into two great hostile camps, into two great classes directly facing each other: Bourgeoisie and Proletariat.

From the Preface and Part 1 of the Communist Manifesto (1888 English edition)

In short, the Communists everywhere support every revolutionary movement against the existing social and political order of things.

In all these movements they bring to the front, as the leading question in each, the property question, no matter what its degree of development at the time.

Finally, they labor everywhere for the union and agreement of the democratic parties of all countries.

The Communists disdain to conceal their views and aims. They openly declare that their ends can be attained only by the forcible overthrow of all

existing social conditions. Let the ruling classes tremble at a Communist revolution. The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win.

Working men of all countries, unite!

From Part 4 of the Communist Manifesto (1888 English edition)

On 21 Feb 1848, after several months of work, the Communist League, an international political party based in London, published a short pamphlet detailing its beliefs. Authored by Karl Marx and Fredrich Engels, two leading members of the League, the *Communist Manifesto* was specifically designed to articulate the differences between the League and other socialist / communist organizations then springing up all over Europe in response to the growth of the proletariat. Really a small pamphlet of less than fifty pages, the *Communist Manifesto* detailed Marx's vision of history as a struggle between different social classes and articulated his call for what he believed was an inevitable worldwide revolution of the proletariat (the industrial working class) against the bourgeoisie (middle class factory owners).

Originally written in German, since its publication over 160 years ago, the Communist Manifesto has been translated into over 100 languages and is reportedly now one of the most widely printed and most widely distributed books in world history, ranking up there with such works as the *Bible*, the *Qur'an*, the *Gita* and *Quotations from Chairman Mao* (commonly known as Mao's "Little Red Book"). Although exact numbers are impossible to calculate (as they are for the other books on that list), historians believe that there have been well over a billion copies of the Manifesto published and distributed around the world since its initial publication. Its words have inspired revolutions around the globe in such diverse places as Russia, China, Cuba and Venezuela. Marx's philosophy as articulated in the pamphlet has been and continues to be the inspiration for billions of people around the globe. Even in western countries such as the United States where Marx's call for revolution went largely unheeded, the Manifesto and its ideas have inspired political and social programs (such as welfare, socialized medicine and unemployment) unthinkable only two centuries ago. Two world wars and countless smaller conflicts have been fought over or against its ideas, and to many people the book remains as influential today as ever.

The problem is that many people have never read the *Communist Manifesto* itself. Misunderstandings abound as to its contents. Questions as to Marx's ideas and his statements are as varied as they are numerous. For decades, Americans grew up with an almost irrational fear of "communism" without understanding what it actually was. Visions of nuclear holocaust and a Soviet style police state were drilled into the heads of children every year in school, to the point where many children actually grew up practicing "duck and cover" drills in school just in case their town was hit by a nuclear weapon. Many of the old cartoons shown to kids in schools and the old public service films shown on TV seem foolish today, as though ducking under a school desk "after the flash" would somehow protect children from the blast of a nuclear weapon (one would imagine that if a child actually saw the "flash", they'd probably be vaporized immediately and wouldn't have to worry about ducking under a desk).

Through an in-depth analysis of various primary and secondary sources, including a thorough examination of the Communist Manifesto itself, students in this lesson will identify, understand and be able to explain Marx's ideas behind history and class struggle, how the Manifesto seeks to explain changes in history through revolutionary activities, and finally how and why Marx and Engels called on the proletariat of their time to revolt against the bourgeoisie. Secure in the knowledge gained in this lesson, students will then be able to judge the effects of Marx's theories over the last 160 years and also to theorize as to whether the *Manifesto* is still relevant to the global society of

the 21st century.

Objectives

1. Students will identify, understand and be able to explain Karl Marx's views on history and revolutionary change as articulated in the *Communist Manifesto*.
2. Students will identify, understand and be able to explain the major points of the *Communist Manifesto*.
3. Students will identify, understand and be able to explain how and why Marx and Engels called on the proletariat to revolt against the bourgeoisie in the *Communist Manifesto*.

Procedures

I. Anticipatory Set

- Writing / Question: What is more important – freedom or equality? (5 min)
- Handouts – Copies of the primary sources and readings from the websites listed below. (5 min)

II. Body of Lesson

- Lecture / PPT – Brief Overview of Marxism and the *Communist Manifesto* (20 min)
- Video – Marxism (BBC documentary – 55 min) or Marxism Documentary (10 min)
- Independent Activity – Students read the primary sources and articles about Marx, Engels and the *Communist Manifesto*, taking notes as appropriate. (30 min)
- Suggestion: Have the students read some of these articles for homework before class to prepare for class discussion.
- Suggestion: Assign different readings to different student groups.
- Suggestion: EVERY student should read the *Communist Manifesto* in its entirety. Most students should be able to read and understand the Manifesto within one week.
- Group Activity – Discussion on Marx, Engels and the *Communist Manifesto*. (30 min)

III. Closure

- Assessment – Essay / DBQ: Explain in detail Marx's ideas behind history and class struggle, how the Manifesto seeks to explain changes in history through revolutionary activities, and finally how and why Marx and Engels called on the proletariat of their time to revolt against the bourgeoisie.

Extension

On tour: Marx / Engels Forum in Berlin

While on tour, students in Berlin can visit the Marx / Engels Forum in Berlin on the eastern Bank of the Spree River, where they will find a statue of the two communist thinkers. Designed and built during the communist era in what was then East Berlin, the forum was unveiled in 1986. After German reunification happened in 1990, there were calls to remove the statue, but it was eventually decided that its artistic and historical significance demanded it be saved. Today, the forum is a major tourist attraction in Berlin. Many people sit on Marx's lap to have their picture taken.

Web Links

Lesson Plan Websites

- www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1848/communist-manifesto/
Manifesto of the Communist Party (primary source)
- www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1848/communist-manifesto/guide.htm
Study Guide for the Communist Manifesto
- public.wsu.edu/~brians/hum_303/manifesto.html
Study Guide for the Communist Manifesto from Paul Brians, Emeritus Professor of English, Washington State University
- public.wsu.edu/~brians/hum_303/misindex.html
Misconceptions, Confusions and Conflicts Concerning Socialism, Communism and Capitalism (website – links to articles). From Paul Brians, Emeritus Professor of English, Washington State University.
- www.bl.uk/learning/histcitizen/21cc/utopia/methods1/bourgeoisie1/bourgeoisie.html
The Communist Manifesto -- Bourgeoisie and Proletariat (article) from the British Library
- sunburst.usd.edu/~clehmann/HWB/hwb_l/marx.htm
Marx's Communist theories (website) – from Clayton Miles Lehmann, Professor of History at the University of SD
- plato.stanford.edu/entries/marx/
Karl Marx (website) – from the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy
- www.historyguide.org/intellect/marx.html
Karl Marx (website) – from the History Guide (UK): Lectures on Modern European Intellectual history
- www.bbc.co.uk/history/historic_figures/marx_karl.shtml
Karl Marx (article) – from the BBC website
- www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1883/death/burial.htm
Fredrich Engels: Speech at the Grave of Karl Marx, Highgate Cemetery, London, 17 Mar 1883 (primary source).
- faculty.njcu.edu/fmoran/pol205/marx.ppt
Marx and Engels PowerPoint – from Fran Moran, Political Science professor at New Jersey City University
- 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 Duvoor of Summit Preparatory Charter High School in Redwood City, CA – highly recommended for teachers.
- www.youtube.com/watch?v=hWW3i7Np4WY
Marxism Documentary (video) – AP World History project on Marx and Marxism – very well done. Under 10 minutes long, so it's good for all classes.
- www.youtube.com/watch?v=mmeUYLntZx4
Marx's Theory of History (video). At just over 50 minutes, this video is probably too long for most in-class showings, but is a valuable resource nonetheless for both teachers and students. It's part of a lecture series from Yale University on the Foundations of Modern Social Thought (Sociology 151).
- www.youtube.com/watch?v=mX65Yej7S0Y
Masters of Money, part 3 of 3: Karl Marx (video). This video, produced by the BBC, at just under 60 minutes, might be too long for most classes, but does a great job not only explaining Marx and his ideas, but also how Marx's ideas have influenced the last 160 years. This video is highly recommended for teachers and students.

Background Information

- en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Karl_Marx
Karl Marx – Wikipedia article
- en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Friedrich_Engels
Fredrich Engels – Wikipedia article
- en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Communist_Manifesto
The Communist Manifesto – Wikipedia Article
- www.passports.com/group_leaders/on_the_road/germany/country_profile
On the Road: Germany (country profile) – from Passports Educational Travel
- www.passports.com/group_leaders/on_the_road/germany/berlin
On the Road: Berlin – from Passports Educational Travel

Key Terms

- Bourgeoisie
- Communism
- Communist Manifesto
- Fredrich Engels
- Karl Marx
- Marxism
- Proletariat
- Socialism

