

Last of the Czars: Dynasty in Decline: Teacher's Guide

Grade Level: 9-12

Curriculum Focus: World History

Lesson Duration: Two class periods

Program Description

For 300 years, the Romanov family ruled Russia until a Lenin-backed revolution ended the reign with their violent deaths. New information gleaned from never-before-seen footage, actual letters, czarist-era survivor interviews, photos, and other rare items gives a finely detailed look at this country's most dramatic dynasty and era. *A Dynasty in Decline* – Nicholas II saw his czarist hold on the country crumble when Lenin's Bolshevik Party and tragic events, such as the infamous "Bloody Sunday," brought constitutional monarchy to the fore. Meet Nicholas and Alexandra, their four daughters and only son, and the czar's mysterious confidant, Rasputin. (Video 1 of *Last of Czars* 2-pack.)

Onscreen Questions and Activities

Segment 1, Last of the Czars: A Dynasty in Decline: Part One

- Pre-viewing questions:
 - The czarist system in Russia was a lot like the monarchies in other European countries. What do you already know about the czarist form of government?
 - As you watch the documentary, keep track of the warning signs that the people were becoming dissatisfied with the system.
- Post-viewing questions: The documentary explains that the foundations of the Romanov faith were orthodoxy, autocracy, and nationality. Discuss what this means and how it might have helped to keep the czarist system of government in place for so long.
- Activity: Choose an event that took place in Russia during Nicholas's reign. Then, write a diary entry or letter about this event from the perspective of one of the Romanovs. Make sure your writing reflects history accurately.

Segment 2, Last of the Czars: A Dynasty in Decline: Part Two

- Pre-viewing questions:
 - During Nicholas's rule, the Duma was created as a parliamentary system. What do you already know about this system of government?

- As you watch the documentary, pay attention to the relationship between Czar Nicholas II and the Duma.
 - Post-viewing questions: The Duma was opposed to the Russian involvement in World War I. Review the reasons why Russia became involved in the war. Why do you think there was internal opposition to Russia's involvement?
 - Activity: Research the causes of World War I and the military responses of the nations involved. Then, create a diagram showing the alliance system that mobilized itself at the start of the war.
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Lesson Plan

Student Objectives

Students will understand:

- Historians can form a picture of a society based on primary sources such as diaries of people who lived through a period.
- Photographs, diaries, and letters from Nicholas II's family have helped historians better understand their life and times.

Materials

- *Last of the Czars: A Dynasty in Decline* video and VCR, or DVD and DVD player
- Resources about Nicholas II and the Romanovs (biographies, history textbooks, encyclopedias)
- Computer with Internet access

Procedures

1. Ask students to review basic facts about Nicholas II from the video. Explain that their assignment will be to research more information about this czar and write a diary entry by the dethroned, exiled emperor. Students should assume that they are composing the imaginary entries in Ekaterinburg, where members of the royal family were isolated by the Communists from April 26, 1918, until their murder a few months later.
2. Explain to students that we have no proof that Nicholas II kept a journal at Ekaterinburg, so this assignment contains an element of the hypothetical. Explain that we know, however, that keeping diaries, taking photographs, and writing letters were common in Nicholas's family. This creative writing assignment will demonstrate students' grasp of the facts surrounding the decline of the Romanov dynasty.
3. Discuss with students' the role personal diaries can play in piecing together history. Inform students that historians have used diaries of both the powerful and the common folk in forming a picture of a period. Ask students whether they think people writing in diaries are truthful



(because they think the entries are private) or slanted (because the writer wants to look good or may be self-deceived about his or her reality) or both.

4. Have the class brainstorm some topics that they, role-playing Nicholas, should cover in a diary entry. These topics should give students an opportunity to demonstrate facts they've learned about Nicholas. Examples of diary topics include the following:
 - Nicholas's reputation among the peasantry at this time
 - Nicholas's feelings toward his wife of more than 20 years
 - Nicholas's feelings toward his four daughters
 - Nicholas's concerns about his son
 - Nicholas's most recent thoughts about Rasputin
 - Nicholas's feelings toward the Bolsheviks

In addition, direct students to include diary passages by Nicholas based on students' intelligent guesses as to what he might say about the following, undocumented topics:

- The act he is most proud of carrying out as czar
 - His greatest regret as leader of the Russian people
 - His view of the future for himself, his family, and Russia
5. Provide or have students gather appropriate resources about Nicholas II and the Romanovs.
 6. When students have drafted and revised their diary entries, have them exchange work and comment on each other's entries. Students should point out to each other any unclear sections that might confuse readers who come across Nicholas's diary in the future. Writers should revise their entries to clarify such sections.
 7. After you've collected students' work, lead a discussion about the assignment. What did students like about it? What did they dislike? What did they get out of the assignment?

Discussion Questions

1. Describe the relationship of Czar Nicholas and his wife Alexandra, and relate how their relationship would contribute to their fall from power during the Russian Revolution.
2. Nicholas and Alexandra wrote many long love letters to one another. Nicholas also took many pictures of his family. What can you infer from the letters and photos of the Romanov family? Brainstorm a list of qualities of the family.
3. Did the actions of Nicholas II toward the Russian people during such incidents as the massacre of January 9, 1905 show that he was an autocratic ruler? How did politics under the czar's government differ from politics under the democratic government of the United States of the same period?
4. Describe the structure of Russian society around the time of Nicholas II and relate the social structure of Russian society to the political events of the time. What were other Eurasian



countries' political structures like during that period? Were they similar or different? How do you think the similarities and differences contributed to the unpopularity of the Romanovs?

5. Compare Russian politics under the czar with that of modern Russian politics during the late 1990s. Pay special attention to the relationship of the Duma with the chief executive.
6. Hypothesize why it was so easy for the monk Rasputin to work his way into the lives of the czar's family. What characteristics did he have that allowed him to have such sway over the royal family? Why do you believe he became close to Alexandra?
7. Outline several reasons why you think democracy was doomed in Russia around the time of the czar.
8. How is Russian support for the Serbs in the Balkans today similar to its support during the time of the czars? How is it different? Support your answer with specific examples from current events.

Assessment

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

- 3 points: Student's diary entry includes many statements about the topics on the brainstorming list and that reflect familiarity with the facts of Nicholas's life up to this point; includes reasonable predictions that Nicholas, logically, may have made at this point.
- 2 points: Student's diary entry includes a few statements about the topics on the brainstorming list and that reflect familiarity with the facts of Nicholas's life up to this point; includes far-fetched predictions by Nicholas.
- 1 point: Student's diary entry does not address topics on the brainstorming list and does not reflect familiarity with the facts of Nicholas's life up to this point; does not provide Nicholas's predictions.

Vocabulary

assassination

Definition: The murder of a political figure.

Context: The trauma of assassination was to haunt Nicholas II all his life.

autocrat

Definition: A person with unlimited power or authority.

Context: After Nicholas signed the Constitution of 1905, he relinquished his power as absolute autocrat.

Bolshevik

Definition: The communist party of Russia and eventually of the Soviet Union. Formed by Vladimir Lenin in 1903, the party was first a faction of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party (RSDLP).



Context: During its early years, the czar did not pay much attention to the newly formed Bolshevik party.

Cossacks

Definition: An ethnic group within Russian society found on the steppes of western Russia and the Ukraine region, used by the czars as an internal police force to quell civil unrest. The Cossacks also participated in numerous uprisings against the czarist government.

Context: The Cossacks were partially responsible for the deaths that resulted from the demonstrations that took place on Bloody Sunday, January 9, 1905.

czar or tsar

Definition: The emperor or monarch of Russia.

Context: Alexander was taught the basics of being a Romanov: orthodoxy, autocracy, and nationality – the Church, the czar, and Russia.

Duma

Definition: The first nationally elected Russian parliament.

Context: The czar and czarina came to the Winter Palace for the ceremonial opening of the first Duma.

dynasty

Definition: A line of rulers who come from the same family. Also, the period of time that they rule over a nation.

Context: The Romanov dynasty ruled Russia for 300 years.

heir

Definition: The child of a king or queen destined to become the reigning monarch after the death of the ruling king or queen. Also, the child who receives the inheritance after the death of the parent.

Context: The Romanov family had four female children, but they needed a male to be the heir to the Russian throne.

interloper

Definition: A person who meddles in the affairs of others, usually for selfish reasons.

Context: The Russian people came to perceive the czarina as an interloper, a German spy, and the source of the country's misfortunes.

propaganda

Definition: Any public information designed to convince or persuade someone to do, believe, or buy something.

Context: The Russian people believed the propaganda about the Russo-Japanese war, which promised swift victory.



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 – An Age of Revolutions: Understand major global trends from 1750 to 1914.
- World History – An Age of Revolutions: Understands patterns of global change in the era of Western military and economic dominance from 1800 to 1914.
- World History – A Half-Century of Crisis and Achievement: Understands reform, revolution, and social change in the world economy of the early 20th century.
- World History – A Half-Century of Crisis and Achievement: Understands the causes and global consequences of World War I.

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
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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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