

# The Gulag

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History's Mysteries—Solve the Crime of the Time



### **About the author**

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# WELCOME TO THE GULAG!

In this hands-on investigative activity, students are given an authentic task: to think like criminalists and review mock forensic files of a historical event. Students gather, analyze, and interpret evidence, engaging in tasks such as examining physical objects (e.g., a model of a guillotine, bullets, a blood-spattered uniform), poring over photographs, analyzing documents, and reading maps and charts. A PowerPoint® presentation includes an introduction to the task, a coroner's report, and several types of sources from the "crime scene." Students then fill out a "forensic report" graphic organizer, hypothesize how the event took place, and conclude by reading a "Mystery Solved" handout that provides historical background on the "crime." Optional extension activities include having students create a "breaking news" TV report, write a front-page newspaper article, or compose a "news alert" text message. Grades 6–12.



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## Purpose and Overview

### Activity Introduction

Welcome to *History's Mysteries: Solve the Crime of the Time*. Included are investigative case files that cover some of the main areas of world history standards-based curriculum. The central purpose of these files is to spark interest and excitement in students for further study of a given unit.

A History Mystery is rooted in having students act like a criminalist whose job is to gather, analyze, and interpret forensic evidence. Real-life criminalists are skilled in studying everyday items, examining bullets, and analyzing documents. Likewise, in a history class a teacher's job is to help students develop critical thinking skills also based in gathering, analyzing and interpreting data.

In this hands-on investigative activity, students are given an authentic task—to think like criminalists and review mock forensic files of a historical event. Each file contains primary and secondary source replica/realia that students analyze in order to hypothesize how a given event took place.

This activity works best as an introduction to a world history unit, but it may also be used as a way to review before a DBQ based assessment at the end of a unit. Students are motivated to solve each Mystery both with accuracy and speed as the first student/team to do so correctly wins a "Criminalist of the Year" nameplate for classroom display.

### How does a History Mystery work?

Students are given the task of reviewing a historical event case file and filling out a Forensic Report. Once this initial step is completed, students then read a **Mystery Solved: Press Release** that reveals all the accurate details of the real life History Mystery.

Each *History's Mysteries Case File* review and **Forensic Report** are completed in a single (60 minute) class session. The follow up **Mystery Solved: Press Release** reading and follow up activities (**Front Page News, Breaking News Report, or Text Message News Alert**) can take another half to full one hour class period.

Each unit comes with reproducible student analysis sheets, teacher directions, student directions, CD-ROM that allows students to view the files on a computer (or the entire class with an LCD projector).



#### Teaching tip

For more scaffolding and challenge to the activity, you can also add a step where students work on a **Front Page News Article, Breaking News Report, or a Text Message News Alert** in which students further synthesize what they believed took place in either an essay, short skit, or short summary form (for better language mastery, beginner or advanced writing skills, ELL and/or AP Students).

What does "Totalitarianism" look like  
in Joseph Stalin's Russia?



AREA 1:  
CRIME SCENE



AREA 2:  
CORONER'S REPORT



NOTES

VICTIM'S NAME (LAST, FIRST, MIDDLE)

**Andreyeva, Olga**

SEX	AGE	RACE	WEIGHT	HT
M <input checked="" type="radio"/> F	40	Ukrainian		

DESCRIPTION OF CORPSE

**Middle aged woman appears older than given age.**

EXTERNAL INJURIES

**Frost bite. Scrapes. Bruises. Cuts and blisters on hands.**

INTERNAL INJURIES

**Body is severely/fatally malnourished.**

**Would appear victim may have starved to death.**



**AREA 3:  
DETECTIVE'S RESEARCH**



**GULAG** was the acronym for the  
**Main Administration of  
Corrective Labor Camps.**

Gulag camps existed throughout the Soviet Union, with the largest camps in both the coldest and hottest areas of the country.

These concentration camps were created in the Soviet Union after the 1917 revolution.

The size and diversity of the population grew during Joseph Stalin's campaign to turn the Soviet Union into a modern industrial power and collectivize agriculture in the early 1930s.