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LESSON 3: PETER THE GREAT

Teacher's Guide

INTRODUCTION

Overview

Peter the Great was an important leader in Russian history as his name—the Great—implies. In this lesson, students have the opportunity to make decisions as Peter. Many of these decisions will show to have significant positive and negative long-term unintended consequences.

■ Vocabulary

- absolutism—the philosophy that government should place all power in a single ruler or small body of rulers, reserving no power for the people
- czar—a king or supreme ruler of Russia
- entrepreneurs—business people
- literacy—the ability to read and write
- nobles—people with high rank in society who usually owned land that others maintained
- parasites—people who live off the work of others
- peasant—poor farmer
- Peter I—ruler of Russia from 1682 to 1725, known as Peter the Great
- poll tax—a tax on each individual adult
- Russian Orthodox Church—the dominant religion in Russia
- serfs—people who were forced to work on land owned by others
- subsidies—government help for businesses
- Table of Ranks—a list of positions in the Russian government that could be gained by one's achievements, not just family background
- tariff—a tax on imports
- turnpikes—roads that charge tolls

■ Decision-Making Skills Emphasized

- Identify underlying problems
- Consider other points of view
- · Ask questions about context
- Ask questions about historical analogies
- Establish realistic goals
- Play out the options
- Predict unintended consequences

LESSON PLAN A: IN-DEPTH LESSON (50 minutes)

Procedure

Handouts 1, 2, and 3 are on foreign policy. Teachers who use Handout 1 will probably want to follow up with Handout 2, which contains an outcome of the decision on taking land and then follows that up with a new problem on whether and how to continue with the war. Handout 3 is an optional handout to help students think through their decision in Handout 2.

Distribute Handout 1 and have students read it. Tell them to decide whether they will take land around the Baltic Sea-Gulf of Finland and risk war with Sweden. After students individually write out their choices, have them pair up and discuss their choices. Circulate around the room to answer questions or clear up misunderstandings. Bring the class back together and ask them to vote on whether to take the land and risk war. After a discussion of the pros and cons of taking the land or not taking it, have students revote. Did many students change their votes? If so, why?

After Handout 1 has been discussed and voted on, distribute Handout 2, with the outcomes of Peter the Great's decision, along with a new problem of how to proceed with the war against Sweden after a major loss in battle. Repeat the procedure used for Handout 1: Students decide, they discuss their choices in pairs, they vote, they discuss the choices as a class, and they revote. Teachers can decide whether to use Handout 3, which provides more specific guiding questions to help students think through their decision. Teachers might use this handout if they noticed their students were not focusing enough on underlying problems, goals, or unintended consequences.

For Handout 4, follow the same procedure used for Handout 1. This handout consists of three problems: taxes, economy, and social matters. The teacher can decide whether to discuss and vote on all three problems at once or one at a time. When Handout 4 has been discussed and voted on, distribute Handout 5, with the outcomes of both Handout 2 (continuing the war) and Handout 4 (taxes, economy, and social issues). Have students read Handout 5 and answer the "Questions for Analysis" at the end of the sheet.

1. Did Peter the Great make good decisions regarding the war with Sweden and internal Russian affairs (taxes, economy, social matters)? Explain what he did well or where he went wrong.

Answers will vary, but some students may notice the oppressive taxes and forced labor resulting from the war.

2. Does Peter the Great deserve that title?

There should be some disagreement on this question, depending on whether students emphasize Peter's accomplishments or his oppressive, authoritarian leadership.

3. What did you do well or poorly in these decision-making problems?

Answers will vary.

4. What was the most important decision-making skill in this problem (for example, identifying assumptions or setting realistic goals)?

Answers will vary.

Option for Primary Sources: When students finish discussing the outcomes in Handout 5, distribute Handout 6, about the controversy on beards and Western-style dress. Have students read the document and answer the "Questions for Analysis."

1. Why were beards and dress so important to Peter the Great and the Russian people?

The importance of beards and dress were symbolic for both sides. Peter wanted Russia to modernize. On the one hand, many Russians considered beards and dress representing traditional ways of life important, including their traditional Russian Orthodox religion. On the other hand, it is interesting to see how readily other Russians made the changes, on the other hand.

2. Did Peter make a mistake in enforcing Western ideas of dress and no beards on Russians?

Answers will vary. This was one of the most controversial changes that Peter made. Although some Russians resisted, many others made the changes.

3. How reliable is this history as a source?

It is a secondary source, since the author (although a contemporary) was never in Russia. In order to answer this part of the reliability, students would have to ask if the author saw Peter give the order or saw people react to the order. Being French, the author had a perspective that may have led him to exaggerate the backwardness of Russians (reason to lie). The French thought of themselves as more advanced than the Russians. They liked the idea of Peter the Great westernizing Russia and may have felt that Russians who were resisting the changes were standing in the way of progress. The title of the source says it is a "history," which implies that the author is trained in writing history. The writing itself seems objective. It is difficult to discern the author's point of view.







