

Teaching Materials

Teaching Strategies

Using primary sources to study the issues and themes outlined in the introduction poses particular challenges for teachers and students. All of the sources included in this packet were produced by the Soviet regime through its publication of newspapers and release of statistics. The Soviet media of the 1930s was controlled by the Communist Party and its affiliate organizations, and served as a means to disseminate a particular set of messages. These articles should not be read as if they followed the ideal model of a free press, where newspapers provided space for opposing views, where distinctions were made between news articles and opinion pieces, and where journalists enjoyed some measure of autonomy from the government. A more productive approach is to read these sources as a kind of advertising for the Soviet regime and its ideological position. Like advertisements, these sources deliberately combined positive and negative messages, selectively introduced examples that promoted certain objectives, and sought to convince the reader of a definite set of opinions. Soviet sources can also be read for both their intended and inadvertent content. Particularly in cases where the articles described some of the more difficult or destructive aspects of Stalinism, reading “against the grain” is a useful exercise in historical analysis. While all the articles contain some negative elements, these need to be seen as part of a propaganda campaign: by describing obstacles and problems, these articles sought to convince readers that while progress had been and was still being made, even greater efforts would be needed in the future.

Discussion Questions:

- Which aspects of Soviet women’s experiences in the 1930s were most difficult, which were most constructive, and what does the range of issues and evaluations suggest about attitudes toward the Stalinist system?
- How did the Soviet government try to shape women’s lives and attitudes during the 1930s, and what obstacles stood in the way of these transformative objectives?

Lesson Plan: Soviet Women Under Stalin

Time Estimate

Four 45-minute class periods and one additional day for writing the DBQ.

Objectives

After completing this lesson, students will be able to:

1. describe examples of Soviet propaganda on women.
2. form reasonable hypotheses about the reasons for that propaganda.
3. identify primary areas of women's employment in the Soviet Union, and the particular successes of women in the world of work.
4. evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of having large numbers of women enter the workforce.

Materials

- Sufficient copies of the following sources (in this sequence):
 - Source 1: Newspaper, Women's Equality
 - Source 4: Newspaper, Women's Roles
 - Source 2: Drawing, Old Way of Life
 - Source 3: Cartoon, Woman with Lenin/Stalin Flag
 - Source 5: Quantitative Evidence, Women's Employment
 - Source 8: Newspaper, Women Workers
 - Source 9: Newspaper, Daily Life
 - Source 10: Newspaper, Women's Education
 - Source 11: Newspaper, Women's Activism
- Sufficient copies of Primary Source Analysis Worksheet: Images
- Sufficient copies of Primary Source Analysis Worksheet: Texts
- Sufficient copies of Primary Source Analysis Worksheet: Quantitative Evidence
- Highlighters—two colors for each student
- Plain, unlined paper for drawing
- Colored pencils or markers
- Blackboard and chalk, or white board and markers, or poster paper and markers

Strategies

- **Hook:** Present the Chinese saying “Women hold up half the sky.” Ask students to think about what this statement means. What could a society achieve if large numbers of women began to work outside the home? What problems might the women or the society as a whole encounter?
- **Bias in the Press:** Distribute copies of the article “On the Path to a Great Emancipation” *Pravda* March 8, 1944 (Source 1: Newspaper, Women's

- Equality**). Explain to the students that newspapers published in the USSR in this period did not report objective facts but rather served as a medium of government propaganda. Depending on your class, have students read the article quietly or read the article out loud together as a class. Instruct the students to pay attention to examples of strong adjectives or exaggerated language in the text. After reading the article, identify and discuss unfamiliar vocabulary words. Give each student a highlighter and instruct the students to mark adjectives, phrases, or sentences that describe the negative conditions women experienced *prior* to the communist revolution (e.g. the “barbaric, savage, and blood stained tsarist regime”). Discuss: According to the article, what was the tsarist regime like? Why would the communists portray the tsarist regime in this way?
- Give students a second highlighter in a different color and instruct them to mark adjectives, phrases, or sentences that describe the positive conditions of women *since* the communist revolution (e.g. “She stands in the most advanced rankings of our working collective in the present-day glorious and productive period of socialist construction.”). Discuss: How does the article portray the experiences of women since the communist revolution? Why would it be to the advantage of the communists to publish ideas like this? Complete the worksheet Primary Source Analysis Worksheet: Texts from **Analyzing Sources**. Discuss.
 - **Achievements of Women:** Divide students into pairs or small groups. Ensure that groupings are heterogeneous in that each pair or small group includes at least one student who likes to draw. Distribute copies of the article “International Communist Woman’s Day” *Pravda* March 9, 1939 (**Source 4: Newspaper, Women’s Roles**). Have students make note of the date. This article was published ten years after the article they studied previously in activity #2. Have students read the article either quietly or out loud as a class. Direct students’ attention to the paragraph that begins “Comrade Nikolaeva talked about the rise of Soviet women...” Instruct students to list specific examples of women’s achievements as described by this passage. Distribute paper and markers or colored pencils. Have each pair or small group illustrate at least two achievements. Each drawing should have a title. Share and discuss students’ work: What achievements did they select? What images did they use to portray the achievements? How did they compose their drawings to convey a positive point of view on women’s achievements?
 - **Soviet Women in Images:** Students should remain in the same pairs or small groups established for activity #3. Distribute copies of the images “Old Way of Life” *Izvestiia* March 8, 1930 (**Source 2: Drawing, Old Way of Life**) and “Women with Lenin/Stalin Flag” *Leningradskaiia Pravda* March 8, 1934 (**Source 3: Cartoon, Woman with Lenin/Stalin Flag**). Distribute copies of the worksheet

Primary Source Analysis Worksheet: Images from [Analyzing Sources](#). Model the process of image analysis for students by analyzing one of the images as a *whole class*. Have students analyze the second image in their pairs or small groups. Share and discuss the students' analysis. Have each pair or group answer the following questions in writing (complete as homework if necessary): How do these images support the way women were portrayed in the newspaper articles studied in activities #2 and #3? How do these images compare with the drawings students made in activity #3?

- **Soviet Women in Numbers:** Distribute copies of the chart “Women in the Soviet Labor Force: Total Number and Percent of Workforce.” *Zhenshchina v SSSR* (Moscow, 1936) ([Source 5: Quantitative Evidence, Women's Employment](#)). Distribute copies of the worksheet Primary Source Analysis Worksheet: Quantitative Evidence from [Analyzing Sources](#). Assist the students in completing the worksheet. When the class reaches the question “What are the patterns in the data? What might account for these patterns?” have students do the following: Look at the 1929 column. What percent of the workforce was women? Rank the areas in which women were employed from greatest to least employment. Look at the 1935 column. What percent of the workforce was women? Rank the areas in which women were employed from greatest to least employment. Compare your results for 1929 and 1935. In what sector of the economy did women continue to be employed in the greatest numbers? What changes occurred in the sectors ranked second to fifth in employment of women? Students should now complete the remaining questions on the worksheet (complete as homework if necessary). Discuss.
- **Jigsaw:** Divide students into pairs or small groups. Distribute a different primary source to each group. Select from among “The Bolshevik factory still does not have any women-master workers,” *Rabochii* July 7, 1931 ([Source 8: Newspaper, Women Workers](#)); “Maria Semenovna Requires Assistance from the Party Collective,” *Pravda Severa* September 9, 1932 ([Source 9: Newspaper, Daily Life](#)); “School No. 130 Follows its own Law,” *Za kommunisticheskoe prosveshchenie* February 6, 1937 ([Source 10: Newspaper, Women's Education](#)); “Defending the Rights of a Soviet Woman,” *Pravda Vostoka* June 22, 1938 ([Source 11: Newspaper, Women's Activism](#)). Assign each group to read their source and list problems stemming from women's participation in the work force, or problems interfering with women's ability to work. Students should be able to identify factors such the lack of female master workers, inadequate child care, continued “domestic slavery” of women in the home, and domestic violence. Use the blackboard, whiteboard, or poster paper and markers to make a web summarizing the work of all groups. Students should copy the web as it is

generated through class discussion.

- **Homework:** Direct students to write a paragraph summarizing the content on the web. Students who have trouble starting their paragraphs may be encouraged to use the topic sentence, “Women workers in the Soviet Union encountered many problems.”
- **Wrap Up:** Have students return to the source “On the Path to a Great Emancipation” *Pravda* March 8, 1944 ([Source 1: Newspaper, Women’s Equality](#)). Discuss: To what extent do they agree with the claims made in this article? To what extent do they disagree?

Differentiation

Advanced Students: Accelerate the lesson by assigning selected activities as homework. Have students research and collect comparative data on women’s participation in the work force and problems attendant to women’s labor. Students may research a different country from the same period, or they may research Russia today. Have women continued to advance in the work force or not? Have the problems attendant to women’s labor been mitigated or not? Have students hypothesize reasonable explanations for their conclusions.

Less Advanced Students: Complete Activities 1, 3, 4, 5 as directed. Complete worksheets and write paragraphs as a group (teacher writes on the overhead or blackboard, while students suggest sentences). For activity 6 select only one article to study as a class: “Maria Semenovna Requires Assistance from the Party Collective” ([Source 9: Newspaper, Daily Life](#)). Prior to having students write the DBQ essay, lead a whole class discussion in which you plan an outline for the essay. Consider allowing students to write their essays with the outline in front of them.

Document Based Question (Suggested writing time: 40 minutes)

Directions: The following question is based on the documents included in this module. This question is designed to test your ability to work with and understand historical documents. Write an essay that:

1. Has a relevant thesis and supports that thesis with evidence from the documents.
2. Uses all or all but one of the documents.
3. Analyzes the documents by grouping them in as many appropriate ways as possible. Does not simply summarize the documents individually.
4. Takes into account both the sources of the documents and the authors' points of view.
5. You may refer to relevant historical information not mentioned in the documents.

Question: Using the documents and images from the Soviet Dictatorship module

- *Describe* the participation of women in the Soviet work force. In what areas did women make significant advances? In what areas did women fail to make advances? What problems did women encounter as their participation in the work force increased?
- *Evaluate* the advancement of women. Express a thoughtful opinion in which you weigh the relative advances achieved by women against the problems they encountered.
- *Recommend* strategies a government might employ to increase the participation of women in the work force beyond what the Soviets achieved.

Be sure to analyze point of view in at least three documents or images.

What additional sources, types of documents, or information would you need to have a more complete view of this topic?

Bibliography

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Lapidus, Gail Warshofsky. *Women in Soviet Society. Equality, Development and Social Change*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978.

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Women's roles in the 1930s are discussed in terms of a long process of pursuing women's equality in Imperial, Revolutionary, and Soviet Russia.