

# METHODOLOGY ONE

## → BASIC FACTS AND THE STORY OF A WITNESS

**When it's convenient:**

Good for when you only have one lesson

### OBJECTIVE



The student will place significant events related to Soviet repression on a timeline, indicating their causes and significance. Retells the story of a selected witness. Summarise in their own words how repression relates to our history.

#### Aids:

Computer, projector, speakers



#### Time:

Minimum 45 minutes



#### Method of work:

Students watch the video and then discuss



### PHASE 1 / max. 10 min.

#### Activity: Evocation

##### Description

See separate methodology „Evocation“

The evocation phase is particularly important in teaching about Soviet repression. Students often do not have sufficient knowledge of the topic (unlike, for example, popular topics from the Middle Ages or World War II). Therefore, they may not consider it important and may not be willing to be interested in it at all. Evocation students them to activate their existing knowledge and ideas and link them to new learning. This will stimulate their curiosity and motivation to learn more about the subject. At the same time, you will find out what ideas or myths students enter the lesson with. You can then build on these in the awareness phase and set them straight.



#### Comments and tips

Choose one of the methods listed separately in the Evocation chapter.

### PHASE 2 / 5–10 min.

#### We specify the meaning of the words

##### Description

Before you play an instructional video or work with the students of a memoirist, it is a good idea to review with your students any concepts that may be unclear. Here we have selected some of the terms that appear in the video that are unfamiliar, especially to younger students. Below are also some ways in which the meanings of the terms can be learned.

##### Option 1 SIMPLE EXPLANATION

State a concept that you think might be unfamiliar to the students and discuss its meaning with them. The idea is not to find the exact definition, but to make the meaning of the words clear to the pupils in a way that is age-appropriate.

##### Option 2 BINGO

##### Preparation:

- Prepare 12 cards with word definitions.



#### Comments and tips

Here are perhaps lesser-known words and possible definitions:

**repression** – harsh suppression of resistance or dissent to the regime

**empire** – a large state controlling many countries

**chaos** – utter confusion, disorder

**terror** – violence inflicted on a population to intimidate

**agitation** – spreading ideas and thoughts to influence people

- Give each student a random selection of 9 definitions in a 3x3 square grid.

#### The course of the game:

- Read the words from the list to the students one by one.
- The students' task is to mark the definition of the word on their card.
- The first person to mark 3 words in a row (vertically, horizontally or diagonally) and shout "Bingo!" wins.

#### Option 3 HARD CHAIR

One student sits with their back to the board while the teacher writes the word on the board. The other students must then explain the word to the student who sits with his back to the board without saying it directly. The student in the hot seat then has to guess what the word is. This game can be played quickly with several different words and students.

#### Option 4 SEARCHING FOR A DEFINITION

For this activity, you need to prepare pieces of paper in advance with the expressions and, separately, with the corresponding definitions. Hand out the pieces of paper randomly and ask the students to find their "partners" with the corresponding expression or definition. This is a quick and interactive activity that forces students to communicate and discuss the meanings of words, put definitions into context, and think critically.

#### Option 5 LIVE IMAGES

Students stand in a circle, eyes closed, the teacher reads the term and students have to try to express its meaning with their bodies. Then they open their eyes and comment. Interestingly, students often spontaneously create a corresponding living sculpture without being aware that they know the term.

**archive** – collection of historical documents

**persecution** – pursuit of people because of their views or identity

**Soviet** – relating to the Soviet Union

**sabotage** – deliberately damaging or obstructing an activity

**espionage** – secretly obtaining information for a foreign power

## PHASE 3 / 10–15 min.

### Video WHAT WAS GULAG

#### Description

**Celý blok:** This educational video clearly summarises the key facts about Soviet repression. It provides a comprehensive macro view of the historical development of repression with a focus on Stalin's era and the European context of the Gulag.

The video can be used as a brief introduction to the topic at the beginning of a class. Just play the video and ask the students to focus on answering their existing questions regarding the topic or on identifying key information.

**The following is a link to the video:** [www.gulagxr.eu/vidoa-a-pribehy](http://www.gulagxr.eu/vidoa-a-pribehy)

Having seen the video, do not forget to ask what was new for the students. For example, to many students in the pilot schools, a new piece of information was that the Gulag was not just a single camp but rather a system of camps. Others were not aware of the scope and the number of victims. Most students did not previously realise the European dimension of the repression. Almost nobody thought that there were children in the camps too.

This is related to the question why we should study the topic of the Gulag in our country.

Before proceeding to the next phase, you can ask what is the next thing the students need to know in order to deepen their understanding of the Soviet repression, and adapt the classes accordingly.

Our experience shows that students usually want to know the story of an actual witness coming from our country. This could be the potential next step.



#### Comments and tips

**Here are the questions that can be answered after watching the video:**

1. When and for what reason were the first labour camps established in the Soviet Union?
2. How many people were imprisoned in the camps during the existence of the Gulags and how many died in them?
3. What were the typical working conditions and daily routine of prisoners in the gulags?
4. Who might have been victims of imprisonment in a labour camp and for what reasons?
5. What was the fate of the people after their release from the gulags and when were the camps officially closed?
6. Why should we deal with the subject of the Gulag in our country?

**Tip:** Instead of playing the full film at once, you can also play the video in parts and let students guess what happens next. They can guess other facts or events before the video finishes the story. This can activate their existing knowledge (e.g. about World War II, the impact of Stalin's death, etc.).

**Tip:** If you are short on time and have already covered the topic of Soviet repression in a previous lesson, you can skip this section. Alternatively, replace it by drawing a timeline and recording the significant events in the history of Soviet repression together with the students.

## PHASE 4 / 10 min.

### The story of a witness



#### Description

Select a memorial story from the archive of stories.

The memories of the witness bring a dimension of so small history into the teaching and thus appropriately complement the information from the previous video. They allow us to see Soviet repression from the perspective of the suffering of a particular person. All the videos are quite emotionally demanding, so remind students of the rules for the situations when watching the story is too mentally demanding for someone.

Here is a link to the list of videos – [www.gulagxr.eu/video-a-pribehy](http://www.gulagxr.eu/video-a-pribehy)

Here are a few variations of how you can work with the video of a witness.

1. Have students record the main points of the witness's story as they listen. Then, in pairs, compare their notes and create a timeline of his or her life.
2. Divide the video into 3 parts. After each part, stop and have students discuss in groups what they have just learned and how the story affects them.
3. Instruct students to note down 3 emotionally powerful moments from the story as they listen. Then have them analyse these moments in pairs - why they are emotional, what they say about the conditions in the Gulag, etc. Additionally, if you have more time, hand out papers and have each student draw a scene from the story that struck them. Then display and discuss the creations. If you don't have the time to do this, it is possible to just have the pupils describe the images in their heads.
4. Finally, ask the students questions such as: What did you find most interesting about the story? What did you find most surprising? What emotions did it evoke in you? What event in his life led to the repression? Did the memoirist have the opportunity to avoid repression?



#### Comments and tips

**Tip:** Check that the students have understood the story. Just ask a few verification questions during or at the end of the video. Who was the victim of repression? Why did she go to the gulag? etc.

**Tip:** Witnesses can sometimes be difficult to understand (weak voice, accent). It is therefore always a good idea to have subtitles running at the same time.

**Tip:** If you don't have tablets at school but can use phones, you can ask students to use their own phones to follow the stories of your chosen witnesses. All the stories are easily accessible via our project page on [Vimeo](https://www.gulagxr.eu).

**Tip:** If you have known your students for a long time, you can try an experiment. Ask them to recall an important event in the life of the school that they will probably all remember (e.g. the first day of school, an important field trip, etc.) and then ask them e.g. what the headmaster was wearing that day, what colour the bus was, who was sitting in the front row, etc. Again, students can write their answers on slips of paper and show them or say them directly. Most likely the answers will vary slightly. This example can be used to demonstrate that a person does not have to lie, but his or her recollection may differ in detail from how someone else remembers the event. This is due to the way human memory works. Therefore, it is a good idea to verify or supplement the witness account with information from other sources. In short, a witness can serve as one source of knowledge about the past, but it should not be the only one.

## PHASE 5 / 5–10 min.

### Reflection



#### Description

Reflection at the end of the lesson on Soviet repression is important because it helps students to better structure and experience the knowledge they have gained about the workings of the totalitarian system. It forces them to summarise the main facts and the fate of specific people. At the same time, it forces them to think about the impact of the existence of the gulags on individuals and society as a whole and to relate these events to the present. In this way, pupils can realise the value of human rights and freedoms. They have the opportunity to express their own views on the topic and to ask additional questions. You, as the teacher, get feedback on their understanding of the material.



**Here are tips on how to reflect:**

- If you worked with a mind map in the evocation phase, use it. Have the students fill in the mind map in a different colour with the 5 key words that stuck with them from the lesson. Then discuss why they chose these words and how their understanding of Soviet repression has deepened compared to 40 minutes ago.
- If you have worked with the question “Why should we learn about Soviet repression at all?” in the evocation, then ask it again and ask a few students to reflect on any shift in their attitude.
- Ask 3 open-ended questions: what new things did you learn? How did the witness’s story affect you? What questions did the topic raise for you? Have them briefly reflect orally or on paper.
- On the board, write “Key takeaways” and “Questions to think about”. Invite students to add ideas freely. Finally, summarise and comment on the contributions.
- Ask for 1-2 things that most interested the students and 1-2 questions that came to mind. Leave space for sharing.
- Anonymous reflection on a piece of paper: 1 thing that interested me + 1 question on the topic. Those who want to can share, those who don’t can stick it on a flipchart or whiteboard.
- In pairs or small groups, ask students to work together to draft a short text on Soviet repression that could appear in a new history textbook.

**If you have the time and are used to it, you can ask questions such as:**

*What did this class give me?*

*What would I like to commend anyone in this room (including myself) for?*

*What do I think caused such evil?*

*Is the subject of the Gulag still relevant today?*

*What could be done to commemorate the victims of repression?*

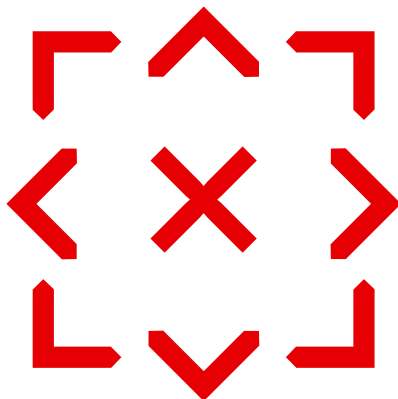
*What can I do to prevent something like this from happening again?*

Invite the students to sit comfortably in a circle. Wait until they are quiet and take a talking “stone”. A talking stone means that only the person holding the object can speak. Have them speak briefly and only to the point. Let them briefly summarise each part of the lesson. Ask the students (whoever wants to) to comment on the questions or tell the others anything they think is important and related to the topic. Anyone who does not want to speak will pass the pebble on and will not be forced to speak.



## Comments and tips

**Tip:** *If you have chosen V-CH-D (I know-I want to learn-I learned) as your evocation activity, it is a good idea to use it here to formulate the “I learned” column.*



## RATING



Criterion-based assessment of students' progress is important in teaching (not only) about Soviet repression because it allows the teacher to better diagnose the level of the students' understanding of key facts, the development of their historical thinking and attitudes towards ethical values. Reflection on the fulfilment of the criteria also provides feedback for further teaching. We believe that you have set up your own assessment system appropriate to your objectives. Here is an example of how an assessment system can be set up, including possible examples of student responses. Assume three levels of mastery of the topic.

### BASIC LEVEL

#### Description of the criteria:

The student can give only basic facts about the functioning of the Gulag. They can only very roughly place it in the historical period of the existence of the USSR. They can retell a brief story of a particular prisoner. They perceive the relationship between causes and effects superficially. They do show much interest in the issue of human rights violations and democratic values.

#### Example of a student's speech:

*"The gulags were in Russia because Stalin was there and made people work hard. Mr. Novak was imprisoned there."*

### MEDIUM LEVEL

#### Description of the criteria:

Students can describe the functioning of the Gulag, place the camps in the Stalinist period and distinguish between several types of repression. They can analyse a specific prisoner's story. They can describe several causes and consequences of repression. They discuss the issues and ask questions. They demonstrate a partial understanding of the values of democracy and human rights.

#### Example of a student's speech:

*"Prisoners in the Gulag worked in inhumane conditions. It was the worst under Stalin. Mr. Novak was imprisoned on trumped-up charges. I think it was unjust. Isn't that a violation of human rights?"*

### HIGH LEVEL

#### Description of the criteria:

The student can describe in detail the functioning of the Gulag and distinguish between different types of repression. They can explain the historical context of their origin and development, including the causes and consequences. They can describe how repression changed over time. They can analyse the specific fates of prisoners and reflect on them from an ethical perspective. They can actively discuss the issues of democracy, freedom, and human rights.

#### Example of a student's speech:

*"The Gulags were camps in the Soviet Union where people were sent for forced labour. They started after the revolution when the communists came to power. At first it was mainly their opponents, but then under Stalin it spread and anyone who didn't like or agree with them could end up there. They imprisoned a lot of people when they were collectivising and building factories in the 1930s. They had to do hard and dangerous labour, often somewhere in Siberia or building factories. A lot of people died there.*

*One of the prisoners was Mr. Novák, an ordinary worker and even a communist. They arrested him and accused him of being a spy, although this was not true. He spent five years in a labour camp in Siberia, where he contracted tuberculosis. When he was released, he was no longer able to work normally and supported himself as best he could. His story shows how the regime violated human rights and destroyed people's lives. From a moral point of view, it is terrible. That is why it is important to defend democracy and freedom so that such things do not happen again."*