

METHODOLOGY TWO

BASIC FACTS AND COMPARISON OF STORIES OF SEVERAL WITNESSES

When it's convenient:

This scenario is suitable for a 90-minute lesson in which you want to discuss not only the basic facts about the repression, but also to address the different perspectives of witnesses and perceptions of the topic in different countries. In theory, it can be done in 45 minutes, but it is better to allocate a two-hour session.

OBJECTIVE



The student can place significant events related to Soviet repression on a timeline, indicating their causes and significance. They can analyse similarities and differences in the stories of several victims of Soviet repression. They can summarise in their own words how repression relates to our history.

Aids:

Computer, projector, speakers, tablets, papers and stationery

Time:

90 minutes

Method of work:

The pupils watch video stories of several witnesses and then discuss.

PHASE 1 / 10 min.

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 allows 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 / 10 min.

We specify the meaning of the words

Description

Before you play an instructional video or work with the memories of a witness, 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 pupils. 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 the pupils. 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.



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



Option 2 BINGO

Preparation:

- Prepare 12 cards with word definitions.
- 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 HOT 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 naming him 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 pupils 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 pupils 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 – persecution 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

standard – an established rule, measure or requirement

amnesty – pardon, remission of offences

camp – Gulag camp



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 all 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.).

PHASE 3 / 15 min.

Video WHAT WAS GULAG



Description

This educational video clearly summarises key facts about Soviet repression. It provides a comprehensive macro view of the historical development of repression, focusing on the Stalin era and the European context of the Gulags.

The video can be used for a brief introduction to the subject at the beginning of the lesson.

Simply play the video and invite students to focus on answering their existing questions about the topic or identifying key information.

Here is the link to the video: www.gulagxr.eu/video-a-pribehy

After watching the video, be sure to ask what was new for the students. For example, it was new to many students in the pilot lessons that the Gulag was not just one camp, but a whole system of camps. Others did not realise the scale of the system and the number of victims. Most pupils were then unaware of the European dimension of repression.

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

Before the next stage, you can also ask what students need to know next to deepen their understanding of Soviet repression and tailor the teaching accordingly.

In our experience, the students mostly wanted to know the story of a real-life witness from our country. We offer this as a possible next step.

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 / 10–30 min.

Stories of witnesses



Description

The memories of the witness bring a dimension of 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 pupils of the rules of engagement if watching the story is too mentally demanding for someone.

In the project we have selected the memories of 10 witnesses from different countries. In this activity you can watch the stories of several witnesses together with your students and then analyse the similarities and differences, e.g. in the causes and consequences of repression, discuss the similarities and differences in the historical context of different countries, etc.

To begin, choose the memorials you want to use in your lessons.

Here is a link to the list of videos: www.gulagxr.eu/video-a-pribehy

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

Choose one memory whose story the whole class will see together. The aim of watching together is to help younger students in particular learn to work with witness narratives. To show them what they can notice in the narrative.

Here are some ways that pupils can work with the narrative:

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.
4. Hand out sheets of paper and have each student draw a scene from the story that struck them. Then display and discuss the creations.

Finally, ask students to help you answer the basic criminalistic questions, i.e. WHO (is the victim of repression), WHEN, WHERE, WHY and HOW (what form of repression was used).

Then explain to the pupils that they will now work in groups in a similar way and their task will be to find the answers to the same questions, but in the stories of different witnesses. Encourage them to take notes on paper.

Then divide the pupils into groups (e.g. 4). Provide each group with one tablet on which to run the story of your chosen witness. Each story lasts approximately 8 minutes so you can expect all groups to finish at approximately the same time.

You can then analyse the similarities and differences in the stories of your chosen memoirs.

Here is a suggestion of some ways to do this:

COMMON TIMELINE

Each group is given a large sheet of paper with a timeline drawn on it.

Groups write 3 key events from their memory story on the timeline – each in a different colour.

Invite students to review the timeline and compare the years and periods in which the stories took place. Alternatively, events can be recorded on a common timeline on the board – each group in a different colour.

COMPARISON TABLE

On the board, draw a table with columns for Name, Age, Occupation, Type of Repression, Reason for Persecution.

Groups will add information about their witness to the table.

Prompt to compare the data in the table.

QUINTUPLET





Comments and tips

Tip: Check that the students have understood the story. Just ask a few verification questions during the video 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.vimeo.com).



Each group is given a paper and writes 5 observations that emerged from stories of the witness. A diagram of a five letter paper might look like this:

- 1. line** – one word, e.g. the name of the witness
- 2. line** – a two-word description of the characteristics of the witness
- 3. line** – three words expressing the plot component of the witness's narrative
- 4. line** – a sentence of four words relating to the story of the witness
- 5. line** – a one-word synonym that recapitulates the essence or message of the witness's story

For example:

- Jiřina
- brave, selfless
- war, resistance, imprisonment
- she survived thanks to the help of her cellmates
- solidarity

Groups read their five letters in turn and discuss the similarities and differences. The discussion is moderated by the teacher, or you can ask a student to act as moderator.

EXHIBITION OF POSTERS

Groups create a poster summarizing “their” story – name, life before repression, reason for repression, description of repression, consequences.

The posters are posted and the groups compare them with each other.

Tip: Always have one member of the group stay with the posters and be available for questions. Others in the group can browse and view each other's posters. Then they take turns.

GRAPHICAL REPRESENTATION – VENN DIAGRAM

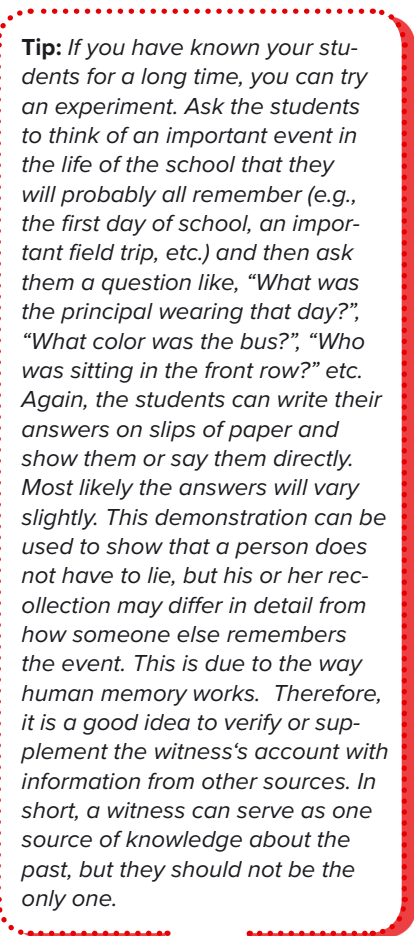
Groups will be given a pre-drawn Venn diagram (2 overlapping circles), or they can draw one according to your instructions.

There are always 2 groups working together, or all together.

They write the identical elements of the stories in the intersection, and the differences in the separate parts.

Students compare the diagrams.

You, or a selected student, go around the groups and record everything that is in the intersections of the Venn diagrams of each group.




Tip: If you have known your students for a long time, you can try an experiment. Ask the students to think of 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 a question like, “What was the principal wearing that day?”, “What color was the bus?”, “Who was sitting in the front row?” etc. Again, the students can write their answers on slips of paper and show them or say them directly. Most likely the answers will vary slightly. This demonstration can be used to show 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's account with information from other sources. In short, a witness can serve as one source of knowledge about the past, but they should not be the only one.

PHASE 5 / 5–20 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 phase, then ask it again and ask a few students to reflect on their shift.



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.



- Ask 3 open-ended questions, “What new things did you learn?” “How did the stories of the witnesses affect you?” “What questions did the topic raise?” Have them reflect briefly 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 about 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.
 - Use the five-letter method (see above) by having each student (possibly in pairs) fill in the five-letter as follows:
 - Row 1** – pre-filled – TODAY’S STORIES
 - 2nd line** – two-word description of the characteristics of the witnesses
 - Line 3** – three words expressing a common plot component witnesses’ narratives
 - Line 4** – a sentence of four words summarizing the theme of the witnesses’ messages
 - 5th line** – a one-word synonym that recapitulates the essence or main common message of the stories of the witnesses
- Then invite the person who wants to read their five-leaf clover. At the same time, write the synonyms from each student’s line 5 on the board. This will give you a collection of values, e.g. ‘friendship, love, solidarity, courage...’, which you can then discuss with the students.
- Ask the students to be quiet and close their eyes. Ask the students whether they think they would have behaved differently from the majority during the Stalinism era or whether they would have adapted. Warn them that you do not want to hear the answer. Let them think in silence for a minute. If anyone wants to share their opinion, allow them to do so, but definitely do not force anyone to answer the question out loud!
 - If you have more time and like to debate, you can divide the class into two teams and debate the topic, “Repressive systems are always the fault of the country’s leadership, not ordinary people.”

Divide the class into 2 teams – FOR and AGAINST the thesis.

- Each team has 5 minutes to prepare their arguments.
- First, the PRO team will present their arguments.
- Then the team AGAINST.
- Teams can then respond to the opposing team’s arguments.
- A final summary of the strongest counter-arguments.

Other topics for debate:

- “The horrors of repressive regimes cannot be repeated in modern times.”
- “Every person is fully responsible for their actions in a repressive system.”
- “Repressive systems always have the support of at least part of the population.”
- In a debate, it is important to set clear rules, a time limit and a final evaluation of the arguments of both sides. It is also possible to vote on the “winner”, but stress that this is a training in critical thinking.

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 topic 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 recap each part of today’s lesson. Ask the students (whoever wants to) to comment on the questions or tell others anything they think is important and relevant to the topic. Anyone who does not want to speak will pass the pebble on and will not be forced to speak.

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 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 a suggestion of how an assessment system might be set up, for example, 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 can list 1–2 similarities or differences between the stories of the witnesses. Their analysis is very superficial. They do not show significant 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.”

“Both Mr Novák and Mr Svoboda were in prison, but Mr Svoboda longer.”

MEDIUM LEVEL

Description of the criteria:

Students can describe the functioning of the Gulag, place it in the Stalinist period and distinguish between several types of repression. They can analyse a specific prisoner’s story. The student can compare the stories of witnesses and finds their similarities and differences. The analysis is rather descriptive. They can describe several causes and consequences of repression. They can discuss the issues and asks questions. They show a partial understanding of the values of democracy and human rights.

Príklad prejavu študenta:

“Prisoners in the Gulag worked in inhumane conditions. It was the worst under Stalin. I think it was unfair. Isn’t that a violation of human rights?” “Both Mr. Novak and Mr. Svoboda were imprisoned on false charges, but Mr. Svoboda spent more years in prison.”

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 in detail the stories of witnesses, finding many similarities and differences. Their comparison is complex and links the details of the individual fates. The student can explain the reasons for the identified similarities and differences. They can actively discuss the topics 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 became widespread and anyone who didn’t like them or disagreed 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.

Despite certain common features, the fates of Mr Novák and Mr Svoboda differed fundamentally. Both were denied justice when they were imprisoned on trumped-up charges. However, while Mr. Novak was deported as an ordinary citizen to forced labour in the gulag in the inhospitable conditions of Siberia, Mr. Svoboda spent years in prison. Although both situations were harsh, Mr. Novak faced the even harsher reality of the liquidation labor camps where many prisoners died of exhaustion and disease. Unlike him, Mr. Svoboda escaped the worst hardships. Both stories show the brutality and ruthlessness of the Communist dictatorship in deciding the fate of the people. From a moral point of view, this is terrible. That is why it is important to defend democracy and freedom so that such things do not happen again.”