

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn | Lesson Plan

How did Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's advocacy and writings reveal the importance of freedom and freedom of speech?

Students will understand how Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn advocated for freedom of speech during communist rule in the Soviet Union. Students will understand how Solzhenitsyn's writings exposed the injustices of communism and the oppressive leadership of Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin. Students will understand the significance of freedom and freedom of speech in maintaining a just and democratic society.

Learning Objectives:

- Identify Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's role in opposing Stalin and communism in the Soviet Union.
- Identify and explain the negative effects of communism and dictatorship on society.
- Analyze the impact of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's writing on society and politics.
- Describe the meaning of freedom and freedom of speech in various contexts.
- Evaluate the relevance of Solzhenitsyn's lessons on freedom in modern-day America.

Key Vocabulary:

- **Communism:** A political system in which individual people own nothing, and instead, the government owns everything. Communist governments are against private property, travel, and even freedom of speech.
- **Nazi:** A member of a political party in Germany led by Adolf Hitler that promoted extreme and harmful ideas, including racism and antisemitism, and was responsible for persecuting and killing millions of people, especially Jewish people, during World War II.
- **Dictator:** A political leader who holds absolute power and authority over a country.
- **Gulag:** A system of forced labor camps in the Soviet Union where many people were sent to work in harsh conditions as punishment, often for speaking out against the government or being suspected of opposing it.

Educational Standards: CCRA.L.1, CCRA.L.2, CCRA.L.4, CCRA.W.2, CCRA.W.4, CCRA.R.7, CCRA.SL.1, CCRA.SL.2, CCRA.SL.4

Academic Subject Areas: Biography, Free Speech, American Values

What You'll Need

- Video: *Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn: Advocate for Freedom of Speech* (Watch [Here](#))
- Worksheet: *Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn: Advocate for Freedom of Speech* (Click [Here](#))

Lesson Plan (45 minutes)



Warm-Up: (15 minutes)

1. Initiate a class discussion on the meaning of freedom. Prompt students to share what the word freedom means to them and why they think America is known as the “land of the free.” Write key points on the whiteboard.
2. Write the following quote from the Warm-Up Activity on the whiteboard or display it on a screen: *“Those who choose comfort over freedom will have neither.” - Benjamin Franklin* Encourage students to consider the meaning of this quote. Prompt students to brainstorm ideas with a partner. Invite students to share their thoughts aloud with the whole class and facilitate a class discussion.
3. Display a copy of the “Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn Worksheet,” and pass out individual worksheets to students.
4. Instruct students to complete the Warm-Up Activity. Students will write their definition of freedom and explain what they think the Benjamin Franklin quote means.
5. Share with students that not all countries value and promise freedom to their citizens as the United States does. Ask them to predict which countries, past or present, might have more limited freedoms compared to America.
6. Preview the video by explaining to students that Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn is an important historical figure who grew up in a country with an oppressive government and no freedom. Invite students to share what they already know about Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn. Prompt students to predict what he might have done to stand up for freedom.
7. Read over the rest of the worksheet as a class so students know what to listen for during the video.
8. Set the stage for the upcoming video by highlighting the theme of courage and bravery. Encourage students to look for ways throughout the video in which Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn demonstrates courage in standing up for freedom.

Watch and Complete: (20 minutes)

1. Watch the video.
2. Assist students with completing the worksheet alongside the video, encouraging note-taking and active listening.
3. Pause throughout the video to allow students to answer questions, especially short answer responses. If necessary, model short answer responses by restating the question and writing a complete sentence.

Wrap-Up: (10-15 minutes)

1. Allow students 10 minutes to complete the worksheet independently.
2. Collect as formative assessment or discuss in class.
3. Ask students to read aloud their responses to the Making Connections section, reflecting on Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn’s story.
4. Conclude with an open-ended prompt on the lessons that can be drawn from Solzhenitsyn’s experiences to understand and value freedom. Some options include:
 - How did Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn demonstrate courage in standing up for freedom in the Soviet Union? Can you think of any specific examples from his life that show this?
 - In what ways did Solzhenitsyn’s experiences in the Soviet Union illustrate the negative effects of communism and dictatorship on people’s lives?

- How do you think Solzhenitsyn's lessons about freedom and free speech are relevant to us in America today? Can you think of any current events or situations where these lessons might apply?
 - Why do you think it is important to learn about people like Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn who have stood up against oppressive governments? How can their stories inspire us in our own lives?
 - How would you describe the meaning of freedom based on what you learned from Solzhenitsyn's story? Why is freedom of speech an important part of a just and democratic society?
 - Why do you think freedom of speech is so crucial for maintaining a democratic society? What could happen if people are not allowed to express their thoughts and opinions freely?
 - What are some ways you can stand up for what you believe in your own life, just like Solzhenitsyn did? How can you promote freedom and justice in your school or community?
 - Can you think of any other historical figures or modern-day individuals who have fought for freedom and human rights? How do their stories compare to that of Solzhenitsyn?
5. Emphasize to students the importance of not taking their freedom in America for granted, reminding them that freedom is something they must actively protect and courageously stand up for.

Don't have time for the full lesson? Quick Activity (15-20 minutes)

Distribute the worksheet and allow students to complete it while they follow along with the video.