

OxfordAQA

International GCSE

History (9245)

Scheme of work

Life in Russia and the USSR, 1914-1953

For teaching from September 2026 onwards
For International GCSE exams in June 2028 onward

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Introduction

This scheme of work is intended to help teachers plan and implement the teaching of Life in Russia and the USSR, 1914-1953 option of the Oxford AQA International GCSE History (9245) specification. The purpose is to provide advice and guidance to teachers, not to prescribe and restrict their approach to the specification. There are obviously many other ways of organising the work and there is absolutely no requirement to use this scheme. We hope the suggested activities will support your teaching of this topic.

This study focuses on life for the people of Russia and the Soviet Union during a turbulent period. It was a period of autocracy and communism – the fall of Tsardom and the rise and consolidation of communism.

Students will study how people's lives were affected by the political, social, economic and cultural aspects of the period and the role ideas played in influencing change. They will also look at the role of key individuals and groups in shaping change and the impact the developments had on people.

Assumed coverage and teaching hours

This scheme of work assumes that the OxfordAQA International GCSE History (9245) is taught as a two-year linear course, with a total of approximately 120–140 guided learning hours in total, in line with specification guidance. This equates to two hours of teaching per week over two academic years, although this may vary according to local timetabling arrangements and students' prior experience. As this optional topic equates to one quarter of the qualification, this scheme of work is designed to be taught in around 30-35 hours.

Work will also need to be completed outside of lessons. The amount of independent study required will depend on curriculum time, the pace of delivery and the extent to which assessment practice and consolidation activities are incorporated into timetabled lessons.

Assessment

Assessment points in the learning activity column indicate possible assessment opportunities. These could be short tests of about ten minutes (exam-style questions, short factual tests, source evaluation) or longer assessments (exam-style questions).

On the part of Paper 2A covered by this Scheme of Work, students are required to create structured accounts, including narratives, descriptions, and explanations.

- Question 1 tests AO1 and is worth 3 marks. It requires students to show their knowledge of a given issue.
- Question 2 tests AO1 and AO2 and is worth 6 marks. It requires students to explain one way in which a given issue developed, supporting their explanation with knowledge and understanding. It will focus on the 2nd order concept of cause/consequence or change.
- Question 3 tests AO1 and AO2 and is worth 9 marks. It requires students to explain two changes or two ways/ reasons why a given issue developed, supporting their explanation with knowledge and understanding. It will focus on the 2nd order concept of cause/consequence or change.

- Question 4 tests AO1 and AO2 and is worth 12 marks. It requires students to construct an extended response with a line of reasoning. It requires students to explain a given cause/ consequence/ change and at least cause/ consequence/ change in the context of a broader development leading to a judgement that evaluates their relative importance. It will focus on the 2nd order concept of cause/consequence or change.

The specification content is based on an unfolding narrative of key developments in the domestic history of Russia/USSR and allows students to explore the effect these developments had on people.

Resources

Research exercises assume students have access to a textbook(s) and / or the internet. You can supplement textbook(s) by other sources.

OUP support this option with 'Life in Russia and the USSR, 1914-1953', published in 2026 as part of the OxfordAQA International series and available in various formats.

Part One: From Tsardom to Communism: Russia, 1914-1924

The impact of the First World War

Suggested timing

4 hours

Specification content

The impact of the First World War: impact on the army and on groups such as the peasantry, industrial workers, and ethnic minority groups; the reasons for and consequences of the Tsar's abdication.

Teaching guidance

- Enquiry question: why did the Romanovs become more unpopular?
- This study, by its nature, relates to the lives of people who lived and experienced events during the period in question. Recurring questions will relate to the problems they faced, how far the problems were dealt with and how far their lives were affected.
- At any early stage, students might consider different groups in society and compare their experiences to build up a complex view of the past. These groups might include some or all the following – the list is not exhaustive: the peasantry, workers in industrial settings, professional people, soldiers and sailors, religious and ethnic minority groups, aristocrats and women. The lives of these groups can be tracked through each Part of the specification, taking their stories up to 1953.
- The emphasis should be on the nature of Russian government and society in 1914 and the impact of the First World War on Russia: the military, social and economic consequences. Focus on the impact of the war on the Romanovs (and their popularity) and develop your students' understanding of the reasons for the Tsar's abdication.
- Here is an early opportunity to practice writing in response to 'explain' style questions – point, evidence, explain (essential for Q2, Q3 and Q4 of the exam paper).

Possible teaching and learning activities

- What was Russia like in 1914? In pairs, students should produce a spider diagram/mind map showing the key features of Russia's system of government, economy and society. They should consider what these features meant for Russian people living in cities and rural areas; or other groups mentioned above, including the impact of Russification.
- Students research how the war affected different groups in Russian society. Your students could use a range of sources and interpretations about the impact of the war. These can include the impact on soldiers, workers in the cities, peasants, women and minority groups. Students might write reports based on their research to explain rising anger against the government.
- The Russian armies on the Eastern Front 1914–1917; chart declining morale and loss

of enthusiasm. Discuss what caused the biggest problems – lack of military supplies, loss of morale, poor leadership?

- Students investigate the political effects of Nicholas making himself Commander-in-Chief of the armies and capture their findings in a spider diagram. Research the personalities of the Romanov family, especially Nicholas, Alexandra and Alexei. Use photographs and other documentary evidence to analyze why the Romanovs became increasingly unpopular.
- Rasputin: students research on his background; why he gained so much influence; the extent of his influence; his murder – analyze the traditional story. What was the role of cartoons and newspapers in demonizing Rasputin? How has Rasputin been portrayed since his death?
- Students peer assess their answers to the following question: 'how did the First World War weaken the Tsar's government?'
- Strategies such as card sorts/diamond 9s, can help students consider what might be the 'main reason' in comparison to others – note in reference to the Q4 style on the exam paper. In this case, what was the main reason for the Tsar's abdication.

The failure of the Provisional Government and its impact

Suggested timing

3 hours

Specification content

The failure of the Provisional Government and its impact: Kerensky's role and the reasons for unpopularity and failure of the Provisional Government, including the Kornilov affair; the Bolshevik seizure of power and its impact on the army, the peasantry, industrial workers, aristocrats and the lives of women.

Teaching guidance

- The focus is to understand and explain reasons why the Provisional Government may have been doomed from the start. Encourage students to consider the key individuals involved, the decisions which had to be made and the different groups who were against the government.
- Develop your students' understanding of the Bolshevik seizure of power and the growth of the party during 1917.
- There are opportunities to consider the 'main reason' why the Bolsheviks succeeded. In addition, sources and interpretations about Lenin's importance might be studied – what messages did authors who lived through the period offer?

Possible teaching and learning activities

- Enquiry questions: How popular do you think the Provisional Government's policies on the war and land would be with the peasants and the soldiers? Why were the Bolsheviks able to seize power at the end of 1917?
- Research the role of Lenin in spring/summer of 1917, especially his ideas including the April Theses and the impact of propaganda – visual and written.
- Students look at the events in spring/summer 1917 from the point of view of the Provisional Government under Lvov and then Kerensky. They can then write a speech justifying government policies. How might they address the problems faced by different groups of people?
- Write a report from Petrograd Soviet about its frustrations. Include the reasons why the Provisional Government failed to deal with Russia's problems and why groups in society might have reacted differently to the efforts to deal with them. For example, coverage could include women, peasants, national minority groups, aristocrats, soldiers, sailors and industrial workers.
- Produce a spider diagram about the impact of the Kornilov affair – include how Kerensky had played into the hands of the Bolsheviks.
- Students produce a timeline for the period following the abdication of the Tsar up to the Bolshevik seizure of power.
- In groups, students investigate the growth in support for the Bolsheviks. They should consider the following factors and debate their relative importance: the roles of Lenin and

Trotsky; the April Theses, the difficulties faced the Provisional Government, the Petrograd Soviet and Kornilov's attempt to seize power. What else would you include?

- Give your students a range of different interpretations and ask them to consider reasons why the events are portrayed in different ways. These can include films, written accounts, paintings etc. Using their own knowledge, they should justify which interpretation they find most convincing.
- Students could also research the fate of the Romanovs.

Lenin's dictatorship, Red Terror and Civil War

Suggested timing

4 hours

Specification content

Lenin's dictatorship, Red Terror and Civil War: secret police; the Red Army; the Whites; the role of women and the impact of propaganda; economic and social changes under Lenin including War Communism, the Kronstadt Rising and NEP; impact on the lives of Russians, including the peasantry, industrial workers, sailors, women, religious and ethnic minority groups.

Teaching guidance

- Develop your students' understanding of Lenin's efforts to strengthen Communist rule. For example, what was the 'main' reason, amongst others, why he was able to do so? They should be able to explain the reasons for the Civil War and the nature of the fighting. You can also explore why the Reds won the war and the consequences of victory.
- The focus is also on the social and economic problems during and after the Civil War, especially the New Economic Policy. Also develop your students' understanding of the impact these problems and policies had on different groups of Russian people. What changed and why?

Possible teaching and learning activities

- Ask students to investigate what Lenin did in the first few weeks/months of communist rule. What can they learn about his priorities? Include the importance of the Cheka and Red Terror in establishing control, and the problems of peace with Germany but Civil War against the Whites.
- Students create a profile of Trotsky and should choose what they believe are the three most important reasons for the success of the Bolsheviks in the Civil War and explain why.
- Students research the conditions of fighting during the Civil War. They can study the propaganda on both sides – both written and visual and use their findings to write a report.
- As a class, list the reasons why the Reds won the Civil War; then in small groups discuss which reasons were the most important and which were the least important.
- Students discuss what a report to the Bolshevik government might say about the economic and social problems faced during the Civil War. How helpful was War Communism in solving these problems?
- Ask your students to compare NEP with War Communism. They should consider what critics of Lenin might say were the arguments for and against having this policy.
- In groups, look at the impact of Bolshevik policies on different groups of people; include sailors and members of the Red Army, Whites, the peasantry, industrial workers, middle

classes and aristocrats, the young, women, and members of minority and religious groups. Report back and collate the findings of each group's work.

- Class discussion: was it inevitable that Russia/USSR would adopt a Communist dictatorship? Why were the Bolsheviks successful under Lenin?

Review

Suggested timing

1 hour

Specification content

Review and assessment of Part 1: From Tsardom to Communism: Russia, 1914-1924

Assessment guidance

- This is the opportunity to develop your students' exam technique and to test their learning so far.
- You can use exam-style questions based on the content of Part 1.
- For second order concept questions, analyse students' effectiveness when writing Point/Evidence/Explanation paragraphs in answer to an 'explain' style question.

Resources

Specimen papers and Activities sections of the OUP textbook.

Part 2: Stalin's Dictatorship: USSR, 1924-1941

Stalin's dictatorship

Suggested timing

3 hours

Specification content

Stalin's dictatorship: Censorship, art, propaganda and the Cult of Personality; the Purges and Great Terror, including the role of secret police and the impact on the army, the party, professional and industrial workers, and religious groups.

Teaching guidance

- Develop your students' understanding of Stalin's control by explaining the Cult of Personality and its consequences.
- There are opportunities to analyze the reasons for, and extent of, the Purges. Students should also understand how different groups which constituted Soviet society were affected. What was the impact on the lives of Soviet people?
- Enquiry question: How far did fear and violence or propaganda contribute to Stalin's dictatorship?

Possible teaching and learning activities

- Explore interpretations about Stalin's Dictatorship; what messages do the interpretations convey, how is our understanding of them influenced by their provenance and are they convincing when tested against contextual knowledge?
- Students investigate the evidence surrounding the murder of Kirov, the show trials and the Great Terror. What were the short-term and long-term consequences of the Terror for the armed forces of the USSR?
- In groups, students investigate the use of secret police and informers. They should consider what effects the secret police and informers would have on communities within the USSR, including religious groups.
- Research conditions in the gulags and present the findings.
- Students write an essay explaining the consequences of the purges and the Great Terror in the 1930s. Class discussion: why did Stalin's government feel that it had to resort to these brutal methods?
- Ask your students to find propaganda paintings, posters, poems, speeches, films to illustrate how Stalin was presented, ie the Cult of Personality. Build a portfolio to illustrate the importance of propaganda in Stalin's control of the USSR. Comment on the value of the sources to an historian studying Soviet propaganda at this time.
- Class discussion: ask your students to evaluate which method of control used by Stalin was the most effective in securing full control.

Economic changes and modernisation

Suggested timing

4 hours

Specification content

Economic changes and modernisation: collectivisation, industrialisation and their consequences for people in the countryside, including Kulaks; the Holodomor in Ukraine; the Five-Year Plans and their impact living conditions in cities and on groups such as managers, industrial and professional workers, and conditions in cities.

Teaching guidance

- Develop students' understanding of collectivisation and industrialization. Explain the reasons behind the policies, their key features and their impact and results. Your students should be able to evaluate the impact of Stalin's economic policies on the people of the USSR. Relate back to different groups in society to compare impact, ie reference earlier lessons to trace how the lives of different peoples changed, and why?
- Consider and categorise the main results of Stalin's modernisation programme by reference to categories of factors, such as political, economic and/or social benefits.

Possible teaching and learning activities

- Enquiry question: 'Collectivisation and the Five-Year Plans brought glory to Stalin and misery to his people.' Do you agree?
- Presentation to cover the reasons why Stalin wanted rapid modernization in the USSR – economically, politically and personally. What was collectivisation and how was it connected to industrialization and the Five-Year Plans.
- Students research collectivisation. They should include: the process; opposition and consequences such as mass famine, which followed.
- Specific lessons focusing on the Holodomor in Ukraine could draw from theses resources: [Teaching Materials - HREC Education](#)
- Students draw up a table showing the successes and failures of collectivization and the Five-Year Plans.
- Students research life in the new industrial cities such as Magnitogorsk to see the realities of industrial development.
- Give your students a range of Soviet interpretations of life in the USSR in the 1930s. How do these interpretations differ? Why might they differ? Which is the most convincing interpretation?
- Students construct a table to show the economic, political and social consequences of Stalin's economic policies.
- Group work – what was the impact of industrialisation on Soviet people? Each group of students to research one of the following and present their findings: managers, workers, women, professionals. Include details about work and everyday life, eg public health, housing, consumer goods and food, experience of propaganda, methods of control.
- The Stakhanovite Movement – how might a visitor to the USSR from abroad report on this Movement – include information about its aims, key individuals, how it was used as propaganda – and how it came to be resented by other workers.

- Students research the construction of the Moscow Underground and how this glorified Stalin.

Social changes

Suggested timing

2 hours

Specification content

Social changes: the differing roles of men and women under Stalin, including the New Soviet Man and the New Soviet Woman; the lives of young people under Stalin, including changes to education; art and culture under Stalin; Russification; the treatment of different religions and ethnic minority groups, including persecution, forced resettlement and deportation.

Teaching guidance

- Enquiry question: to what extent did Stalin change Soviet society, art and culture?
- Analyze the reasons why Stalin promoted the idea of a New Soviet Man and New Soviet Woman; how was this done and how far did everyday life change?
- For women specifically, the impact on their lives and the debate about the 'Great Retreat' from the attitudes of the 1920s would be worthy of study.
- Education and youth organizations played a central role in societal change – what happened, why and analyze their importance to the Soviet state?
- Finally, there are opportunities to understand Stalin's policies towards religion and minority and ethnic groups/ What was the nature of Russification under Stalin?

Possible teaching and learning activities

- Create a spider diagram to show the qualities or features of the New Soviet Woman and New Soviet Man – what was 'new' and how might their daily lives be shaped by these new 'ideals'.
- Research into Soviet propaganda and art, such as film, posters and literature – how did propaganda support these new social ideas and why did the Soviet state invest so much time and effort into art and culture? Prepare a display or scrapbook of examples to illustrate your understanding.
- Class debate – considering policies towards women, how far did Stalin's changes represent a change or 'Retreat' from the 1920s – different groups could present assessments about the impact on family life, employment and women's rights.
- Students present reports about how the lives of young people changed under Stalin; include information about school, youth organizations, health and how they were meant to contribute to Stalin's Soviet state. Illustrate with examples from Soviet propaganda.
- Prepare a fact file to describe and show the impact of Russification, and the treatment of religious and ethnic minority groups. What similarities and differences can you identify? How do you think these aspects of Stalin's policies might be explained both inside and outside the Soviet Union?

Review and assessment for Part 2

Suggested timing

1 hour

Assessment guidance

- This is the opportunity to develop your students' exam technique and to test their learning on the content of Part 2.
- You could use this as an opportunity to develop their understanding of how to answer AO1/AO2 questions such as 'describe', 'explain' and the bullet-point 12-mark evaluative question.
- Discuss exam techniques with your students. Use low tariff questions to check acquisition of knowledge.
- For second order concept questions, analyze students' effectiveness when writing Point/Evidence/Explanation paragraphs in answer to an 'explain' style question.

Resources

Specimen and past papers.

Part 3: The ‘Great Patriotic War’ and the final years of Stalinism, 1941-1953

The impact of the Second World War on the USSR

Suggested timing

4 hours

Specification content

The impact of the Second World War on the USSR: economic and social problems; Stalin’s wartime leadership; the role and contribution of women to the ‘Great Patriotic War’; women in wartime propaganda, including Lyudmila Pavlichenko.

Teaching guidance

- Analyze Soviet successes and difficulties faced when overcoming the problems of the Great Patriotic war. How were ordinary people’s lives affected?
- Evaluate the successes, weaknesses and controversies surrounding Stalin’s wartime leadership.

Possible teaching and learning activities

- Create a spider diagram of the economic, military and social problems the USSR faced during the Great Patriotic War.
- Divide the students into groups to research different aspects of the contribution of Soviet women to the war effort: women in the workforce, on the home front, in the military and how propaganda was used as testimony of their work, eg Pavlichenko. Groups to report back to the class.
- Students present details of the impact of the war on various groups in the Soviet Union, on life in the cities, countryside, occupied lands, and the impact on families.
- Taking the roles of two Soviet historians, present two reports; one published at the end of the Second World war focusing on Stalin’s achievements as wartime leader, and the other published after his death which was more critical of Stalin’s role.
- Research examples of sources from the wartime period which present Soviet propaganda. Prepare a portfolio of a selection of different types of sources, commenting on what can be inferred, on their provenance and how useful they are in studying the Soviet war effort.

Post-war reconstruction

Suggested timing

4 hours

Specification content

Post-war reconstruction: agricultural policies and stagnation; the extent of industrial rebuilding and peoples' standard of living by 1953; High Stalinism, including the role of propaganda; Terror and purges; Beria and the NKVD; the death of Stalin.

Teaching guidance

- Analyze changes in Soviet agriculture and industry after the Second World War; what was the impact on standards of living?
- Gain an understanding of High Stalinism as it applied to the Soviet Union after the end of the Second World War.
- Analyze the controversies surrounding Stalin's legacy.

Possible teaching and learning activities

- Prepare a fact file of post war economic changes to agriculture and industry.
- Create a spider diagram to show how far people's standard of living declined. Did Soviets have reason to complain? How did conditions in the USSR affect different groups of people?
- Present a profile of Beria – focus here on his post war work in the USSR.
- Students prepare reports on different aspects of High Stalinism and present their findings with the rest of the group: propaganda, culture, history, science and terror. How did each contribute to High Stalinism? How far did High Stalinism reach its peak after 1945?
- Research why there continues to be controversy about the circumstances surrounding Stalin's death.
- Study a selection of sources and interpretations about Stalin's legacy. Look at aspects such as political, economic, social and international. Debate why there continues to be so much controversy about Stalin's legacy?
- Which sources and interpretations proved most convincing. Why?

Review and assessment of Part 3

Suggested timing

1 hour

Assessment guidance

- This is an opportunity to review and assess Parts 1, 2 and 3 and to develop your students' exam techniques.
- Give your students a Section A question from one of the specimen papers.
- Model the answer and/or peer review students' responses.

Resources

Specimen and past papers. Helpful for students to understand question styles.