

HISTORY AND MEMORY IN ESTONIA

Introduction:

The purpose of this lesson is to provide students with background information on Estonia's history, beginning with Estonia's experiences in World War II, the Cold War, and post-Soviet relations, as well as some information on current controversies that many view as legacies of this time period. Students examine 10 "snapshots" of Estonia's history to expand upon the limited information given in their world history text. To close the lesson, they examine editorial cartoons depicting several cartoonists' viewpoints on some of the enduring issues still facing Estonian democracy today.

Objectives: At the conclusion of this lesson, students will be able to:

- Describe Estonian's location and population.
- Explain major events in Estonia's history from 1939 to the present.
- Connect Estonian history with contemporary issues facing Estonia's democracy.

Materials and Preparation: Make enough copies of the **Country Overview** handout for all students. Copy and cut out enough of the **Snapshots: History and Memory in Estonia** cards so one-third of the class can have each. Make transparencies of the **Estonia Cartoons**.

Procedure:

1. Begin the lesson by asking students if they can share some of the World War II experiences of their grandparents or great-grandparents. You might also ask if any have seen any of the Ken Burns PBS Film Series, *The War*. What things come to mind when they think about World War II and the Cold War period?
2. Explain that the Estonian students they will interact with in the DID project have probably also heard memories of this time period from grandparents and great-grandparents. To make the most of our partnership with Estonian students, we'll take a little time to learn about Estonia's recent history. This might enable us to have richer deliberations and message board discussions with our counterparts in Estonia.
3. Distribute the **Country Overview** handout and ask students to read it quickly. Tell the class:

This lesson provides some "snapshots" of Estonia's recent history, beginning with Estonia's experiences in the 1940s and World War II, the Cold War and the current post-Soviet time period—experiences in the time period of the parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents of the students you will meet in the DID Project.

This very brief history will provide you with some background about Estonia's struggles with Nazi Germany and Russia during World War II and the Soviets during the period of the Cold War. It closes with Estonia's entrance into NATO and the European Union.

4. Divide the class into three groups. Give the first group cards 1-3; the second 4-6; and the last 7-9. Working in groups, students should read the information on their assigned cards and use their world history textbook to find the relevant pages to "match" the information given on their cards. Explain that their task is to prepare brief reports (5 minutes each) in which they explain what their history texts contain about the time period given on their "snapshot" cards and the relevant details provided on the "snapshot" cards.

As an alternative strategy for DID students who are not in a World History class, ask students to identify three key points on each card that they will then share with the class and contribute to making a timeline for this period of Estonian history.

5. Close the lesson with the editorial cartoons. As they examine the cartoons, ask them to consider the following questions:
 - What words, if any, are used in the cartoon?
 - Having learned some background about Estonia, what is familiar to you in this cartoon?
 - What issue is the focus of the cartoon?
 - What do you think is the viewpoint of the artist? Cite evidence to support your answer.
 - What questions do you have about this cartoon?
 - When do you think the cartoon was published?

Information about Cartoons:

#1. The Man Who Came to Dinner

From “Edmund Valtman: The Cartoonist Who Came in from the Cold.” Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Collection:

(<http://www.loc.gov/rr/print/swann/valtman/presentation.html>).

Annotatation of the cartoon, “The Man Who Came to Dinner,” published in 1979:

“After Estonia was incorporated into the Soviet Union at the close of World War II, many Russians were resettled in the largely agricultural country to provide the manpower necessary for industrialization—a process called Russification. By 1979, the population was almost 25% Russian.”

#2. For Fifty Years I Worked Hard

From “Edmund Valtman: The Cartoonist Who Came in from the Cold.” Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Collection:

(<http://www.loc.gov/rr/print/swann/valtman/presentation.html>).

Annotatation of the cartoon, published in 1994: “In 1944, Russian troops drove the Germans out of Estonia and immediately incorporated it into the Soviet Union. Fifty years later, with the fall of the Iron Curtain, Estonia had declared its independence, but Russian leader Boris Yeltsin (1931-2007) refused to remove the last 2000 Russian troops until the Estonian government agreed to provide former Russian officers who had retired there with citizenship, housing, and pensions. Under pressure from the United States, the Russians eventually backed down.”

Note: Cartoonist Edmund S. Valtman (1914-2005) experienced Soviet rule firsthand. The Pulitzer Prizewinning cartoonist from Estonia was working as a draftsman when the Soviets overran the nation in 1940. Russia went to war with Germany in 1941 and required Estonian men under fifty, including Valtman’s two brothers, to join the Soviet military. Germany occupied Estonia for three years until the Soviets reoccupied the beleaguered nation. On the day in 1944 that Soviet tanks re-entered Tallinn, the capital of Estonia, Valtman fled the country. After four years in displaced persons’ camps in Allied-controlled Germany, he found a sponsor in the United States and immigrated in 1949. Events in Estonia profoundly affected Valtman who drew editorial cartoons for the Hartford (CN) Times Newspaper for over 25 years. His work is best remembered for drawings that forcefully indict 20th century leaders of totalitarian states.
(<http://www.loc.gov/rr/print/swann/valtman/overview.html>)

#3. Gorbachev.

Glenn McCoy. Belleville News-Democracy (Illinois) 1991.

#4. The Break-up of the USSR: Soviet “Nesting Dolls” (Matryoshka)

Cartoon by Georges Million. *Fuere epais: dessins d’actualite* 1991-1994 et *dessins d’humour*. Albertville: 1994.

#5. Soviet War Memorial

Paresh Nath, *The National Herald*, Delhi, India. May 12, 2007

<http://caglecartoons.com/viewimage.asp?ID={01FF870F-63A7-4D3C-A6AE-64A654D2A40B}>

#6. Warfare

Patrick Chappatte, *International Herald Tribune*, May 30, 2007

#7. Invasion, Occupation, Lies...

Jan Darasz. *Newropeans Magazine*. June 18, 2007.

Annotation: "The past is being conscripted to serve the present again. A Russian's imperial nostalgia is not an Estonian's; not that there's any understanding. The big bully the small and then re-write the history books"

Country Overview: Estonia



Estonia is located in northeastern Europe, bordering the Baltic Sea on the west, the Gulf of Finland on the north, Latvia on the south, and Russia on the east. Estonia has an area of 17,500 square miles (45,226 square kilometers), smaller than New Hampshire and Vermont combined.

The capital is Tallinn located on the Gulf of Finland; other major cities include Tartu, Parnu, and Narva. Estonia is the smallest of the Baltic countries (others are Latvia and Lithuania).

The population of Estonia is approximately 1.3 million (smaller than the population of the Denver-metro area). Ethnic Estonians comprise almost 70 percent of the population; 25% of the population are ethnic Russians. * Within the Russian population, 27% hold Russian citizenship*, 35% hold Estonian citizenship, and 35% continue to have undefined citizenship—a term used in Baltic states to indicate “statelessness” (i.e., immigrants from former Soviet republics who chose not to pursue any country’s citizenship after the collapse of Soviet Union.)

Obtaining citizenship has been very difficult for the majority of Russian-speakers. The citizenship policies of Russia, on the other hand, has been very inclusive, allowing permanent residents of the former Soviet Union to become Russian citizens with very little effort.

* Following annexation in 1941, Russians immigrated to Estonia in large numbers. After Estonia regained its independence in 1991, only Russians who had lived in the country before 1940 were granted Estonian citizenship. All others were subject to a citizenship exam testing Estonian language proficiency. Under Estonian law, residents without citizenship may not vote in elections of the Riigikogu (the national parliament) or elections for the European Union Parliament. They are, however, eligible to vote in local elections.

Useful Websites:

- Video trailer for the documentary, "The Singing Revolution." <http://www.singingrevolution.com>
- Brief factual overview of Estonia's geography, history and culture. <http://www.infoplease.com/ipa/A0107501.html>
- In depth articles about all aspects of historical and modern Estonia published by the Estonian ministry of foreign affairs. http://www.vm.ee/estonia/kat_509/pea_172/
- English language newspaper, "The Baltic Times." <http://www.baltictimes.com/>

SNAPSHOTS: HISTORY AND MEMORY IN ESTONIA

1. 1939: Stalin gains Hitler's Agreement to Divide Eastern Europe into "Spheres of Special Interest"

In August 1939, Germany and the Soviet Union signed a Treaty of Non-Aggression. In September 1939, after the collapse of Poland, Red Navy warships appeared off Estonian ports and Soviet bombers began a patrol over Tallinn and the nearby countryside. The Estonian government was forced to agree to allow the USSR to establish military bases and station 25,000 troops in Estonia soil for "mutual defense."

While the world's attention was focused on the fall of Paris to Nazi Germany a day earlier, a Soviet military blockade on Estonia went into effect. In June 1940, the Soviet Union invaded Estonia as 90,000 Red Army troops entered the country. The Estonian government decided, given the overwhelming Soviet force, not to resist and to avoid bloodshed and open war. Thus the military occupation of Estonia was complete.

2. August 1940: Annexation by the Soviet Union as the Estonian SSR

Mass deportations of Estonians were carried out by the Soviets in June 1941. Many of the country's political and intellectual leaders were killed or deported to remote areas of the USSR.

When the German Operation started against the Soviet Union, 34,000 young Estonian men were forcibly drafted into the Red Army. Less than 30% of them survived the war. Many countries, including the United States, did not recognize the seizure of Estonia by the USSR. These countries continued to recognize Estonian diplomats and consuls who still functioned in many countries in the name of their former government.

Contemporary Russian politicians deny that the Republic of Estonia was illegally annexed by the Soviet Union in 1940. They state that the Soviet troops entered in 1940 with the consent of the government of the Republic of Estonia and maintain that the USSR did not wage any combat activities in Estonia.

3. 1941 to 1944: German Occupation

Nazi Germany invaded the Soviet Union in 1941, thus breaking the Treaty of Non Aggression signed two years earlier. Though the Germans were initially perceived as liberators from the USSR, Estonians soon realized that they were yet another occupying power. Nazi Germany invaded the Soviet Union in June 1941. As they marched through Estonia enroute to the Soviet Union, Nazi officers, seeing Estonian soldiers already fighting the Soviets, were able to pull back and let the Estonians do the fighting. However, the Germans pillaged the country for the war effort, and Estonia was incorporated into the German province of Ostland in 1941.

During the German occupation, many Estonians fled to join the Finnish army to fight against the Soviet Union. Many other Estonians were forcefully drafted into the German Army. In 1944 with the threat of a new invasion by the Red Army, more Estonians joined the German forces.

4. 1944: From One Occupation to Another

In 1944, the Soviet Army pushed the German front back. The prime minister of the Republic of Estonia delivered a radio address that implored all able-bodied men to report for military service under the Estonian government. 38,000 volunteers joined the military. It was hoped that this effort, Estonia would be able to attract Western support for independence from the USSR.

In September 1944, units of the Red Army captured Tallinn. Although it was a milestone on the road to the Allied victory in Europe, to Estonians it was the beginning of a repressive Soviet occupation that would last for nearly 50 more years.

In the face of the country being re-occupied by the Red Army, tens of thousands of people chose to either retreat together with the Germans or flee to Finland or Sweden, becoming war refugees and later, expatriates. In addition to the human and material losses suffered by war, thousands of civilians were killed and tens of thousands of people deported from Estonia by the Soviet authorities until Joseph Stalin's death in 1953.

5. Estonia Continues Under Soviet Rule

In 1949, in response to slow progress in forming collective farms, Soviet authorities forcibly deported over 20,000 Estonians either to labor camps or Siberia. Within weeks, almost all of the remaining rural areas were collectivized.

Half of those deported perished; the other half were not allowed to return until the early 1960s (several years after Stalin's death). That and previous repressions sparked a guerrilla war against the Soviet authorities in Estonia. This guerrilla war was waged into the early 1950s by a group known as the "Forest Brothers," comprised mostly of Estonian veterans of both the German and Finnish armies as well as some civilians.

Militarization was another aspect of the Soviet regime. Large parts of the country, especially the coastal areas, were restricted to anyone but the Soviet military. Most of the seashore and all islands were declared "border zones," and people were restricted from traveling to them without a permit.

Hundreds of thousands of migrants were relocated to Estonia from other parts of the Soviet Union to conduct industrialization and militarization, increasing the population by about a half million people. The immigrants stayed on. By 1980, Russification and migration had achieved a level that, in some cases, caused protests among ethnic Estonians.

6. The Soviet Union Unravels

1987 saw the first open protests against Soviet rule and in 1988 the Estonian Soviet legislature declared sovereignty. The independence drive began in earnest. By the mid-1980s, the foreign policies of President Reagan and British Prime Minister Thatcher toward the Soviet Union and problems within the system itself led the Soviet Union into deep crisis. It became clear to the Soviet leadership that they were losing the Cold War. In order to halt the costly arms race and preserve the Soviet Union, Mikhail Gorbachev introduced reforms for economic restructuring called *perestroika* and a new openness to the world called *glasnost*. His policies angered hard-line Communist party members, who in 1991 attempted an unsuccessful coup in Moscow, but ultimately led to the dismantling of the Soviet Union.

7. National Songs Unite a Nation: The Singing Revolution

Estonia's "Singing Revolution" began in 1988 during peaceful protest rallies in which protestors would sing national songs that, along with the Estonian flag, were forbidden during the Soviet years. Night after night for four years, thousands of singing demonstrators protested throughout Estonia in outspoken defiance of Soviet rule.

In 1991, Soviet tanks rolled through the countryside in an attempt to quell the Singing Revolution. Fearing a total crackdown by the Soviet army, the Estonian parliament met in emergency session and passed a final resolution declaring full independence and requesting international recognition. Estonians stood as human shields to protect radio and TV stations from the Soviet tanks. Through these actions, Estonia regained its independence without any bloodshed.

8. A New Government Defines Citizenship

In 1991, a constitutional assembly drafted a new constitution, creating a parliamentary form of government. The most serious issue that the new government faced was what to do with the 500,000 mostly Russian, Soviet-era immigrants living in Estonia. Because these people had settled in Estonia under Soviet rule, they were not automatically considered citizens of Estonia. They would have to be "naturalized" on the basis of language and residency criteria. Furthermore, the majority of Estonia's Russian population did not speak Estonian.

In February 1992, the parliament set naturalization terms, which included a two-year residency requirement, the ability to speak conversational Estonian, and a one-year waiting period after applying. This had serious implications because the resident Russians would then be ineligible to vote in the September 1992 elections for a new parliament. Non-citizens were, however, given the right to vote in local elections under the terms of the new constitution.

In August 1994, former Soviet troops and tanks were finally removed from Estonia—but not without controversy. Russian leader Boris Yeltsin refused to remove the last troops until the Estonian government agreed to provide former Russian officers, long retired, with citizenship, housing, and pensions. Under pressure from the United States, the Russians eventually backed down, and the 2000 Russian troops finally left Estonia in August 1994.

9. NATO and EU Membership and Continuing Tensions with Russia

In 2004 Estonia was accepted into NATO, marking the first time in its history it joined a military alliance voluntarily. In 2004 Estonia also joined the European Union.

Estonia still struggles with including ethnic Russians into its democracy. Tensions between the two groups deteriorated most recently with the relocation of a World War II monument, a statue of a Russian soldier, from the middle of Tallinn to a military cemetery. To many Estonians, the statue is a reminder of the forced rule of Soviet dictatorship of more than 50 years following World War II. To those with Russian heritage, the statue pays tribute to those who sacrificed and defeated Nazi fascism in Europe.

After removal of this statue, riots broke out in Tallinn. More than 1000 people were arrested. Estonia's state websites experienced a massive "cyber attack," on their electronic infrastructure, disabling the websites of the Estonian presidency, Parliament, almost all government ministries, political parties, three news organizations, two major banks, and communications firms. Young Russian protestors blockaded Estonia's Embassy in Moscow. The Russian government has denied involvement in what many call the world's first "cyber war." Observers note this has been the most serious dispute between the two nations since Estonia regained independence in 1991.

Estonia's democracy is considered one of the most successful of the former countries under Soviet rule. Currently, Estonia has an estimated 150 troops serving with multinational forces in Afghanistan, and up to 40 in Iraq. Two Estonian soldiers, mine-clearing specialists, were recently killed in Afghanistan; three have been killed in Iraq.