What's So Great About Peter?

About the Show

Sam's Grandpa Dima tells some pretty amazing stories to Sam, Fred, and Samantha about his ancestor, Alexander Kikin—but could they be true? Fred and Samantha convince Sam to travel back to Russia in 1698, just in time to save Kikin (a member of the Russian guardsmen, the Streltsy) from the wrath of Peter the Great.

Introduction

Although Russian history may not be part of your regular social studies curriculum, studying Peter the Great is an excellent way for students to understand the scope of Eastern and Western European history. Learning about Peter the Great is also an intriguing way to examine the complexities of "great" leaders.

Historical Background

Peter I of Russia came to the throne in 1682. Known as Peter the Great, he was a brilliant but highly controversial ruler. He made Russia into a great power although he brutally oppressed many of its people.

While many countries in Western Europe had made economic, scientific, and cultural changes by the 17th century, Russia—the largest country at the time—was still a mostly illiterate, agricultural society, based on a feudal system of serfdom. It had no army, few schools, and almost no factories. Foreigners were kept out. Peter was determined to bring Russia up to date.

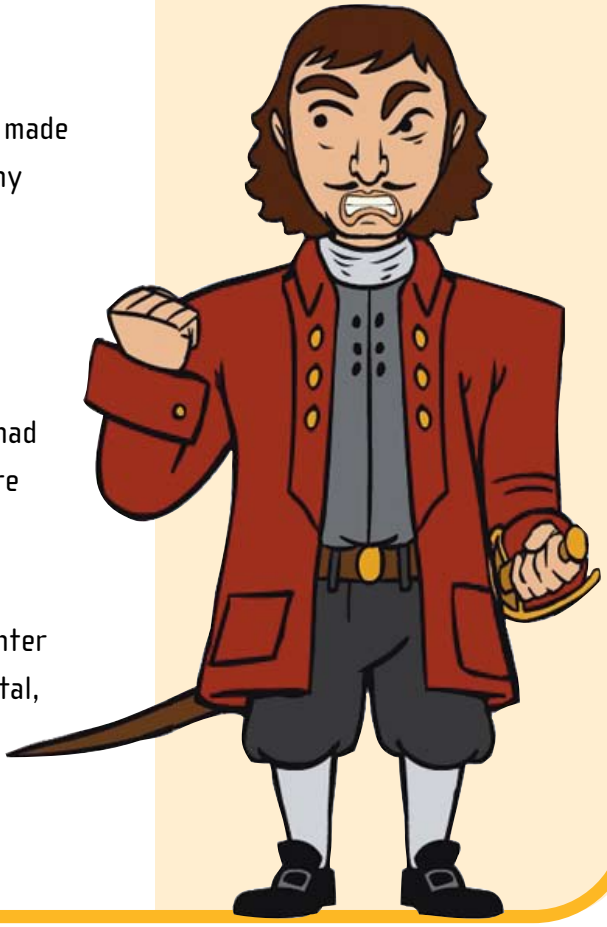
In 1697 Peter traveled to Europe in disguise (although at over 6 feet tall, he was rather recognizable). He worked as a carpenter in a Dutch shipyard, learned how to cobble shoes, engrave metal, and even to pull teeth.

Curriculum Connections

- European history
- leaders
- Peter the Great
- Russia
- world history

Subject Areas

- geography
- language arts
- social studies



What's So Great About Peter?

Historical Background *continued*

When Peter returned to Russia he mandated extensive reforms in religion, art, science, and government. He created a Russian navy and established schools, libraries, and museums. He encouraged the sons of nobles to study abroad and master reading, writing, arithmetic, and geography. Women were no longer to be kept secluded, but were to appear in public at social functions.

Peter wanted to create a city that would showcase Russia's power and progress. In 1703, work began on St. Petersburg (later called Petrograd and then Leningrad). Peter transformed what others viewed as a dismal marshland into a beautiful capital city. In 1721, after defeating the Swedish and winning Latvia and other territories, Peter proclaimed Russia an empire and took the title of Emperor of All Russia, Father of the Fatherland.

Despite his reforms, Peter was also a ruthless dictator. It is estimated that 30,000 to 100,000 people died building St. Petersburg. When Russians hesitated to move to the new city, Peter ordered them to do so at their own expense. Peasants, most of whom were serfs working the land for the nobility, could not travel without permission, and could be drafted into the army at any moment. Hundreds of thousands of people left the country during Peter's reign.

Although Peter and his second wife, Catherine I, had 12 children, only two lived past the age of seven. In 1718, fearing his son Alexi was plotting against him, Peter disinherited and tortured his heir, who died in prison awaiting trial. After Peter died in 1725, it would be 37 years before Russia enjoyed another "golden age" under the reign of Catherine II, also known as Catherine the Great.



Want students to get even more excited about history?

Check out the Peter the Great adventure for kids at

www.timewarptrio.com/adventures/russia/

Put It Back, Jack! and other interactive games to play.

Plentifax 487—the ultimate time traveler's guide—gives facts about life in 17th century Russia and more!

Cool Books that kids will love.

Activity 1



What's In a Name?

Peter the Great named a city after himself. In this activity, students learn the origins of the name of their city or town.

Introductions

1. Explain to students the historical background of the creation of St. Petersburg. You may want to review an excerpt of the Time Warp Trio show, "What's So Great About Peter?" where Peter the Great talks about his plans to build a great city and why he feels it will be important for his country.
2. Ask students what they think is the origin of the name of their community or city. (Be sure to research it beforehand so that you know the answer.)
3. After you have discussed the origins of the name, brainstorm a list of nearby towns, cities, neighborhoods, states, schools, etc.
4. Either in groups or as a whole class, have students divide the place names into these categories:
   - people (e.g., Seattle, Franklin, or Washington)
   - location (North, South, East, or West)
   - geographic features (e.g., Ocean City, Fallsview, etc.)
   - descriptions (e.g., Greenville)
   - names adopted from other languages or peoples (e.g., North Dakota, Massachusetts)
5. Have each student pick a city, town, state, or country from a United States and/or world map. Have them research the story behind the name.
6. Have them present their findings to the class. They may want to add graphics, music (for instance, the state song), or another item that helps tell the story.

Take It Further

If students have chosen local places, contact the local newspaper to see if they are willing to feature some or all of the students' reports.

Objectives

- to practice research skills
- to understand the origins of place names

Materials

- writing supplies

Curriculum Standards

- **NCSS**
  Time, Continuity & Change:
  The students will compare and contrast different perspectives based on stories or accounts about past events, people, places, or situations, identifying how they contribute to our understanding of the past.
- **NCTE/IRA**
  Students employ a wide range of strategies as they write and use different writing process elements appropriately to communicate with different audiences for different purposes.

Activity 2



"Bio Poem"

Writing poetry about a historical figure is a way to help students demonstrate their understanding of events and people from the past.

Introductions

1. Introduce students to the concept of a "Bio Poem." Explain that it uses a certain format in order to tell about the life of its subject.
2. Distribute the Bio Poem handout, which shows the template, and the "William H." handout, an example of a Bio Poem.
3. Ask a student volunteer to read Kaitlin Tibbetts's poem about William H. Carney, a black sergeant with Massachusetts 54th Regiment, the famed African American Civil War regiment.
4. Have students compare the Bio Poem of William H. Carney with the template. How has Kaitlin Tibbetts, a middle school student, used the template to tell the story of Carney's life?
5. Tell students that they will create a Bio Poem about Peter the Great, Catherine the Great, or another figure from Russian history. Generate a list of ideas, inspired by what you have been studying in class, or from research conducted by the students.
6. Share the Bio Poems by reading them aloud and then displaying them on a bulletin board.

Note: For more information about biography poems, visit:

hrsbstaff.ednet.ns.ca/phillie/webquest/ibiopoem.htm
library.thinkquest.org/11883/data/biopoem.htm

Objectives

- to use different parts of speech in poetry
- to use facts to complete a poem

Materials

- writing supplies
- "William H." handout
- "Bio Poem" handout

Curriculum Standards

- **NCSS**
  Time, Continuity & Change: The students will use knowledge of facts and concepts drawn from history, along with elements of historical inquiry.
- **NCTE/IRA**
  Students participate as knowledgeable, reflective, creative, and critical members of a variety of literacy communities.

Bio Poem Handout

Use the space below for your notes.

Line 1	**First name in bold**	
Line 2	Character traits (3 adjectives)	
Line 3	Relative of (3 people or phrases)	Who is . . .
Line 4	Lover of (3 nouns or phrases)	Who loves . . .
Line 5	Who feels (3 adverbs or phrases)	Who feels . . .
Line 6	Who needs (3 nouns or phrases)	Who needs . . .
Line 7	Who fears (3 nouns or phrases)	Who fears . . .
Line 8	Who gives (3 phrases)	Who gives . . .
Line 9	Who would like to see (3 phrases)	Who would like to see . . .
Line 10	Resident of (3 times, dates, metaphors)	Who lives . . .
Line 11	**Last name in bold**	

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William H.

Who is brave, deserving, a hero to the Union
Relative of his friends in the 54th,
all people who flew their flags at half mast at his death,
his free black father; William H. Carney, Sr.
Lover of his country, his fellow soldiers, his oppressed brothers and sisters
Who feels the flag of the United States shouldn't ever touch the ground shamefully,
the oppressed blacks should be free,
the pain of bullets penetrating his skin.
Who needs to make his friends in the regiment know the flag had not touched the ground,
to fight for this country which he loved,
to be free in body, soul, and mind.
Who fears his brothers would never be free,
the Union would lose the war
his friends in the regiment and he would be killed.
Who gives honor to the name 54th regiment,
hope to his oppressed friends
honor to his superiors.
Who would like to see all coloreds be free and treated with respect,
more black regiments,
the Union win the war.
Who lives in the 1800s,
in New Bedford, Massachusetts,
in the camp of the 54th regiment.

Carney

Kaitlin Tibbetts, May 2000. Used by permission.

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Resources

Recommended Books

For Teachers

Chronicle of the Russian Tsars: The Reign-by-Reign Record of the Rulers of Imperial Russia by David Warnes. (Thames and Hudson, 1999)
A detailed look at the history of Russia and its rulers.

A History of Russia, 7th edition by Nicholas Riasanovsky. (Oxford University Press, 2004)
The book presents Russia, from its origins, to the building of an empire, to Soviet Russia and beyond.

Peter the Great by Robert Massie. (Ballantine, 1981)
The story of the extraordinary leader, against the backdrop of 17th and 18th century Russia and Europe.

Russia in the Age of Peter the Great by Lindsey Hughes. (Yale University Press, 1998)
A thorough examination of the complex life and times of Peter the Great. See also *Peter the Great*, a biography by the same author (Yale University Press, 2004).

St. Petersburg by Catherine Phillips. (DK, 2003)
A fully illustrated travel guide to the city.

The Revolution of Peter the Great by James Cracraft. (Harvard University Press, 2003)
A scholarly study, this book focuses on Peter's accomplishments.

For Students

Fiction

Anastasia, The Last Grand Duchess by Carolyn Meyer. (Scholastic, 2000)
The Royal Diaries series. A fictional account of the last four years in the life of Anastasia, the final descendant of Peter the Great.

Angel on the Square by Gloria Whelan. (HarperCollins, 2001)
The events that lead to the revolution that toppled Tsar Nicholas, the last of Peter's line to rule Russia, affect the young daughter of a lady-in-waiting.

Avram's Gift by Margie Blumberg. (MB Publishing, 2003)
Grandpa Morris tells Mark stories of his family's life in Russia and their move to the United States.

The Dream Stealer by Gregory Maguire. (Harper & Row, 1983)
Legend says that every generation or so, a wolf with superior powers will come to steal dreams. Just such a wolf is stalking the village of Miersk. How can two ordinary children like Lisette and Pasha defeat this beast?

The Flying Witch by Jane Yolen. (HarperCollins, 2003)
When she finds a girl in the forest, Baba Yaga thinks she has just the ingredient required for tasty soup.

The Golden Mare, the Firebird, and the Magic Ring by Ruth Sanderson. (Little, Brown, 2001)
Elements from three classic Russian folktales combine to create a story of magic, bravery, and love.

The Tale of the Firebird by Gennady Spirin. (Philomel, 2002)
When the tsar's third son discovers that a firebird has been stealing golden apples, he travels to faraway lands to find it.

Nonfiction

100 Military Leaders Who Changed the World by Samuel Willard Crompton. (World Almanac Library, 2003)
Short biographies, including Peter the Great, highlight major accomplishments and battles.

Cooking the Russian Way by Gregory and Rita Plotkin. (Lerner, 2003)
Information about Russia, its history, traditional foods, holidays, and festivals. Includes a recipe for blini.

New York Is English, Chattanooga Is Creek by Chris Raschka. (Atheneum, 2005)
This explanation of the names of 41 cities helps readers understand what makes the United States so unique.

Peter the Great by Diane Stanley. (Morrow, 1986)
Peter's boyhood, his travels, and his accomplishments are told in lively words and pictures.

Resources

Peter the Great and Tsarist Russia by Miriam Greenblatt. (Marshall Cavendish, 2000)
A description of Peter the Great and everyday life in his time, including excerpts from Russian writers.

Russia by Kathleen Berton Murrell. (Knopf, 1998)
Eyewitness books. An introduction to Russia, including architecture, costumes, icons, Fabergé eggs, ballet, and more.

Russia by Neil Wilson. (Raintree Steck-Vaughn, 2001)
The vastness of the country is described, as well as its history, economy, arts, and what lies ahead.

Web Sites

THE CREATION OF ST. PETERSBURG
europeanhistory.about.com/library/weekly/aa021201a.htm
A quick overview of St. Petersburg's creation, including notes about the architecture and geography of the city.

THE HERMITAGE
hermitagemuseum.org/html_En/03/hm3_6_2.html
Visit Russia's state museum and view objects and paintings owned by Peter the Great. Includes a virtual tour of Peter the Great's Winter Palace.

HISTORY OF ST. PETERSBURG
www.saint-petersburg.com
This travel guide includes history, fun facts, and photographs of St. Petersburg.

RUSSIAN FOOD
www.waytorussia.net/WhatIsRussia/RussianFood.html
Learn about the main components of Russian food and try a few of the recipes for traditional dishes.

Please note:
Although these sites were verified at the time of publication, Web site addresses and content are frequently subject to change.

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