

Countries Around the World™

Czech Republic

Program Summary

Meet 11-year-old Magda. She and her family live in Trinec, a city located close to the Czech Republic's eastern border. Join Magda as she grabs her trusty camera to take pictures of her hometown. We learn about aspects of the Czech Republic's economy, geography and history when Magda rides her bike past a row of factories before heading out to her grandparents' farm in the countryside near the border with Slovakia, which was once part of Czechoslovakia along with the Czech Republic. Then, Magda travels to the capital city of Prague and meets up with her friend Pavla. After admiring a unique statue depicting Saint Wenceslas, the patron saint of the Czech Republic, Magda and Pavla admire the view of Prague from the tower on Petra Hill before heading back into the city and visiting one of its most famous and storied attractions — the Orloj, otherwise known as the Prague Astronomical Clock. Finally, Magda returns to Trinec and sings a traditional Slovak folk song along with her friends at the youth center.

Country Information

- **location:** Central Europe; bordered by Austria, Germany, Poland and Slovakia
- **capital:** Prague
- **official language:** Czech
- **type of government:** parliamentary democracy
- **total area:** approximately 78,866 sq km
- **climate:** temperate, with cool summers and cold, cloudy, humid winters
- **terrain:** Bohemia in the West consists of rolling plains, hills, and plateaus surrounded by low mountains; Moravia in the East consists of very hilly country
- **natural resources:** includes hard coal, soft coal, kaolin, clay, graphite and timber
- **industries:** includes metallurgy, machinery and equipment, motor vehicles, glass and armaments
- **agricultural products:** includes wheat, potatoes, sugar beets, hops, fruit, pigs and poultry

Vocabulary

flora — Another name for plants.

fauna — Another name for animals.

Communist — A member or advocate of a political and economic system called Communism, in which private property is abolished and all goods are owned jointly.

Slavic — Referring to the Slavs or their languages. Slavs are a group of people from Eastern Europe.

Czechoslovakia — A country that existed until 1993, when the Czech Republic and Slovakia were formed from Czechoslovakia, shortly after the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

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European Union (EU) — A family of democratic European countries that are committed to working together for peace and prosperity. The Czech Republic is a member of the European Union.

Bohemia — A historical region and former kingdom of present-day, western Czech Republic.

Middle Ages — Also known as the medieval period, the time period that stretched roughly from the fifth to the 15th century. The term was coined to describe the era in between the time of ancient Rome and the Renaissance.

Moravia — A region of central and eastern Czech Republic.

Orloj — Also known as the "Prague Astronomical Clock." A large clock tower, located in Prague, that features an astronomical dial, a calendar dial and an hourly, mechanized display of moving figurines.

Czech koruna — The currency of the Czech Republic.

Pre-viewing Discussion

- Discuss how regions in the world are divided by different factors, like language, people, geography and politics. Questions to ask include: What is a border? What are some geographic features that could constitute natural borders? What are some examples of other types of borders? Why do borders sometimes change? Can you think of any examples from your community where places are divided by things like language, food or geography?
- Distribute maps of the Czech Republic to the class. Have them label the capital and other major cities, as well as neighboring countries and their capitals. Ask students questions, such as: How many countries border the Czech Republic? Which country shares the longest border with the Czech Republic? Which country shares the shortest? Do you think that the people of the Czech Republic share anything in common with the people of the countries that surround it? If so, what?
- Lead a discussion on why learning about a different country and a different culture is important. Introduce students to the idea of point of view by asking them what they think about different things like food, clothing and music. After noting how some people see things differently from others, explain that different cultures have different points of view, also known as "cultural perspectives." Why is it important to consider different points of view? Why should you learn about another country's point of view? How can learning about other people and their cultures lead to a better understanding of the world? How can learning about a different culture help you to learn something about yourself?

Follow-up Activities

- Czech Republic bingo! The Kingdom of Bohemia, the Moravian Empire, Slovakia, Czechoslovakia, the Soviet Union — the modern nation of the Czech Republic was a part of these different regions and was ruled by different groups of people over the centuries before it became the country we know today. Invite students to create their own bingo cards that feature the different kingdoms, regions, countries and governments that are a part of the history of the Czech Republic. As a resource, visit www.czech.cz/en/czech-republic/history/all-about-czech-history/. After reviewing the history of the Czech Republic region and establishing the parameters of the game, have students fill out their bingo cards. Draw the names from a bag. Who will be the first to bingo?

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- Read Peter Sis' retelling of a Czech folktale, *The Three Golden Keys* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001) to the class. Then, have students recreate this story in the classroom by acting it out. This can be done as a puppet show, a mime skit, a student play, etc. Divide the students into small groups and have them prepare their own production by choosing a format and thinking about the story's elements of character, setting and plot. After each group performs, conduct a question and answer session in which the students talk about why they chose to retell *The Three Golden Keys* in the way that they did. As an extension, discuss how *The Three Golden Keys* incorporates the number three into its narrative and how other folktales have often used the number three. Students can even generate a list of stories that have used the number three and retell them to the class in their own words.
- National symbols, like the flag, coat of arms and national anthem, can tell a lot about a country's history and identity, and they can also reveal a shared heritage between two countries. Have students investigate the similarities and differences among the national symbols of the Czech Republic and Slovakia. For information about the symbols of the Czech Republic, visit www.senat.cz/zajimavosti/z_historie-eng.php?ke_dni=7.2.2002&O= and for information about Slovakia's, visit www.slovakia.org/sk-facts.htm. Discuss what the national symbols say about the people and history of the Czech Republic and Slovakia. How are the national symbols of these two countries similar? How are they different? Does the fact that these two countries were both part of Czechoslovakia help to explain any similarities and differences? As an extension, compare the national symbols of the Czech Republic and Slovakia with the symbols of Czechoslovakia to gain a better understanding of how the modern national symbols evolved.
- The Orloj, also known as the "Astronomical Clock," is a unique fixture and popular tourist destination in Prague. Visit www.prague.net/astronomical-clock for information about this unique time-keeping device, including its design features and even the folklore surrounding its creation. Then, have students investigate the different types of clocks used throughout time, from sundials to atomic clocks, and discover how they work. Each student can pick a particular timepiece and create a fact poster by sketching his or her clock, labeling its parts and providing information, such as who invented it, when it was used and how it works. As an extension, students can design clocks, similar in style to the Orloj, that feature designs representative of where they live.
- Students can discover some of the holidays celebrated in the Czech Republic by visiting www.myczechrepublic.com/czech_culture/czech_holidays/index.html and www.czech.cz/en/culture/public-holidays-and-commemorated-days/. Then, have students design and create posters that announce a festival to be held in honor of a particular Czech holiday. Each poster can contain basic information about the holiday in addition to any food, music or activities associated with it. Display the posters in the classroom.
- Invite students to write acrostic poems about the Czech Republic by using words associated with the country, such as "Bohemia," "Prague" and "Moravia." For an interactive guide on writing an acrostic poem, visit www.readwritethink.org/materials/acrostic/. Encourage students to share their poems with the class.
- Magda tells us that Prague is a medieval city, but what was life really like for people in Europe during the Middle Ages? Divide the class into small groups and have students find facts about medieval life in Europe. Assign each group a topic related to the Middle Ages, such as clothing, buildings, music, food, etc. Students can create dioramas and time lines and plan and give short presentations about their assigned aspects of medieval life in Europe. As a resource, visit www.historyforkids.org/learn/medieval/.
- For information about the historic buildings and towns in the Czech Republic, visit www.zamky-hrady.cz/index-e.htm. Students can select a particular structure and then sketch it or build a model of it by using cereal boxes, shoeboxes and various craft materials. Students can also create placards with information about their buildings. Encourage students to share their models and illustrations with the class.
- In the program, Magda travels around the Czech Republic, taking pictures of the country for a school report. Students can pretend that they are "on assignment" in the Czech Republic and have to compile images for inclusion in a travelogue. For images from the Czech Republic, visit www.phototravels.net/czech-republic/. Students can pick five images and draw pictures of them. For each picture, write a caption that provides information about the picture and also builds a narrative about visiting the Czech Republic (e.g., "Here I am in the eastern Bohemian-Moravian highlands, visiting Pernštejn Castle."). Arrange the pictures in a photo album and share with the class. For a classroom with the technological means, have the students present their "travel photos" as an interactive slide show.

Suggested Internet Resources

- www.czech.cz/
The official web site of the Czech Republic! Features up-to-date information on the history, culture, people, economy and politics of the Czech Republic.
- www.myczechrepublic.com/
This site provides information about the culture, history and language of the Czech Republic.
- www.cia.gov
The CIA World Factbook web site presents detailed and up-to-date information on the Czech Republic and many other countries. Topics include geography, people, government, economy, transportation and communication. On the main page of the CIA site, click on the "World Factbook" link.

Suggested Print Resources

- Bultje, Jam Willem. *Looking at the Czech Republic*. Oliver Press, Minneapolis, MN; 2006.
- Milivojevic, JoAnn. *Czech Republic*. Children's Press, Danbury, CT; 2004.
- Otfinoski, Steven. *The Czech Republic*. Facts on File, New York, NY; 2004. A resource for teachers.
- Press, Petra. *Modern Nations of the World: Czech Republic*. Lucent Books, Farmington Hills, MI; 2001.

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