

Countries Around the World™

Russia

Program Summary

Meet Macha. She and her family live in Moscow, the capital of Russia. Join Macha as she reveals aspects of Russian history when she stops by the Federal Assembly building in Moscow. Next, Macha and her grandmother visit the Bolshoi, Russia's famed ballet theater, and the buildings of Red Square, including the Kremlin and the colorful St. Basil's Cathedral. Discover some of Russia's religious traditions when Macha, her mother and her grandmother attend a Russian Orthodox Mass. After church, Macha and her family go shopping in a covered market and show us examples of typical Russian fare. Finally, Macha meets up with her father, and together they travel to the countryside to meet her grandfather at his *dacha*, a small country home. While there, Macha, her family and neighbors dine on *shashlyk*, a type of kebab, before inviting her neighbors to join her for some outdoor, wintry fun of ice skating and snowball fights.

Country Information

- **location:** northern Eurasia (the Ural Mountains and the Caspian Sea are considered to be the dividing lines between the Asian and European sections of Russia), bordering the Arctic Ocean and the North Pacific Ocean; bordered by Azerbaijan, Belarus, China, Estonia, Finland, Georgia, Kazakhstan, North Korea, Latvia, Lithuania, Mongolia, Norway, Poland and Ukraine
- **capital:** Moscow
- **official language:** Russian
- **type of government:** federation
- **total area:** approximately 17,075,200 sq km
- **climate:** ranges from steppes in the South through humid continental in much of European Russia; sub-arctic in Siberia to tundra climate in the polar north; winters vary from cool along Black Sea coast to frigid in Siberia; summers vary from warm in the steppes to cool along the Arctic coast
- **terrain:** broad plain with low hills west of the Urals; vast coniferous forest and tundra in Siberia; uplands and mountains along southern border regions
- **major bodies of water:** Arctic Ocean, North Atlantic Ocean, Caspian Sea, Baltic Sea, Volga River, Lena River, Ob River, Angara River and Moskva River
- **natural resources:** includes major deposits of oil, natural gas, coal and timber
- **industries:** mining and extracting coal, oil, gas, chemicals and metals; machine building; defense industries, including radar, missile production, and advanced electronic components; shipbuilding; road and rail transportation equipment; communications equipment; agricultural machinery; electric power generating and transmitting equipment; medical and scientific instruments; consumer durables, textiles, foodstuffs and handicrafts
- **agricultural products:** includes grain, sugar beets, sunflower seeds, vegetables, fruits, beef and milk

Vocabulary

dictator — A ruler who has total control over a country.

Bolshoi — Russia's premier opera house.

Kremlin — Refers to both the citadel in Moscow that houses the Russian government and the Russian government itself.

tsar — Also "czar." A male monarch or emperor, especially one of the emperors who ruled Russia until the revolution of 1917.

Cyrillic — An alphabet used for certain Slavic languages, such as Russian.

apostle — A leader of the first Christian mission to a country or region.

incense — An aromatic substance that produces a pleasant odor when burned.

ruble — The currency of Russia.

dacha — A Russian country house or villa.

shashlyk — A type of kebab, popular in Russia, that is usually made from beef, pork or lamb.

kebab — Small pieces of meat that are cooked on a skewer, often with vegetables

tundra — An area where the ground is permanently frozen and the land is level and treeless.

Pre-viewing Discussion

- Distribute outline maps of Russia to the class. Have them find and label the capital, other major cities, major bodies of water and the neighboring countries. Questions to ask include: How many countries border Russia? Since Russia is such a big country, do you think there are differences among the people who live there? Do you think there are different types of climate regions in Russia? How might different climate regions account for potential differences in the way people live in Russia?
- Lead a discussion about how climate affects where and how people live. Begin by having students talk about how the weather in their area affects their lives. Expand the conversation with questions, such as: How would you have to adapt your lifestyle if you lived in a place that was really hot? What about a place that was really cold? How do people who live in such extreme conditions adapt to the climate? Would you like to live in a place like that? As they prepare to watch the program, instruct students to watch for references to how climate affects people living in Russia.
- As a class, brainstorm a list of questions about Russia. Prompt students by asking them to share what they already know about Russia and what they would like to find out about the country. Discuss how the students' points of view might be a factor in their understanding of Russia. Students can make predictions about what they think they will see in the program. As they watch, have students keep track of how many of their questions were answered and if their preconceptions about Russia were correct or not.

Follow-up Activities

- From 1922 to 1991, Russia and 14 other countries were a part of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, more commonly known as the Soviet Union, a nation consisting of a collective of Communist republics. Engage students in a study of the Soviet Union. Begin by dividing the class into small groups and assign each group a topic. Since there is a wide range of information regarding the Soviet Union, narrow the focus of the study by choosing topics that are appropriate for your class. Topics to cover about the Soviet Union can include its origins, its leaders, studies of the individual republics, the reasons for its demise, etc. Each group can produce fact sheets, posters, pictures, illustrations, maps and time lines for its area of focus, and plan and give a presentation on its topic. Finally, students can work together to create and post a classroom time line of the rise and fall of the Soviet Union.

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- With vast steppes, coniferous forests, mountain ranges, thousands of rivers and frigid climates above the Arctic Circle, Russia is home to a diverse array of geographic areas, climate regions and biomes. Students can each select a region of Russia and create a diorama that depicts that region's climate, topography, wildlife and vegetation. Students can also write fact sheets to accompany their dioramas. Display students' work in the classroom.
- Have you ever wanted to see the view from Moscow's famous Red Square, but you don't have the time to fly halfway around the world? Students can visit Red Square, without ever leaving the classroom, by visiting www.panoramas.dk/fullscreen5/f52-red-square.html. Students can pick their favorite structures and sketch pictures of them. Then, they can find facts about the buildings they chose, and other structures in Red Square, and create fact sheets for them that contain information about the buildings, such as when they were built, how long the construction took, what their purposes are, etc.
- Read Demi's retelling of a Russian folktale, *Firebird* (Holt, Henry Books for Young Readers, 2005), to the class. Then, have students recreate this story in the classroom by acting it out! This can be done as a student play, a mime skit, a puppet show, etc. Begin by dividing the class into small groups and have each group prepare for its performance by focusing on the story's elements of plot, setting and character. After each performance, conduct a question and answer session in which students explain why they chose to retell the stories in the ways that they did.
- Alexandr Pushkin is considered one of the greatest Russian poets for works such as "The Bronze Horseman" and "Ruslan and Ludmila." Read Pushkin's narrative poem, "The Tale of the Fisherman and the Fish," to the class. Students can share their impressions of the poem and discuss its story and moral. Then, students can find their "inner-Pushkin" by writing their own narrative poems based on elements from "The Tale of the Fisherman and the Fish." Students can even illustrate their poems. Collect the students' poems for inclusion in a class book.
- National symbols, such as the flag and national anthem, can reveal a lot about the values and identity of a country. Have students find facts about Russia's national symbols and listen to the national anthem by visiting russiatoday.strana.ru/en/profile/sym/. Discuss what these symbols say about Russia and its people. Then, students can compare and contrast the national symbols of modern Russia with the symbols used by the former Soviet Union and discuss how the changes reflect events in history. As an extension, have students create new flags and national anthems for the United States. Students can share their designs with the class.
- *Dachas* are little cottages that can be found dotting Russia's expansive countryside. Have students find information on *dachas* and using their knowledge of scale, have them draw floor plans for their own *dachas*. Then, using shoeboxes, cereal boxes and various craft materials, students can build models of their *dachas* for display in the classroom. As a culmination, students can write a series of journal entries about vacationing in their *dachas* that include information about Russia's geography and climate (e.g., "I love to spend time in my *dacha* just outside of St. Petersburg, but the cold weather keeps me from going outside for too long!").
- Russia experiences extremely cold weather, with some parts of the country enduring temperatures as low as -78 degrees Fahrenheit! But is Russia the coldest place on Earth? Students can find out the answer to this question by finding facts about the coldest worldwide temperatures. Have students find out the coldest temperatures ever recorded on each continent and create graphic organizers that compare these temperatures with Russia's. Students can also use this information to express greater than/less than relationships, find averages, find the differences between numbers and convert one unit of measurement to another. As an extension, students can find out the coldest temperatures recorded on the planets of our solar system and compare them with the coldest temperatures on Earth.

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- Make a "word code" using the Cyrillic alphabet and its corresponding letter in the Roman alphabet. Students can write messages to each other and decode them. Not all letters in the Cyrillic alphabet directly correlate to the Roman letters, so encourage students to be creative! To find a transliteration from the Cyrillic alphabet to the Roman one, visit www.du.edu/langlit/russian/alpha.htm.
- Students can work in pairs to create crossword puzzles about Russia. Have each pair come up with a list of words related to Russia, such as "Soviet," "Kremlin" and "Siberia." Once they have finished making their puzzles, have students exchange and complete each other's puzzles. An online, interactive crossword puzzle maker can be found at: www.crosswordpuzzle.com/create.html.

Suggested Internet Resources

- library.thinkquest.org/CR0212302/russia.html
Learn about the culture and customs of Russia from the perspective of a child who lives there! The students of Roosevelt School in Wauwatosa, Wisconsin present this award-winning site to teach people about different cultures.
- www.peacecorps.gov/kids/world/europemed/russia.html
This child-friendly site provides basic facts and information about Russia.
- www.timeforkids.com/TFK/hh/goplaces/main/0,20344,595847,00.html
Discover Russia and what it is like to live there! This website by Time Inc. presents information about Russia's famous sites, history and language. Also includes a quiz.
- www.cia.gov
The CIA World Factbook web site presents detailed and up-to-date information on Russia 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

- Hintz, Martin. *Russia*. Scholastic Library Publishing, New York, NY; 2004.
- Hoffman, Mary. *Clever Katya: A Fairy Tale from Old Russia*. Barefoot Books, Cambridge, MA; 2005.
- Kort, Michael. *Russia*. Facts on File, New York, NY; 2004. A resource for teachers.
- Spengler, Kremena. *Russia: A Question and Answer Book*. Capstone Press, Mankato, MN; 2004.
- Steele, Philip. *Moscow*. World Almanac Library, Strongsville, OH; 2003.

Teacher's Guide written by Brian Wales, Curriculum Specialist, Schlessinger Media

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