

THE SINGING REVOLUTION



Subjects: History / Psychology & Sociology

The Psychology of Brutality

Aim / Essential Question

How do situational influences cause people to act brutally?

Overview

The Singing Revolution includes interviews and footage of people who experienced brutality and murder at the hands of Soviet guards and occupiers, which begs the question: What can drive a person to act so one-sidedly violent? This lesson will use situational influences as explored in the Stanford Prison Experiment to consider an answer.

Materials & Technology

- *The Singing Revolution*, Disc 1, Scene 1 (from Disc One / Chapters)
- Estonians Fleeing Stalin-Waiting to Return video clip (from Disc Two / Section 1: 1939-1956: The Soviet & Nazi Occupations)
- The Psychology of Brutality: Discussion Questions handout (below)
- Website on the Stanford Prison Experiment: <http://www.prisonexp.org/>
- Computers for student use (optional)
- Index cards for closing activity
- Extension Project List (below)
- Computer w/ projection capability and internet access
- Any DVD-compatible player that will allow distinct chapters to be shown
- A television or video projection unit

Lesson Time: One 50-minute class period.

Objectives

Students will:

- Analyze the perspectives of military occupiers.
- Investigate the role of situational influences on brutality.
- Compare and contrast the Stanford Prison Experiment with the Estonian occupation.

Instruction

Opening: Bell Ringer / Do Now

Ask students to recall a time when they acted out of character, because of who they were with or because of unusual circumstances. Examples could include doing something because of peer pressure even though they knew it was wrong, or doing something because an adult or authority figure instructed them to even though they might have otherwise considered it wrong. You may choose to have students brainstorm these anecdotes silently, write them as brief journal responses, share aloud with a partner, and/or share some examples with the whole class.

Activities

1. Show students the opening six minutes of *The Singing Revolution* (Disc 1, scene 1). Ask students to consider, specifically, the role of the Soviet military whose members imprisoned, guarded, tortured, and even executed innocent Estonians.
2. Give students several minutes to respond to the first question on the handout, “What could cause a guard to act as callous and brutal as to execute an unarmed prisoner?”
3. Show students the clip, “Estonians Fleeing Stalin-Waiting to Return” (12:44). Ask them to pay specific attention to the accounts of the unarmed refugees being bombed by Soviet planes.
4. Give students several minutes to respond to the second question on the handout, “What could cause a pilot to bomb unarmed and fleeing refugees?”
5. If student computers are available, allow students to explore the website: <http://www.prisonexp.org/> about the Stanford Prison Experiment. Tell students that when a person acts brutally as part of a military campaign or occupation, situational influences and role psychology, (guard vs. prisoner, etc.) are often at work. This website will offer some insight into these concepts.
6. If student computers are not available, show the class the website’s slide show with a projector or print a summary of the experiment to share with students.
7. After exploring the website on the Stanford Prison Experiment and considering situational influences and role psychology, (perceptions about the roles of guard vs. prisoner, etc.), students answer the final question on the handout, “What new insights do you have into why a Soviet guard, pilot, or other military occupier could act brutally? Were any of your original responses or thoughts confirmed?”

Close: Application / Summary

On an index card, students should write a paragraph addressing the following questions:

- Why would it have been difficult for a Soviet guard to resist acting brutally, when ordered, towards Estonians?
- What would you have done if you were in the position of the Soviet or the Stanford guards? Are there ways that you could have resisted acting brutally?

Extension Project (Optional):

There are many examples of the guard/prisoner or oppressor/oppressed relationships throughout history. Besides the Soviet gulags and occupation of Estonia, and the Nazis with concentration camps, there were also the American DOJ internment camps for Japanese-American citizens during WWII, (which offers an interesting comparison/contrast since they lacked the violence and murder of Nazi camps); there were the brutal historical pogroms of Armenians and Jews. The Rwandan genocide provides a notorious example, as does the more recent “Lost Boys” of Sudan, where young boys fleeing for Nigerian orphanages were attacked by government troops and militias. There are several other examples as well.

As an optional extension project: provide students the Extension Project List with the above examples, and ask them to do a comparison/contrast assignment in which they look at the similarities and differences between their chosen example, the example from *The Singing Revolution* lesson (Soviet occupation of Estonia), and the Stanford Prison Experiment.

Students should explore three questions:

1. How is my chosen topic like the Soviet occupation of Estonia?
2. How is my topic different from the Soviet occupation of Estonia?
3. How does my chosen topic demonstrate situational influences and the psychology of brutality?

Students may explore these questions in a traditional essay, or they may create a PowerPoint presentation, Photo Story, or other similar multimedia project to present their answers.

Name _____

Date _____

Class _____ Period _____

Teacher _____

Discussion Questions

1. After watching the opening of *The Singing Revolution*, consider the following: What could cause a guard to act as callous and brutal as to execute an unarmed prisoner?

2. After watching the second clip from *The Singing Revolution*, consider the following: What could cause a pilot to bomb unarmed and fleeing refugees?

3. After exploring the website on the Stanford Prison Experiment and considering situational influences and role psychology, (perceptions about the roles of guard vs. prisoner, etc.), what new insights do you have into why a Soviet guard, pilot, or other military occupier could act brutally? Were any of your original responses or thoughts confirmed?

Extension Project List

There are many examples throughout history which demonstrate the tragic reality of situational influences in relationships between the oppressor and the oppressed. Besides the Soviet gulags, Nazi concentration camps, and the Stanford Prison Experiment, other notorious examples include:

- Japanese-American DOJ internment camps during WWII
- The historical pogroms of Jews and Armenians
- The Rwandan Genocide of 1994
- The “Lost Boys of Sudan”
- The persecution of Irish-Americans in northeastern America
- The struggle of African-Americans to gain Civil Rights
- South African apartheid
- India’s struggle for independence from Britain
- The Trail of Tears and the plight of Native Americans from westward expansion

Choose one of the above topics for further research and comparison/contrast to the lesson on situational influences and the psychology of brutality. Answer three questions:

1. How is my chosen topic like the Soviet occupation of Estonia?
2. How is my chosen topic different from the Soviet occupation of Estonia?
3. How does my chosen topic demonstrate situational influences and the psychology of brutality?

There are two options for presenting your research and answers:

1. Write a traditional comparison/contrast essay.
2. Create a Photo Story, PowerPoint, or other multi-media presentation to present your research and the answers to your questions above through narrations, images, video, etc.