

THE SINGING REVOLUTION



Subjects: History / Cultural Studies/ English Language Arts

The Pull of Propaganda

Aim / Essential Question

How did the Estonian people resist Soviet propaganda?

Overview

This lesson shows how even powerful Soviet propaganda could not break the spirit of the people of Estonia. The spirited Estonian culture of singing helped resist the Soviets' coercive literature and songs. The Estonian resistance was helped in part by the media of Western countries, such as Finland and the United States.

Materials & Technology

- *The Role of Finnish TV, Voice of America & Radio Free Europe* video clip (from Disc Two / Section 2: 1957-1986: The Stagnation Years)
- *The Singing Revolution* (Chapter 1, Chapter 4) (from Disc One / Chapters)
- 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:

- Identify the role of propaganda as it relates to the Soviet Union and Estonia.
- Examine how the history of Estonia produced a people able to withstand the powerful propaganda of the Soviet Union.
- Analyze how Estonians resisted Soviet propaganda by singing their own songs at song festivals.
- Evaluate how Finnish television and Voice of America acted as pipelines of vital information for Estonians, who were denied news of the outside world.

Instruction

Opening: Bell Ringer / Do Now

Propaganda is the language of persuasion. In four to six sentences, write persuasively about why, or why not, homework is an important part of education.

Activities

1. Introduce the Singing Revolution by telling students that they will watch three chapters of a feature-length documentary about a lesser-known non-violent movement carried out by the people of Estonia, a small Baltic country in Northern Europe.
2. Hand out copies of questions regarding disc one, chapters one and four, and disc two, *The Stagnation Years (1915-1986): The Role of Finnish TV, Voice of America & Radio Free Europe*.
3. Have students read the questions for each chapter. Then read the questions aloud to the students, and tell them to write down their answers as the documentary plays. Inform the students that, at the end of each chapter, questions and answers will be reviewed and, if necessary, clarified.

4. Show chapter one of *The Singing Revolution*. Remind the students to answer the accompanying worksheet questions as the video plays. After chapter one, take a few minutes to go over the questions and answers.
5. Show chapter four of *The Singing Revolution*. Remind the students to answer the accompanying worksheet questions as the video plays. After chapter four, take a few minutes to go over the questions and answers.
6. Show disc two, *The Stagnation Years*. Remind the students to answer the accompanying worksheet questions as the video plays. At the end of the section, take a few minutes to go over the questions and answers.

Close: Application / Summary

Call on a student to ask and then answer the aim. Appropriate answers may include: 1) Estonians always insisted that their national anthem be played after singing propaganda songs about the Soviet Union, which in turn helped keep their cultural identity alive; 2) Western media, such as Finnish TV and Voice of America, acted as pipelines of information to the Estonians, who didn't get news of the outside world from the Soviet Union propaganda machine.

Call on students to provide new information they have learned from the documentary. Appropriate student responses may include: 1) The song festivals allowed Estonians to come together and assert their nationalism, their pride in being Estonians, rather than just be mere custodians of the Soviet cause; and 2) Voice of America allowed Estonians to know that people outside the Soviet bloc cared about them, and that the Estonians were not alone during their hardship under the yoke of Soviet oppression.

Lastly, ask students how this lesson might connect to their own lives or current affairs. Appropriate answers may include government-sponsored propaganda campaigns in other countries, such as North Korea, Cuba, or even the United States.

Homework

In two to three paragraphs, explain the different ways in which the Voice of America influenced people of Estonia to resist Soviet propaganda.

The Singing Revolution
Disc One, Chapter 4

- 1) Who and what did the Estonians begrudgingly sing about at their song festivals?

- 2) Why does Singing Revolution participant Artur Talvik say it was “worth it” to first sing Soviet songs, and then end with traditional Estonian folk songs?

- 3) What did the Soviets forbid the Estonians to wear at the 1969 song festival? What did the Soviets forbid the Estonians to sing? Why?

- 4) How does Estonian artist Heinz Valk describe the actions of the Estonian singers once, the official part of the song festival program was over?

- 5) According to Valk, what was the positive outcome of the 1969 song festival for Estonians?

