

# THE SINGING REVOLUTION



**Subjects:** History / Cultural Studies / English Language Arts

## The Language of Liberty

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### Aim / Essential Question

How did glasnost inadvertently help Estonia achieve independence?

### Overview

Glasnost, part of the Soviet Union's plan to overhaul its economy, was not intended for Soviet Union subjects such as Estonia to get heady ideas about liberty. But that is exactly what happened. Glasnost allowed Estonians to assert greater confidence in their culture and, ultimately, find a game plan for freedom.

### Materials & Technology

- *The Singing Revolution* (Chapter 1 and Chapter 5)  
(from Disc One / Chapters)
- Class set of chapter questions and homework handout  
(below)
- 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 purpose of glasnost as a free-speech policy designed to encourage debate as an avenue to root out corruption among Communist Party members, and to overhaul the moribund Soviet Union economy.
- Examine how glasnost encouraged Estonians to organize a protest against strip mining.
- Analyze how Estonia's Heritage Society used glasnost to highlight the abuses of Soviet occupation.

### Instruction

**Opening:** Bell Ringer / Do Now

Respond to the following questions: Why do we allow flag burning in America? Should it be illegal to burn the American flag? Why or why not?

### Activities

1. Introduce the Singing Revolution by telling students that they will watch two 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 five.
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*, reminding 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 five of *The Singing Revolution*, again reminding the students to answer the accompanying worksheet questions as the video plays. After chapter five, 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: Glasnost, intended as free speech to help revive the Soviet economy, ironically encouraged Estonians to demonstrate and speak out against Soviet occupation.

Call on students to provide new information they have learned from the documentary. Appropriate student responses may include how *Voice of America* helped organize demonstrations in Estonia.

Lastly, ask students how the statement by Estonian activist Trivimi Velliste, —“Whenever you give free speech to people, things get out of hand”— connects to their own lives or current affairs. Answers may include discussions about current upheavals in Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, Yemen, and Syria. Egypt’s revolution, in particular, was sparked in part by the help of *Facebook*, a social network that helped with organizing demonstrations.

**Homework**

Students answer questions re: excerpt of Tiit Madisson’s speech at Hirve Park, (see accompanying worksheet).

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Class \_\_\_\_\_ Period \_\_\_\_\_

Teacher \_\_\_\_\_

## ***The Singing Revolution***

### **Disc One, Chapter 1**

**Directions:** Answer these questions as you watch the video segments.

1) For centuries, what cultural questions did Estonians face? Why?

2) In Estonia, according to *The Singing Revolution* documentary's narrator, "Patience is a weapon, caution a virtue." How does that motto relate to Estonians, who endured centuries of invaders?

3) "The most important thing to understand, to understand Estonian history, is our singing tradition," according to *The Singing Revolution* participant, Toomas Raudberg. How is that tradition then explained by the documentary's narrator?

4) By 1920, Estonia was briefly an independent nation of high literacy rates and a thriving economy. What, however, was Estonia's deficit (weakness) in the face of belligerent, ambitious neighbors such as Russia?

5) "All the singing the in the world couldn't prevent the events to come," states the documentary's narrator. What were those events?

## ***The Singing Revolution***

### **Disc One, Chapter 5**

- 1) According to the documentary, how did Mikhail Gorbachev's travels to the West bring about his policy of glasnost and perestroika?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 2) What was Gorbachev's "fundamental mistake"?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 3) How did the Estonians first "test" the Soviet policy of glasnost?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 4) What government agencies helped publicize the Hirve Park demonstration?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 5) Explain the significance and outcome of the demonstration in Hirve Park.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 6) How did the Heritage Society take advantage of glasnost?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 7) How did the Estonians get around the banning of their traditional flag during the Tartu demonstration?

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Class \_\_\_\_\_ Period \_\_\_\_

Teacher \_\_\_\_\_

## ***The Singing Revolution***

### **Excerpt of Tiit Madisson's Speech at Hirve Park in Tallinn, Estonia, August 23, 1987**

A nation that doesn't know or remember its history has no future */long applause/*. The Hitlerites' crimes against humanity have been condemned, and the murderers have been allotted due punishment. The poet August San wrote: "Nothing in the world will change, if we won't change it. You must do all you can, even if it's not a lot."

We must disclose honestly the history of our people. Many things must be re-evaluated in the process. All crimes against humanity must be resolutely condemned. Stalinist executioners, many of whom are collecting a government pension today, must be put on trial! */Very long applause. Shouts of "Bravo!"* Only then can we be sure that all this will never be repeated.

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**Directions:** Read the above excerpt of a speech by Tiit Madisson at Hirve Park in Tallinn, Estonia, on August 23, 1987, then answer questions below.

- 1) In your own words, explain what is meant by the statement: "A nation that doesn't know or remember its history has no future."
- 2) Why did Tiit Madisson quote poet August San? How did the quote apply to Estonia? Do you think it applies today in other parts of the world? How? Why?
- 3) Describe the tone of the text. Cite evidence from the speech to support your answer.
- 4) How did glasnost allow Tiit Madisson to make this speech?