

THE SINGING REVOLUTION



Subjects: History / English Language Arts / Music & Art

Arts and Media in the Soviet and Post-Soviet Periods

Aim / Essential Question

How did the role of the arts and media in Estonia change as the political system changed?

Overview

On the DVDs, various Estonians discuss the changing role of the arts in Estonia. The arts—books, theater, films, music, literary criticism—had an important role during the Soviet period. What was the role of the arts during this time? How was the role of education and the media different back then? When Estonia gained its independence in 1991, the role of the arts changed. What was the role of the arts after independence? This lesson aims to have students understand the relationship between politics and the arts in a totalitarian society.

Materials & Technology

- “Soviet Education & Youth”
(from Disc Two / Section 2: 1957-1986: The Stagnation Years)
- “The Role of Finnish TV, Voice of America & Radio Free Europe”
(from Disc Two / Section 2: 1957-1986: The Stagnation Years)
- “Role of Culture Under Soviet Occupation”
(from Disc Three / Section 4: 1987-1991: *The Singing Revolution*)
- Any DVD-compatible player that will allow distinct chapters to be shown
- A television or video projection unit

Length: One 50-minute class period.

Objectives

Students will:

- Identify various genres within the arts.
- Compare and contrast the role of the arts before and after independence.
- Analyze how the Soviets controlled thought and expression in Estonia.

Instruction

Opening: Bell Ringer / Do Now

- Write a paragraph in which you interpret the following quotation: “In order to know where you are going, you need to know where you have been.”
- How could you apply this quotation to life and/or to history?

Activities

1. View the film segment, “Soviet Education & Youth” from Disc 2. Stop at 8:02 minutes.
2. Ask students to identify two examples from the film segment of the Soviets “revising” history.
3. Post-Film Discussion. Students share examples of Soviet lies or exaggerations.

4. Discuss the following questions:
 - What was the purpose of these distortions? In other words, what were the Soviets trying to achieve?
 - How did the knowledge Estonian students received from their parents at home differ from what they learned at school?
 - Outside the home, what pressures to conform to the party line might Estonians have encountered?
5. View the entire film segment, “The Role of Finnish TV, Voice of America & Radio Free Europe” (6:20) from Disc 2. Ask students to identify how the Estonians received uncensored information from the West.
6. Post-Film Discussion. Discuss the following questions: Why did the Estonians feel such a need for outside information from the West? What did they want to hear, see, or know? What measures did the Soviets take to block the transmission of media from the West, and how did the Estonians respond?
7. View the entire film segment, “Role of Culture Under Soviet Occupation” (Length: 8:02) from Disc 3. Prior to viewing, briefly discuss Hamlet’s predicament so the students will understand how the meaning of the play *Hamlet* was interpreted differently by Estonian audiences during the Soviet period. (Hamlet’s predicament is that his father has been murdered by his uncle and Hamlet has to decide what to do about it. Hamlet could take revenge or do nothing. The “something rotten in Denmark” line in this segment refers to illicit manner in which the new king has gained the throne. The Estonians also felt that something was “rotten” in their country and they felt as though they were in a similar predicament as Hamlet.
8. Post-Film Discussion. Discuss the following questions:
 - Why did the Estonian audience react so strongly to parts of *Hamlet*?
 - What examples are there of how parts of the play were viewed “metaphorically” in the “context” of Soviet domination? In other words, how did the audience “read between the lines?”
 - How is this an example of the arts having a political role, and not just a cultural role?
 - Why couldn’t political concerns be expressed back then through politics?
 - The film segment goes on to note that the arts no longer have the popularity and importance they had in the Soviet period. How does the example of the number of published poetry books demonstrate this point?
 - Instead of serious books and theater, which forms of entertainment are Estonians now more interested in? Why?

Close

Application / Summary

Students answer Aim: How has the role of the arts changed as Estonia moved from the Soviet period to the post-Soviet period?

Homework

One of the interviewees, Artur Talvik, in the film segment on culture says that art forms like film and theater no longer have the power they had during the Soviet period. He attributes this decline in impact to the fact that these art forms now lack “somebody to fight with.” Write a one page response that answers the following:

- What does Talvik mean by this statement?
- Do you think this is true?
- Does art need something or someone to be in conflict with to be really powerful? Give an example perhaps of a popular song or film to back up your opinion.