

THE SINGING REVOLUTION



Subjects: History

Freedom of Speech Topples the Soviet Union

Aim / Essential Question

How did Gorbachev inadvertently bring about the collapse of the Soviet Union through his policies of glasnost and perestroika?

Overview

For decades, the Soviet Union controlled people's lives, the production of goods and services, education, and information that was presented in the media. In the mid 1980s, because of dire economic conditions, Gorbachev established new policies known as glasnost and perestroika. Once Gorbachev allowed free speech, occupied countries used that new free speech to speak out against the occupation by the Soviet Union, thus leading to their independence.

Materials & Technology

- Slide show presentation of activities
(from www.izzit.org)
- Comments on Gorbachev video clips
(from Disc Three / Section 4: 1987-1991: *The Singing Revolution*)
- Details on the 1987 Hirve Park Demonstration video clips
(from Disc Three / Section 4: 1987-1991: *The Singing Revolution*)
- Class set of Homework worksheet
(below)
- Optional follow up: *Freedom's Sound*, a 12-minute video about the Estonia Piano Company.
http://www.izzit.org/products/index.php?video=freedoms_sound
- Any DVD-compatible player that will allow distinct chapters to be shown
- A television or video projection unit
- Computer with projection capability

Lesson Time: One 50-minute class period.

Objectives

Students will:

- Identify economic events that led to the new policies of glasnost and perestroika.
- Differentiate between glasnost and perestroika.
- Explain why glasnost was more important than perestroika in terms of freedom.
- Hypothesize the fate of the Hirve Park demonstrators had the protest occurred in 1941.
- Analyze the role of free speech in the progress made by Estonians seeking liberation.

Instruction

Opening: Bell Ringer / Do Now

Show students the beginning of the slide show, which shows the increases to the national public debt as a way to get them to think about their freedom to speak out against government deficits. Slides #8 and #9 have questions and discussion points.

Activities

Continue slide show.

1. Slide 10 defines the terms.
2. Slides 11 and 12 highlight economic conditions in the Soviet Union that were creating resentment among the population.
3. Slides 13 and 14 introduce Gorbachev.
4. Slide 15 prompts video on disc 3, Mari-Ann Kelam comments. (1:49)
5. Slide 16 explains the relationship between Gorbachev and Reagan.
6. Slide 17 prompts video on disc 3, Tunne Kelam comments. (0:49)
7. Slide 18 questions how far the movement would be allowed to go before force was used against them.
8. Slide 19 prompts video on disc 3, Trivimi Velliste comments on “rocking the boat.” (2:06)
9. Slide 20 introduces the first Estonian protest using their environmental concerns to test the limits of the new policy of openness.
10. Slide 21 brings in Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze and his reflections on the state of the economy and military spending, and how to solve the problem.
11. Slide 22 shows Gorbachev’s attempt to make peace with the West and reduce military spending.
12. Slides 23 and 24 explain another incident whereby Estonians test the limits of Soviet openness again, this time at Hirve Park.
13. Slide 25 introduces video on disc 3, the Hirve Park Demonstration. (9:02)
14. Slides 26 and 27 explain how Gorbachev's policies reduced the fears of Estonians to speak out, and list some of the issues that Estonians spoke out about.
15. Slide 28 introduces video on disc 3, Lagle Parek on the Hirve Park experience. (1:52)
16. Slide 29 is a quote from Lagle Parek, on the Hirve Park experience and the Estonian fight for freedom.

Close: Application / Summary

In the beginning of the lesson, we used examples of government debt to create a sense of outrage and a threshold that would initiate protest. For decades, Estonians were not allowed to speak out against Soviet policies, prices, availability of consumer goods, all of which were controlled by the government. Gorbachev’s policy of perestroika, or rebuilding and reforming the socialist system, was not the impetus for real change. Glasnost, or public openness, was the catalyst for true change.

Had the economic climate in the Soviet Union been better, there would have been no motivation for change. It is important to understand how poor economic conditions forced the new Soviet leadership to evolve. Glasnost was the catalyst for the beginning of the end of the Soviet Union. The Estonian activists took small steps to test the limits of Gorbachev’s new policies. Ultimately those policies, which exposed the many truths of the Soviet system, emboldened the people to push the limits of protest, and bring down one of the world’s superpowers.

Homework

Have students complete the worksheet for homework.

Name _____

Date _____

Class _____ Period _____

Teacher _____

Homework on "Freedom of Speech Topples the Soviet Union" Lesson

1. List some complaints Americans have.

a) _____

b) _____

c) _____

d) _____

2. What are some complaints Americans have about our local, state, or national governments?

3. What are some ways we can voice those complaints?

4. How different would our lives be if we could be jailed for complaining about or criticizing our government and our leaders?

5. How does the lack of free speech in some countries allow the government to control its people?

6. How does free speech allow people to control their government?

7. Should people control their government? Why / Why not?

