Lesson Ten: The Siege of Leningrad

Lesson Overview: A significant, horrifying chapter in the history of St. Petersburg was the “Blokoda,” or Siege of Leningrad by the Germans during World War II. Students will examine this event through a background lecture and readings from an official St. Petersburg website and a primary source document. Discussion will center on the experiences of Leningrad’s citizens during these horrible years and how the city stood firm, despite the loss of thousands of lives. This lesson fits in well within a unit on World War II.

Objectives:

1. Students will learn background information regarding the Siege of Leningrad and its context within Russia’s experience of World War II.

2. Through a primary source reading, students will analyze one witness’ experience of the Siege.

3. Students will read the shocking statistics regarding the Siege and will be able to describe the general conditions the people of Leningrad faced and how they coped.

Focus Questions:

1. When and where did Hitler decide to launch an offensive in Russia? Why?

2. How did the people of Leningrad respond to the Siege? What were their lives like during the 900 days?

3. How did Stalin respond to the German invasion?

4. What were some of the staggering statistics regarding this Siege?

5. How did Leningrad rebuild?

Resources/Materials:

- A copy of the primary source reading for each student
- A copy of the Study Guide for each student
- Access to the Internet

Procedures/Activities:

1. Give students a mini-lecture on the events leading up to and surrounding the Siege of Leningrad. The teacher may want to put an outline on the board or overhead.
2. Have students read silently (or read aloud) the primary source reading from Harrison Salisbury’s *The 900 Days*, then discuss the two questions regarding the reading as a class.

3. Have students use the Internet website [http://www.saint-petersburg.com/](http://www.saint-petersburg.com/) to complete the study guide. After the students have completed the questions individually or in pairs, discuss the answers as a whole class or in small groups.

**Evaluation/Assessment:**

1. Students may be graded on the study guides, either through a participation grade based on the class discussion, or handing them in to be graded.

2. Students could do further research on the Siege, then be assigned to represent various types of citizens of Leningrad: soldiers, students, children, shopkeepers, museum curators, etc. Students could then write journal/diary entries describing the Siege from the various points of view of these citizens.

**Extension:**

Students may research the Battle of Stalingrad and compare the experiences of the citizens there to those of Leningrad.
Background Information:

Hitler and Stalin signed a “Non-Aggression Pact” in 1939, although both probably realized that this would only delay, not prevent war between Germany and Russia. During that same year, Hitler told a Swiss diplomat:

Everything I undertake is directed against Russia. If those in the West are too stupid and too blind to understand this, then I should be forced to come to an understanding with the Russians to beat the West, and then, after its defeat, turn with all my concentrated force against the Soviet Union.

(Quotation from Kishlansky, p. 902)

In June of 1941, Hitler launched his attack on the Soviet Union. The Soviet army was not well prepared. Stalin had “purged” (executed or sent to gulags) many of his top officers, so the Soviets lacked competent military leaders. Stalin had not expected an invasion until 1942.

Hitler sent three million soldiers to Russia, the largest invasion force in military history. The Germans targeted Leningrad in the North, Moscow, and the Southern oil-rich Caucasus region.

Leningrad was besieged for 900 days, from September 8, 1941 until January 27, 1944, but refused to surrender. Thousands of civilians died.
Primary Source on the Siege of Leningrad:


In December they began to appear—the sleds of the children, painted bright red or yellow. They had been intended as presents for sliding down hills or racing around icy curves.

Now suddenly they were everywhere—the children’s sleds—on the broad boulevards, moving toward the hospitals. The squeak, squeak, squeak of the runners sounded louder than the shelling of the enemy’s guns. The squeak deafened the ears. On the sleds were the ill, the dying, the dead.

There were no authorities in the city. Only the people, pulling their burdens, the dead in coffins of unpainted wood, large and small, the ill clinging to the runners of the sleds, and pails of water and bundles of wood dangerously balanced.

On December 29, Mr. Luknitsky noted in his diary that ten days earlier he had been told that six thousand people a day were dying of starvation.

“To take someone who has died to the cemetery,” Luknitsky said, “is an affair of so much labor that it exhausts the last strength in the survivors. The living, fulfilling their duty to the dead, are brought to the brink of death themselves.

Discussion Questions:

1. According to this reading, from what did many civilians die during the Siege?

2. How does the last sentence describe the effects of “total war” on the civilians during World War II?
Study/Discussion Questions on the “Blokoda” (Siege) of Leningrad

Using the information from http://www.saint-petersburg.com/history/siege.asp
And http://www.saint-petersburg.com/history/reconstruction.asp, answer the following questions:

1. How soon after the Nazis began their attack on the Soviet Union did they reach Leningrad?

2. How many people lived in Leningrad at the time?

3. Describe the general conditions of the city during the Siege.

4. How many died during the months of January and February 1942?

5. Did the city shut down during the Siege? Why not?

6. What was the “Road of Life,” and how did it get its name?

7. How did people protect many of their treasured works of art?
8. How did the composer Dmitry Shostakovich honor the city during the Siege?
9. How many people died during the Siege? What percentage of the original population was lost?

10. Where are most of the victims of the Siege buried?

11. Describe the problems Leningrad and the rest of Russia experienced just after the war.

12. How was Leningrad’s reconstruction different from other Russian cities?

13. How would you describe the author of these websites’ point of view regarding the Russian war effort? Do you think he/she left anything out regarding this Siege? What might have been left out, and why?
Social Studies Content Standards and Benchmarks (for High School) Met by Lesson Plans:

Strand I. HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Content Standard 1: All students will sequence chronologically …

3. Identify some of the major eras in world history and describe their defining characteristics. (Lessons 1, 2, 9)

Content Standard 2: All students will understand narratives about major areas of American and world history by identifying the people involved, describing the setting, and sequencing the events.

4. Select events and individuals from the past that have had global impact on the modern world and describe their impact. (Lessons 1, 2, 5, 6, 7, 8)

Content Standard 4: All students will evaluate key decisions made at critical turning points in history by assessing complications and long-term consequences.

3. Analyze key decisions by drawing appropriate historical analogies. (Lessons 1, 2, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10).

Strand II: GEOGRAPHIC PERSPECTIVE

Content Standard 2: All students will describe, compare, and explain the locations and characteristics of ecosystems, resources, human adaptation, environmental impact, and the interrelationships among them.

1. Describe the environmental consequences of major world processes and events. (Lesson 2)

Content Standard 5: All students will describe and explain the causes, consequences, and geographic context of major global issues and events.

1. Explain how geography and major world processes influence major world events. (Lessons 1 and 2).
Strand IV. ECONOMIC PERSPECTIVE

Content Standard 5: All students will describe how trade generates economic development and interdependence and analyze the resulting changes and benefits for individuals, producers, and government.

2. Trace the historical development of international trading ties.

3. Explain how specialization, interdependence, and economic development are related.
   (Lessons 1 and 2)

Strand V. INQUIRY

Content Standard 1: All students will acquire information from books, maps, newspapers, data sets and other sources, organize and present the information in maps, graphs, charts, …

1. Locate information pertaining to a specific social science topic in depth using a variety of resources and electronic technologies. (Lessons 3, 4, 6, and 7)

2. Use traditional and electronic means to organize and interpret information pertaining to a specific social science topic and prepare it for in-depth presentation. (Lessons 4, 6, and 7)

3. Develop generalizations pertaining to a specific social science topic by interpreting information from a variety of sources. (Lessons 4, 6, and 7)

Content Standard 2: All students will conduct investigations by formulating a clear statement of a question, gathering and organizing information from a variety of sources, analyzing and interpreting information, formulating and testing hypotheses, reporting results both orally and in writing, and making use of appropriate technology.

1. Conduct an investigation prompted by a social science question and compare alternative interpretations of their findings. (Lesson 8)

(From The Content Standards for Social Studies. Michigan State Board of Education, 1996.)
Bibliography


