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TITLE OF LESSON PLAN:
Peter the Great

LENGTH OF LESSON:
Two class periods

GRADE LEVEL:
9-12

SUBJECT AREA:
World History

CREDIT:

OBJECTIVES:
Students will understand the following:

1. Peter the Great modernized Russia, which had been left behind in the arts and sciences.

2. Peter the Great was inspired by what he saw in western Europe on his travels.

MATERIALS:
For this lesson, you will need:

History textbooks and time lines, biographies of Peter the Great, and other reference materials about the late 17th and early 18th centuries

Markers and other art supplies
PROCEDURE:

1. Invite students to demonstrate their knowledge of Peter the Great by adopting his persona—writing in the first person as if they were Peter the Great. As Peter the Great, they should write five or more entries in his travel journal or letters to his wife, Catherine. They can mix journal entries and letters or stick to one genre only. All the entries should be written as if Peter were traveling somewhere in Europe. Have students assume that Peter wrote the journal entries with the intention of keeping them private. Explain that, according to biographer Robert K. Massie, when Peter was away from home, he really did write to Catherine every three or four days.

2. Share a sample of correspondence from Peter to Catherine:

   Berlin, October 2, 1712

   Yesterday I arrived here and I went to see the King. Yesterday morning, he came to me and last night I went to the Queen. I send you as many oysters as I could find. I couldn't get any more because they say the plague has broken out in Hamburg and it is forbidden to bring anything from there.

3. Help students analyze how much hard information comes across in Peter's short letter from Berlin: where Peter wrote from and when; what he did in Berlin; what he sent along with the letter as a gift to his wife; what new development had occurred elsewhere in the country he was visiting. Point out to students that correspondence from a traveler often mixes small, personal details with larger-scale information about a journey. The letters and journal entries that your students write should contain not only the emotions students suspect Peter may have been feeling but also real news about the world he was exploring on his trips. Students can discover when Peter would have learned about specific events in Europe—events worth recording in his journal or letters—by reviewing printed and electronic history textbooks, biographies, and chronologies showing where Peter was when and what news he heard about or saw firsthand.

4. Brainstorm with the students to draw up a list of topics that Peter might have written about in his journal or letters to Catherine. A partial list would include the following:

   - Peter's thoughts as he traveled in disguise so that he could learn about the progress of the West without giving away his identity
   - Peter's thoughts about the Church in Russia
   - Peter's plans for the Russian military—especially the navy
   - Peter's thoughts about other monarchs in Europe—especially Charles XII of Sweden
   - Peter's interest in science—especially new instruments such as the microscope
5. Also challenge students to show in their made-up journal entries and letters the range of moods Peter, like most people, was capable of:

- Love for Catherine and concern for their children
- Misery over his son Alexis
- Violent anger
- Awe at the progress of the West
- Competitiveness with other countries

6. Tell students that the journal entries and letters should reflect actual trips that Peter took—the dates he was away and the places he visited at those times.

7. You can have students decorate the paper they use for journal entries and correspondence with designs Peter may have seen in Russia or on his trips abroad.

ADAPTATIONS:

Have students generate only one travel journal entry or one letter to Catherine.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Peter felt his country had been isolated from progress too long, and he looked to Europe as the center of culture and technology. If you felt isolated in your community today, where would you look for inspiration and ideas for advancement? Would you necessarily need to travel as far and wide as Peter did to find what you need? What other resources could you tap into?

2. Peter struggled to bring Russia out of the Dark Ages and into a more modern existence. Today, many (underdeveloped) developing countries are striving toward the same goal. Are the obstacles faced by such countries today the same ones faced by 17th century Russia? Analyze the similarities and differences you can identify in their situations.
3. Peter sensed a large gap in his background and knowledge and set out to fill that gap by learning everything he could about the world beyond Russia's borders. Select a current world leader whom you feel could stand to learn more about something important to his or her country's future. Name the leader, explain what he or she needs to learn, and suggest a strategy for attaining that knowledge.

4. Peter the Great seemed to be completely fascinated by cities. What fascinates you about cities? If Peter were to reappear today, what three cities would you show him? Explain your choices.

5. Peter the Great had his own son killed because of an act of treason. Do you think his son deserved this punishment? How do you think Peter felt about ordering the death of his own son? Do you think he should have done this or was there another option for punishment?

6. Although Peter brought many positive changes to Russia during his reign, he was still a dictator with absolute power. How would you feel if you had lived in Russia during his reign? Would you have been a supporter? Explain the reasons for your answer.

**EVALUATION:**

You can evaluate your students on their journal entries or letters using the following three-point rubric:

- **Three points:** meets the minimum of at least five entries; includes many historical facts appropriate to the time and place of the written piece; shows correct grammar, usage, and mechanics

- **Two points:** meets the minimum of at least five entries; includes some historical facts appropriate to the time and place of the written piece; shows mostly correct grammar, usage, and mechanics

- **One point:** does not meet the minimum of at least five entries; does not include historical facts; shows significant errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics

You can ask your students to contribute to the assessment rubric by determining how many historical facts should be required.
EXTENSION:

Roads Not Taken in Russian History
Clearly, Peter the Great's reign made a lasting imprint on the future of Russia for centuries to come. But what would have become of Russia if Sophia had been able to retain her power? What might have happened if Ivan had had the mental capacity to become czar and had challenged Peter for the throne? Or suppose Peter had decided to leave Russia altogether and relocate to the city of Amsterdam, which he found so fascinating, instead of returning with innovations to his homeland? Have students examine some of these alternatives within the total context of Russian history and make sound predictions based on factual evidence. Then, they can present their predictions in a web that explains where different choices would have led. Webs can be hand drawn or created with webbing software such as Inspiration K-12.

City Planning
Use Peter the Great's fascination with European cities and his innovative construction of St. Petersburg as a springboard into urban planning. Challenge your class to give your town or a nearby city or town a total facelift by incorporating modern architecture, business centers, and cutting-edge industry. Or they can create their very own city from scratch.

Divide the class into cooperative planning groups to maximize the product of brainstorming. Students can use paper and pencil or computer drawing software to sketch out ideas for new buildings, enterprise zones, and recreation facilities. In the end, each group should submit a list of innovations, a map, and sketches.

SUGGESTED READINGS:

World Leaders Past & Present: Peter the Great
This biography traces the life of the czar who began the transformation of Russia into a modern state in the late 17th and early 18th centuries.

St. Petersburg: A Cultural History
The author presents the gateway to the West in his cultural biography of the city built in 1703 by Peter the Great, detailing the artists who have helped shape the city and its inhabitants.
WEB LINKS:

**History-Part Three-Reconquest of Peter the Great**
This site describes Tsarskoe Selo, which, according to the site's author, “had been established as a country retreat by Catherine I, wife of Peter the Great.” The site is opulent in its design and beautifully illustrates the lifestyle of 18th century Russia.
http://www.alexanderpalace.org/tsarskoe/historythree.html

**History of St. Petersburg, Russia: Peter the Great**
This site is part of a cultural guide to St. Petersburg. Contains links to cultural and business resources in St. Petersburg as well as an excellent description of the city's history.

**Peter the Great**
Here you can find a history of the dynasties of the Russian czar.
http://www.sptimes.com/Treasures/TC.2.3.6.html

**Peter the Great of Russia**
Click on the large picture of Peter the Great and move to a page with numerous links on royal Russia.
http://www.english.upenn.edu/~jlynch/Frank/Gifs/pgreat.html

**A History of the Russian Navy**
Here is an extensive site on Russian naval history with a large number of pages dedicated to Peter I.

VOCABULARY:

de cree
An order usually having the force of law.
**Context:**
A European dress code was enforced by decree.

**i nterrogation**
A systematic and formal questioning.
**Context:**
Suspecting a plot against him, Peter forced his guards to undergo cruel interrogation until the truth came out.

**re gent**
One who governs a kingdom in the minority, absence, or disability of the sovereign.
**Context:**
Ivan and Peter shared the crown, with Sophia as regent.
regime
A form of government.
Context:
The clock was already ticking on Sophia's regime.

sacrilege
Gross irreverence toward a hallowed person, place, or thing.
Context:
Many thought Peter's decision to melt down Russia's church bells to make weapons was sacrilege, but he thought it was progress.

serfs
Members of a servile feudal class subject to the will of their lord.
Context:
The Russian serfs were enslaved to grinding poverty and harsh physical labor.

ACADEMIC STANDARDS:

Grade Level:
6-8, 9-12
Subject Area:
world history

Standard:
Understands how European society experienced political, economic, and cultural transformations in an age of global intercommunication between 1450 and 1750.

 Benchmarks:
(6-8) Understands the emergence of strong individual leaders, monarchies, and states in Europe between the 16th and 18th centuries (e.g., the character, development, and sources of wealth of strong bureaucratic monarchies; the significance of Peter the Great's westernizing reforms; the emergence of the Dutch republic as a powerful European state; the reign of Elizabeth I and her efficacy as a leader and builder of a strong nation-state; the governmental policies of Catherine the Great; why St. Petersburg was called the window on the West).

(9-12) Understands the accomplishments of significant European leaders between the 16th and 18th centuries (e.g., the success of Russian expansion in the Caucasus, Central Asia, and Siberia, and the success of the czars in transforming the Duchy of Moscow into a Eurasian empire; the life and achievements of Louis XIV, and elements of absolutist power during this period; how Peter the Great and Catherine the Great expanded Russian territory; major achievements in the reigns of Frederick the Great, Catherine the Great, and Joseph II, and which of these leaders displayed the features of an “enlightened despot”).
Grade Level:  
9-12  
Subject Area:  
geography  

Standard:  
Understands the forces of cooperation and conflict that shape the divisions of Earth's surface.  

Benchmarks:  
Understands the changes that occur in the extent and organization of social, political, and economic entities on Earth's surface (e.g., imperial powers such as the Roman Empire, Han dynasty, Carolingian Empire, British Empire).  

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