

Lesson Plan for “Putin’s Kiss”

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Subject: Social Studies/Modern History/Contemporary World Politics

Themes: Contemporary Russia, democracy, authoritarianism, civil society, press freedoms, youth movements

Time: 2-3 (55 minute) class periods or option of 1-2 class period(s).

Grade Level: 9th-12th grade

Film Overview:

Nashi is an increasingly popular political youth organization in Russia with direct ties to the Kremlin. Officially, its goal is to support the current political system by creating future elites among the brightest and most loyal Russian teenagers. But the organization also works to prevent the political opposition from spreading their views among young people. 16-year-old Masha Drokova, a Nashi commissar and spokesperson, is an ambitious middle-class student from the outskirts of Moscow. After joining Nashi at the age of 15, she moves to the very top of the organization, and is rewarded for her dedication with a university scholarship, an apartment, and even a pro-Putin talk show. Everything changes when Drokova becomes acquainted with a group of liberal journalists, including popular anti-Putin reporter Oleg Kashin. At first, she remains devoted to Nashi while pursuing tentative friendships with its left-wing critics — but when Kashin is brutally beaten by "unknown perpetrators," she has a genuine change of heart and decides to take a stand. (Source: <http://itvs.org/films/putins-kiss>)

Background information and general thematic questions:

1.) “Putin’s Kiss” shows two different organizations (journalists and Nashi) that make up Russia’s civil society and their interactions with state authorities. What is **civil society**? The term “civil society” refers to civic engagement that exists outside of religious affiliation and official government structures. Civil society can emerge through formal organizations (professional societies, community organizations, student groups, activists). An open civil society is considered to be part of a vibrant democracy, though what civil society is (and more importantly, is not!) continues to be up for debate because the lines between individuals, groups, and the state can be

2.) This film calls into question the concept of democracy. Can a state where the freedom of the press and assembly are restricted truly be democratic? **What is democracy?** The term in its most conventional usage generally refers to the concept of a “liberal democracy.” At its most essential, democracy simply means rule of/by the people; liberal democracy (such as the system currently in place in the United States) includes other components such as freedom of expression, freedom of speech, freedom of the press, and freedom of assembly. Some definitions of democracy also include the right to petition the

government, equality before the law, basic human rights provisions, as well as entitlements to due process, and civil society. Based on the film, is Russia a democracy?

Pre-Film Discussion Questions

What needs to exist in a society for there to be democracy?

What role do civil society organizations play in a democracy? Do you belong to any youth groups or organizations? How do they benefit you?

Have you ever left an organization that you have been a member of? What motivated your choice to leave?

Do you have friends who have different viewpoints than you? How do you address your differences?

Film Discussion Questions

What is Nashi? What are the goals of Nashi?

Is Nashi a civil society organization? Why or why not?

According to Masha's parents and grandparents, how was civil society different during the Soviet Union? Who would protest and why?

How does Masha represent the "new generation" of Russians? What was Russia like for her as a child compared to how it is now?

Why is Putin such a popular leader?

What does the opposition in Russia want?

Why did Putin "take control of political activity" in Russia?

What was Masha's role in Nashi?

What is the role of journalism in Russia? Are journalists respected? What are some of the dangers they face? How can they avoid them?

One of the critiques against Nashi is their willingness to burn books or perform other public displays of protest against groups and individuals who are critical of Putin or their own ideals. However, in the film, one of the journalists burns a book at a birthday party that was written by a Putin supporter who was critical of the liberal opposition. Do you think that the journalists were right to burn the book? Are their actions any better or worse than those of Nashi? Why or why not?

After seeing this film, do you think Russia is a democracy? Why or why not?

How does the role of journalism in Russia compare to the role of journalism in the United States? Does the treatment of journalists differ in each place?

Do you think that there are times when the freedom of the press should be limited? When? For what reasons?

Single Course Section:

Overview of Putin's Russia and brief explanation of Nashi and introduction of individuals featured in the documentary.

Film Clip Start time: 2:45

Film Clip End time: 15:38

A selection of the above discussion questions and below related material could be used at the instructor's discretion as it relates to this portion of the film.

Additional Resources:

"Russia: Putin's Plan"

PBS Frontline World: <http://www.pbs.org/frontlineworld/stories/russia703/>

This site provides a link to a series of interviews and other primary source material about Putin as well as a guide to the opposition parties/individuals in Russia.

"Vasiliy Yakemenko Quits as Rosmolodezh Head"

http://en.gazeta.ru/news/2012/06/13/a_4624281.shtml

June 13, 2012

Russia Beyond the Headlines: <http://rbth.ru/>

This site provides in-depth news and analysis on Russia in a highly accessible style.

Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty: <http://www.rferl.org/section/Russia/161.html>

This site offers top recent headlines in Russia with links to other blogs, analysis and in-depth coverage of the region.

Site for news articles about the Russian opposition: <http://www.theotherrussia.org>

It should be noted that the url for the youth group "Nashi" (www.nashi.su) has been blocked from access by internet users outside of the Russian Federation unless a Russian proxy server is used.

Videos/media:

Reuters interview with Oleg Kashin on March 19, 2012 (8 mins)

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ulIYVd_0W2U

Podcast from Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Blog "The Power Vertical."

June 8, 2012

In an interview with Sean Guillory, a historian and post-doctoral fellow at the Center for Russian and Eastern European Studies at the University of Pittsburgh, the blog authors

discuss historical analogies from Russia's past teach us about today's situation in the country.

<http://www.rferl.org/content/podcast-crackdowns-and-consequences/24608350.html>

Additional In-Depth Reading on Nashi

Finkel, Evgeny, and Yitzhak M. Brudny. "Russia and the Colour Revolutions."

Democratization 19.1 (2012): 15-36. Print.

The color revolutions, and especially the Orange Revolution in Ukraine, are widely perceived as major international setbacks to Putin's Russia. The Ukrainian events alarmed Russian elites, who feared the possibility of a local color revolution during the 2007-2008 electoral cycle. To thwart the perceived color revolution threat, Russian authorities adopted strategies that combined a political, administrative and intellectual assault on the opposition and Western ideas of democracy promotion. An integral part of this assault was, first, an attempt to create a mass youth movement, Nashi, as a counterweight to the various youth movements that were the driving forces behind the color revolutions in Serbia, Georgia and Ukraine. Second, it was an attempt to delegitimize the idea of liberal democracy itself, labeling it subversive and alien to the Russian national character. We argue that Russian reactions to the 'color revolution threat' provide important insights into what an authoritarian regime, such as that in Russia, perceives as the most threatening aspects of democratizing activities by domestic and international actors.

Hemmet, Julie. "Nashi, Youth Voluntarism, and Potemkin NGOs: Making Sense of Civil Society in Post-Soviet Russia." *Slavic Review* 71.2 (2012): 234-60. Print.

By interrogating Putin-era civil society projects, this article tracks the aftermath of international development aid in post-Soviet Russian socialist space. State-run organizations such as the pro-Kremlin youth organization Nashi (Ours) are commonly read as evidence of an antidemocratic backlash and as confirmation of Russia's resurgent authoritarianism. Contributing to recent scholarship in the anthropology of postsocialism, Julie Hemment seeks here to account for Nashi by locating it in the context of twenty years of international democracy promotion, global processes of neoliberal governance, and the disenchantments they gave rise to. Drawing on a collaborative ethnographic research project involving scholars and students in the provincial city Tver', Hemment reveals Nashi's curiously hybrid nature: At the same time as it advances a trenchant critique of 1990s-era interventions and the models and paradigms that guided democracy assistance, it also draws on them. Nashi respins these resources to articulate a robust national-interest alternative that is persuasive to many young people. Moreover, rather than a static, top-down political technology project, Nashi offers its participants a range of registers and voices in which they can articulate their own individualized agendas.

Horvath, Robert. "Putin's 'Preventive Counter-Revolution': Post-Soviet Authoritarianism and the Spectre of Velvet Revolution." *Europe-Asia Studies* 63.1 (2011): 1-25. Print.

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This article examines the emergence of a mobilizational authoritarian regime during

Putin's second term. It argues that this development was shaped by the repercussions within Russia of 'velvet revolutions' in former Soviet republics. On the one hand, it traces the growth of the perception that Russia faced an imminent revolutionary threat. On the other, it shows how the Kremlin's counter-measures the creation of the youth movement Nashi, the imposition of controls on the NGO sector, and the elaboration of 'sovereign democracy' as an unofficial state ideology were directed against a domestic threat.

Laruelle, Marlene. "Negotiating History: Memory Wars in the Near Abroad and Pro-Kremlin Youth Movements." *Demokratizatsiya: The Journal of Post-Soviet Democratization* 19.3 (2011): 233-52. Print.

Lassila, Jussi. "Making Sense of Nashi's Political Style: The Bronze Soldier and the Counter-Orange Community." *Demokratizatsiya: The Journal of Post-Soviet Democratization* 19.3 (2011): 253-76. Print.

Sperling, Valerie. "Nashi Devushki: Gender and Political Youth Activism in Putin's and Medvedev's Russia." *Post-Soviet Affairs* 28.2 (2012): 232-61. Print.

In Russia, as elsewhere, hegemonic ideas about gender are invoked in the political realm. This article explores some of the gendered ways in which political youth organizations voice their criticism of and support for the Putin-centered regime. Interviews and a wide range of mass media sources, including blogs and YouTube videos, as well as the scholarly literature are used to look at political youth group actions and rhetoric on both sides of the Kremlin. The focus is on how gender is used by political youth groups as an organizing principle for exhibiting or withholding support for state leaders and opposition leaders.