

# The Amur River Region of the Russian Far East: a Curriculum Guide

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**Introduction:** The region surrounding the Amur River Basin is of critical geopolitical and economic importance to the Russian Federation. Not only does it contain important industrial areas and mineral resources for Russia, this region also borders Manchuria within the People's Republic of China. Although the Amur region is not a formal region insofar as it is not officially recognized as such, it is arguably a functional region owing to the many connections between cities found within the Amur River Basin. By focusing on the Amur River Basin as a region, this lesson plan seeks to provide a convenient spatial structure around which students can be introduced to the basic human geography of the region represented by cities.

**Goals of Lesson for Students:** The goal of this lesson plan is to familiarize students with the basic human geography of the region surrounding the Amur River in the Russian Far East. Students should come away from this lesson with a general knowledge of the region's cities, the names of the tributaries of the Amur River, and the significance of this area for Russia, especially as it pertains to its relationship with the People's Republic of China. Students will ideally have the opportunity find information about particular cities and region-relevant issues in Sino-Russian relations on the Internet and then share this in class.

**Key Geographic Features:** Below is a table of key geographic features for students to learn.

Rivers	Cities
Amur	Chita
Ingoda	Blagoveshchensk
Shilka	Khabarovsk
Zeya	Amursk
Bureya	Komsomolsk
Amgun	Nikolayevsk
Ergune (Argun)	Vladivostok
Human	Heihe
Songhua	Tongjiang
Ussuri	Harbin

**Design of Lesson Plan:** The instructor should first use an atlas or an online map such as Google Maps to identify the geographic features listed above and read the news articles listed below prior to the in-class lesson. Suggested Activities 1 and 2 will familiarize students with the rivers and cities of the region. Students should read the news articles below prior to the lesson so that a

discussion may be held. Students will then profile a city listed above in the context of the issues discussed in the articles for the next class meeting.

**Suggested Activity 1:** Using a detailed map of the region (either a large physical map or a digital map using a projector), point out the tributaries of the Amur River. The left tributaries include: the Ingoda, the Shilka, the Zeya, the Bureya, and the Amgun. The right tributaries include: the Ergune (or Argun), the Human, the Songhua, and the Ussuri. If classroom technology is available, have students identify the sources of these rivers (usually mountain ranges in China, Mongolia, or Russia).

**Suggested Activity 2:** Using a detailed map of the region (either a large physical map or a digital map using a projector), point out the major cities found within the Amur River Basin. The Russian cities include: Chita on the Ingoda River (one of the sources of the Shilka), Blagoveshchensk at the confluence of the Amur and Zeya Rivers, Khabarovsk on the Amur River, Amursk on the Amur River, and both Komsomolsk and Nikolayevsk on the Amur River. Vladivostok, Russia's principle Pacific port, is not physically located within the Amur River Basin, but because of its close proximity to Khabarovsk, it should be included in this exercise. Some cities in China are also worth mentioning, including: Heihe on the Amur (or Heilong Jiang as it is known to the Chinese), Tongjiang at the confluence of the Amur and Songhua Rivers, and finally and most importantly, Harbin on the Songhua River.

**Discussion of Articles:** Students should be prepared to discuss the articles in class on the day in which the lesson is held. After providing an overview of the content, the instructor should ask the following questions of the students: 1) How is this region important to Sino-Russian relations? 2) How does Russia feel threatened by China in the Russian Far East? 3) How might relations between Russia and China affect the US "pivot" towards the Asia-Pacific region?

**Suggested Student Assignment:** Students should be asked to profile one the cities mentioned above for the next class session. Profiles could be delivered either orally or in writing (1/2 page to full page). Ideally, any profile should include information on demographics, economics, political structures, and cultural aspects of a given city. Students should tie issues discussed in the news articles with these profiles. This information can be easily found on the Internet and will further familiarize students with this region.

**Assessment for Suggested Student Assignment:** The instructor naturally has latitude in determining the quality of students' work. However, students should be expected to demonstrate an understanding of the geopolitical situation in this region along with its basic human geography.

## **Suggested Materials:**

Google Maps

Wikipedia.org

Other Internet Resources

## **Articles:**

Gabe Collins, "China Looms over Russian Far East," *The Diplomat*, June 22, 2011, accessed February 2, 2014, <http://thediplomat.com/2011/06/china-looms-over-russia-far-east/?allpages=yes>.

Andrew S. Bowen and Luke Rodeheffer, "Is Russia Losing Control of Its Far East?," *The Diplomat*, October 1, 2013, accessed February 2, 2014, <http://thediplomat.com/2013/10/is-russia-losing-control-of-its-far-east/>.

Taylor Washburn, "Between Russia and China, a Demographic Time Bomb," *The National Interest*, August 23, 2013, accessed February 2, 2014, <http://nationalinterest.org/commentary/between-russia-china-demographic-time-bomb-8938?page=show>.

Sergei Blagov, "Russia Mulls Far Eastern Economic Revival" *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 9 (83), May 2, 2012, accessed February 2, 2014, [http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no\\_cache=1&tx\\_ttnews%5bswords%5d=8fd5893941d69d0be3f378576261ae3e&tx\\_ttnews%5bany\\_of\\_the\\_words%5d=georgia&tx\\_ttnews%5bpointer%5d=15&tx\\_ttnews%5btt\\_news%5d=39320&tx\\_ttnews%5bbackPid%5d=7&cHash=91631a38821a489135c4429f505214f9#.UvCeifldWSp](http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews%5bswords%5d=8fd5893941d69d0be3f378576261ae3e&tx_ttnews%5bany_of_the_words%5d=georgia&tx_ttnews%5bpointer%5d=15&tx_ttnews%5btt_news%5d=39320&tx_ttnews%5bbackPid%5d=7&cHash=91631a38821a489135c4429f505214f9#.UvCeifldWSp).