

Everyday Life under Late Socialism Social Studies/History

Grades: 9-12, Community College

Suggested time frame: 3 sessions (1 homework assignments)

Illinois State Goal(s):

Early High School:

16.a.4a Analyze and report historical events to determine cause-and-effect relationships.

16.A.4b Compare competing historical interpretations of an event.

Late High School:

16.A.5a Analyze historical and contemporary developments using methods of historical inquiry (pose questions, collect and analyze data, make and support inferences with evidence, report findings).

16.A.5b Explain the tentative nature of historical interpretations.

National Social Studies Standards: The 20th Century Since 1945: Promises and Paradoxes
Students should understand:

- Analyze the continuing growth of mass consumption of commodities and resources since World War II.

Big Questions:

1. What are the key components of state socialist political, economic and cultural system?
2. What are the common components of a society's "daily life," in the material, intellectual and social sense?
3. What were the challenges and issues facing ordinary people living in a communist country and how did they experience them?
4. How did conditions of daily life contribute to the collapse of communist regimes in Eastern Europe and Soviet Union (1989-1991)?

Materials:

Lecture

Kolejka/Queue: The Board Game

Student Packet

Day 1

Note: Set-up Kolejka before class (except pawns and product delivery cards)

Opening Activity (10 min.): Commence by asking the entire class “What is (or was) Communism? How would you characterize political, economic and cultural life in a communist regime?” Record and organize your students’ responses. Allow the students to struggle, brainstorm and reflect but guide the conversation so that some of the essential elements of a communist government, social structure, economic system, and cultural life are identified. Be sure to explain/clarify the following key terms based on the lecture packet: communism, state socialism, dictatorship of the proletariat, single-party system, command economy, shortage economy, and socialist culture.

Change directions by having students describe what an average or routine day is like for them and for their parents. What kind of goods/materials make up that life? How do they go about obtaining those goods? How do they imagine their life being different under a communist regime? These questions ask students to formulate a clear picture of daily life in America today, identify the goods/services common to that life and contrast it to their understanding of everyday life under socialism.

Activity 1. Small Group Activity (40 min.): Read the introduction to *Kolejka* and explain the rules based on the directions enclosed. Ask students to observe all players during the game paying particular attention to the following three questions: What does time revolve around in this game? What kinds of products and services are being acquired? What frustrates or facilitates this process of acquisition? What sort of emotions do you and other players experience in the process? Instruct students to note down their answers while playing.

Activity 2. Primary Source Analysis - Homework: Divide the class into groups and assign the corresponding primary source packets on workers, youth, and women. Ask students to reflect on the daily life of these social categories based on these sources and their experience of playing *Kolejka*. The overall goal of this exercise is to help students identify the formal characteristics of daily life. It also prompts them to consider how people’s subjective experience varied based on their membership in a particular social category and the kinds of goods/services they wished to obtain.

Day 2.

Activity 3. Group Role-Play (50 min.): Based on their readings, set up groups for workers, youth and women in order to form a debate about how the party should address problems of daily life. A group should represent party leaders and state planners directing the different domains of socialist life (culture, education, industry, consumption etc.). This group should include students familiar with sources on workers, youth and women and following the debate should formulate a prioritized list of actions to be taken in order to meet the demands of the wider socialist society.

Allow groups representing workers, youth and women access to their primary sources and allocate 10 minutes asking them articulate a list of demands and supporting arguments based on

the sources. All demands should reference sources such as “as the working masses know from Source A, our most pressing concern is to develop better distribution of consumer products to avoid shortages” (rather than simply “we need to improve distribution”). Similarly, the group of party leaders and planners should also indicate the source of their information when announcing their list of priorities. After allowing the debate for approx.. 30 minutes, give the students time to reflect. How important were the roles to their participation and understanding? How did this activity elucidate their understanding of the structural elements of daily life?

Day 3.

Activity 4. Short Lecture (20 min.): The goal is to build on students’ understanding of everyday life under socialism developed in Activity 1-3 and ground that understanding in knowledge informed by current scholarship. Prompt students to draw connections between their work and your lecture by asking them to bring up primary sources and explain their relevance to lecture points.

Activity 5. Reflection Prompt –Journal Entry (30 min): Write a journal entry of a “day in the life of ...,” imagining that you and your family lived in an Eastern bloc country under communist rule. Be sure to use the primary sources and your experience with *Kolejka* as the foundation for your journal.

* * *

Developed by: Zsuzsánna Magdó
PhD Candidate
Department of History
University of Illinois