

# The Russian Revolution

## Student Text



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## Introduction: The End of an Era

On March 2, 1917, Tsar Nicholas II gave up his birthright: the Russian Empire. In doing so, he relinquished his authority over a territory that spanned seven thousand miles from east to west and encompassed one-sixth of the of the earth's land surface. Tsar Nicholas II was a member of the Romanov family dynasty that had ruled Russia for more than three hundred years.

The Russian Empire included seventy-four million people who spoke more than one hundred different languages, came from over one hundred distinct ethnicities, and practiced many different religions. With his decision to abdicate (give up) the throne, Nicholas ended a tradition of dynastic rule by his family dating back to the seventeenth century. Since the sixteenth century, Russia had been governed by a tsar who possessed complete authority over all aspects of life in Russia.

What compelled Tsar Nicholas II to give all this up? Who—or what—would take his place?

In the coming days, you will consider these questions and examine the history of the Russian Revolution of 1917, an event which took place in two parts. The first part began in February 1917, when workers, peasants, soldiers, generals, statesmen, and nobles forced the tsar to abdicate the throne, and put a temporary government in his place. The second part of the Russian Revolution began in October 1917. Led by Vladimir Lenin, a radical socialist party called the Bolsheviks took hold of the government, and in 1922 established the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). These historical events are among the most important of the twentieth century.

The issues leading to the Russian Revolution have deep and complicated roots. For centuries, the tsars had the support of much of the land-owning nobility and ordinary people, who regarded the tsar as a representative of God and a force for good. But brutal government repression and the suffering of millions led to political movements by people seeking change in Russia.

By the late nineteenth century, nearly 80 percent of the Russian population consisted of oppressed peasants who worked for the nobles, the church, and the state with little to no economic gain for themselves. There were numerous non-Russian minorities (including Poles, Jews, Finns, Tatars, Muslims and Ukrainians) seeking greater autonomy. Russia was also a patriarchal society where men held power and authority.

In the coming days, you will dig deeper into the history of Russia and the histories of those who lived during the Russian Revolution. The Russian Empire was vast and the revolution played out in different ways



Tsar Nicholas II and his family in January, 1913. Nicholas was the last emperor of Russia.

# The Russian Revolution

## Teacher Resource Book

TEACHER RESOURCE BOOK

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## Women, War, and Revolution

### Objectives:

**Students will:** Analyze primary source documents representing perspectives of women in Russia about World War I.

Identify the various political concerns and opinions of women at the time.

Compare and contrast the political beliefs reflected in the documents.

### Required Reading:

Students should have read Part II and completed “Study Guide—Part II” (TRB 22-23) or “Advanced Study Guide—Part II” (TRB-24).

### Handouts:

“Primary Sources: Women, War, and Revolution” (TRB 30-32)

### Video:

The short video used with this lesson is available at <[choices.edu/russianrevolution](http://choices.edu/russianrevolution)>.

- “What is patriarchy?” (Emily Owens)

### In the Classroom:

**1. Establish Key Concepts—**a. Write the question “What does it mean to be revolutionary?” on the board. Give students five minutes to approach the board and write whatever comes to mind—statements, words, questions, people, etc. Instruct the class to do the exercise in silence. Encourage students to add to each other’s postings as well as write their own independent postings.

b. Play the video of Professor Emily Owens answering the question, “What is patriarchy?” Do students have enough information from their readings to decide if Imperial Russia is a patriarchal society? What evidence can they provide to support their answers?

**2. Examine Sources—**Form pairs of students and distribute “Primary Sources: Women, War, and Revolution” to all students. Direct students to read the instructions carefully and answer the questions that follow the sources.

**3. Analyze Competing Ideas—**After the pairs have completed the handout, have groups share some of their answers. What is the main point that each source wants to convey? What is each source’s position on the war? Record answers on the board about each of the sources.

Invite students to read aloud lines from the sources that stood out to them. Which ideas and beliefs do the sources share? Which ideas are not shared by the sources? Why do students believe that the sources have significantly different points of view?

What factors lead people to have different points of view in general? Have students speculate about which of these factors could influence the views expressed in these sources.

**4. Concluding Discussion—**Do students believe that the ideas of each of the sources are revolutionary? Are any of the sources’ ideas more revolutionary than the others? Why? Which sources challenge the patriarchal system in Russia? Have students provide evidence from the sources to support their answers.

What questions do these sources raise for students? What additional sources might they consult to find answers to those questions?

### Writing Extensions:

**1. Creative Response:** Have students assume the role of the author of Source 1 or Source 2. They should write a short letter to the other author (Source 1 or 2) comparing and contrasting their ideas.

**2. Research Project and Persuasive Essay:** Have students draft a short, evidence-based, persuasive essay that answers the question: “*Was Alexandra Kollontai the most radical revolutionary of the Russian Revolution?*” Students should write in the third person, and gather and cite evidence from the readings and other sources.

### Homework:

Students should read “Spring 1917: The People of Russia Debate Their Future.”



## Primary Sources: Women, War, and Revolution

*Instructions:* Read the sources below two times. On the **first read**, put a star by a sentence or phrase that stands out to you. On the **second read**, look for patterns across different sources. When you notice an idea or detail that comes up in more than one source, use a colored pencil to underline each time a source mentions this idea or detail. Use a different color for the next pattern you notice. Then answer the questions that follow.

### Source 1: *Zhenshschina i voina* (Women and War), No. 1, 1915

*Women and War was a new publication in 1915 dealing with women's role in Russia during World War I.*

“Now in the epoch of great war, it becomes clear that, in spite of her present lack of civil rights, woman is strong. The war emphasizes this strength. Fathers, brothers, husbands, sons left for the front. According to the obsolete male philosophy, sorrow and helpless tears should have been the destiny of the women left behind. But at this historical moment for Russia, women are proving that they have no time to cry. Merchants' wives are running vast trading businesses, peasant women are responsible for the cultivation of the land, and we now have female tram conductors, points-women, cab-women, female porters and street-cleaners, dray-women, and even female soldiers.... Now a woman's responsibility to her motherland is great. The war has moved her to the front line of life, and she is taking her final examination. History will later determine her mark.... Unexpectedly for ourselves and our recent opponents, men, the war has introduced women to those areas of male labour which were beyond our reach in the old days. All we have to do is to prove ourselves in our new jobs so that in the future, after the war, we shall remain in our present, newly gained positions.”

### Source 2: Alexandra Kollontai, “Who Needs the War?” 1915

*Alexandra Kollontai was a Bolshevik revolutionary. She strongly supported women's rights and equality, but believed that class and economic inequalities also needed to be eliminated as well.*

“Let those who were ready to die ‘for the homeland’ ask themselves honestly and in all conscience: what homeland does the worker have, what homeland do the dispossessed have? Do they have a homeland? If they did, would there be the yearly flow of emigrants from every country into alien

lands, the dispossessed and unemployed leaving their native land, believing, hoping, that perhaps this ‘alien land’ will prove a more loving step-mother than their own mother country? Would there be, in Russia itself, hundreds of thousands of hungry and penniless migrants’?

“The general has a homeland, and so does the landowner, the merchant, the manufacturer, and all those who carry a fat wallet in their pocket. To these, the wealthy with the bulging purses, the homeland gives rights and privileges and the state authorities concern themselves about their fate.... For the poor, the motherland is not a mother but a stepmother....”

### Source 3: A letter published in a St. Petersburg newspaper in August 1914

“We women don't wish to remain simply bystanders during these great events. Many of us want to join the army as nurses to ease the sufferings of the wounded heroes.... I, too, am full of desire to help my motherland, but I don't have a calling to become a nurse. I want to volunteer to serve in the army as a soldier, and appeal to wealthy people to respond by providing me with the necessary funds to fulfil my dream of setting up a detachment of women soldiers, of Amazons.”

### Source 4: Poliksena Shishkina-Yavein, August 1915

*Poliksena Shishkina-Yavein was a medical doctor who advocated for women's rights and equality. She was president of the Women's Equality League.*

“We women have to unite: and each of us, forgetting personal misfortune and suffering, must come out of the narrow confines of the family and devote all our energy, intellect and knowledge to our country. This is our obligation to the fatherland, and this will give us the right to participate as the equals of men in the new life of a victorious Russia.”

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

## Analyzing the Sources

1. What is the date the source was produced?

Source 1:

Source 2:

Source 3:

Source 4:

2. Who produced this source?

Source 1:

Source 2:

Source 3:

Source 4:

3. What about the identity (e.g., gender, profession, political viewpoint) of the source's author can you identify? Does the author claim or intend to be representing anyone? If so, whom?

Source 1:

Source 2:

Source 3:

Source 4:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

4. What events does the source discuss?

Source 1:

Source 2:

Source 3:

Source 4:

5. Does this source have a particular point of view? If so, what is it?

Source 1:

Source 2:

Source 3:

Source 4:

6. Does this source contain a revolutionary idea? If so, what is it? Be sure to explain your reasoning.

Source 1:

Source 2:

Source 3:

Source 4:

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