

History Revolutions: Russia
Teach Yourself Series
Topic 1: Chronology of key events

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SAMPLE

Chronology of key events

The Russian Revolution of October 1917 was the first example of a communist revolution succeeding in one country. The Soviet Union, the regime established by that revolution, lasted essentially until the collapse of communism in 1989-1991, making it part of recent history. Many historians you will encounter in your study of the Russian Revolution lived during the Soviet era, which adds to their difficulty in distancing themselves from it, and being objective about events associated with the Revolution.

There were, in fact, three 'Russian Revolutions': the first, in 1905, was a challenge to the autocratic ruler of Russia, the Tsar, who established a 'parliament'. This did not solve Russia's problems however, and the Tsar continued to behave as an autocrat. In February 1917, the second Russian Revolution occurred, when the Tsar abdicated and a Provisional Government attempted to move Russia towards a modern democratic state. The third and final Russian Revolution was the overthrow of the Provisional Government by the Russian Bolshevik or Communist Party. The October 1917 Revolution is the revolution that is generally meant by the term, 'Russian Revolution' and the Study Design defines the October Revolution as the focus of your study.

A word about words

Russia or Soviet Union or USSR?

In your study of the Russian Revolution, you may encounter varying terms such as 'Russia', 'Soviet Union' and 'USSR' (an acronym for Union of Soviet Socialist Republics). Don't be confused: for our VCE Revolutions course, the terms are practically interchangeable.

'Russia' was the name given to the empire that covered northern Europe and Asia. The Tsars ruled the Russian Empire, which included provinces that were not technically 'Russian.' After the October 1917 Revolution, six provinces became independent Soviet republics, and in 1922, they signed the Treaty of Union, forming the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics - otherwise known as the 'Soviet Union.' 'Russia' was one of those republics, however, the term 'Russia' was often used to refer to all republics in the USSR. The government of the USSR was in Moscow.

The term 'official Soviet history' is used because, from the 1920s, the government of the USSR promoted one view of the history of the revolution and censored alternative views.

There are also variations in spelling key words such as 'tsar', which is sometimes written 'czar.' This is rare now, but these anomalies arise because the words are translated from Russian. Place names also change: St Petersburg became the more Russian-sounding 'Petrograd' during the First World War, then became Leningrad after 1924; in 1991, it reverted to St Petersburg.

From 1903, Lenin's political party was called the Bolsheviks. In 1918, it was renamed the Russian Communist Party. During the early years after the Revolution, many Russians were probably confused and unclear about the correct names. In your writing, unless you have cause to particularly identify them otherwise, it is acceptable to use the names interchangeably.

Overview of revolutions

As it appears in Units 3 and 4

This is the overview of revolutions that appears in the Study Design.

Revolutions represent great ruptures in time and are a major turning point which brings about the collapse and destruction of an existing political order resulting in a pervasive change to society. Revolutions are caused by the interplay of ideas, events, individuals and popular movements. Their consequences have a profound effect on the political and social structures of the post-revolutionary society. Revolution is a dramatically accelerated process whereby the new order attempts to create political and social change and transformation based on a new ideology. Progress in a post-revolutionary society is not guaranteed or inevitable. Post-revolutionary regimes are often threatened internally by civil war and externally by foreign threats. These challenges can result in a compromise of revolutionary ideals and extreme measures of violence, oppression and terror.

Review Questions

- Using your dictionary to help you, write working definitions of these words and phrases as they appear in the Study Design:

Word/phrase	Working definition as it applies to Revolutions
ruptures in time	
turning point	
existing political order	
post-revolutionary society	
profound effect	
dramatically accelerated process	
ideology	
regimes	
civil war	
compromise	
oppression	
terror	

2. Rewrite the overview of revolutions using your own words.

Overview of revolutions As it appears in Units 3 and 4

Skills developed in your study of Revolutions

The Study Design states that students:

- develop an understanding of the complexity and multiplicity of causes and consequences of revolution
- construct an argument about the past using primary sources as evidence
- evaluate the extent to which the revolution brought change to the lives of people
- consider perspectives of the revolution
- consider change and continuity
- evaluate historical interpretations about the causes and consequences of revolution
- evaluate the effects of change instigated by the new order.

Review Questions

3. Write working definitions of these words as they are used in the Study Design:

Word/phrase	Working definition as it applies to Revolutions
complexity and multiplicity of causes	
primary sources	
perspectives of the revolution	
change and continuity	
historical interpretations	

Solutions to Review Questions

1.

Word/phrase	Working definition as it applies to Revolutions
<i>ruptures in time</i>	<i>Great breaking points. The time when events make great changes to society.</i>
<i>turning point</i>	<i>The time at which the society changes from one system to a very different system.</i>
<i>existing political order</i>	<i>The old regime. The system of governing and social structure that exists before the revolution.</i>
<i>post-revolutionary society</i>	<i>The society created after the revolution.</i>
<i>profound effect</i>	<i>Great change or causing great difference.</i>
<i>dramatically accelerated process</i>	<i>Changes to the political and/or social structure are very rapid and increase in speed.</i>
<i>ideology</i>	<i>A set of beliefs. The beliefs that underpinned the new government.</i>
<i>regimes</i>	<i>The system of government. The prevailing system.</i>
<i>civil war</i>	<i>War between two or more groups within the country.</i>
<i>compromise</i>	<i>The new government (regime) has to change some or its ideals or aims.</i>
<i>oppression</i>	<i>Government by coercion.</i>
<i>terror</i>	<i>Extreme measures against anyone who opposes the government.</i>

2. *Revolutions mark the point where the society changes and takes a different direction. They are caused by different forces - ideas, events, individuals and popular movements - working together. As a result of the revolution, the political and social structure changes profoundly, as the new order tries to impose its beliefs. But the new government often faces internal and external threats. These force the government to change some of its aims and it may be forced to use coercion and force against its opponents.*

3.

Word/phrase	Working definition as it applies to Revolutions
<i>complexity and multiplicity of causes</i>	<i>Revolutions are not caused by one factor, but many different factors.</i>
<i>primary sources</i>	<i>First hand evidence from the period or by those who witnessed the events.</i>
<i>perspectives of the revolution</i>	<i>How the revolution has been viewed. Differing views of the revolution.</i>
<i>change and continuity</i>	<i>As a result of revolution, some aspects of society change, but other factors continue unchanged, or return to the former structure.</i>
<i>historical interpretations</i>	<i>Historians and commentators see the revolution in different ways and give varying weight to its causes and consequences.</i>

4. In 1917, Russia still used the Julian calendar, while most of the West used the Gregorian calendar. On the Julian calendar, the first revolution began on 23 February, so is known as the 'February Revolution', but it was 8 March on the Gregorian calendar.

5.

<u>Date</u>	<u>Event</u>	<u>What changed or why was it significant?</u>
<i>19th century</i>	<i>Attempted reforms</i>	<i>Various groups tried to reform Russia's political and social structure</i>
<i>1896</i>	<i>Tsar Nicholas II crowned</i>	<i>Nicholas believed strongly in absolutism</i>
<i>1904-1905</i>	<i>Russia at war with Japan</i>	<i>Russia defeated - creates political, social and economic tensions</i>
<i>22 January 1905</i>	<i>Bloody Sunday</i>	<i>Tsar's troops fired on petitioners; loss of faith in Tsar</i>
<i>October 1905</i>	<i>October Manifesto</i>	<i>Established a дума, which on paper seemed to support political reform.</i>
<i>1905</i>	<i>Formation of St Petersburg Soviet</i>	<i>First example of workers having political power.</i>
<i>27 April 1906</i>	<i>Fundamental State Laws</i>	<i>Tsar states that Russia is still an autocracy.</i>
<i>1906-1916</i>	<i>Four Dumas</i>	<i>Tsar didn't believe in real reform.</i>
<i>August 1914</i>	<i>World War One</i>	<i>Russia on Allied side; poorly equipped to fight 20th century war</i>