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Study Guide

for

**One Day in the
Life of Ivan
Denisovich**

by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn



New York, New York Columbus, Ohio Woodland Hills, California Peoria, Illinois

Meet Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn



*When you've been pitched head first into hell
you just write about it.*

—Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn knew firsthand the power of the state to suppress writers. He risked imprisonment or worse punishments to reveal to the world the tyranny of the Soviet government under Joseph Stalin. His first published novel, *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, did more than expose the horrors of a vast system of labor camps for political enemies; it also revealed the author's belief in the common man's ability to survive with dignity and integrity.

Born in Kislovodsk in 1918 and educated in Rostov-on-Don, Russia, Solzhenitsyn served in the Soviet army at the beginning of World War II. His difficulties with the government began in 1945, when he was arrested for having written critical remarks about the dictatorial ruler Joseph Stalin in a letter to a friend. After the letter was intercepted by army censors, Solzhenitsyn was sentenced without a trial to eight years in prison. He served part of that term in a forced-labor camp. Ironically, he was released in 1953, on the day that Stalin died.

Under the horrendous conditions of the prison camp, Solzhenitsyn managed to write on

tiny scraps of paper, which he destroyed as soon as he had memorized their contents. Exiled after his sentence was completed to a rural area in Kazakhstan, he taught physics and wrote surreptitiously, knowing he was being watched.

When *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* was published, in 1962, Solzhenitsyn turned to writing full time. He was admitted to the Union of Soviet Writers and hailed by critics in the official newspapers.

Solzhenitsyn's official government favor proved to be short-lived. Before he could publish his second novel, Premier Nikita Khrushchev, who had allowed publication of the first novel, was removed from power. Khrushchev's successors confiscated Solzhenitsyn's writings, and government officials criticized and harassed him.

In 1967, Solzhenitsyn responded by writing a scathing letter about censorship and repression to the Fourth National Congress of Soviet Writers. Although his manuscripts were eventually returned, Solzhenitsyn continued to be denounced by Soviet officials; and his works, barred from publication. He published his own short stories, poetry, and plays and circulated them illegally. His novels were published outside of the Soviet Union in both Russian and English. Solzhenitsyn was expelled from the Union of Soviet Writers in 1969.

On the international scene, Solzhenitsyn was awarded the 1970 Nobel Prize in literature. However, the more he was admired in Europe and the United States, the less he was tolerated by his own government. In 1974 Solzhenitsyn was arrested and then expelled from the Soviet Union.

While living first in Switzerland and then in the United States, Solzhenitsyn spoke out on what he considered to be the shortcomings of Western democracy and its institutions. In the late 1980s, when the Soviet Union adopted a policy of *glasnost*, or openness toward the West, the Russian government restored Solzhenitsyn's citizenship. He ended his exile and returned to Russia in 1994. Since then, he has published a number of political essays and books.

Introducing the Novel

Although Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn earned his university degree in mathematics and physics, his passion was literature and writing:

The desire to write, and the unconscious idea (unprompted by anyone) that I ought for some reason to become a writer, arose in me at a very early age, at nine or ten, when I was not even capable of understanding what it was like to be a writer or why one wrote. From that time on, throughout my youth, I wrote a great deal of nonsense in various genres. But for a long time I did not come to know either my linguistic or my natural environment. It was only just before the war, having visited Central Russia, that I discovered for myself this unique region, where I could become not just a writer in general but a Russian writer.

When Solzhenitsyn won the Nobel Prize in literature in 1970, he quoted a Russian proverb in his acceptance speech: “One word of truth shall outweigh the whole world.” Solzhenitsyn’s goal has been to preserve the truth of his nation’s history against what he sees as attempts by Soviet authorities to distort or obliterate it. “Literature transmits . . . condensed experience from generation to generation,” he has observed. It “becomes the living memory of a nation.”

In the Soviet Union in the early 1960s, the government placed heavy restrictions on the subjects that writers could deal with. The truth about many of the central events in Soviet history—World War II, the collectivization of agriculture (that is, the combining of small farms into large government-supervised units), and the vast network of prison camps—remained off-limits. Because *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* concerned itself to some degree with all of those taboo subjects, the novel’s publication in 1962 was a ground-breaking surprise.

However, even as the Soviet government began to permit some criticism of the Stalinist era Solzhenitsyn was writing about, the author still had to tone down some of his opinions in order to get

the first version of the novel published. In the version you are about to read, Solzhenitsyn’s original ideas have been restored.

One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich not only illustrates the horrors of the totalitarian repression of human rights but also makes the universal observation that “freedom is found only when a [person] has been stripped of everything.” Once again, Solzhenitsyn says it best:

One can build the Empire State Building, discipline the Prussian army, raise the official hierarchy above the throne of the Almighty, yet fail to overcome the unaccountable spiritual superiority of certain human beings. [The task of the writer] is to treat universal and eternal themes: the mysteries of the heart and conscience, the collision between life and death, [and] the triumph over spiritual anguish.

THE TIME AND PLACE

After the violent overthrow of the last of the Russian czars in 1917, the new rulers of Russia dealt just as harshly with their political adversaries as the czars had done. Prison camps for criminals and political dissidents were built in sparsely populated Siberia and administered by secret police. *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* takes place in one of these camps.

In order to move the Soviet Union from an agricultural society to an industrial nation, the Soviet rulers Vladimir Lenin and Joseph Stalin introduced a series of five-year plans. In addition to abolishing the private ownership of land and nationalizing banks, these plans created heavy demands for workers.

Beginning about 1929, when workers were needed for the construction of canals, railroads, highways, factories, and cities, the government increasingly depended on forced labor. Criminals and political enemies worked side by side. Sentenced at first to three-year terms, prisoners found their sentences randomly increased at the whim of camp leaders or government officials. The first group of forced laborers consisted of farmers

who had lost their land to collectivization, but religious believers of all denominations, members of minority groups, and anyone who failed to perform his or her assigned industrial tasks soon followed. During World War II, many soldiers accused of being responsible for the Russian army's defeats were also sent to these camps, as were

soldiers like Ivan Denisovich who had been taken prisoner. After the war, soldiers who had had any contact with the British or American forces were imprisoned. In the novel, Captain Buynovsky's "crime" was that he had been assigned as a liaison officer to the British navy and had received a commendation for his services.

Did You Know?

In Russia, a person's full name consists of a first name, such as Ivan; a patronymic (a name derived from the name of the father or a paternal ancestor), such as Denisovich, which means son of Denis; and a last name, such as Shukhov. A person's last name is generally used for administrative purposes in places like schools and the army.

In the novel, the prison authorities use *Shukhov* to refer to Ivan Denisovich. His fellow prisoners often use his first name plus the patronymic. His good friends and relatives would use only his first name, Ivan, or a diminutive of it, such as Vanya. The author generally uses the name Shukhov in the text of the novel.



Joseph Stalin, who was responsible for setting up labor camps like the one in the novel, was one of the most controversial world leaders of all time. Ruling the Soviet Union for

twenty-nine years, he was despised as a despot and revered as an infallible leader. He brought victory in war and pride in industrialization; he was also responsible for mass murder and famine.

Stalin's effect on the Soviet Union was so enormous that destroying his legacy later became an official policy. De-Stalinization began in 1956, when Nikita Khrushchev denounced the cult of Stalin's personality and the horrors of Stalin's regime.

The end of de-Stalinization in the early 1960s marked a rise in the criticism of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn and his work. In 1964 he was nominated for the Lenin Prize in literature but failed to win the award. Citing his first novel as unworthy of the prize, an editorial in the newspaper *Pravda* criticized the author for not distinguishing between "honorable and good people" on the one hand and "criminals and traitors" on the other.

Before You Read

One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich Pages 1–28

FOCUS ACTIVITY

What do you think it would be like to be forced to work for an authoritarian government without being paid or without receiving adequate food or shelter?

Think-Pair-Share

With a partner, discuss how long each of you thinks you could endure this situation. What would you do to keep your spirit alive? How would you expect your fellow workers to act toward you and toward one another?

Setting a Purpose

Read to find out what a Soviet prison camp was actually like and what skills it took to survive in one.

BACKGROUND

Time and Place

Labor camps were started in 1919 by Vladimir Lenin, who was the first head of the Soviet state; but the camps took on a new dimension after Joseph Stalin came to power in 1928. The Soviet Union became the only major country in the twentieth century to have a permanent forced-labor system, known as the *gulag*. The actual statistics remain a state secret, but historians estimate that the number of imprisoned workers in the gulag reached 15 million after World War II. Both Lenin and Stalin believed that it was wasteful to kill their enemies outright. Instead, they chose to work them to death. Imprisoned laborers did not live long, so replacements were always in demand. Total deaths in the gulag during the Stalin years were estimated at 12 million men and women.

Stalin treated animals better than he did human beings. Horses had private stalls and warm blankets as well as nutritious food. A guard dog received more meat to eat than a prisoner did. Prisoners had to earn their food by meeting a daily quota of work, regardless of their strength or ability. Doing more work brought slightly more food; doing less meant having less food. There was no way to win: a prisoner who worked hard enough to avoid starvation would likely die from exhaustion, exposure, or of one of the diseases that were rampant in the camps.

Language

To depict the camp environment realistically in the novel, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn uses profanity, slang, and camp jargon. From the critics' point of view, this informal language contributes to the story's effect. As Burton Rubin pointed out in *Soviet Literature in the Sixties*, "In keeping with Shukhov's village speech, [Solzhenitsyn's style] is frequently ungrammatical, composed in rich variety of the colloquialisms of the uneducated folk and the semi-obscene, harsh argot of the camp. . . . [His] is a coarse style, completely adequate to the unbeautiful material it governs, capable of striking with a kinetic immediacy at the reader's perception."

VOCABULARY PREVIEW

chagrin [ʃə ˈɡrɪn] *n.* a feeling of failure or disappointment

imperiously [ɪm pɛr ˈē əs lē] *adv.* arrogantly; overbearingly

ingenuously [ɪn jɛn ˈū əs lē] *adv.* innocently; straightforwardly

putrid [pū ˈtrɪd] *adj.* foul-smelling; rotten

reveille [rev ˈə lē] *n.* a signal (usually musical) to get out of bed

Active Reading

One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich Pages 1–28

To keep track of the many characters in the novel, fill out a row of this chart for each character you meet. You may not be able to fill in all the categories for every character. Continue filling out the chart as you read the other two sections of the novel.

Character	Appearance	Job	Crime	Personality
Ivan Denisovich Shukhov	40 years old, lost half of his teeth, almost bald	carpenter and bricklayer	spying	honest, hardworking

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Responding

One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich Pages 1–28

Personal Response

With a partner, discuss how you are similar to or different from Ivan Denisovich.

Now that you know something about life in a Soviet prison camp, evaluate the discussion you had with a partner during the **Focus Activity**. Was it realistic? What aspects of camp life did you overlook?

Analyzing Literature

Recall and Interpret

1. Why does Shukhov ordinarily get up as soon as reveille is sounded?

2. What is one way in which prisoners can improve their lives in camp? Why does this method work so well?

3. What is ironic about the character of the doctor's assistant, Kolya Vdovushkin?

Responding

One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich Pages 1–28

Analyzing Literature (*continued*)

Evaluate and Connect

4. The prisoners Shukhov and Fetyukov are very different from each other. In what ways are they different? Provide an example from the text to illustrate their differences. Why do you think the author set them up as contrasting characters?

5. How do the camp authorities exert control? What kinds of modern-day institutions or organizations exert control in ways that are similar to those used in the prison camp?

Literature and Writing

Historical Analysis

As a historian, you have been asked to draw some conclusions about the treatment of men in Soviet prison camps. Using details from this first section of the novel, write an analysis of the way the prison guards controlled the inmates. Be sure to include in your analysis the numbering system, the roll calls and searches, the hierarchy of prisoners, and the guards' actions. Why do you suppose the prisoners were treated so harshly?

Extending Your Response

Literature Groups

Shukhov follows a personal code of behavior, regardless of the actions of the other prisoners around him. For example, eating fish heads and spitting bones on the table are acceptable, but eating with his cap on is not. With a group of your classmates, examine Shukhov's code. What actions are acceptable and why? What actions are unacceptable and why?

Art Connection

What one scene or image from this section of the novel stands out the most in your mind? Select a medium that can best express your impressions, such as pen and ink, chalk, or tempera paints, and record your impressions of the scene on paper. Display your completed representation for the class. Compare your impressions with those of your classmates.

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Before You Read

One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich Pages 29–64

FOCUS ACTIVITY

In your opinion, is it ever acceptable to be selfish and not share what you have with others?

Journal

Think about the advantages and disadvantages of being selfish when in a situation like Shukhov's. In your journal, discuss when you might be willing to share with others who are less fortunate than you. Consider some or all of these questions as you construct your answer: What might you gain by sharing? Would you be more willing to share with a prison official or with a fellow prisoner?

Setting a Purpose

Read to find out how Shukhov makes the most of the system of bribery and privilege in the prison camp.

BACKGROUND

Russian Filmmaking Under Stalin

Once Stalin came to power, all filmmakers in the Soviet Union were required to devote 30 percent of their time and budgets to the production of documentaries that promoted the dictator's industrial objectives. Writers and directors were also expected to support the propaganda of the Communist Party.

When Shukhov takes Tsezar Markovich's noontime meal to the "office," he overhears a debate about the artistic merits of director Sergei Mikhailovich Eisenstein's film *Ivan the Terrible*. Shukhov, a peasant, is an uncomprehending bystander to the conversation. Tsezar Markovich, an artist and an intellectual, defends the movie as the work of a genius. He is not interested in its political message, which the other man condemns for its glorification of tyranny. This brief scene gives Solzhenitsyn the opportunity to continue a theme he began when Shukhov encountered the poet Vdovushkin in the sick bay. The author subtly condemns all Russian artists who compromised themselves or collaborated with the Stalin regime to get their works past the censors.

Ivan the Terrible was appropriate subject matter from Joseph Stalin's perspective. Czar of Russia during the early sixteenth century, Ivan the Terrible centralized power by keeping the people under rigid control. His reign was marked by constant warfare, oppression, and cruelty.

Eisenstein filmed *Ivan the Terrible* as a three-part work. Part 1, shown in January 1945, was an immediate success; but Stalin disliked part 2, and the film was banned. The Central Committee of the Communist Party denounced Eisenstein for having "betrayed his ignorance of historical fact by showing . . . Ivan the Terrible, who was a strong man of will and character, as weak and indecisive."

VOCABULARY PREVIEW

cadge [kaj'] v. to beg

derisively [di rī' sīv lē] adv. mockingly

fawn [fōn] v. to seek favor and attention through submissive behavior or flattery

haggard [hag' ərd] adj. appearing worn and exhausted

peremptory [pə remp' tər ē] adj. not allowing contradiction or refusal

swarthy [swōr' thē] adj. having a dark complexion

Active Reading

One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich Pages 29–64

In this section of the novel, Solzhenitsyn develops several important themes. To organize main ideas and supporting details about two of these themes, fill out the graphic organizer below. Record the theme in the central box and the main idea on the diagonal line. The first theme and the main idea have already been identified for you. Then record specific examples that highlight the theme on the attached horizontal line.

Main Idea: works for his own satisfaction

Example: _____

Example: _____

Example: _____

Example: _____

Theme: work ethic

Theme: _____

Main Idea:

Example: _____

Example: _____

Example: _____

Example: _____

Responding

One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich Pages 29–64

Personal Response

In this section, you learn more about the crimes with which Shukhov and his fellow prisoners are charged. How do you feel about their guilt and the appropriateness of their sentences?

Analyzing Literature

Recall and Interpret

1. In what ways is the “special” camp better than the regular camps in which Shukhov had been imprisoned previously?

2. In what ways are gang bosses like Pavlo and Tyurin so important to the prisoners?

3. Why doesn't Shukhov hold it against Gopchik that the younger man does not share his food parcels? Would you share your parcels if you were in the same position? Why or why not?

Responding

One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich Pages 29–64

Analyzing Literature (*continued*)

Evaluate and Connect

4. At the end of the day, how does Shukhov feel about the work he has done as a brick-layer? What risk does he take? Do you think his attitude and actions make sense, considering his circumstances? Why or why not?

5. In your opinion, could Shukhov survive an addition to his sentence? Why or why not?

Literature and Writing

Analyzing a Philosophy

Recall that Shukhov finds and saves a bit of steel from a hacksaw blade. He hides the metal in his clothes, saying or thinking, “Thrift beats riches.” How does this saying represent Shukhov’s philosophy of life and survival? Support your analysis with examples from the novel.

Extending Your Response

Literature Groups

With your group, analyze the character of Captain Buynovsky. How does Solzhenitsyn characterize him? As you develop your opinion, consider the captain’s own words and actions and the words, thoughts, and actions of others. Do you think the captain will be able to withstand prison life? Why or why not?

Interdisciplinary Activity: Mathematics

In discussing why he took his university degree in mathematics, a subject of marginal interest to him, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn said, “[M]y later life showed that mathematics unfailingly came to my aid in all the difficult periods of my life, and I believe that without this specialty I would not have been able to survive until today.”

On your own or with a group of your classmates, make a list of the ways in which Solzhenitsyn’s main character, Ivan Denisovich, uses math to survive in the prison camp.

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Before You Read

One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich Pages 65–98

FOCUS ACTIVITY

Imagine that you are Ivan Denisovich and that your day has come to an end. Before you fall asleep, you mentally review your day.

Chart It

Create a chart to record the positive and the negative experiences that you, in the role of Ivan Denisovich, have had.

Setting a Purpose

Read to find out how Ivan Denisovich maintains a positive attitude in spite of his grim existence.

BACKGROUND

The Structure of the Novel

The action in *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* takes place within one day. There are no chapters in the novel. Instead, the novel is loosely structured around episodes related to the survival concerns of the prisoner: food, work, and submission to authorities. Scenes in which Shukhov's survival is threatened alternate with scenes that show his small triumphs over the inhumane prison system.

The Narrative Point of View

To narrate the story of Ivan Denisovich and his fellow inmates, Solzhenitsyn chose a variation of a traditional Russian narrative form, the *skaz*. Used widely in folktales, this technique establishes an anonymous narrator who is on the same educational and social level as the main character. This narrator transmits the main character's actions and thoughts by using the third-person singular (he, she) and sometimes the first-person plural (we). Occasionally, too, the author uses an omniscient, more educated narrator as a spokesperson for the author's views. The combination of these two points of view allows readers to see through Shukhov's eyes but to understand through Solzhenitsyn's mind.

VOCABULARY PREVIEW

dossier [dô' sē ā'] *n.* papers that give detailed information about a person

elated [i lā'tid] *adj.* filled with joy

servile [sur'vil] *adj.* submissive; acting like a slave

Active Reading

One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich Pages 65–98

To emphasize the importance of food to a prisoner's survival, Solzhenitsyn describes the prison meals in detail. Use the graphics below to collect details about how Shukov secures his meal, what food he is given, and how he feels about his meal.

How he gets
the meal

Waits in line for Tsezar to receive extra portion

What food
he is given

How he feels
about the meal

Responding

One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich Pages 65–98

Personal Response

Were you surprised by the outcome of the novel? Why or why not?

Analyzing Literature

Recall and Interpret

1. Why do the prisoners march slowly at first and then speed up?

2. Why is Shukhov so willing to wait in line for a package for Tsezar Markovich?

3. How and why does Shukhov's ordinary behavior change when the time arrives to serve dinner to his group?

Responding

One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich Pages 65–98

Analyzing Literature (*continued*)

Evaluate and Connect

4. In your opinion, would Shukhov be better able to cope with camp life if he had not rejected organized religion?

5. At the end of the day, Shukhov ignores the negative experiences of his day and focuses on the positive ones. What enables him to do this? Could you? Why or why not?

Literature and Writing

Interpreting a Quotation

As the prisoners approach the camp gate, they are forced to get rid of the firewood they have collected. Shukhov thinks to himself, “Who is the convict’s worst enemy? Another convict. If zeks didn’t squabble among themselves, the bosses would have no power over them.” What do you suppose he means? What point is Solzhenitsyn trying to make? Write a paragraph to answer the questions.

Extending Your Response

Literature Groups

Throughout the novel, Solzhenitsyn includes proverbs or sayings such as this one: “Like rabbits finding that frogs . . . are afraid even of them.” These sayings reflect practical wisdom. With your group, locate several of these sayings and explain what they mean.

Map It

What do the labor camp and work site look like? Review the novel to find descriptions of those places. Then draw a map that shows the layout of the camp and work site. Use stars or other symbols to indicate the places that Shukhov goes during the course of the day. Display your map in your classroom.

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Teach Your Children

Irina Eremia Bragin

Before You Read

Focus Question

Would you remain silent if you saw a fellow student being ridiculed or your friends acting in a way you believe to be wrong? Why or why not?

Background

Because of travel restrictions imposed by the Romanian government on its citizens, the Eremia family was separated for twenty-five years. In this personal account, Bragin writes about the impact of the separation on her family and her feelings about their reunion.

Responding to the Reading

1. How was Ion Eremia's family affected by his arrest and prison sentence? List both immediate and long-term effects on the family members' emotional lives and economic well-being.

2. Bragin asks why people should risk anything of real value to themselves for the sake of a principle, an ideal, or a standard. Does she answer her question? How?

3. **Making Connections** Like Solzhenitsyn, Ion Eremia was imprisoned for writing critically about the government. Eremia's writing was never published. How might a totalitarian government justify such harsh punishment for this kind of activity?

Role Playing

Imagine that you are interviewing Shukhov and his wife on Shukhov's return to his village. With two other students, take turns playing the roles of the interviewer, Shukhov, and his wife. Keeping in mind his wife's letters about new jobs in their village, ask Shukhov about his job prospects. Using the description given by Solzhenitsyn, ask Shukhov's wife to comment on what her husband should do.

The First Gulag Returns to Its Monastic Roots

Margaret Shapiro

Before You Read

Focus Question

How do you think you would react to visiting a place that was the scene of an injustice in your state's or your nation's history? Why?

Background

When *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* appeared in Russia, Solzhenitsyn received letters from thousands of people who had survived prison camps across the Soviet Union. These letters led to the author's long novel *The Gulag Archipelago*, about the system of labor camps. In this news story, the reporter finds the prison that became a model for later gulags within the Soviet Union.

Responding to the Reading

1. The reporter explains that Solovetsky Island served as a prototype for the system of camps in which Shukhov was imprisoned. What features of the monastery building and the island are similar to features of the camp described in *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*? Take into consideration the location of the camp, the climate, and the prisoner's routine.

2. What do you suppose the local historian means when he says that he doesn't think the monastery could be turned into a prison again but that "during a crisis time, it's hard to be 100 percent sure"?

3. **Making Connections** According to the journalist, Solovetsky Island now attracts thousands of tourists. Imagine that Shukhov's prison hut and the power station have become local museums. What items belonging to Shukhov might be on display? What other artifacts might be found there?

Time Line

Create a time line for the monastery structure on Solovetsky Island. Remember that Ivan the Terrible ruled from 1547 to 1584 and that the Bolsheviks came to power in 1917.

Death and the Soldier

retold by Charles Downing

Before You Read

Focus Question

When you were a small child, what stories taught you lessons?

Background

Russian peasants had a long history of oppression by the ruling class and the landowners. The Revolution of 1917 replaced one set of harsh rulers with another set that was equally indifferent to human rights. Lacking material resources and formal education, peasants like Shukhov learned their values and social skills from folktales such as “Death and the Soldier.”

Responding to the Reading

1. How does the Soldier demonstrate his personal code of military dignity when he is discharged because of his age?

2. Food is important to everyone but, in the case of the Soldier, survival depends on bread. List the ways in which bread figures in the Soldier’s first few days on the road.

3. In your opinion, what is the moral of the folktale according to the second ending?

4. **Making Connections** Who among the ex-soldiers in Shukhov’s work group most resembles the Soldier of the folktale in terms of compassion for others? Give examples to justify your choice.

Creative Writing

In folktale style, try your hand at writing the story of Shukhov’s release from prison with 1650 grams (about 3.5 pounds) of bread. Allow some magic to enter his life and ease his passage home. Use a separate sheet of paper.

Requiem

Anna Akhmatova

Before You Read

Focus Question

Recall a time when you offered words of encouragement to someone who was having a difficult time. What did you say? How did the person react?

Background

Anna Akhmatova reveals the harshness of Soviet policies by personalizing the experiences of common citizens. Like Solzhenitsyn, Akhmatova suffered injustice and was unable to publish her writings in her country. Her ex-husband was executed, and her son was arrested and spent years in Siberia. In this poem, she speaks in the voice of a woman waiting for news of her son's fate.

Responding to the Reading

1. In describing her feelings and observations, the speaker also tells readers what is happening in Leningrad. In your own words, explain what is happening to her family and to other families in the city.

2. In which section of the poem does the speaker draw on the biblical story of Jesus and Mary? Who is the speaker referring to when she talks about "little scoffer, apple of everyone's eye"?

3. **Making Connections** Draw a parallel between the speaker's words "I must kill off memory, / My heart must be changed into stone. / I must learn to live again" and Shukhov's way of adapting to his fate.

Personal Correspondence

Imagine that you are Akhmatova. Write a letter to your son, telling him about the events of the day. Decide what tone you will use in the letter. Will you express anger, frustration, hope, love, or some other attitude or emotion?

Bringing the First Amendment (Live!) into the Schools

Nat Hentoff

Before You Read

Focus Question

Should people be allowed to say whatever they want, even if others are offended by their words? Why or why not?

Background

The U.S. Constitution guarantees freedom of speech to all people. Or does it? In this excerpt from *Free Speech for Me—But Not for Thee*, writer and *Village Voice* columnist Nat Hentoff explores how the First Amendment has sometimes been challenged in schools.

Responding to the Reading

1. How did school officials deal with the case of a student who wore the Confederate flag on his jacket? Overall, did they deal with the situation effectively?

2. In your opinion, should all types of speech be protected under the First Amendment? Use examples from the article and from your own knowledge and experience to justify your answer.

3. **Making Connections** After he was released from prison for writing negative statements about Stalin in a letter to a friend, Solzhenitsyn taught in a high school. How do you think Solzhenitsyn would have reacted to his students' openly expressing their opinions?

Exploring Pros and Cons

List some of the pros and cons of freedom of speech in society. Give examples for each pro and con. Finally, come to a conclusion about whether the positive aspects of freedom of speech make up for the negative aspects. Use a separate sheet of paper.