RUSSIA CULTURE GUIDE

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**WHY STUDY CULTURES?**

For most of us, cultures are misunderstood; they are nebulous, vague, and hidden. Like the famous iceberg analogy, we know that most of what a culture is cannot be seen. But what does that mean? And why, then, should we study cultures if we do not know what we’re studying in the first place?

In the late twentieth century, Brigham Young University did not embrace a new discipline, but rather a new area of study—the study of cultures. Typically, anthropology is the social science that studies cultures. Why should they have all the fun? The study of cultures unites other academic disciplines (as needed), drawing upon literature, political science, sociology, and even the more applied areas of nursing, social work, law, and business. The study of cultures has grown into nothing short of a revolt against disciplines, “a mode of inquiry” that looks at things in new ways.1

In 1982, the David M. Kennedy Center for International Studies established International Outreach as a formal program to help build bridges of intercultural understanding. Since then, more than 10,000 *gratis* cultural presentations have been given to local area public schools, taking students to new places using language, multimedia, and imagination. *CultureGuides* derive from the same expertise that has been honed in classrooms—with the exciting exception that these intercultural learning tools are not geographically bound. Thanks to the Internet, accessible multimedia technology, and our trusty iMAC, a limitless audience can learn about different cultures.

Globalization, the driving paradigm of the post-Cold War world, means that now, more than ever, culture matters. Culture is the invisible context that may keep us from understanding important people, places, and ideas; it exists whether or not we think about it. Intercultural education can help us, not only as an intellectual exercise, but also in very practical ways to combat racism, to expand business, and to communicate effectively.

*CultureGuides* share the same aim as Edward T. Hall, the eminent cultural scholar, to try and “make culture real.”2 Even though our “student guides” are not present in every classroom, we hope that *CultureGuides* will make classrooms of the mind and cultural laboratories wherever you may reside.

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TRADITIONS

FAMILY TIES

Because of economic instability, Russian families have had to rely on one another for their daily needs. As a result, extended families have developed strong bonds. Close family interaction marks both daily activities as well as special occasions and holidays, such as the New Year.

Starting Points

1. How many people are in your family? Did you include extended family members? Why or why not? How would life be different if you lived in the same house as your extended family?

2. Economic problems can create many difficulties for people. As you learn about families in Russia, consider how these difficulties also provide opportunities for positive family experiences.

3. Look at Traditions Visual 3. What holiday is being celebrated? To most, this might look like Christmas, but this is a Russian New Year celebration. Like Christmas in other countries, the traditions associated with this favorite Russian holiday revolve around the family.

Information

Russian Lifestyle

Because of economic problems, many Russian families, including grandparents, parents, and children, all live in one apartment. In each apartment, there is usually a corridor where family and guests can hang coats, remove boots, and put on house slippers. Beyond the corridor is a small living room area that is decorated with hanging rugs and sometimes has a wallpapered ceiling. Apartments are also decorated with wooden decorations, such as painted wooden bowls and spoons, or traditional matryoshka dolls (see Cross-cultural Contributions Visuals 3–4). Apartments usually have a small kitchen (see Traditions Visual 1), one or two bedrooms, a bathroom (where the sink and bathtub are located), and a toilet room.

Small families are common in Russia because it is difficult to support a large family. After work and school, the family sits down together at home to eat a traditional meal. After the meal they drink tea and talk. Russians also like to sing folksongs in the evenings. In addition, they enjoy walking through the cities, admiring their buildings and churches.

The Dacha

Economic struggles cause food prices to increase and disastrous food shortages to occur. As a result, most Russian families have a dacha, a small summer home outside
the city. Dachas are simple houses made out of brick or wood that families usually build themselves (see Traditions Visual 2). They travel to them throughout the summer and tend the gardens there. When the work is done, Russians socialize with their families. On the weekends, the trains are filled with people traveling to their dachas. Many Russians spend the whole summer there. At the end of the harvest, the trains are filled with people carrying bags of carrots, beets, potatoes, apples, or cabbage. Dachas allow Russians to plant, cultivate, and harvest enough food to last through the winter. Many will grow extra crops and sell the excess supply in the city as an additional means of income.

**New Year**

Russians celebrate many holidays, the biggest being the New Year (see Traditions Visual 3). Children and adults look forward to this celebration all year. In Russia, the new year is celebrated much like Christmas in the United States and western Europe. The family usually buys a New Year’s tree, or yolka, a week or two before the holiday. The celebration officially begins on New Year’s Eve. Often people travel door-to-door through their neighborhood collecting treats or vodka. They put presents around the tree and pass out candy or fruit to visitors. Everyone wears nice clothes, and the family sits down to a huge feast. After dinner, the family moves into the living room. Presents are exchanged and people talk, eat, and dance until the new year arrives.

**Activities**

1. Throw a New Year’s celebration as they would in Russia. Assign each person a family role (i.e., mother, father, cousin, etc.). Bring a yolka (tree) to decorate and presents and candy to pass out. Wear formal clothes and dance to Russian folk music (see Additional Resources).

2. Design a book cover for a Russian photo album. Decorate it with images that reflect the importance of families in Russian culture.

3. Pretend you are visiting a family in Russia. Write a journal entry about your experience. What things are similar to your own family? What things are different?

4. Draw a picture of a dacha. What do you think it would be like to spend your summer growing food for your family?

**Discussion Questions**

1. How does the wealth of a country affect its people?

2. Can you think of some other cultural examples in which members of a family depend on one another?

3. What are similarities between American and Russian families?

4. What can holiday traditions teach about a culture? Besides cultural values, what can we learn from specific holidays?
FOLKLORE & LANGUAGE

FABLES AND FAIRY TALES

Russia’s history, values, and ideals are expressed through its folklore. Stories are handed down from one generation to the next. They serve to entertain and teach moral lessons. Through stories, children learn to respect Russian values.

Starting Points

1. Watch a short video clip of a cartoon fairy tale (i.e., Disney’s Cinderella). Movies such as these are based on stories that have been told for hundreds of years. Many cultures have a long history of storytelling, and Russia is no exception.

2. Ask the students why they like listening to fairy tales. Do they learn anything from these stories? Why do we tell them?

3. Read the Russian fairy tale, The Firebird. Try to think of a fairy tale that is similar.

Information

Fables

Russian fables are similar to those we know in the United States. They include a moral that teaches a lesson. One particular fable, The Crow and the Crawfish, emphasizes the importance of not being prideful or boastful of one’s own strength, intelligence, or talents.

The Crow and the Crawfish

One day a crow was flying over a beautiful blue lake. Down in the clear water he saw a crawfish. The hungry crow swooped down and snatched up the crawfish and carried him into the forest, where he landed on the branch of a tree. The crow wanted to sit there and enjoy his lunch. The crawfish knew that he was in serious trouble. He didn’t want to be eaten but could see no way to escape.

Suddenly the crawfish yelled, “Crow, Crow! Your father and mother flew over my lake often, and I saw that they were good.”

Without opening his mouth the crow grunted, “Uh-huh.”

Again the crawfish cried, “I knew your brothers and sisters; I watched them catch fish in the lake. They were also good.”

Again, the crow answered without opening his mouth.

The crawfish went on saying, “Everyone in your family is good; however, they cannot compare to you. You are the cleverest of all. In fact, you are the most clever in all the world!”
The crow liked these words so much that he couldn’t resist and began to caw at the top of his lungs to the whole world that he was the cleverest of all creatures. In doing so, he released the crawfish who fell safely to the bottom of the lake. The crawfish wisely instructed his children to avoid the dangers of boasting.

**Russian Fairy Tales and Folklore**

Fairy tales often contain some element of truth. Along with the adventures that any fairy tale holds, they tell much about the culture and way of life to which people aspire. In Russian history, the majority of the people were peasants. The rulers possessed the bulk of the country’s riches. Therefore, many fairy tales are based on the life that peasants dreamed about, but did not enjoy. Stories often tell of a clever or beautiful peasant outwitting an evil ogre, or performing great deeds for the tsar, the Russian king or emperor. Afterward, the peasant would be granted great riches, half the kingdom, or marriage into the royal family. Because Russians believed that God granted the position of tsar to a chosen individual, he was traditionally revered by the people; fairy tales often exemplify the tsar’s wise and just actions.

**Baba Yaga**

*Baba Yaga* (ba-buh yeah-GAW) is an important character in Russian fairy tales. Baba Yaga is a witch who lives in a hut in the middle of a forest. She is a witch who is forced to help people. In many stories, people seek her advice and aid which she grants them because of their forcefulness. In other stories, she possesses different objects of power and, when people request her help, they must complete tasks in an allotted amount of time before she will aid them. In some tales, she is simply a wise woman with few powers. In others, she is a powerful witch and can control the night and day. Baba Yaga traditionally flies around in a mortar and pestle—a ceramic or wooden cup and post for crushing things into a powder. If she is involved in the story, Baba Yaga is usually not a main character, but she introduces an important development in the plot (**see Folklore & Language Visual 1**).

**The Firebird**

There was once a tsar of Russia who had three sons and was the richest tsar of all the kingdoms. He owned the most beautiful garden, where he walked every day. In the garden, there was a large tree with golden apples, the tsar’s favorite tree of all.

One morning as he was strolling through his garden admiring his gorgeous tree, the tsar noticed that two of his golden apples were missing. “I know there were two more apples here yesterday,” he said to himself. “I counted them all.” That evening he hid by the tree to catch the thief. He waited late into the night and finally saw a light flash across the garden. Surprised and stunned, he watched a large flaming bird alight on the branch of his apple tree (**see Folklore & Language Visual 2**). The bird’s feathers were a brilliant gold, so bright that the light hurt the tsar’s eyes. He was too awed to move but whispered to himself, “The firebird.”

The next morning the tsar told his sons that whoever could capture the firebird alive would receive half of the tsar’s kingdom at once and the other half when he died. The sons swore to do their best, not for the reward, but because they loved their father.
That night, the eldest son, Sergei, waited in the garden. The soft night air soon put him to sleep, and the firebird came and stole two apples without even being seen. In the morning, Sergei lied and told his father that the Firebird never appeared.

The next night Dimitri, the second son, kept watch in the garden. He too fell asleep. The next morning, he also lied to his father, claiming that the firebird never came.

The third night, Ivan, the third son, stood watch. He made himself uncomfortable, and if he started to become drowsy, he splashed water in his eyes. Suddenly he saw a bright streak of gold. It was the firebird! As it perched on a branch to snatch the apples, Prince Ivan quietly moved closer. He made a grab for the firebird, but it was too fast and he only succeeded in grabbing one of the long, brilliant, tail feathers (see Folklore & Language Visual 3).

The next morning, he told the tsar his tale and presented the feather to his father. The tsar was satisfied for a while because the firebird didn’t come back to the garden. Soon, however, he became consumed with the feather and looked at it everyday. He wanted the firebird so badly that he again told his sons that whoever could bring him the firebird, alive, would be given half the kingdom then, and the other half at the death of the tsar. The two oldest sons set out together immediately, but Prince Ivan waited for his father’s blessing and set out on his own.

Ivan rode for a long time until he came to a sign that said, “He who continues this way shall lose his horse.” There was no other way to go, so Ivan continued in that direction even though he loved his horse. After a few days, his horse dropped dead beneath him. A gray wolf was standing by the roadside (see Folklore & Language Visual 4), and as Ivan cried, the wolf asked, “Ivan, if you so loved this horse, why did you continue in this direction?” Ivan told him the story and then continued on his way. Three days later, the gray wolf showed up again and offered to help Ivan.

The wolf took Prince Ivan to Tsar Darmot’s garden where the firebird was kept in a golden cage. He said to Ivan, “Prince, you must jump this wall and take the firebird out of the golden cage. Do not touch any part of the golden cage besides the spring. Promise me that you won’t touch it.” Ivan promised and hopped over the wall.

Ivan immediately saw the firebird and took it out of the cage. He looked at the beautiful golden cage and thought how nice it would be to carry the bird in, but as soon as he touched the cage, alarms went off all over the garden and palace. Guards jumped out, grabbed Ivan, and carried him before the tsar. He told the tsar his story.

Tsar Darmot asked why the son of such a powerful tsar had to resort to stealing, instead of just asking for it. To redeem himself, Ivan had to do the tsar a favor. The tsar wanted the white horse with a golden mane and tail and told Ivan that he would give him the firebird if he would bring back the horse.

Ivan sadly walked out and told the gray wolf his story. The gray wolf consented to take him to the golden-maned horse if Ivan would follow his orders this time. After a day of running like the wind, they arrived at Tsar Avron’s stables. The wolf pleaded with Ivan to follow his instructions carefully. “Go into the stables,” he said, “take the golden-maned horse, but do not touch the golden bridle that is hanging on the wall.”
Ivan snuck into the stables where all the grooms were sleeping and took the horse *(see Folklore & Language Visual 5)*. As he was turning to leave, he noticed the golden bridle. It was so beautiful that he couldn’t resist touching it. As soon as he took hold of the bridle an alarm rang out, and all the grooms awoke and seized Prince Ivan.

Tsar Avron decided to allow Ivan to redeem himself by bringing Helen the Beautiful to him. She was the most beautiful *tsarina* (Russian princess), in the world, and if Ivan would bring her to Tsar Avron, he would be given the golden-maned horse. In sadness Prince Ivan returned to the gray wolf and confessed his mistake. The wolf sighed and consented to take him to Helen the Beautiful. After running for two days and nights, the wolf stopped under a tree and told Ivan to wait there.

The gray wolf snuck to the palace and waited by the garden gate. Soon Helen the Beautiful came out to walk in her garden *(see Folklore & Language Visual 6)*. Before the maids had a chance to sound an alarm, the wolf had jumped over the gate, grabbed Helen the Beautiful, leaped back out of the garden, and ran out of sight.

Prince Ivan thought Helen was so beautiful that he had fallen in love with her before they reached Tsar Avron’s palace. “Friend wolf,” he cried, “I do not want to give up Helen the Beautiful for a horse with a golden mane and tail. What shall I do?”

The gray wolf simply answered, “Trust me.” He gave Ivan instructions and then changed himself into a form of a young woman exactly like Helen the Beautiful. They walked into the tsar’s palace, and Tsar Avron was so happy that he gave Ivan the golden-maned horse and the golden bridle. Ivan took the horse back to the tree where he had left Helen, and they proceeded on to Tsar Darmot’s kingdom.

After a time, Ivan missed his gray wolf and called to him. The wolf appeared by the golden-maned horse, and Ivan joyfully leaped onto the wolf’s back. When they arrived at Tsar Darmot’s, Ivan was sad again. He told the wolf how beautifully the horse suited Helen the Beautiful and how it would be a shame to give it up. The wolf again consented to help Ivan.

The wolf changed himself into a golden-maned horse, and he and Prince Ivan went to Tsar Darmot’s palace *(see Folklore & Language Visual 7)*. The Tsar was delighted and gave Ivan the Firebird and the golden cage. Ivan took them back to Helen and the group again set out on their way.

Ivan started to miss his friend, the gray wolf, and he called for him. For several days, they all traveled together until they arrived at the place where Prince Ivan’s horse had fallen dead. Here the gray wolf said he must leave them, for he could be of no more use. Then he vanished.

At this time, Ivan’s brothers caught up to him. They were very jealous of their younger brother, so they tied him to a tree and stole everything he had gained. The evil brothers left him for dead and took Helen, the bird, and the horse as their own.

For many days, Ivan was tied to the tree. He was almost dead, and the crows were flying around him, waiting for him to finally die so they could have dinner. Suddenly, the gray wolf appeared again. He made the crows fetch water for Ivan. They untied him, and when he was revived he hopped on the wolf’s back and raced to his father’s palace.
Ivan walked into the palace hall where his brother was preparing to marry Helen the Beautiful. He threw open the doors to see the shocked faces of his brothers who had been sure he was dead (see Folklore & Language Visual 8). Helen ran to him crying, “This is the one; this is the prince who won me!” The tsar embraced his son who he had thought was dead. Helen the Beautiful told the tsar the whole story and he learned that Ivan had not only brought home the tsarina, but the horse with the golden mane and tail, and the firebird as well.

The tsar furiously ordered that his other sons be banished from the kingdom forever. He then ordered the feast to continue, and in a short time Prince Ivan and Helen the Beautiful were married. They lived happily ever after with the firebird in their garden and the golden-maned horse in their stables.

Activities

1. Make puppets of the characters in “The Firebird.” Color the pictures (see Folklore & Language Visual 9) and glue them on popsicle sticks or paper bags. Perform the story using your puppets.

2. Rewrite one of the stories you read. You may want to add characters or change parts of the plot. Try writing your story in a different style, such as a poem, a news report, or a mystery novel.

3. Make a book of “The Crow and the Crawfish.” Make sure to include the lesson or moral at the end.

4. Listen to Stravinsky’s ballet The Firebird. What images come to your mind? Can you “hear” parts of the story in the music?

Discussion Questions

1. What was your favorite part of the story? Why?

2. What lesson can we learn from the fairy tale “The Firebird?” What can we learn from “The Crow and the Crawfish?”

3. Why do Russian people tell fables and fairy tales? Why do you like hearing fairy tales?

4. How are Russian fables and fairy tales different from the stories with which you are familiar? How are they similar?
FOOD

THE RUSSIAN DIET

Russians live in a somewhat harsh climate with a short growing season. Despite difficult economic circumstances, the Russian diet offers a variety of food, including interesting breads, unique Russian dairy products, and a variety of delicious vegetables. Most families grow their own vegetables, storing them for the winter and selling the surplus at open markets. Hot vegetable soup, like borsch, is a simple way to use the stored vegetables and survive the long, cold winter.

Starting Points

1. Make or purchase Russian food. What are the students’ reactions?

2. Ask students if their families have gardens. Have they ever had to rely on a garden to feed the family? What kinds of food would they be limited to if they only ate what they grew?

3. Write down a typical daily menu. As you study Russian food, have the students compare the Russian diet with their own. Consider specific reasons that account for similarities and differences.

Information

Russian Crops

Because Russia is so far north, the summers are very short. The growing season is only about three months long. By September, the ground freezes, and the weather becomes too cold for crops to grow. Russians must grow foods that grow quickly during the summer and can survive cold weather, such as potatoes, onions, carrots, cabbage, turnips, and beets. Cucumbers, beans, herbs, and tomatoes are also common because they don’t take long to ripen. Russians grow these crops both because they are suited to the climate and also because they can be easily stored to eat through the long winters.

Dachas

Russians grow their vegetables at their dachas—small summer homes outside the cities (see Traditions Visual 2). At the dacha, families work together to plant and harvest crops, pick berries, hunt for mushrooms, and store food for the winter. Because vegetables have to last all winter, they are often bottled, pickled, or dried. People bring gunny sacks full of cabbage and potatoes home on the trains. If the family has a successful season, they may have enough vegetables to sell the surplus at the local market.
Rynok: The Russian Market

Most people shop at outdoor markets called rynoks (see Food Visual 1). There are some indoor supermarkets in Russia, especially in big cities, but the food is too expensive for most people. The rynok is divided into booths for different types of foods and for individual vendors. At each booth, a vendor tries to convince buyers to buy their goods. Shoppers must go from booth to booth in order to get all their groceries for the day. They often complain about the prices and haggle with the salespeople, who will adjust prices to sell more. Since most people don’t have cars, shoppers carry their groceries home in plastic or canvas bags called pakets (pa-KETS). Sometimes, people have to walk long distances with several heavy pakets in each hand.

At the rynok, other products besides fresh fruits and vegetables are sold. Early in the morning, a large yellow milk truck comes into the city and parks near the rynok. Many older people form a line to buy their milk, giving them an opportunity to gather together and socialize. Bread is baked fresh and delivered to the rynok each day in large trucks that look like army transport vehicles. One can also buy meat, eggs, cheese, and packaged foods like sugar, macaroni, canned fruit, and candy. Ice cream is a favorite dish and is always sold at the rynok, even on the coldest winter days.

What Russians Eat

Bread is served at every meal in Russia as a symbol of hospitality. Russians eat white and wheat bread, but they are famous for their dark rye bread. Bread is baked fresh daily, without any preservatives, and it should never be wasted. If a piece of bread goes stale, Russians take it outside and feed it to birds or dogs instead of throwing it away. They always hold a piece of bread in their left hand throughout the meal, taking bites as they eat. If a person eats bread by itself, though, Russians worry that they will get sick. A person must drink something like hot tea or hot chocolate with their bread. They may also serve soup to eat with bread.

Russians don’t drink a lot of milk, but they eat a lot of milk products such as butter, buttermilk, cheese, cream, sour cream, and yogurt. Often these are added to soup or salad, or eaten with slices of bread. They also like to eat all kinds of meat, fish, and poultry. Meat can be very expensive, however, and people often either cook without it or buy bones or fat for flavoring in their cooking. Some Russians like to spread salo, or seasoned pig fat, on bread. Fresh fruit is usually imported into Russia from other countries. It is very expensive, and most Russians simply grow their own apples or pick wild berries; they often use them to make jam and pie filling.
Recipe for Borsch

You will need:

- 3 C potatoes, peeled, cubed
- 3 C cabbage, shredded
- 1/2 C onions, minced
- 3 C beets, grated
- 1 C carrots, grated
- 2 qt beef broth*
- 2 tomatoes, peeled and cubed
- 1 T garlic powder
- 6 T red wine vinegar

- 2 bay leaves
- 12 peppercorns
- 1/2 tsp each dill, parsley, thyme
- salt to taste
- 2 T butter, lard, or oil
- sour cream
- Russian black bread
- large pot and frying pan

Some tasty variations include adding 1 cup of kidney beans, chopped pickles, green peppers, or parsley root to the soup.

Preparation

1. Boil potatoes.
2. Chop and fry cabbage and onion in oil.
3. Add grated carrots and beets to the frying mixture. Cabbage should be tender when the potatoes are almost done (which is about the same time it takes to peel and grate the carrots and beets).
4. Drain potatoes and add to broth.
5. Add vegetables to beef broth.
6. Bring to a boil.
7. Add tomatoes, vinegar, and seasonings. Let simmer at least 45 minutes.
9. Slice bread, and cut each slice vertically in half so that it fits in one hand while you eat your soup with the other.

*The easiest way to make beef broth is to use beef bullion. Follow the directions on the package for two quarts of beef broth. If you don't want to use bullion, buy soup bones at the grocery store and boil them until the flavor reaches a desired strength, usually 2–3 hours.

Activities

1. Plant a garden. You will need the following: several paper cups half-filled with potting soil; seed packets of beets, carrots, or radishes; water; and a sunny place near a window or under a heat lamp. Poke a hole in the soil up to the second knuckle of your forefinger. Drop four to six seeds into the hole. Pour a small amount of water into the cup, just until all the soil is wet. Place in a sunny place. Once the plants are several inches tall, transfer them to an outdoor plot or larger gardening pots. The vegetables can be harvested after six to eight weeks.

2. Market Day Simulation. You will need: 1) A shopping list for each group member with five or six of the items discussed in the rynok section including bread, dairy, vegetables, meat, and packaged goods; 2) Twenty-five rubles cut out of paper for each individual consisting of three 5p coins, three 2p coins, and four 1p coins (the Russian r for ruble looks like an
English p); 3) Cans of food, wooden blocks, or other heavy goods; 4) A plastic bag as a paket for each participant. Set up ten to twelve booths on desks or tables, and designate group members as salespeople for each.

**Some suggested prices:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Price</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 kg of beets</td>
<td>6 rubles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 kg of potatoes</td>
<td>8 rubles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 head of cabbage</td>
<td>3 rubles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 kg of sugar</td>
<td>16 rubles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 kg of macaroni</td>
<td>10 rubles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 kg of beef</td>
<td>24 rubles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 kg of chicken</td>
<td>18 rubles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 kg of pork</td>
<td>15 rubles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>250 g of butter</td>
<td>1 ruble</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>250 g of cheese</td>
<td>9 rubles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 eggs</td>
<td>6 rubles</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These prices are not unrealistic, but they are rather high for a twenty-five ruble budget. Encourage participants to haggle over prices. Also, remind them that they don’t have to buy a whole kilogram. At the market, salespeople frequently cut portions of meat and cheese, open packages, and hand out individual eggs. After 15 minutes, switch roles. If you run out of food, just remember, that is part of Russia too.

3. Make a menu for a Russian restaurant. Include different dishes, and design a picture for the cover.

4. You have been invited to dinner with a Russian family. Write a letter to your family at home telling them about it.

**Discussion Questions**

1. How is Russian food different from common American food? Why do these differences exist?

2. What are some of the advantages of buying fresh foods daily from a local market? What are some of the disadvantages?

3. How does Russia’s food reflect the traditions and values of the Russian people? What does your diet say about your culture?
Cross-cultural Contributions

Russian Arts

Russian people enjoy the color and variety that music and painting add to their lives. Russian arts have been greatly influenced by the conditions of everyday life, evident by the prevalent peasant and folk themes. The appreciation of Russian art has spread throughout the world and many people recognize Russia’s contribution to the arts as a symbol of their love of beauty and creativity.

Starting Points

1. Listen to an audio recording of a Russian composition, or watch a segment of Walt Disney’s Fantasia that utilizes Russian music (see Additional Resources). Did you know that a great deal of world-renowned art comes from Russia?

2. Ask others to share their knowledge of arts and music from other countries and cultures. Think specifically of art and music that has its roots in folk traditions. Can you think of “classical” music or art that is based on folk themes?

Information

Ballets and Symphonies

During the late 1800s, Russian music flourished in Russia and throughout the world. During this time, the Russian ballets, in particular, became internationally famous. Composers like Peter Ilich Tchaikovsky and Modest Mussorgsky wrote operas, ballets, symphonies, and concertos that were recognized worldwide. Much of this music is based on Russian history or folklore and contains distinct Russian themes. Russians still take great pride in their music. It may often be heard in St. Petersburg in many music halls around the Winter Palace. One of the most famous Russian ballets is The Nutcracker, written by Tchaikovsky. Tchaikovsky also wrote Sleeping Beauty, Swan Lake, the 1812 Overture, Fifth and Sixth Symphonies, and Vesper Service.

Tchaikovsky and other composers, such as Mussorgsky, owe many of their ideas to Russian folk songs. During holiday celebrations and other public events in Russia, groups of traditional singers and dancers perform songs and folk dances that tell folk stories. The themes in famous classical pieces are based on these same stories, tales that composers would have heard in their homes and neighborhoods as children. For example, Mussorgsky’s Night on Bald Mountain was influenced by the music he heard growing up.

Russian Art

Between the tenth and seventeenth centuries, Russian painting received minimal influence from the common people. Artists were commissioned by aristocrats to produce religious icons, wall paintings, and mosaics for the interiors of churches.
Although a definite change in Russian painting styles did not occur until the turn of the century, Russian attitudes toward painting began to evolve by the mid 1800s. Art schools were established in Moscow and St. Petersburg. It was not until after the seventeenth century, however, that new styles and forms of painting emerged to replace the religious works. One of the most distinct folk styles was painted woodwork.

In the village of Palekh, artisans painted and lacquered wooden boxes. Often their paintings depicted churches, hunting scenes, battles, fairy tales, and decorative patterns (see Cross-cultural Contributions Visual 1). Today, lacquer boxes are treasured all over Russia and throughout the world for their beautiful facades.

Wooden bowls, spoons, and cups were also used by artisans as canvas (see Cross-cultural Contributions Visual 2). Like the boxes, these beautifully carved and painted dishes are more than just a form of art. Even after they are changed, these items are still used for their originally intended purposes. The wooden spoons are given to young children in place of metal ones. The effect of this folk form of woodworking on the lives of the Russian people is immeasurable. Every home has several pieces of the art that penetrates their daily lives. Furthermore, the revenue created from selling the items to foreign visitors is a major source of income for millions of Russian families.

Matryoshka dolls, also known as nesting dolls, further represent Russian folk art (see Cross-cultural Contributions Visual 3). These treasured works of art were originally designed as children’s toys but soon grew in popularity as collectors’ items. The dolls were traditionally depictions of women (matryoshka is one Russian version of “Maria”), but today, matryoshka dolls are painted with the faces of animals, Hollywood stars, presidents, sports teams, or even custom painted with the faces of a particular family. The dolls in visual 3 have Russian fairy tales painted on them (see Cross-cultural Contributions Visual 3).

Artists added beauty and art to the daily activities of the common people. These innovative artists changed plain wooden boxes and ordinary household items into exquisite, beautiful works of art that added color and variety to the doldrums of peasant life. In time, these transformed utensils and boxes gained national and international attention as a distinguished art form.

**Authors**

Russians consider Alexander Sergievich Pushkin to be the greatest of all Russian writers. He was an author, poet, and artist. Almost every Russian knows who Pushkin is and has memorized several of his poems. Through his writing, Pushkin was instrumental in modernizing the Russian language, and his talents are recognized throughout the world. Other popular and influential Russian authors are: Feodor Dostoyevsky, who wrote *Crime and Punishment*; Ivan Turgenev, who wrote *Fathers and Sons*; and Leo Tolstoy, who wrote *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina*. 
Activities

1. Design a matryoshka doll (see Cross-cultural Contributions Visual 4).
2. Listen to different pieces of Russian music. Create a visual image of what you hear. Try to use materials and designs that reflect the feelings created by the music.
3. Design and make your own piece of Russian art from an ordinary household item. Remember to improve the appearance of the items without affecting how they are used. The item should still be useable like the Russian lacquered spoons, bowls, and cups.
4. Many artists use traditional folk stories and themes as the basis of their work. For example, Aaron Copland, an American composer, is famous for his inclusion of folk tunes in his pieces. Identify several pieces of fine art that derive from folk art, and make a poster or bulletin board entitled “From Folk Art to Fine Art” to display your discoveries. Try to include works from as many different cultures as you can.

Discussion Questions

1. What can music and art communicate that words cannot? Why are music and art valuable for these reasons?
2. How is Russian art different from other art you have seen? How is it the same?
3. What ordinary items that you use every day might potentially be works of art?
4. What can we learn about Russian culture through a study of Russian arts?
5. What influence do folklore and folk music have on the arts in the United States?
**Facts About Russia**

**Official Name:** Rossiyskaya Federatsiya (Russian Federation)

**Capital:** Moscow

**Government Type:** federation

**Area:** 17,075,200 sq km

**Land Boundaries:** Azerbaijan, Belarus, China, Estonia, Finland, Georgia, Kazakhstan, North Korea, Latvia, Lithuania, Mongolia, Norway, Poland, Ukraine

**Climate:** ranges from steppes in the south to humid continental in much of European Russia; subarctic in Siberia to tundra climate in the polar north; cool winters along the Black Sea coast to frigid seasons in Siberia; warm summers in the steppes to cool summers along Arctic coast

**Lowest Point:** Caspian Sea -28 m

**Highest Point:** Mount El’brus 5,633 m

**Natural Resources:** wide natural resource base including major deposits of oil, natural gas, coal, strategic minerals, and timber

**Note:** formidable obstacles of climate, terrain, and distance hinder exploitation of natural resources

**Natural Hazards:** permafrost over much of Siberia is a major impediment to development; volcanic activity in the Kuril Islands; volcanoes and earthquakes on the Kamchatka Peninsula

**Population:** 144,978,573 (July 2002 est.)

**Ethnic Groups:** Russian 81.5%, Tatar 3.8%, Ukrainian 3%, Chuvash 1.2%, Bashkir 0.9%, Byelorussian 0.8%, Moldavian 0.7%, other 8.1%

**Religions:** Russian Orthodox, Muslim, other

**Languages:** Russian, other

**GDP:** $1.2 trillion (2001 est.)

**GDP Per Capita:** $8,300 (2001 est.)

**GDP Composition By Sector:** agriculture 7%, industry 37%, services 56% (2001 est.)

**Labor Force:** 71.3 million (2001 est.)

**Unemployment Rate:** 8.7% (2001 est.) with considerable additional underemployment

**Industries:** mining and extractive industries producing coal, oil, gas, chemicals, and metals; machine-building, including rolling mills and high-performance aircraft and space vehicles; shipbuilding; road and rail transportation equipment; communications equipment; agricultural machinery, tractors, and construction equipment; electric power-generating and transmitting equipment; medical and scientific instruments; consumer durables, textiles, foodstuffs, handicrafts

**Agricultural Products:** grain, sugar beets, sunflower seed, vegetables, fruits, beef, milk

**Exports:** $103.3 billion (2001 est.) petroleum and petroleum products, natural gas, wood and wood products, metals, chemicals, and a wide variety of civilian and military manufactures

**Imports:** $51.7 billion (2001 est.) machinery and equipment, consumer goods, medicines, meat, grain, sugar, semifinished metal products

**Trade Partners:** Europe, North America, Japan, Ukraine, Germany, U.S., Belarus

**Currency:** ruble (R)

**Exchange rates:** 30.4669 R = $1 U.S. (January 2002)
**History and Holidays**

**Time Line**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>860</td>
<td>Cyrillic alphabet invented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1147</td>
<td>Moscow founded as defense outpost</td>
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<tr>
<td>1240</td>
<td>Kiev sacked by Mongols</td>
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<tr>
<td>1380</td>
<td>Prince Dmitri Donskoi defeats Mongols</td>
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<tr>
<td>1462-1505</td>
<td>Ivan III (Ivan the Great)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1480</td>
<td>Ivan renounces allegiance to Mongols</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1533-1584</td>
<td>Ivan IV (Ivan the Terrible), virtual elimination of secular culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1613-1645</td>
<td>Mikhail Romanov (beginning of the Romanovs)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1703</td>
<td>Saint Petersburg founded</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1812</td>
<td>Russian victory over Napoleon</td>
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<tr>
<td>1842</td>
<td>Mikhail Glinka’s opera <em>Ivan Susanin</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>1861</td>
<td>Alexander II abolishes serfdom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1905</td>
<td>Revolution begins, first parliament elected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1909</td>
<td>Ballet Russes founded</td>
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<tr>
<td>1914-1918</td>
<td>WWI; Lenin and Bolsheviks seize power (1917); Nicholas II and family executed (1918)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1922</td>
<td>USSR established</td>
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<tr>
<td>1924-1953</td>
<td>Josef Stalin harnesses all economic power to the state, mandates atheism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1941-1945</td>
<td>The Great Patriotic War (WWII)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1957</td>
<td>Sputnik launched</td>
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<tr>
<td>1985-1991</td>
<td>Mikhail Gorbachev is president (perestroika)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>USSR dissolves, Boris Yeltsin becomes president</td>
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<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>Yeltsin resigns on New Year’s Eve</td>
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<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>Vladimir Putin becomes president</td>
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</tbody>
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**Holidays**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Event</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Jan</td>
<td>New Year’s Day</td>
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<tr>
<td>7 Jan</td>
<td>Russian Orthodox Christmas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Mar</td>
<td>International Women’s Day (Mother’s Day and Valentine’s Day)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-2 May</td>
<td>Holiday of Spring, traditionally communist demonstrations</td>
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<tr>
<td>9 May</td>
<td>Victory Day (Commemorates the Great Patriotic War—WWII)</td>
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<tr>
<td>12 Jun</td>
<td>Russian Independence Day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22 Aug</td>
<td>Day of the Russian Federation State Flag</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Nov</td>
<td>Day of Accord and Conciliation—Anniversary of Great October Socialist Revolution (Bolsheviks)</td>
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<tr>
<td>12 Dec</td>
<td>Constitution Day</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

RUSSIAN EMBASSY TO THE UNITED STATES
2650 Wisconsin Ave. NW
Washington, D.C. 20007
Phone: (202) 298-5700, Fax: (202) 298-5735
Web site: http://www.russianembassy.org

RUSSIAN CULTURAL CENTRE
1825 Phelps Place
NW Washington, D.C. 20008
Phone: (202) 265-3840, Fax: (202) 265-6040
E-mail: rcci@erols.com

BOOKS
CultureGrams ‘99, Brigham Young University, 1998.

FILM
*Fantasia*, Walt Disney, 1940.

INTERNET SITES
CIA World Factbook:
http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/
Classical Music of St. Petersburg:
http://www.classicalmusic.spb.ru

Russia on the Net Site:
http://www.russia.ru/

Russia on the Web:
http://www.valley.net:80/~transnat/

Russia-U.S. Relations:
http://www.friends-partners.org

Russian Phototrack:

Window-To-Russia:
http://www.wtr.ru

MUSIC
Traditions Visual 1: Russian Kitchen
Folklore & Language Visual 2: The Firebird
Cross-cultural Contributions Visual 2: Lacquered Bowl, Cups, and Spoons
Cross-cultural Contributions Visual 4: Matryoshka Doll Pattern
The Russian flag design was influenced by the Dutch flag, but the colors are traditional. This flag has been a part of Russia since 1883, but was suppressed under the Bolsheviks. In 1991, Boris Yeltsin reintroduced the flag, and it remains today. The white symbolizes God, the blue the tsar, and the red the people. The tsar is above the people, and God is above all.