

Hemispheres

Understanding Migration

Curriculum Resources for the Classroom

Hemispheres is a partnership of:

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Center for Middle Eastern Studies
Center for Russian, East European & Eurasian Studies
South Asia Institute

in the College of Liberal Arts
at the University of Texas at Austin

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Student Activity: Migration from the Former Soviet Republics to Russia

Time needed:

1 class period (45 min.–1 hour) should be sufficient to complete the reading and T-Chart or writing prompt activities. The writing prompt may be done in class or assigned as homework. (Although the T-Chart and writing prompt activities complement each other, it is not necessary—and may be redundant—to assign both to your students.)

Supplies for this activity:

- Map of the world (not included)
- Reading: *Migration from the Former Soviet Republics to Russia* (p. 45)
- Either the *T-Chart: Russia* worksheet (p. 46) or the *Writing Prompt: Russia* worksheet (p. 47)
- Chalkboard or dry-erase board

Preparation:

Have students identify Russia on a map of the world. Compare its size to that of the United States. You may also wish to use the map on page 110 to further explore the percentage of ethnic Russians living in the former Soviet republics.

You may wish to go over the following terms with your students:

- **Ethnic, ethnicity:** common characteristics such as race, language, culture, and/or religion that make people feel they are part of a common group.

Class activities:

Distribute the *Migration from the Former Soviet Republics to Russia* reading to all students. Have them read quietly.

Variation 1:

Distribute the *T-Chart: Russia* worksheet and have students complete the chart individually or in small groups. When finished, draw a T-Chart on the board and have each student or group offer one point and write it in the appropriate place on the board. Continue until all of the unique points offered by students are included. Discuss the results with the class. Ask students to compare the answers they gave with the answers that others gave. Are there any similarities? Are there any differences? Why? Or why not? Ask for a show of hands to determine which side the students feel has a stronger argument. Ask one or two students to explain their reasons.

Variation 2:

After students have finished reading, replicate the T-Chart from the *T-Chart: Russia* worksheet on the board. Complete the T-Chart by having students suggest points in favor of and in opposition to migration and write them in the appropriate column. As a follow-up to this activity, you may wish to assign the *Writing Prompt: Russia* worksheet as homework or an in-class activity.

Variation 3:

Assign both the *Migration from the Former Soviet Republics to Russia* reading and the *Writing Prompt: Russia* worksheet as homework. In class the next day, replicate the T-Chart from the *T-Chart: Russia* worksheet on the board. Complete the T-Chart by having students suggest points in favor of and in opposition to migration and write them in the appropriate column. Continue until all of the unique points offered by students are included. Discuss the results with the class. Ask students to compare the answers they gave with the answers that others gave. Are there any similarities? Are there any differences? Why? Or why not? Ask for a show of hands to determine which side students supported in their writing, and have some of the students read the conclusion from their writing prompt out loud to the class.

Migration from the Former Soviet Republics to Russia

The Soviet Union consisted of fifteen “soviet socialist republics,” many of which were originally independent nations that had been conquered by the Russian Empire or over the course of the 1917 revolution that established the Soviet Union. In 1989, the last Soviet census listed 128 separate *ethnic* groups living in the fifteen republics. At the time of the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991, more than twenty-five million ethnic Russians were living in the former-Soviet republics outside of Russia. Because Russians formed the dominant group during the Soviet years and often got the best jobs and housing, after the transition Russians still living in these republics were often treated poorly. They faced the difficult choice of whether to try to remain in the post-Soviet republics, or whether to try to make a new life in Russia. Read the two accounts below and complete the activity.

My name is Boris and I am 16 years old. I am an ethnic Russian, but I was born in Riga, the capital of Latvia, located on the Baltic Sea. My parents were born in Russia and moved here when my father was in the Soviet navy. Because of this, the Latvian government says that we are not Latvian citizens.

I am in high school. All through grade school I studied in Russian. But the Latvian government has decreed that 60% of high school instruction must be in Latvian. Fortunately, I can speak Latvian and I’m doing OK—my friend Igor doesn’t speak any Latvian at all, and he is struggling in class. When we go on to university, Igor will have to pay to go to a private university so he can study in Russian.

My mother, who is a teacher, lost her job because she can’t teach in Latvian. They’ve also started using Latvian as the main language of business at the Defense Ministry and it’s likely my father will lose his job. My father speaks very little Latvian.

Because we’re not citizens of Latvia, my parents will have a hard time finding new jobs here. Companies prefer to hire Latvians. If we were Latvian citizens it would be different, but the citizenship exams are very difficult, including a Latvian language test as well as tests in history and culture. I could probably pass, but my parents couldn’t. They say they’re frustrated at not being able to vote.

My mother and father have decided that we’re going to move in with my grandparents in Moscow when my father’s job ends. I’ve been to Moscow a few times to see them. I don’t like it there—Moscow is too big. I also like going to the beach with my friends here, and there’s no beach in Moscow. I’ve lived all my life in Latvia, but I don’t feel like I have a future here anymore.

My name is Tatiana. I am 17 years old, and I live in Bishkek, the capital of Kyrgyzstan. My grandmother is Kyrgyz, but my grandfather’s family is Russian, and he made sure that all his children, including my mother, listed their nationality as Russian. Under the Soviet system, there were advantages to being Russian. Nowadays, I’m not so sure.

My father is Assistant Director at one of the coal mines. Since the breakup of the Soviet Union, production at the coal mine has gone down and my father is only paid 8 months out of the year. Unemployment is high here, and my father thinks we should move to Russia so he can find a more reliable job.

Many of my friends have already moved to Russia with their families. They have sent me letters about their new lives in Russia. Many of them have told me that people in Russia treat them badly. One girl wrote me that someone spat on her while she was standing in line at the store and told her to “go back where you came from.” Because my grandmother is Kyrgyz, I have dark hair and don’t “look Russian.” I wouldn’t want the same thing to happen to me!

My father thinks I should apply to university in Moscow so I will have a “better chance” in life. I think I can have a chance right here. I want to apply to a university here in Kyrgyzstan. When I graduate I’ll have an opportunity to work for an international company. I think this can help our economy.

There are a lot of people in Kyrgyzstan who want everyone who is not Kyrgyz to leave. That’s just silly. There are a lot of people in Kyrgyzstan who aren’t Kyrgyz. If we all went away, there would be no one left here! This country was strong under the Soviets, and if we all work together, I am sure that it can be strong again.

Ethnic, ethnicity: common characteristics such as race, language, culture, and/or religion that make people feel they are part of a common group.

T-CHART: RUSSIA

Name: _____ Date: _____ Class: _____

Assignment: Read the passages on *Migration from the Former Soviet Republics to Russia*. Then complete the chart below, listing reasons why ethnic Russians living in the former Soviet republics might want to emigrate to Russia in the left column, and reasons why they might choose to stay in the right column.

Make as many points as you need for each side. The first three are already labeled for you.

Reasons why ethnic Russians should emigrate to Russia	Reasons why ethnic Russians should remain in the former Soviet republics
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.

Which side do you agree with? Cite examples from the text to support your answer:

About Hemispheres

Created in 1996, Hemispheres is the international outreach consortium at the University of Texas at Austin. Hemispheres utilizes University resources to promote and assist with world studies education for K–12 and postsecondary schools, businesses, civic and non-profit organizations, the media, governmental agencies, and the general public.

Comprised of UT's four federally funded National Resource Centers (NRCs) dedicated to the study and teaching of Latin America; the Middle East; Russia, East Europe & Eurasia; and South Asia, Hemispheres offers a variety of free and low-cost services to these groups and more. Each center coordinates its own outreach programming, including management of its lending library, speakers bureau, public lectures, and conferences, all of which are reinforced by collaborative promotion of our resources to an ever-widening audience in the educational community and beyond.

Hemispheres fulfills its mission through: coordination of pre-service and in-service training and resource workshops for educators; promotion of outreach resources and activities via exhibits at appropriate state- and nation-wide educator conferences; participation in public outreach events as organized by the consortium as well as by other organizations; and consultation on appropriate methods for implementing world studies content in school, business, and community initiatives.

For more information, visit the Hemispheres Web site at:
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