



Voices from the USSR

Working with Oral Histories from the Harvard Project on the Soviet Social System Online

a resource for educators, grades 7-12



Prepared by
The Davis Center for Russian and
Eurasian Studies
at Harvard University

February 2015

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This curriculum module is one of a series of topical resources created on a variety of historical, political, and sociocultural themes relating to Russia and Eurasia. Each document includes a content essay, classroom applications and approaches, a bibliography and list of further resources, as well as connections to the Common Core Standards. In order to access additional modules and multimedia content, please visit the Davis Center website at <http://daviscenter.fas.harvard.edu/outreach>.

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Introduction

The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) lasted for more than seventy years and in its final days boasted a population of nearly three hundred million citizens. The people of the Soviet Union, their lives, and their experiences, both public and private, were not monolithic. The goals of the “Voices from the USSR” module are to explore a selection of individual experiences of daily life in the Soviet Union and to invite students to critically examine how primary sources can be used to build knowledge on this topic. Using lectures and archival material students are asked to consider:

How did Soviet ideology uniquely shape the relationship between the state and Soviet individuals? How did the Soviet state attempt to realize its ideological vision?

How can we learn about the private lives of individuals in history, particularly when they lived under an authoritarian political system? What value does this knowledge provide in better understanding the nation’s history?

How does social context influence individual identity? How and why do individuals have different experiences within the same social, political, and historical context?

The activities in this module pair video lectures with digitized oral histories from the Harvard Project on the Soviet Social System (HPSSS). This large, searchable, online archive of primary source material makes available hundreds of interviews with Soviet refugees conducted during the Second World War and immediate postwar era.

Access and Materials

This module makes use of an online archive of English-language primary source material available through the Harvard library system. This archive can be accessed from any computer with Internet access. As several activities ask students to browse primary sources individually or in small groups, access to multiple computers is ideal.

A Note to Teachers: Considerations and Limitations

As noted in the lessons below, the primary sources referenced in this module are a rich but limited window into Soviet life in this time period. While the archival interviews discuss life experiences dating back to 1917, the post-World War II era in which they were captured (from 1950–1953), and the focus on refugee subjects, provide a window into a particular set of voices and experiences that do not necessarily reflect those from other segments of the vast history of the Soviet Union.

For a broader set of materials about the Soviet Union, see the interactive web resource [Seventeen Moments in Soviet History](#). In addition, the full set of lectures from the 2012 summer workshop “Everyday Life in the Soviet Union” are available on the Davis Center’s [Digital Resource](#) page.

Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks and Common Core Standards

Both the content and approaches outlined in this module support key Career Readiness Anchor Standards articulated in the Common Core Standards, reflecting a focus on literacies of reading, speaking, and listening in the K-12 social studies classroom.

Massachusetts History and Social Science Curriculum Framework

WHII.22 Summarize the consequences of Soviet communism to 1945. (H, E)

Common Core State Standards for College and Career Readiness

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.1 Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, connecting insights gained from specific details to an understanding of the text as a whole.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.3 Evaluate various explanations for actions or events and determine which explanation best accords with textual evidence, acknowledging where the text leaves matters uncertain.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.7 Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, as well as in words) in order to address a question or solve a problem.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.1 Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.

Background for Teachers and Students

Every nation plays a role in shaping the lives of its citizens through laws and policies, and every government must define its own idea of the public good when writing those laws. This is as true today in the United States as it was at the time that our Constitution was drafted. And this was certainly true in the USSR from 1917–1991; the socialist Soviet state was driven by a strong vision of a just society, and the government attempted to make this vision a reality through social, economic, and political policies. But this project required shaping more than policies and behaviors; creating a collective reality required shaping each individual's values, beliefs, and worldview.

The ways that Soviet individuals understood themselves and their role in the world was central to the larger project of building the Soviet state. This idea was woven into the very start of the Soviet revolution and continued throughout its seventy-plus years. But changing historical moments and a highly diverse Soviet population meant that living in the Soviet Union was a very different experience at different times, in different regions, and for different people. In this introduction we will look at some of the changing ways that the Soviet government informed the identities and worldviews of its citizens. The classroom activities that follow will investigate the ways that some individuals responded to these efforts, inviting students to ask questions about the relationship between personal and national identity, and our ability to understand and document the private selves of individuals in history.

A Revolutionary Worldview?: The Legacies of 1917

The Soviet government that emerged after the 1917 Russian revolutions and civil war was driven in large part by the theories of Karl Marx. Marx wrote that capitalism would inevitably progress to a point at which the workers (proletariat) would become conscious of their exploitation by those who profited from their labor, and rise up to collectively take control of the government and economy. But this is not quite what happened in Russia. At the time of the revolutions, Russian society was not in the worker-led revolutionary stage predicted by Marx. In 1917 Russia had not reached full, industrial capitalism; wage-earning workers were still a small part of the population, and a large majority of Russians were farming peasants.

Following the February revolution of 1917 that ousted the tsarist autocracy, Vladimir Lenin played a key role in toppling the ensuing provisional government and establishing a socialist state under his leadership. But the collective worker identity and revolutionary worldview that was supposed to bring it into power had not fully developed among the larger Russian population. The legitimacy and ideology of the government was inextricably tied to how Soviet citizens understood themselves as individuals and as part of a larger class. Leaders like Lenin, informed by Marx's vision, understood it as their mission to form this identity in Russian citizens. Shaping and forming such an identity happened in many ways, through the ever-growing state presence in the everyday lives of Soviet citizens, including control over public culture, art, and media. *Learn more about this period in Robyn Angley's lecture "Intersection of Early Soviet Ideology and Culture."*

The Post-War Moment: A Turning Point in Soviet Identity

After Lenin's death in 1924, the scope of the role of the state continued to grow under the rule of Joseph Stalin, to include policies related to collective farming and housing; control over official film, the press, radio, music, and visual art; and eventually control of citizens through arrest and deportation to the system of forced labor camps known as "the Gulag". Scholars like Alexis Peri, whose lecture is highlighted in this resource, ask us to consider what kinds of freedoms of thought, choice, and conscience were preserved, and what kinds of diverse individual experiences were had by Soviet persons even in the midst of such intensive efforts to control and assimilate them by the state. How can we know or gain access to the inner thoughts and lives of individuals who lived in this time and place in order to answer these questions? The oral histories of the HPSSS on which this module focuses are one such resource to consider.

These interviews were conducted in the early 1950s, following the Second World War. Peri highlights this moment of the war and its aftermath as a turning point in the way that Soviet individuals thought about themselves and their relationship to larger Soviet society. The scale of devastation from the war was unimaginable—a massive interruption of the story of success and progress that the Soviet state told about itself. Peri describes several effects of this shock. Because there was no simple or easy way for the state to explain this tremendous loss, there was more room for Soviet individuals to decide on their own what it meant. After the decades led by Lenin and Stalin when Soviet citizens were continually seen as works in progress, always "becoming" the conscious, collective, worker class they were supposed to be, the sacrifices of the war meant that citizens had unquestionably proven themselves. They now were Soviet citizens, no longer "in progress". And they were citizens who felt entitled to question and contradict the state more outspokenly, both in their public and private voices.

Learn more about this period in Alexis Peri's lecture "Ordinary Lives, Extraordinary Times: Personal Accounts of the Soviet Experience." Minutes 45:36–46:40 discuss changes to Soviet state identity during World War II, and minutes 48:15–49:34 talk about changes in personal identity, illustrated with three passport photos of a Soviet woman.

Peri invites us to ask: How do scholars like herself know what citizens know or think in their private lives? Private writing found in diaries and letters are one source. The oral histories focused on in these lessons are another. But even when reading personal writings, is it possible to separate someone's "true" self, thoughts, or feelings, from the identity, thoughts, and feelings that are shaped by outside forces? Through close exploration of individual Soviet voices, this module invites students both to learn about the diverse individual experiences of Soviet citizens, and to connect these larger questions about personal identity and public forces to their own lives.

What is the Harvard Project on the Soviet Social System?

In the early years of the Cold War, American researchers from Harvard's Russian Research Center embarked on a project to explore large-scale questions about the nature of Soviet society. These social scientists gathered data through documentation of the life histories, experiences, and worldviews of Soviet refugees who managed to avoid repatriation to the USSR at the end of the Second World War. Project participants were recruited from among ethnic Russians, Ukrainians, Byelorussians, and other former Soviet citizens—mostly former prisoners of war, migrant laborers, and even Nazi collaborators—resulting in an extensive set of primary sources. These materials offer a glimpse into the lives of hundreds of individuals as well as data through which to analyze and better understand the workings of Soviet society on a broad scale. Including the stories of former schoolteachers, soldiers, dancers, farmers, and more, it remains one of the largest collections of English-language, primary source material documenting Soviet life from 1917 to the 1940s.

Through the digital HPSSS collection students can read and search scanned transcripts of over eight hundred interviews. Half of these (“A-schedule” interviews) focus generally on the subject's life history; in the other (“B-schedule” interviews), subjects are asked more specific questions about topics like economics and ethnicity. To get a sense of how social scientists structured this massive task, students can browse through the complete set of the A-schedule interview questions in [Appendix C of the Manual for Use with A-Schedule Materials](#). (A complete record of the B-schedule interview questions was not preserved.)

When exploring the interviews themselves, students and teachers can [search the interviews by keywords and phrases](#), as well as browse the [list of interviews](#), which includes information about each interviewee's age, gender, and occupation. For easier reading when viewing a page from the archive, students can choose the “view text” option to see the page in plain text, rather than as a scan of the original.

Introductory Classroom Activities

In the years following the Second World War, relations between US and Soviet populations were characterized by mutual anxiety and antagonism. A majority of each country's citizens formed understandings of the other only through images heavily mediated by their governments and by popular culture. In the very early days of this era, Harvard researchers attempted to construct as broad an understanding as possible of Soviet culture through the interviewees available to them.

Guiding Questions Through Video

Have students watch minutes 00:44–2:05 of Alexis Peri's lecture, "[Extraordinary Times: Personal Accounts of the Soviet Experience](#)." Here Peri introduces two questions: "*How did [Soviet] people think, view, themselves, and the world around them?*" and "*How successful was the regime in transforming the consciousness of its people?*" Ask students how they think scholars might try to answer these questions. What sources might they look to? Explain that they will be exploring a series of interviews conducted by American researchers who were attempting, in part, to answer these questions.

Who Were the Interviewees?

Ask students what they would consider if they were selecting interview subjects to represent the society in which they live today. Who would they include in order to give a full and accurate picture of life within a large and diverse nation? Researchers constructing the HPSSS did not have the luxury of selecting whomever they wanted to be part of their study; they had access only to those living outside the USSR who would agree to be interviewed. Pages 1–7 of the "[A Schedule Face Sheet Data Book](#)" provide a demographic breakdown of the subjects who make up this group portrait of Soviet life. Students can begin by browsing this summary or the [list of subjects](#) in the HPSSS, and then reflecting on the following questions:

- What do you notice about the ages of these subjects? *The interviewees range from twenty-two to seventy years of age, but are dominated by working-age people.* How might the experiences of younger and older citizens have differed from the population represented here?
- Of the 331 interviewees, 232 (70%) were fugitives who fled the USSR following World War II; the rest were refugees who traveled west during the Soviet occupation of Eastern Europe. Roughly 265 of the 331 surveyed (80%) had either experienced arrest while in the USSR or had family members who had been arrested. *What do these factors tell us about the interviewees' experience of the USSR and their relationship to the state? How might their perspectives differ from their fellow citizens who remained in the Soviet Union?*

The full list of A- and B-Schedule interviews gives the age, gender, ethnicity, and/or occupation of A-Schedule interviewees. Students can begin exploring the archive by selecting interviews based on their own interests and curiosity, or the teacher can provide general prompts such as:

- Find two interview subjects with the same occupations as two adults you know today (examples: [mechanic](#), [schoolteacher](#), [dentist](#), [full-time parent](#), [nurse](#), [dancer](#)) and read through their life history interviews. What stands out to you? Are there elements of their lives that are similar to the lives of people you know today? What elements are most different?
- Find three interviewees that share one aspect of their identity in common, but also one difference (example: three interviewees who are all schoolteachers, [one Russian](#), [one Byelorussian](#), and [one Ukrainian](#)) and read through their life history interviews. What stands out to you? What elements of their lives are similar? What are different? What conclusions can you draw about sources of diverse experience within the Soviet Union?

Evaluating the HPSSS as a Source

Conclude by watching minutes 4:30–7:45 of Peri’s lecture, in which she reviews many types of sources used by scholars, including written sources like diaries and letters, as well as non-textual sources like images that depict dress and appearance, to learn about the lives of Soviet citizens. With this range of sources in mind, ask students what they think the strengths of the HPSSS are, as a source. What do they believe are its weaknesses?

Individual and Society Lesson

While the Schedule-A interviews prompted subjects to share open-ended reflections on their life histories, the Schedule-B interviews asked specific questions about how Soviet society functioned and how these social policies shaped the lives of its citizens. Some of these interview scripts included a section titled “situations,” in which respondents were asked to reflect on how a typical Soviet citizen might respond to a hypothetical scenario in their family or work life. Through these questions the researchers hoped to gain insight into the character of Soviet society and how it might differ from non-communist countries such as the United States. These interviews present an opportunity for students to reflect on the ways in which values are shaped within individuals and societies, both in their own lives and in the lives of Soviet citizens.

Hook

Ask students to list five values or personality traits that they think are central to their identity. Begin by listing some possible examples on the board, such as curious, generous, pessimistic, and trusting. Then, ask students to reflect on which of these they believe would stay the same regardless of the time or place in which they were born. Do they believe that some of these personality traits would remain constant, regardless of the family that raised them, the school they attended, and the society in which they grew up?

Students will likely express a range of opinions; discussion can explore students’ perspectives on the elements of identity that are inherent to an individual and those that are shaped by external influences. Explain that the researchers of the HPSSS hoped to discover how Soviet citizens might differ from Americans and those from other non-communist countries. Ask students how, as interviewers, they might try to determine which values of individuals are shaped by the social policies of the government under which they live. Based on what they already know about the Soviet Union, do students think that their values and behaviors would be different, had they grown up in that place and time? Do they think that individuals from the Soviet Union had different values than individuals from other parts of the world? Why or why not? Explain to students that they will be exploring answers to these questions based on primary sources from these former Soviet citizens.

Activities

1. Present students with several scenarios from the “situations” portion of the Schedule B Clinical Interviews:

A father tells his son that he will give him money for his studies and help him get a good education, but only under the condition that he will study the courses prescribed by the father. The son makes up his mind to discuss the matter with his father and the whole family. What will the son say and why? What will the father do and why?

A nine-year-old boy refuses to go to school; he says to his father that he is scared of the teacher who has often punished him for misconduct. What will the father do and why?

A man has asked a friend for a letter of recommendation. The friend feels he cannot honestly give him a good recommendation. Meanwhile the man appears in order to find out whether the letter has been sent. What will the friend do and why?

A person gets the impression that others are talking behind his back. It happened several times that when he entered the room the people stopped talking or changed the topic of their conversation. And again he is approaching a group of acquaintances of his and it seems to him that the talk stopped as soon as he approached them. What will this person do and why?

Answering from their own perspectives, have students respond to the questions individually or in small groups.

2. Share answers as a class. Ask students whether they all arrived at similar answers. If not, what might account for differences among their answers? Is it easy to predict how individuals in the same community might respond to these hypothetical scenarios? What factors shaped their answers to these questions?

3. Have students compare their own answers to those of Soviet citizens interviewed as part of the HPSSS. Here are some sample responses they might read:

Sample response number one

Sample response number two

Sample response number three

Sample response number four

To locate more responses, the class can use either the [search function](#) of the online archive (enter the questions above into the search box) or the full [interview list](#). Students can then scroll to the Schedule-B interviews and click through to the section marked “situations” to find these questions and answers.

Ask students to read 3–5 responses to the questions from former Soviet citizens. Are all the answers the same? What similarities did they notice across the HPSSS interview answers? What differences did they find? What questions and ideas do these differences and similarities prompt about diversity within the Soviet experience?

Ask students to compare and contrast the interviewees’ answers with their answers and those of their classmates. Did they notice any similarities between their answers and those of the Soviet citizens? Did they notice any differences? Referencing the discussion from the start of class, what questions does this prompt regarding the potential of social policies to shape individual identity?

4. Beginning at minute 26:10, have students watch 10–20 minutes of Robyn Angley’s lecture “[The Transformative State: The Intersection of Early Soviet Ideology and Culture.](#)” In this clip Angley discusses various practices the Soviet state implemented in order to influence the beliefs and behaviors of Soviet citizens. After viewing the clip, ask students to reflect on what Soviet state leaders believed about their ability to shape individual identity. What values did state leaders seek to instill in Soviet citizens? In their reading of primary source interviews, do students see evidence of ways that the state may have influenced the values and worldviews of these interviewees? What evidence do they see of diverse worldviews amongst citizens? What might the sources of these differences be?

Soviet Education Lesson

In her lecture “Creating the New Soviet Man: Education in the USSR,” DCRES Outreach Director Cris Martin explores the evolving role that education played through different eras of Soviet rule. The full lecture describes the use of education to shape ideal Soviet citizens, including vocational and hands-on educational practices, literacy campaigns, grade structures, and extracurricular activities. Paired with interviews from the HPSSS, this topic offers an opportunity for students of history to reflect on the relationship between government policy and individual experience.

Hook

Students are naturally situated to reflect on the structure and experience of schools in their own lives. Teachers can ask students to reflect on whether they agree or disagree with one or more of following statements:

The most important purpose of education is to prepare students to get a job.

Parents should be able to decide what their children learn in school.

Have students share their responses in small groups or with the class as a whole. Explain that ideas about the nature and purpose of education have changed (and continue to change) throughout history and within different cultural contexts. Students’ responses to the prompts reveal some of their own assumptions about these values, which they can compare with Soviet perspectives and experience.

Activities

1. Watch minutes 18:07–24:40 of [Cris Martin’s lecture](#) in which she describes the “complex method”, vocational orientation under Stalin, effects of the “thaw” under Khrushchev, and military training. As they watch, have students record each time they hear a description of the purpose of education.

Example: Under Stalin, the purpose of education was largely to produce highly skilled workers for Soviet industry. To attain this goal, schools focused on grades, rather than communal experiences, and subjects like math and science.

2. Discuss as a class:

How and why did the goals for education in the Soviet Union change over time?

Do any of these visions for the purpose of education match students’ own beliefs? If so, which ones?

Student Project: Engaging with the Interviews

1. After watching this overview, students can begin to explore personal reflections on education found in primary source interviews, as many interviewees reflected on the Soviet educational system.

The A-Schedule Life Histories include an “Education Section,” with questions such as “Did you like school?” “What were your relations like with your teachers?” and “What were the libraries like in your schools?” A complete list of questions asked in this section can be found on [pages 8–14 of Appendix C of the Manual of A-Schedule Materials](#).

In B Schedule, Volume 20 “Professions Schedule,” interviewees were asked to describe the “Material Conditions and Personal Satisfaction of Teachers,” among other occupations. Reflections on school came up naturally in many other sections of the interviews, as well, such as the Nationalities Schedule (Vol. 7 of B-Schedule interviews) in which ethnic minorities such as [Azerbaijanis](#), [Kalmyks](#), and [Buddhists](#) reflect on their experiences of assimilation in Russian-language Soviet schools.

2. Begin by having students survey 5–10 sources by using the [search function](#) or selecting particular subjects from the [interview list](#) (see sidebar for suggested subjects).

Have students keep track of their reading by noting:

- Name, age and gender of interviewee
- Occupation
- What they said they liked and disliked about school

Ask students to answer the following questions:

- What similarities do you see in their feelings about school? What differences do you see?
- How does this compare to your own experience at school?

3. After recording notes about several interviews, ask students to select one individual who they will represent in a roundtable discussion. In groups of 3–5, have students sit in a Socratic seminar circle and respond to the following questions:

- What do you like best about school? What do you like least? What would you change?
- What can American schools learn from Soviet schools? What can Soviet schools learn from American schools?

Suggested Interview Subjects

[Schedule B, Vol. 7, Case 15](#): “I transferred to this new school which was for Kalmyks. Yet in the first year of this school’s existence I was the only Kalmyk student and all of the faculty was composed of Russians.”

[Schedule B, Vol. 21, Case 424](#): “In September everything was still fine, then came October and what I remember is that all of a sudden everything in the school changed.”

[Schedule B, Vol. 20, Case 491](#): “The moral satisfaction of the student who is studying to be a teacher is high... But when the student becomes a teacher and clashes with reality, he begins to feel worse. He sees that he cannot freely lecture on any subject.”

Soviet Subject Lesson

Guiding questions: *Is it ever possible to know someone's real or true thoughts or feelings? Do our identities change over time?*

These universal questions have particular relevance for the study of Russian and Soviet history. When studying the Soviet Union we hope to gain an understanding both of the Soviet state and political system, as well as the lived experience of individuals within it. Scholar Alexis Peri studies diaries from this period, and explores questions about whether we can separate the “true” feelings of Soviet citizens from the state’s expectations and individuals’ responses to those expectations.

These themes are both complex and intuitive for students. They are complex because students are asked to think meta-cognitively not only about the sources they are looking at, but about the recursive thinking of the person who wrote it. They are intuitive, as well, because students are already (although perhaps subconsciously) asking themselves these questions every time they decide what to wear to school, think about how to speak to teachers, and write an essay using different words than they would use to talk to their best friend.

Hook

Begin by asking students to respond to one of these prompts:

Do you think people write differently in a diary than they do on an online social media site? What accounts for these differences?

Write three social media posts about the same issue: one your parents will see, one your teacher(s) will see, and one only your best friend will see. What is the difference here? Why is there a difference?

After students have reflected and shared their answers, ask them to consider: Are these different kinds of writing all “true” representations of themselves? Is it possible to have multiple versions of your “true” self? How might it be possible to tell? Would someone else be able to tell what is “true” and what is not?

Activities

1. Have students watch minutes 00:00–4:30 of Alexis Peri’s lecture “[Ordinary Lives, Extraordinary Times: Personal Accounts of the Soviet Experience](#).” In this clip Peri poses the questions: What were the inner worlds of Soviet citizens like? What were people’s senses of who they were? Is it possible to access this knowledge? If so, how?
2. After viewing, ask students: What is the major question, challenge, or problem that Peri is raising? What sources of information does she rely upon? What are the strengths and weaknesses of each?

3. After reviewing the definition of a primary source with students, ask them to imagine that someone living one hundred years in the future is trying to find out what life was like at their school. Why might they want to know about this topic? Why would it matter to a historian? Have students consider several types of sources that this future historian might have access to: a diary, emails sent between students, postings from a social media site, etc. Ask students what each source might tell the person about students at their school. What is the strength of each source? What is the weakness of each source? Is any more “truthful” than another? What would “truthful” mean in this context?

Reflecting on the HPSSS

This online archive provides the “voices” not only of the interview subjects, but the interviewers themselves through their marginal notes, introductory comments, and interview questions. Some of this “marginalia” offers revealing examples of the ideas Peri discusses in her lecture. Have students explore this through one or more of the paired viewings and readings below:

1. Watch minutes 1:04:38–1:12:30 of Peri’s lecture on non-textual sources, particularly regarding clothing.

Read an excerpt from [Schedule B, Vol. 1, Case 126](#), beginning with “*I have the feeling that I was dealing with one of the more lawless Soviet types.*”

Ask students: How is the interviewer “reading” the subject even before the interview begins?

2. Watch minutes 24:25–27:10 in which Peri reflects on the idea, “There is always a disjunction between text and life.”

Read an excerpt from [Schedule B, Vol. 2, Case 220](#), beginning with “*He has all his views neatly capsuled and prepared.*”

Ask students if they agree with Peri’s claim that writing can never purely represent our thoughts and feelings. Do you agree? Do you agree with this interviewer’s assessment that prepared answers might be less reliable or authentic than unprepared interview responses?

3. Watch minutes 49:42–53:41 of Peri’s lecture on the diary of Elena Mukhina. Ask students to respond first to the diary entries of Elena Mukhina. Why might Elena have switched between first person and third person? Do her diary entries sound like something an American student might write? Why or why not?

Peri says that when studying Soviet citizens it is important to avoid either extreme of saying, “They’re nothing like us” or “They’re exactly like us.” Do students agree? What is problematic about both of these perspectives? How can they be avoided?

4. Have students read page 3 of the HPSSS [Guide for Interviewing Soviet Escapees](#), the manual written to guide future research efforts, beginning with “Americans are unaccustomed to the direct and spontaneous expression of emotion to which Russians are likely to give vent easily.”

- What assumptions does the guide seem to have about Americans? About Russians?
- How do the HPSSS researchers imagine these differences might affect the interview process?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of these interviews as sources of information about individual lives and Soviet society?

Extensions

Using theater:

Performing the Meta Voice

Divide students into pairs with excerpts from interviews. Have students write an imagined “meta voice”. What might the person be thinking but not saying? Have one student read the original text while a second student stands behind them, reading the “meta voice” to accompany the piece of writing.

Visualizing Voice

The visual vocabulary of comic strips, including thought and word balloons, allows writers and readers to visualize the relationship between written or spoken communication and the inner thoughts of an individual. Visualization prompts for students can include having them draw a three-panel comic strip in which someone thinks one thing but says or writes another. Or, have students draw a one-page comic adaptation of a diary excerpt that includes both written text and accompanying thought balloons.