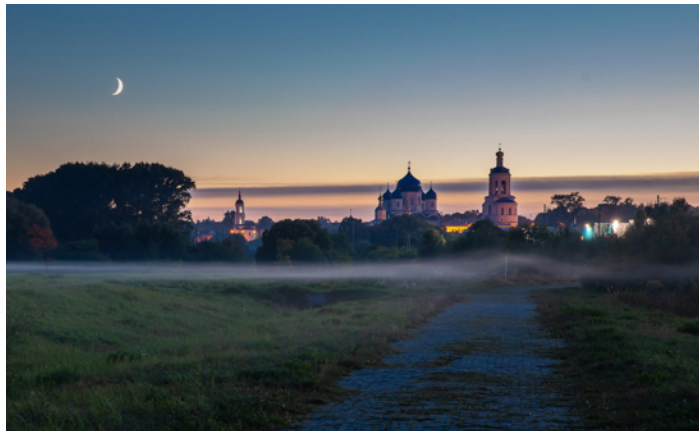


**Introduction to Russian Studies**  
**(21G.087 / 21H.144)**



This class invites you to take a journey through Russian history, looking at pivotal moments in the country's past that continue to shape its present-day culture. Over the course of the semester, we will explore seminal historical epochs and cultural figures, listening to voices from the past and their echoes in the present. We'll immerse ourselves in visual images, music, architecture, and art as we try to imagine what it was like to live in those epochs. We'll read excerpts from historical documents and literary works, as well as scholarly articles that ponder difficult moments in Russian history. We'll explore daily life, from posters to postcards, and learn about holidays, traditions, superstitions, and more. Each student will select a topic of interest to create their own "gallery page" to share with the class. Throughout the course we will practice critical reflection and try to make connections with our present-day culture and society.

**Learning goals:**

- Acquire basic cultural literacy, learn about key dates, events, cultural figures
- Recognize references to events, analyze contemporary Russian culture in an informed way
- Develop frameworks for studying cultural/ historical epochs
- Think about philosophical questions that were of burning interest in those and our times
- Learn about Russian traditions and daily life

**Evaluation (see next page for the detailed outline of requirements):**

1) Completion of readings and annotations	20 %
2) Participation in class discussion and activities	15 %
3) 5 short responses via Padlet	25 %
4) Final project: Gallery page ("pub"), part of class PubPub project "Our Russia" (details below)	40 %
Gallery pitch (1 paragraph) (week 3) - 5%	
Topic and resources description (week 6) - 5 %	
Images + commentary text "blurbs" (week 10) - 10%	
Final version of the page (week 13) - 20%	

**Course Materials:** **No required textbooks.** Readings and links to online resources posted on the Canvas course website. The class final project will be a group collaborative resource completed on PubPub (link shared in class)

**Office Hours:** **Elizabeth Wood** by appointment ([elizwood@mit.edu](mailto:elizwood@mit.edu))

**Maria Khotimsky:** Mondays 2:30-3:30 p.m. in 14N-311 and by appointment (<https://calendly.com/khotimsky>)

**Statement on Academic Integrity:** We welcome your ideas, opinions, and questions! All the work in the class should be your own, and you should cite your sources accordingly. Please refer to MIT handbook on Academic Integrity: <https://integrity.mit.edu/>

#### **Assessment criteria:**

1) **Completion of homework readings, annotations, and other tasks (20 %):** daily homework will typically include reading and annotation tasks (on some days) that should be completed before class. We will use Perusall, a social annotation tool accessible via Canvas. Typical annotation tasks include highlighting an important idea, posing a question, commenting on a passage (3-4 comments throughout the text). In addition to readings, homework tasks will include watching short videos, and/or looking up information for class discussion. Readings listed in the daily class outline are due on the day. Grading criteria: complete/ incomplete (based on annotation tasks and preparation for class activities)

2) **Participation in class discussion and activities (15 %):** our class will incorporate many discussion-based and group exploration activities during which you will collaborate with your peers in reflecting on the daily topics, completing cultural exploration tasks, sharing information you found in the homework, and brainstorming your final project. In addition, some classes will include guest speaker visits, and we'll work together to prepare questions for our guest speakers. Two unexcused absences are allowed per semester, no questions asked. Please notify your instructors in case of absence due to health issues, professional commitments (conferences, interviews, research presentations) or personal (religious holiday observance, family circumstances, etc.). Grading criteria: complete/ incomplete

3) **5 short responses via Padlet (25 %):** in these short tasks, you will look up information on a topic and add it to a shared class page using Padlet (link will be provided in class). These shared group pages should be completed before class, so we will be able to refer to them during class conversation. Topics and tasks will vary: e.g.: 1) Russian traditions and superstitions; 2) A palace in Saint Petersburg; 3) Culture and traditions of a non-Russian ethnic group; 4) Life in communal apartment; 5) A famous Soviet scientist. Grading criteria: 20 pt.

4) **Final project: Gallery Page "Our Russia" (40 %):** we will work as a group on an informational gallery page (working title "My Russia," but we'll decide as a group). Each student will select a topic in connection with Russian art, culture, society, science, or anything else that is of personal interest and significance to them and will create a Gallery page to include 5 images and 1 interactive resource (a game, a clickable image, or a timeline) that will present their topic as portrayed in different media (e.g.: historical sources, art, film, etc.). Please see detailed discussion of the project and grading rubric on the dedicated page on Canvas. Timeline of the project:

Gallery pitch (1 paragraph) (week 3) - 5%

Topic and resources description (week 6) - 5 %

Images and text "blurbs" (week 10) - 10%

Final version of the page (week 12) - 20%

#### **Covid and other emergencies contingency plan:**

- 1) **Class absence due to illness or quarantine isolation:** In case you are ill and must miss several classes, please notify your instructors (or ask your advisor to reach out to us). Your health and well-being should be a priority, so please, take care of yourself and give yourself time to recover. We will work with you individually to design a plan to stay on track with class assignments (we can meet with you individually to go over the materials, and help you reflect on the topic). We will also post class slides with key discussion points each week.
- 2) **In case of Institute-wide schedule changes and closures,** we will adjust the syllabus accordingly.
- 3) **In case of inclement weather, instructor illness, or quarantine for more than half of class participants,** we may convene one or more class sessions over Zoom; we will notify you promptly if this is the case.

#### **MIT-Russia program contacts and resources:**

We invite you to explore the opportunities for internships and Global Teaching Labs programs in Russia, Kazakhstan, and more! Please contact MIT-Eurasia Program Manager Katya Zabrovski: ([zabroves@mit.edu](mailto:zabroves@mit.edu))

**Applications for Summer 2022 are still open!**

## Weekly schedule of class topics and reading assignments

### Week 1. Introduction to Russian Culture and Geography

**Tuesday 2/1: Introduction to the class, Russia's geography**

**Thursday 2/3: Culture: What is it? Cultural semiotics**

Yuri Lotman and Boris Uspenski, "On the Semiotic Mechanism of Culture"



### Week 2. Starting from the Beginning: Medieval Russia and Russian Folk Traditions

**Please book a meeting with one of the instructors this week to brainstorm your final project (gallery) topic**

**Tuesday 2/8: From Kievan Rus to Muscovy**

- 1) Read Valerie Kivelson, "Imperial Beginnings: Muscovy" in *Russia's Empires*, pp. 44-57, 61-74.
- 2) Listening: [Museum of Russian Icons lecture Sacred Spaces, Sacred Time](#) (a video lecture about Russian church architecture)



**Thursday 2/10: Folk culture, traditions, superstitions**

- 1) Linda J. Ivanits, *Russian Folk Belief*, excerpts: "The Pagan Background" (pp. 3-19)
- 2) Padlet Task 1: Russian folk traditions and common superstitions (details on Canvas)

### Week 3. Moscow and St. Petersburg: Two Cities, Two Cultures

**Tuesday 2/15 Moscow as the center of power; the figure of the Tsar**

- 1) Selections from Sigmund Herberstein's "*Rerum Moscoviticarum Commentarii*" (*Commentaries on Muscovite Affairs*)
- 2) Michael Flier, "Saint Basil's Cathedral" (4 pp.)
- 3) William Brumfield, "The Kremlin's Dormition Cathedral: Russia's Sacred Crown" (online photo article)



**Thursday 2/17: "A Window to Europe": Peter the Great and the founding of Saint Petersburg**

- 1) John T. Alexander, "The Petrine Era and After, 1689-1740"
- 2) "Feofan Prokopovich Eulogizes Peter the Great, 1725"



### Week 4. St. Petersburg: The Imperial Capital and Center of Culture

**Tuesday 2/22 - No Class (Monday schedule of classes)**

**Thursday 2/24: An exploration of Saint Petersburg**

- 1) Solomon Volkov, *St. Petersburg: A Cultural History*, ch. 1 (pp. 3-55)
- 2) Padlet Task #2: A palace in Saint Petersburg (details on Canvas)

### Week 5. Nineteenth Century Life: The Provinces and the Intelligentsia

**Tuesday 3/1: Life on the Russian estate: provinces and center**

**Guest speaker: Professor Lounsbery (via Zoom)**

- 1) Anne Lounsbery, *Life is Elsewhere. Symbolic Geography of Russian Provinces*, Chapter 1: "Geography, History, Trope: Facts on the Ground" (32 pp.)
- 2) Anton Chekhov, "On Official Business" (skim the story)



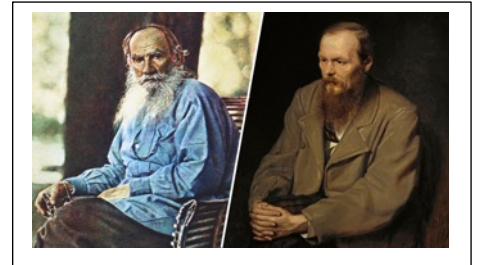
### Thursday 3/3: The Napoleonic War, the Decembrists, and the rise of Russian intelligentsia

- 1) Sergey Horujy, "Slavophiles, Westernizers, and the birth of Russian philosophical humanism." In *A History of Russian Philosophy 1830-1930: Faith, Reason, and the Defense of Human Dignity* (2010) (12 pp.).
- 2) Martin Malia, *Alexander Herzen and the Birth of Russian Socialism*, pp. 313-34 (22 pp.)

### Week 6: Food for the Soul, Food for the Body

#### Tuesday 3/8: Tolstoy and Dostoevsky

- 1) Leo Tolstoy, *War and Peace* (excerpts, 12 pp.)
- 2) Fyodor Dostoevsky, "The Legend of the Grand Inquisitor" from *Brothers Karamazov* (14 pp.)
- 3) Skim Tolstoy's and Dostoevsky's biographies



### Thursday 3/10: Russian Food across Epochs

#### Guest Speaker: Darra Goldstein

- 1) Reading: excerpts from Darra Goldstein, *The Kingdom of Rye: A Brief History of Russian Food*
- 2) **"Gallery Room proposal" (1-paragraph description of your project, due Friday 3/11)**

### Week 7. The Growth of Empire/ Facing "the Other"

#### Tuesday 3/15 -Expansion of the Empire; Russia's internal "others"

- 1) Valerie Kivelson and Ronald Suny, "Pacifying' the Peripheries" and "Conquering Central Asia" (3 pp.)
- 2) The Gorchakov Circular on Russia's mission in Central Asia (1864), (2 pp.)
- 3) Watch the documentary film *Siberian Dream* (32 min)



#### Thursday 3/17: Regions and Cultures of Russia

- 1) Look at a collection of photo articles about different ethnic groups
- 2) Padlet Task #3: Look up information about an ethnic group or minority residing in Russian Federation. Add a post to the map, share facts about the region, culture, and traditions. Prepare to share in class.

**3/21- 3/25: Have a nice spring break!**

### Week 8. The Russian Revolution(s) and Culture of the Early 20th Century

#### Tuesday 3/29: The Silver Age in Russian culture; Modernist art in Russia

- 1) Kahn, Lipovetsky, Reyfman, Sandeler, "Defining the Silver Age," from *A History of Russian Literature* (14 pp.)
- 2) Silver Age Russian Poetry (short online article + images)
- 3) Video on Russian art of the XX century (watch 9 minutes)



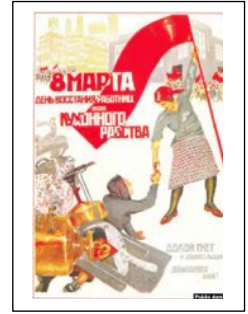
### Thursday 3/31: Three Revolutions in Twelve Years: 1905, February 1917, and October 1917

- 1) Boris Kolonitskii, "The Russian Idea and Ideology in the February Revolution"
- 2) The abdications of Nicholas II and his brother Grand Duke Michael in Dmytryshyn, pp. 523-25.

## Week 9. The New Soviet Man and Woman

### Tuesday 4/5: Overcoming Backwardness

- 1) “Women’s Liberation in the Soviet Union (Picture Essay)” in Robert Weinberg & Laurie Bernstein, *Revolutionary Russia: A History in Documents* (9 pp.)
- 2) Reading: short stories by Mikhail Zoshchenko (6 pp.)
- 3) Explore visual resource: [Americans in the Land of Lenin: Documentary Photographs of Early Soviet Russia](#): 750 photographs of every-day life in the Soviet Union (1919-1921 and 1930) from the papers of Robert L. Eichelberger and Frank Whitson Fetter.



### Thursday 4/7: Stalin Personality cult, World War II in Russian Memory

- 1) Anita Pisch, “The Personality Cult of Stalin in Soviet Posters” pp. 49-65, pp. 74-86
- 2) World War II in Russian culture and look at images of monuments – skim the article ([link on Canvas](#))

## Week 10: Life in the Soviet Union: visible and hidden aspects

### Tuesday 4/12: Life in the Soviet state: architecture, apartments, daily life, new holidays

- 1) Explore the online resource on communal living in the Soviet era: <http://kommunalka.colgate.edu/>
- 2) Padlet Task #4: Life in communal apartments (details on Canvas)



### Thursday 4/14: The Gulag, De-Stalinization

- 1) Feruza Aripova’s class visit (reading TBD)
- 2) Nikita Khrushchev’s speech on de-Stalinization (file on Canvas)

## Week 11. Soviet science, the space race

### Tuesday 4/19: Russian contributions to the world of science

- 1) Aleksei Kojevnikov, “The Phenomenon of Soviet Science,” (20 pp.)
- 2) Natalia Baranskaia, short story “A Week Like Any Other” (6 pp.)
- 3) **Padlet activity #5:** a famous Soviet scientist



### Thursday 4/21: Soviet Space Race and Space Mythology in Russian Culture

- 1) Slava Gerovitch, Soviet Space Race: *Soviet Space Mythologies* (excerpts)  
Ch. 1 “Why are we Telling Lies?” (pp. 1-26) Ch. 3 “‘New Soviet Man’ inside Machine: Human Engineering, Spacecraft Design, and the Construction of Communism” pp. 48- 67.
- 2) Contemporary trends in space exploration: commercialization of space (2 short news posts, links on Canvas)

## Week 12 The Soviet Experiment at its Peak: Life in a “Closed” Society

### Tuesday 4/26: The Chernobyl Accident

#### Guest speaker: Professor Kate Brown, MIT

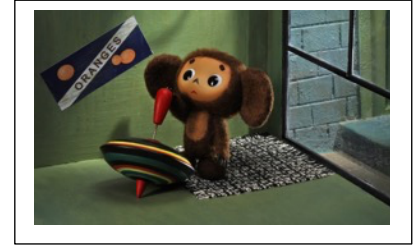
Kate Brown, *Manual for Survival: A Chernobyl Guide to the Future* (excerpts)

- 1) Read selections from Prof. Brown’s book
- 2) Browse the photo articles of Chernobyl and the exclusion zone (linked on Canvas)



### Thursday 4/28: Late Soviet Society: Different forms of resistance

- 1) Read Frida Vigdorova's transcript of the Joseph Brodsky trial (9 pp.)
- 2) Watch 2 popular animated films for in-class discussion (linked on Canvas)
- 3) **Finish your webpage text draft by Friday 4/29 at 5 p.m.**



### Week 13 Perestroika and Putin's Russia

#### Tuesday 5/3: "Perestroika," "Glasnost," and the fall of the Soviet Union

- 1) Michael Gorham, ch. 2, "Glasnost Unleashed: Language Ideologies in the Gorbachev Revolution." In *After Newspeak* (2014), pp. 48-74. (excerpts)
- 2) Archie Brown, *The Human Factor: Gorbachev, Reagan, and Thatcher, and the End of the Cold War*. Oxford University Press, 2020 (excerpts)
- 3) Svetlana Aleksievich, *Second-Hand Time* (excerpts)



#### Thursday 5/5: Politics & Culture in Putin's Russia Today

- 1) Elizabeth Wood, "Performing Memory: Vladimir Putin and the Celebration of World War II in Russia" *The Soviet and Post-Soviet Review* 38, 2 (2011): 172-200
- 2) Elizabeth Wood, "Crimea in my Heart"



### Week 14. Website launch; end of the semester celebration

#### Tuesday 5/10: Class presentations

- Class website launch
- Discussion of your projects
- Group reflection on key topics covered in the class
- End of the semester celebration

*Thank you for your work! Have a great summer!*

