

THE SOVIET EXPERIMENT: RUSSIA'S TUMULTUOUS 20TH CENTURY

Tuesdays, October 17 to December 7, 10:00 A.M. to 12 Noon
Fairfield Senior's Centre, 81 Lothian Avenue, Etobicoke

Coordinator and Presenter: Dr. Julia Zarankin

Course Overview: From the Bolshevik Revolution to Putin, Russia's history in the 20th and early 21st centuries has been nothing short of tumultuous. As the 20th century began, St. Petersburg was the capital of the Russian Empire. A quarter century later, Moscow became the capital of the Soviet Union, with St. Petersburg renamed Leningrad; by the end of the century, the Soviet Union had crumbled, Leningrad transformed back into St. Petersburg, and Moscow became capital of the Russian Federation, with a new, modern-day dictator at its helm. We will examine how this head-spinning historical trajectory plays out in Russia by focusing on the evolution of Russian culture – including art, music, literature, film, architecture – from Soviet to post-Soviet times.

This course will explore the early part of the 20th century, from the 1905 Revolution to Stalin's reign of Terror, to Khrushchev's thaw, Brezhnev's stagnation, and Gorbachev's perestroika, in order to help us make sense of Putin's current socio-political climate in present-day Russia.

- October 17. Twilight of Empire: Russian culture at the turn of the 20th century**
Cultural splendor in Russia comes hand in hand with imperial decay. Avant-garde movements.
- October 24. Revolutionary Energy**
Russia had not one, but three revolutions – the first in 1905 and two in 1917. The end of the Romanov dynasty and the rise of Lenin and the Bolsheviks. How Russian modern artists, poets, writers, theater directors embraced the spirit of the Revolution. St. Petersburg renamed Petrograd; capital of Russia moves to Moscow.
- October 31. Visions of Utopia and Homo Sovieticus**
The formation of the Soviet Union after the death of Lenin, the rise of Stalinism and the Socialist Realism doctrine for the arts. The emergence of a new cultural icon, and a new human being: the invincible Homo Sovieticus. Five year plans, forced industrialization, Stakhanovites, collectivization. St. Petersburg renamed Leningrad.
- November 7. "Life has Become More Joyous": Stalinism in Russia**
Terror, the gulag, the purges and the barbaric 1938 show trials of the former Bolsheviks. In the midst of Stalinist purges and the terror, musical comedies thrive in the Soviet Union. Propaganda and the creation of an entertainment industry.
- November 14. The Thaw De-Stalinization**
After the Great Patriotic War and the death of Stalin, Khrushchev's regime erases the stains of Stalinism, and what follows is brief period of reprieve. Conquering space: Russia's first cosmonauts. The perils of reform. Joseph Brodsky's trial and the arts.
- November 21. Stagnation and the Ruins of Utopia**
Living in the sham that is Brezhnev's Soviet Union. Olympics in 1980. Maintaining a façade amidst the disintegration and erosion of Soviet ideology.
- November 28. Glasnost, Perestroika, and the End of the USSR**
Moving toward a new order. Opening up toward the west, dismantling communism, Gorbachev's reforms, Yeltsin, and the 1993 coup. Leningrad becomes St. Petersburg again and the Soviet Union collapses.
- December 5. Beyond Communism**
Putin's Russia and his new cult of personality. Russian nationalism and rewriting of the country's Communist past. Corruption. Post-Soviet art and literature. Where is Russia headed now? What does it mean to live in Putin's Russia today? Reflections on the "Soviet Experiment."

Researcher/Committee contact and Chair: Loretta Fines