

*Module 1: 1968*

*Activity 1: Communist Life in Czechoslovakia*

**Compelling question: To what extent and in what ways are our lives impacted by the political and economic systems we live with?**

**Overview:** Teachers might use and adapt this activity as a stand alone exercise or in conjunction with other Module 1 activities. Also, we encourage you to explore Modules 2, 3, and 4 to design a comprehensive exploration of the 68, 77, 89 project.

As you design your students' learning experiences we suggest:

- Utilize the background resources for Module 1
- Previewing the selected primary and secondary resources
- Explore the instructional supports and selected vocabulary
- Adapt the lesson plans and performance assessments we provided for this activity

**Focus:** In this activity, students will explore life under communism and Stalinism in Czechoslovakia, 1948-1968.

## Primary and Secondary Resources for this Activity

### Oral History:

1. [Frank Safertal](#) - This 1 minute clip retells how Frank's father was arrested for his involvement in an underground resistance group.
2. [Jana Frankova](#) - This 2 minute clip explains how Jana's cousin was sent to a concentration camp during WWII, while her mother went into hiding

### Socialism Realised:

3. [Class Cleansing](#) - This document describes one of the ways in which individual farmers were persecuted via discrimination in the educational process.
4. [Back to the Past](#) - This 2 minute clip illustrates the specific generational experience of village residents for whom the prosperous agricultural production in cooperatives provided important social certainty and prestige.

### Play Excerpt:

5. [Havel's \*The Memorandum\*](#) - The following passage from Václav Havel's play *The Memorandum* is a soliloquy that describes a new language introduced by the government at every organization in the state, presumably Czechoslovakia. It is delivered by an instructor of the language, who claims that the state is implementing it to increase the efficacy of individual offices. This activity demonstrates the thick veil of bureaucracy in the Czechoslovak state.

### LONG OPTION BELOW

This was suggested: The following passage from Václav Havel's 1965 absurdist play *The Memorandum* is a soliloquy that describes the introduction of a new language at an organization that Havel doesn't tell us much about, but we can assume that he was parodying Czechoslovak society of the time. The soliloquy is delivered by an instructor of the language, who claims that the goal of the new language is to increase the efficiency of inter-office communication. Since language is central to how we understand ourselves, Havel was commenting here on what we might call the bureaucratization of human identity, and this certainly applied to life in communist Czechoslovakia."

### Novel Excerpt:

6. [Kundera's \*The Joke\* \(originally published in 1967, and this translation by Michael Henry Heim is from 1982\)](#) - Kundera's novel explores the consequences of a stupid joke that is taken seriously by socialist authorities who label Ludvik a counter-revolutionary. Read the excerpt from the novel in which Kundera describes Ludvik's love for Marketa, his complicated relationship to the socialist revolution, and the joke that unintentionally has dire consequences for Ludvik.

## Support Resources

[Graphic Organizers](#): Create free, custom made graphic organizers including T-Charts, Venn Diagrams, Frayer Models and much more.

[Historical Thinking Prompts](#): The chart helps demonstrate historical thinking and has sentence frames to support the development of these skills.

[Document Analysis Organizers](#): Use these worksheets — for photos, written documents, artifacts, posters, maps, cartoons, videos, and sound recordings — to teach your students the process of document analysis.

[Harvard's Project Zero Thinking Routines](#): A routine can be thought of as any procedure, process, or pattern of action that is used facilitate the accomplishment of specific goals or tasks. Explore this collection and use them with the activities.

[Socratic Seminar/Discussion Stems](#): A handout of prompts and scaffolds for students.

[Rubric Maker](#): Easy to use, quick and free rubric tool maker.

Key Vocabulary for this activity:

- 1. The State:** A political organization with a centralized government that maintains a monopoly of the legitimate use of force within a certain territory.
- 2. Concentration Camp:** A place for assembling and confining political prisoners and enemies of the state.
- 3. Collectivization:** To organize (something) on the basis of ownership by the people or the state, abolishing private ownership or involvement.
- 4. Communism:** a political theory derived from Karl Marx, advocating class war and leading to a society in which all property is publicly owned and each person works and is paid according to their abilities and needs.
- 5. Stalinism:** The form of Marxism associated with Soviet leader Joseph Stalin. Stalinism emphasizes the repression of all dissent, often by brutal means; a rigid adherence to government management of economic life; and the domination of all communist movements worldwide by the Soviet Union.

## Suggested strategies and assessments for this activity.

**Compelling question:** To what extent and in what ways are our lives impacted by the political and economic systems we live with?

### **Instructional Strategy A:** Socratic Seminar

In a Socratic Seminar activity, students help one another understand the ideas, issues, and values reflected in a text through a group discussion format. Students are responsible for facilitating their group discussion around the ideas in the text; they shouldn't use the discussion to assert their opinions or prove an argument. Through this type of discussion, students practice how to listen to one another, make meaning, and find common ground while participating in a conversation. ([Full details can be found here](#)).

**Class 1: Preparation** - Students read/watch the 5 resources provided in this activity. Utilize the questions and commentary provided with the resources as well as the support items provided. As students engage with the resources, remind them that they should be looking for evidence to answer the compelling question.

**Class 2: Socratic Seminar** - The teacher facilitates the socratic seminar described above. We suggest the teacher or students utilize a twitter # (that you design for the class) to tweet highlights of the discussion. This allows students to review the exchange in the future. ([How to use a twitter # hashtag](#))

Be sure to remind them that they should be looking for evidence to answer the compelling question.

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### **Instructional Strategy B:** Gallery Walk

During a gallery walk, students explore multiple texts or images that are placed around the room. You can use this strategy when you want to have students examine multiple historical documents. ([Full details can be found here](#)).

**Class 1: Gallery Walk** - Arrange your class so that the documents are spread throughout the room in 5 stations. Have the

video clips set-up on devices or provide the link for students to use their own. At each document have a large post it or index cards so that students write their main take away from the source concerning the compelling question.

Arrange the class into groups so that they are clustered around each resource evenly. After 10-12 minutes, have students rotate to the next resource and repeat until all resources have been engaged with. An option is to have you or another teacher/librarian be at a 6th station to provide background knowledge about the time period

**Class 2: Performance Assessment** - This class invites students to organize their information from gallery walk and present it in the assessment format you use (suggestions below). By giving them class time to work on the assessment, you can troubleshoot, check in with students, and they can collaborate.

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**Suggested Performance Assessments:** Now that students have engaged with the documents and have shared their insights with their classmates, it is time for them to collect their thoughts and answer the compelling question. It is important to connect the historical content to the present. In this sense, the historical content informs students about the past and apply that knowledge to the present.

Your decision on what students should produce will relate to the skills you think they should develop to succeed in the future. Suggestions include:

- 1) Create an infographic that demonstrates their conclusion about the compelling question utilizing the sources in this activity and their understanding of the present.
- 2) Write an essay that answers the compelling question.

Create a survival guide for people today to be aware of state power. The guide should draw from the resources in this activity.