Ethnic Diversity in Russia

Background

Russia is the largest country in the world and also one of the most ethnically diverse. A census conducted in 2002 identified more than 180 different nationalities, ethnic groups, or sub-ethnic groups within the territory of the Russian Federation, although Russians are by far the predominant nationality.

Until 1991, Russia was part of the Soviet Union. In that year, the Soviet Union broke apart into Russia and 14 other independent countries. Many experts at that time predicted that Russia would soon split into many smaller, ethnically based republics. However, despite ethnic conflicts in some areas, Russia has managed to hold onto its ethnically diverse territory. It has achieved this, in part, by giving greater autonomy to its ethnically based areas than to other regions in the country.

For Investigation

Conduct research to learn more about Russia’s ethnic groups and how Russia is divided into ethnic republics and other regions. As you read, look for answers to the following questions:

1. Identifying What are the ten largest ethnic groups in Russia, based on the 2002 census? (Note: The 2002 census figures can be found at www.perepis2002.ru. Although much of this Web site is in Russian, the statistics in English can be found by clicking on the English words “2002 All-Russia Population Census” and then on “Basic Result.”)

2. Classifying Russians, Ukrainians, and Belorussians make up a larger ethnic and linguistic group called Slavs. What are the three other large ethnic and linguistic groups to which most of the people in Russia belong?
Enrichment Activity
continued

3. Locating In what parts of Russia do most of the members of each of these three large groups live (the groups you identified in question 2)?

4. Categorizing Which ethnically based areas in Russia have the status of republics?

5. Explaining In the ethnic republics, do the majority of the people belong to the ethnic group that gives its name to that republic? Explain.

6. Identifying What special rights do the ethnic republics have?

7. Defining What are "autonomous okrugs"?

8. Differentiating Besides ethnic republics and autonomous okrugs, what are the other regional divisions of Russia?
Activity

Create a poster-size map that shows the location and ethnic composition of Russia's ethnic republics. The map should show the seven federal districts of Russia and the location of each of the ethnic republics within those districts. Illustrate the ethnic composition of the republics by linking pie charts to each of the republics on the map or by any other method that is clear and concise. Indicate the percentage of the population in each republic that is Russian, as well as the percentage that belongs to the other main ethnic groups in each republic. The ethnic composition should be based on figures from the 2002 census.

Assessment Checklist

Assess your map using the checklist below:

- Easy to read and interpret
- Visually pleasing and interesting
- Scale is accurate and appropriate
- Federal districts and ethnic republics are outlined and identified effectively
- Ethnic compositions of the republics are illustrated in a clear and concise way
- Labels are complete and correctly spelled

GOING FURTHER

- Many of the ethnic republics in Russia have been able to gain special privileges from the federal government because they are rich in natural resources. Conduct research to learn about the natural resources in each republic. Add symbols and a key to your map to show what resources are abundant in each republic.
- Linguistic diversity often accompanies ethnic diversity. Research the languages spoken in Russia. How does the number of languages compare to the number of ethnic groups in Russia? What is the official government position concerning the study and use of languages in Russia? Write a brief report summarizing what you learn.
- Work with a partner to learn more about the ethnic conflicts in Russia since the breakup of the Soviet Union. Should the ethnic republics in Russia be allowed to secede? Present each side of this issue in a debate.