Russian Climate, Russian Culture

The climate of a place usually has a great impact on the people living there and the culture they develop. This has been especially true in Russia. Most of the country experiences a long, brutally cold winter. Russia receives little of the sun’s heat even during the summer months. The Russian people have been forced to adapt to this climate. Some scholars have even argued that the character or personality of the Russian people has been formed largely by the long winters they endure. For example, historian George Vernadsky has said, “All civilizations are to some extent the product of geographical factors, but history provides no clearer example of the profound influence of geography upon a culture than in the historical development of the Russian people.”

In his book From Nyet to Da: Understanding the Russians, author Yale Richmond talks about the Russian climate. He says that although it has helped the people become strong, patient, and able to endure hardships, it has also brought out caution and pessimism. Consider the relationship between climate and the foods Russians eat. Traditional Russian cuisine includes many starchy and fatty foods such as bread, cereal, potatoes, and meaty soups and stews. Fats and starches produce body heat and help keep Russians warm during the cold winters. Because rye can be grown during the short growing season in many parts of the country, it is widely cultivated, so rye bread is a staple food. Big game and fish from the plentiful forests and rivers are also popular.

The climate in Russia has intensely affected almost every aspect of life for the Russian people—not only their foods, but where they can live, when and where they can travel, and even the amount of resources available to keep warm. Many smaller villages are isolated during the long winter months. These factors contribute to a uniquely “Russian” personality and sense of nature, different from any other culture in the world.

Directions: On a separate sheet of paper, answer the following questions.

1. Analyzing Why do you think the harsh Russian climate might cause many Russian people to feel generally cautious about their lives?

2. Evaluating Do you believe climate really has as much impact on the character of people as Vernadsky and Richmond claim in the information above? Why or why not?
Teaching Strategies for Different Learning Styles

The following activities are ways the basic lesson can be modified to accommodate students' different learning styles.

**English Learners (EL)**

Invite students to tell about the climate in their native country. Also have students answer the following questions about the passage: (1) What is winter like in most of Russia? *long and brutally cold* (2) How are the Russian people described in the passage? *strong, patient, and able to endure hardships but also cautious and pessimistic* (3) What are some traditional foods Russian people eat? *breads, cereals, potatoes, and soups/stews*

**Verbal/Linguistic; Intrapersonal**

Have students imagine they are living through a winter in Moscow. Ask them to write a short poem about what this is like. Then have them imagine that winter is ending and warmer weather is about to begin. Tell them to write a second poem describing their feelings about the coming of summer.

**Logical/Mathematical**

Ask students to prepare a table showing average high/low temperatures for January and July for ten large cities in Russia. Also have them include the average daily amount of sunshine each city receives during these months.

**Spatial/Visual**

Find some descriptions of the Russian countryside during winter and instruct students to locate them. Then ask students to draw landscapes based on the descriptions.

**Auditory/Musical**

Obtain some examples of traditional Russian folk music to play for the class. As you play the selections, ask the class to visualize a region three times larger than the United States, with long winters and isolated villages. During many winters, families lived together almost continually for months—sometimes in a single room. After hearing several selections, ask the class to discuss the relationship between the living conditions the people experienced and the music they produced.

**Advanced Learners**

Advise students that alcoholism is a serious and widespread problem in Russia. The country’s harsh climate is sometimes blamed for this. Instruct students to research the issue in an attempt to sort out the myths and the realities of this problem. A two- to three-page paper should be the result.

**Kinesthetic; Interpersonal**

Assign groups of students to research a traditional Russian recipe and work together to create a class presentation focusing on (1) the relationship of climate on the dish, (2) why the dish is important, and (3) a demonstration/explanation of how to prepare it. If practical, allow the class to sample the results.

**Verbal/Linguistic**

Invite students to speculate on the ways climate has impacted other cultures, including Mediterranean, Scandinavian, equatorial regions, island nations such as Japan, and others. Students can brainstorm and then summarize their speculations in a brief paper.

**Below Grade Level**

Have students outline the information presented on the previous page. Each paragraph can be a main (I, II, III) entry. Students should determine their own subentries (A, B, C) based on the content of the paragraphs.