



Early Russia



Catherine the Great

Reader



Ivan the Terrible



Catherine the Great's crown

St. Basil's



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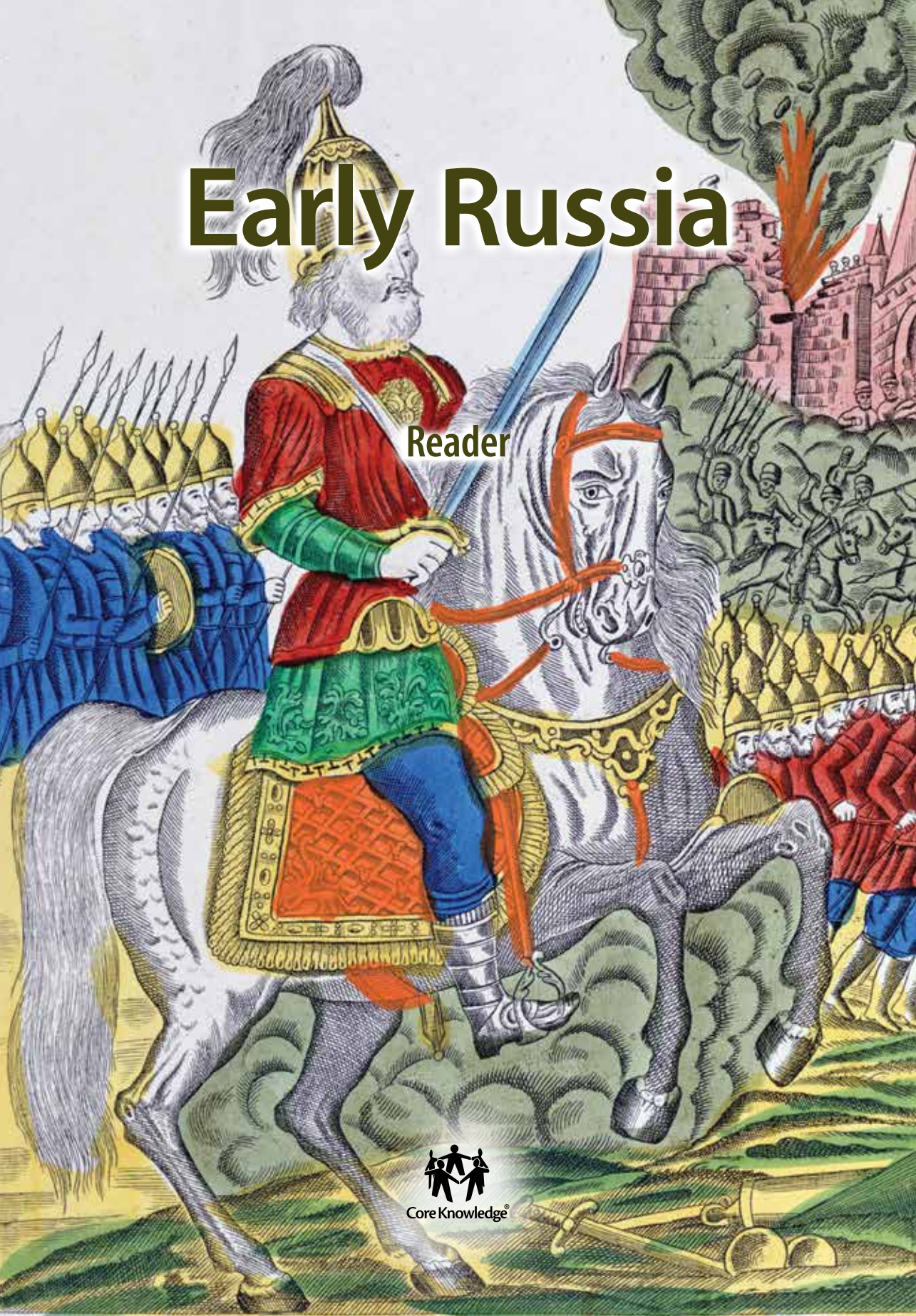
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Early Russia

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Early Russia **Reader**

Core Knowledge Sequence History and Geography 5

Chapter 1

Russia's Beginnings

Meet the Giant Imagine a giant standing with his left foot in one world and his right in another. The giant takes a little from one world and a little from the other world, and tries to get along with both.

The Big Question

How did Russia become a Christian country?

That giant is the huge country of Russia, standing with one foot in Europe and the other in Asia. Russia is a big country. In fact, it is the biggest in the world. Russia is nearly twice the size of the United States.

Vocabulary

time zone, n. one of twenty-four zones around Earth within which everyone observes the same time

Russia is so wide that it stretches from Eastern Europe across northern Asia to the Pacific Ocean. It spans not only two continents, but also eleven **time zones**. That means someone living in western Russia is waking up in the morning just as someone living in eastern Russia is eating dinner in the evening.



Russia is a giant country that crosses two continents.

As you learn about early Russia, you will read stories of high adventure, wars, weak rulers, and strong rulers. You will read about the growth of a mighty country from its humble beginnings in the early 800s to a great **empire** in the 1700s.

The Roots of Russia

Russia was not always as large as it is today. What we now call Russia first began as a series of small villages along the rivers in Eastern Europe. In the early years of the country's history, various groups of people spread throughout this area. Sometimes these people came to trade. Sometimes they came to conquer. But always they brought new ideas and customs. Among the earliest groups of people in Russia were the **Slavs**.

The Slavs probably came from the area of present-day eastern Poland, western Ukraine, and the Czech (/chek/) Republic. For the most part, these people were farmers. Some became merchants who traded with people in other countries. The Slavs spread throughout central Europe and Russia.

By 800 CE, the Slavs had built a number of towns along the rivers in southern Russia, including along the Dnieper (/dne*pur/) River. The Slavs used the rivers as trading routes. They developed contacts with many different groups of people and sometimes went to war against them.

Vocabulary

empire, n. a group of countries or territories under the control of one government or one ruler

Slav, n. a person who belongs to an ethnic group of people that settled in Eastern Europe many years ago; the Slavs include Russians, Ukrainians, Poles, and Czechs.

The Vikings

As the Slavs were settling into the lands now called Russia, they collided with the Vikings, who were moving south from Scandinavia. Scandinavia includes the lands we now call Sweden, Norway, and Denmark. The Vikings are also called the Norse or the Norsemen. They were great warriors and traders.

As they pressed south, the Vikings sought trading partners. They wanted to trade their products from Scandinavia for products they did not make at home. Beginning in the 800s, the Vikings followed several of the long river routes into central Europe. These rivers carried Viking war and trading ships through the lands of the Slavs. The Slavs called the Vikings “Rus (/roos/),” a term for Swedish Vikings.

The Vikings liked the lands they explored on their voyages throughout central Europe and along the Dnieper River. The Dnieper River flows mainly through what is now Ukraine. Some Vikings decided to make their homes among the Slavs already living there. Many Slavs lived in what became the city of Kiev (/kee*ev/). You will read more about Kiev shortly.

The Vikings were more powerful than the Slavs. They forced the Slavs to trade with them, whether



The Vikings traded with the Slavs and eventually settled with them along the Dnieper River.

the Slavs wanted to or not. The Vikings often threatened the Slavs if the Slavs did not give the Vikings goods or money every year. This payment made by the Slavs to the more powerful Vikings was called **tribute**.

Over the years, however, the Slavic and Viking peoples blended together. They began to adopt each other's customs. They became the first people we call Russians today.

The Coming of Christianity

Another powerful influence on early Russia was Christianity. At the time of the Viking and Slav settlements, most Russians worshipped a variety of gods. As the Russians came into contact with other countries, they learned about religions such as Islam, Judaism, and Christianity. These religions teach that there is only one God.

Christianity worked its way into Russia from the Byzantine (/bihz*un*teen/) Empire, which was located to Russia's south. In the 800s, the Byzantine Empire was one of the most powerful empires in the world. Its capital was Constantinople. Greek **missionaries** from Constantinople brought Christianity to the Russian city of Kiev in about 900. The Byzantine form of Christianity was known as Orthodox Christianity.

These missionaries taught some of the early Russians about Christianity. One of these Russians was a princess named Olga, who lived in Kiev. Princess Olga was married to Igor I, the ruler of Kiev. After Igor was killed in 945, Olga took control of the

Vocabulary

tribute, n. payment of money or goods by a people or their ruler to another country or ruler in exchange for protection

missionary, n. a person on a journey for the purpose of spreading a particular religious belief



Constantinople was the capital of the very powerful Byzantine Empire.

government because her son was too young to rule. She was probably the first woman ruler in Russia.

A few years after she came to power, Olga traveled to Constantinople. While there, she met the Byzantine emperor. Supposedly, he was so struck by her beauty and wisdom that he asked her to marry him. She turned down the emperor's offer of marriage but asked him to teach her more about his religion.



Princess Olga of Kiev traveled to Constantinople, where she spent time learning about Orthodox Christianity.

The emperor wanted to please Princess Olga. He asked the patriarch (/pay*tree*ahrk/), or leader, of the Orthodox Church in Constantinople to teach her about Christianity. According to legend, Olga learned about Christianity “like a sponge absorbing water.”

Olga then returned to Kiev and encouraged her people to practice Orthodox Christianity. Most Russians, however, stayed true to their old gods—the gods of nature, the winds, and the fields. Even Olga’s son resisted her attempts to Christianize Kiev.

Years passed, and wooden statues of many different gods still stood in Kiev. Prince Vladimir, grandson of Princess Olga, ruled the city. Vladimir wanted Kiev to be a great power. He was interested in the religions of other great powers. He listened to traveling merchants who came to Kiev and spoke of religious beliefs in the Byzantine Empire and in Western Europe. Instead of many gods, the merchants spoke of a single, almighty God.

Prince Vladimir asked his **nobles** what they thought about other religions. They told him he should send “ten good and true men” to visit other lands to learn about other religions. In their visits, those men could observe how people in other places worshipped. Prince Vladimir did as the nobles suggested. When the ten advisers returned, they reported that they were most impressed with Orthodox Christianity, and in particular with the magnificent Byzantine churches. The splendor and beauty of the churches took their breath away.

Vocabulary

noble, n. a person who belongs to the highest social class of a country

In 988, Vladimir became an Orthodox Christian, like his grandmother Princess Olga. He had the statues and pictures of the old gods and goddesses destroyed. Vladimir ordered all the people in Kiev to become Christians.



After converting to Orthodox Christianity, Vladimir forced all the people of Kiev to convert, too. It is said that Vladimir ordered that statues of Russian idols be thrown into the Dnieper River.

Chapter 2

The Mongols Invade

The Mongols “Give us trade,” demanded the Vikings from the north. “Try our religion,” urged missionaries from the south. Now a new voice was heard throughout Russia. “Pay us taxes,” ordered the Mongols of the east.

The Big Question

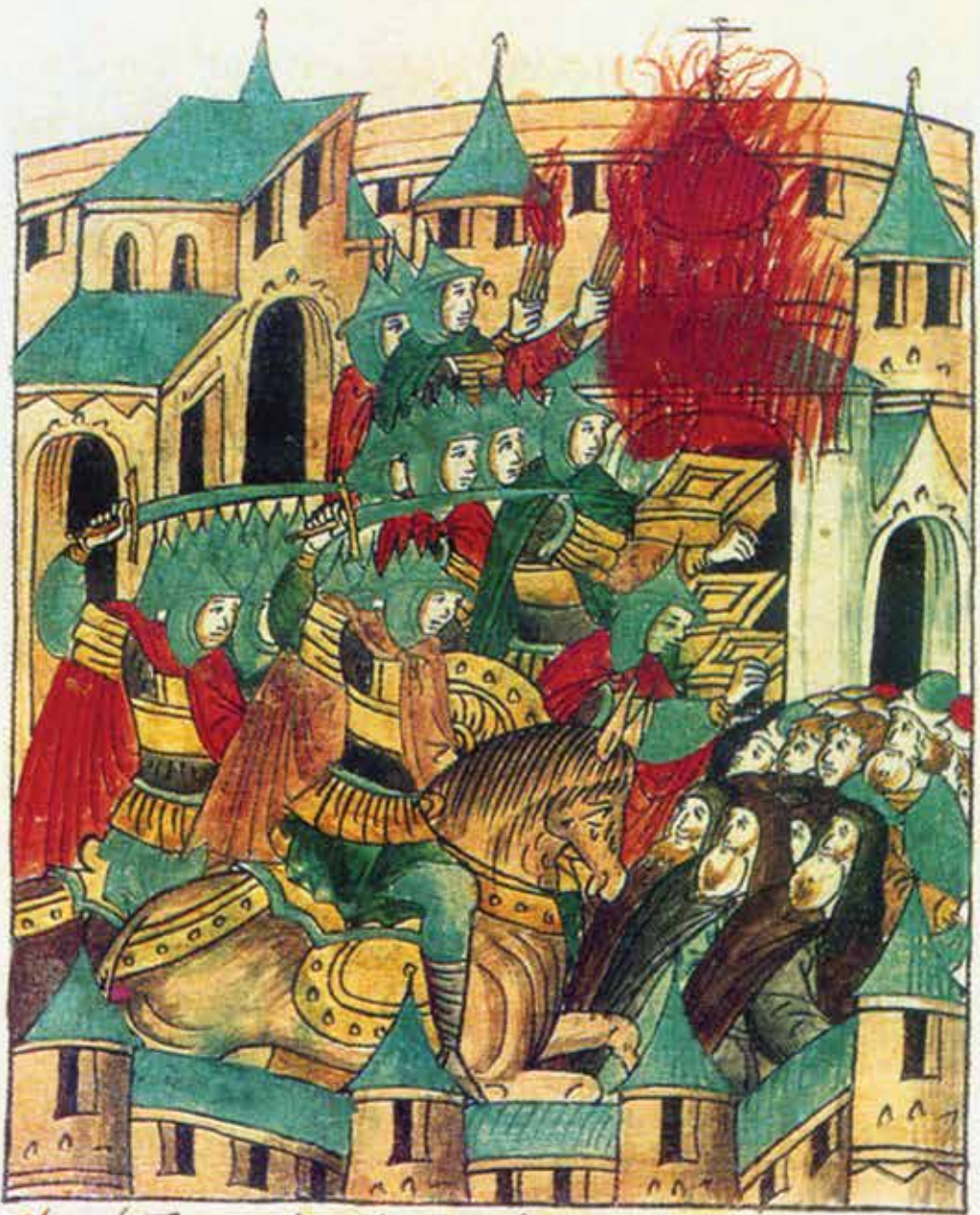
What are some key features of Russian geography, and how have these features influenced the nation’s history?

Because of its geography, Russia is a relatively easy country to invade from both east and west. It has suffered major invasions throughout its history. In the early 1200s, Russia endured one of the greatest and most important invasions in its history. The Mongols of central Asia invaded from the east.

Vocabulary

steppe, n. grassland plain

The invasion route into Russia from the east is especially easy. A grassland known as the **steppe** (/step/) stretches some five thousand miles from central Asia to Eastern Europe.



И шедъше оудъша градъ оудаль . и црѣ
икоуветююбцоу разграбнша . а про
чедсеиотне
мъпо
жъ

The Mongols invaded Russia from the east. This image shows mounted archers attacking a Russian town.

шд

Most of the steppe is low and level grassland. The steppe has cold winters and hot, dry summers, much like the Great Plains of North America. Tribes of hard-riding warriors from central Asia have used the steppe as an invasion route into Russia and Eastern Europe for thousands of years.

Russia does have one important mountain range, the Urals. But the Urals are not very high mountains. Over the centuries, erosion has worn them down to mostly hills.

Mapmakers often use the Urals as a dividing line between Europe and Asia. Many geographers consider Russia west of the Urals as part of Europe and Russia east of the Urals as part of Asia. To be sure, the Urals make a better boundary than barrier. The Urals have never been high enough to block the movement of traders and warriors. In the 1200s, the Urals did little to stop the fierce Mongol invaders who galloped in from the Asian steppe.

Ferocious Conquerors

During the 1200s, the Mongols were one of the most powerful peoples in the world. They originated in central Asia and spread out in all directions. They conquered China and most of western Asia, as well as Russia. They created an enormous empire.

The Mongols were bloodthirsty warriors. They swept across Russia on horses specially trained to withstand the snow and cold. The Mongols were vicious in war. They would thunder into an area and destroy anyone or anything in their way. They left

behind them a trail of dead bodies, burned villages, and ruined farmlands. People were terrified of the Mongols. A warning of their coming sent people running for a hiding place, but there were few places to hide.

The Mongol attack on Russia was especially destructive and deadly. In 1238, the Mongols charged into Russia and burned fourteen cities in a single month. Two years later, they attacked and burned Kiev. The Mongols killed most of the people and destroyed houses and buildings. Kiev was the most important city in Russia at that time. It would never again be as powerful as it was before the Mongol invasion.

The Mongol armies did not remain long in Russia. After they left, a group of people called the Tatars ruled Russia. The Tatars were a blend of Mongol and **Turkic** tribes. Turkic tribes had fought with the Mongols and remained in western Russia after the Mongols withdrew.

Vocabulary
.....
Turkic, adj. related to one of the languages spoken in western and central Asia

The Beginnings of Moscow

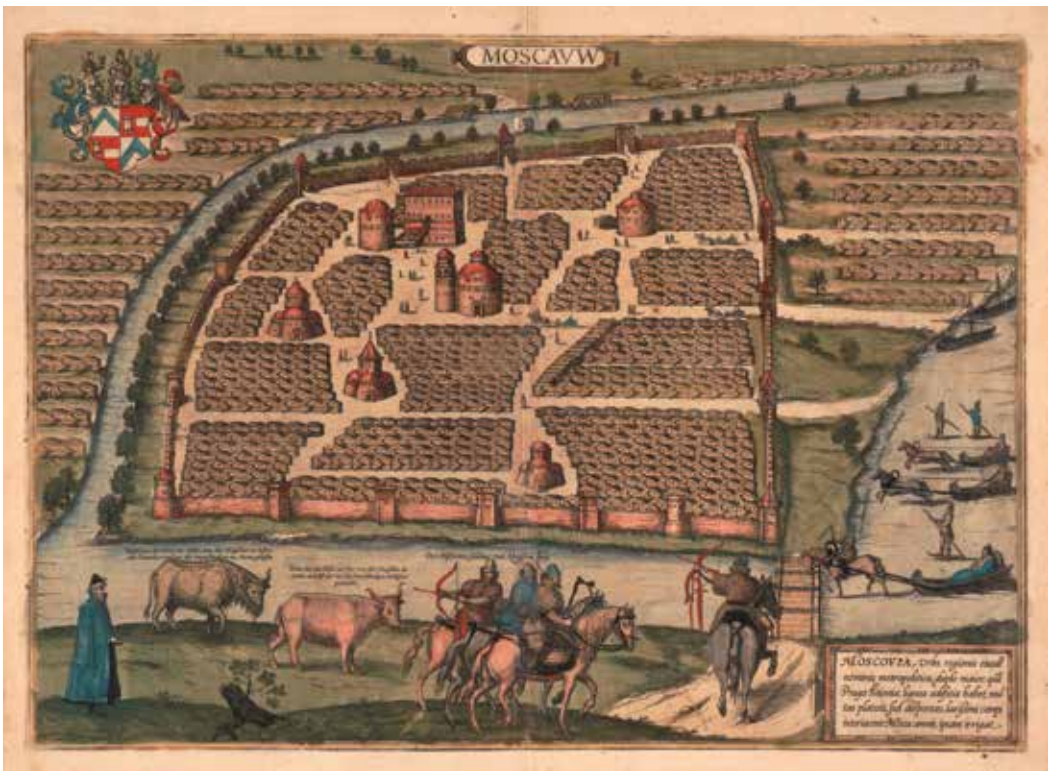
Kiev had been losing power even before the Mongol invasions. Civil wars and raids by various nomadic tribes weakened the once powerful city, and fewer merchants came to trade there. As a result, the Russians in and around Kiev began to move to the northeast, where they built new farms, churches, and towns.

Moscow, one of these new settlements, rose from a small town into a key city. Located on **strategic** land and water trade routes, Moscow grew to become the most important center of a Russian state called Muscovy.

Vocabulary

strategic, adj. useful or important to achieving a goal or completing a plan, especially in a war

One ongoing problem prevented most of the Russian princes from growing even more powerful than they were. This was the problem of land ownership. When a Russian prince died, his sons split up his lands among themselves. Therefore, land holdings became smaller and smaller, and princes became weaker and weaker.



This map shows the Oka River, an important link that would help the development of Moscow as a major city.

In the city-state of Muscovy, land was not equally divided among the sons when a prince died. The oldest son received the largest share of land. Thus, Muscovy remained large while other city-states got smaller.

Muscovy had some very strong rulers during the early part of the 1300s. Among them was **Grand Prince** Ivan I. He remained on good terms with the Tatars mostly because he was very good at making sure people paid taxes. He was known for his tight control over financial matters and made himself very wealthy. He was so good at his job that he was nicknamed "Ivan the Moneybag."

Vocabulary

"Grand Prince," (phrase), mainly Russian, the leader of all the people and head of the government of a city-state or region

Chapter 3

Ivan the Great

A Strong Ruler The next strong ruler of Muscovy was Ivan III, who became known as Ivan the Great. Ivan became Grand Prince of Muscovy in 1462 and ruled until 1502. He came into power at a time when Russian princes were still competing among themselves and struggling against the Tatars.

The Big Question

How did Ivan III gain more control over those he ruled?

No prince wanted power more dearly than Ivan III. He dedicated his entire life to making Muscovy the strongest state in Russia and to ridding his country of Tatar rule. No wonder he became known as Ivan the Great.

Ivan grew up in a period of almost continuous warfare. Often, this warfare took place among members of the same family. When Ivan was only a boy, some of his relatives rebelled against his father. They kidnapped his father and blinded him. Then they held him prisoner and tried to govern Muscovy themselves.



The Russians fought against the Tatars for many years.

With the help of some friends, young Ivan escaped capture, but not for long. One of the men who helped him escape later told the rebels where the young prince was hiding. The rebels found Ivan and carried him off. Ivan became a prisoner, like his father.

The struggle for control of Muscovy continued. Soon the supporters of Ivan and his father triumphed over the rebels. Ivan and his father were released, and they took power again.

At a young age, Ivan married the daughter of the then "Grand Prince." It was an arranged marriage, made for political reasons, not for love. Before he was twenty-two, Ivan led an army against his father's enemies and finally defeated them. He also fought against the Tatars. By the time his father died, Ivan had accomplished much. He was ready to take on the duties of Grand Prince of Muscovy. Ivan's father died in 1462, when Ivan was twenty-two years old. After that, Ivan ruled alone until 1502.

Winning Back Russia

As Ivan III gained power in Muscovy, there was conflict among the Tatar leaders in Russia. In 1480, a group of Russian princes led by Ivan III and his son forced the Tatars to retreat. Russia was at last free from foreign rule. Ivan took power into his own hands. Under his reign, and that of his son, the territories of Muscovy tripled in size. The Muscovy territories began to form a larger and more unified nation.



Ivan III copied the Tatar and Byzantine traditions of ruling with absolute power, a power no one could challenge.

As Ivan gained lands, he clamped down more tightly on all those he ruled. It became his mission to limit the power of the **boyars**, or landowning nobles. Ivan issued new, stricter laws. He punished anyone suspected of plotting against him with prison or death.

Vocabulary

boyar, n. a rich landowner in medieval Russia

“Like God, the Highest”

Ivan III copied the Tatar and Byzantine traditions of ruling with absolute power—a power no one could challenge. Like the Byzantine emperors of the past, Ivan used the double-headed eagle as his symbol. In addition to his title of grand prince, he called



Ivan III used a double-headed eagle as his symbol.

himself **czar** or tsar, from the Russian word for “Caesar.”

When Ivan became Grand Prince of Muscovy, great intellectual, artistic, and scientific progress was taking place in Western Europe. Historians call this period of history “the Renaissance.” These great changes began in Italy and soon spread throughout Western Europe. But Russia was isolated, and the Renaissance had only a small impact on the country. Russia was mostly out of touch with the progress in the arts and sciences taking place in Western Europe.

Vocabulary

czar, n. from the word “Caesar,” the title of an emperor of Russia before 1917; sometimes spelled tsar

There was one high-ranking person in Moscow who had firsthand knowledge of the changes taking place in Western Europe. That person was Ivan's second wife, Sophia. She had been raised in Italy and given a Renaissance education. But Sophia did not seem to have much influence on Ivan. She did not change him very much.

"The czar," Ivan was fond of saying, "is in nature like all men, but in authority, he is like God, the highest."

Ivan dressed as if he were, indeed, a god. He often appeared in robes woven from gold threads and lined with expensive fur. What a contrast this was to the tattered clothing and leaky boots of Russian workers and **serfs**.

The serfs were the millions of poor people in Russia who suffered under the harsh rule of the Russian princes and boyars. Most serfs were poor farmers. They farmed the land, did the hard work, and lived in miserable conditions.

When one landowner sold his farm to another, the serfs went with the sale. Some landowners also sold serfs individually, just like slaves. Serfs were not allowed to move from place to place without the consent of the landowner. Over the years, life for the serfs did not improve. In some ways the system of **serfdom** meant that things got worse for many people working on the land.

Vocabulary

serf, n. a peasant who is not free; a person living on a feudal estate who was required to work for the lord of the manor

serfdom, n. an agricultural system in which people (serfs) were not free, but required to stay and work for a landowner as the owner demanded

Building His Reputation

Ivan III made up imaginary ancestors who just happened to be Roman emperors. He created legends about himself that showed him as glorious and strong.

To complete his image of greatness, Ivan started huge new building projects in the city of Moscow. Most large Russian cities had **kremlins**. The kremlins were built as walled fortresses to protect Russian cities. The rulers of a city usually lived inside the kremlins.

Vocabulary

kremlin, n. a central fortress built to protect a Russian city; today the term generally refers to the fortress in central Moscow



While many Russian cities had kremlins, the Moscow Kremlin became the most important one. It was where the czar lived.

The czar lived in the Moscow Kremlin, which had been badly damaged by fire and needed repair. Ivan the Great changed that. He set about building many fine and grand structures inside the walls of the Moscow Kremlin. He built several very elaborate cathedrals, government buildings, and palaces. The newly rebuilt Moscow Kremlin stood as a grand symbol of Ivan's growing might and power.

Chapter 4

Ivan the Terrible

Fearful Times A storm shook Moscow on August 25, 1530, and as the thunder rolled, Ivan IV was born. According to legend, a **priest** had warned Ivan's father that he would have a wicked son. "Your states will be prey to terror and tears; rivers of blood will flow," the priest is supposed to have said. If he did say that, he was right.

The Big Question

Why was Ivan IV called "Ivan the Terrible"?

Vocabulary

priest, n. a person who has the training or authority to carry out certain religious ceremonies or rituals

The boy who was to become Ivan IV was a troubled, angry child. Unfortunately, for the Russian people, he became their czar. This grandson of Ivan the Great launched a reign of terror that earned him the reputation of being terrifying and eventually the title Ivan the Terrible.

When Ivan was three, his father died. Ivan became the Grand Prince of Muscovy, but he was only a child. The real ruling power rested in the hands of his mother, Yelena Glinskaya (/glin*sky*uh/), and the boyars who supported her.



Originally Ivan IV was known as Ivan the Terrifying, but over time he became known as Ivan the Terrible.

Yelena ruled for the next five years, receiving advice from relatives and boyars. Suddenly, one day she doubled over with pain and, within hours, she was dead. Some people believed that Ivan's mother had been poisoned.

Only eight years old, Ivan was alone in the world and still far too young to rule Muscovy. A power struggle broke out among the boyars for control over young Ivan.

As a young boy, Ivan probably felt afraid and uncertain. He spent his childhood being told he was a ruler, but for the most part, he was ignored. As the Grand Prince of Muscovy, Ivan lived in Moscow's Kremlin, where life was filled with violence as the nobles fought for power. He saw people unfairly arrested, exiled, and even killed, and he grew to distrust everyone around him.

A Czar Is Crowned

Ivan wanted to be crowned Czar of Russia. His grandfather, Ivan III, had claimed the title, but no Russian monarch had ever been crowned czar.

"Grand Prince" or "Czar"? It made little difference to the boyars. They agreed to his wishes. In Moscow on January 16, 1547, when he was not yet seventeen years old, Ivan was crowned Holy Czar, Monarch of All the Russians.

Czar Ivan IV was now ready to marry. According to tradition, boyars introduced their daughters to him. When Ivan saw Anastasia (/an*uh*sta*see*ya/) Romanovna (/roh*ma*nov*nah/), he offered her a jeweled handkerchief. He had found the woman he wanted to marry.



Ivan IV was crowned as czar when he was still a teenager.

Anastasia became Russia's **czarina**. She had a kind and gentle heart, and she cared deeply about the Russian people. Over the years, many lives were saved thanks to the czarina's gentle and calming influence on Ivan.

Vocabulary

czarina, n. the wife of a czar

The Empire Builder

Ivan IV worked to expand his country's holdings to the east, including parts of Siberia, the largest part of present-day Russia.



Ivan IV built St. Basil's Cathedral in Moscow. The architect who worked on the cathedral with Ivan IV was from Italy.

In addition to parts of Siberia, Ivan added more lands to his territory by waging war with his neighbors to the south and west.

To celebrate one of his victories, Ivan built the beautiful onion-domed cathedral of St. Basil's in Moscow.

One legend says that Ivan asked the **architect** if he could ever build another church as fine as St. Basil's. When the architect said that he could, Ivan supposedly had the poor architect blinded to make sure he would not.

Vocabulary

architect, n. a person who designs buildings

persecute, n. to treat people cruelly and unfairly

Spreading Terror

Ivan distrusted the boyars. He became more and more suspicious of them and began to suspect that enemies surrounded him. He began to **persecute** some of the boyars.

After giving birth to her sixth child, Czarina Anastasia became ill and died. The grieving czar fell into a sorrow that was close to madness. Once, in a fit of rage, he even struck and killed his favorite son.

As Ivan's temper grew worse, he became more vicious. He ordered arrests and executions. After a long, nasty reign, Ivan IV died in 1584 and left behind an empire of suffering, rebellious people. The years of disorder after Ivan's death became known as the Time of Troubles.

Chapter 5

Peter the Great

A New Dynasty In 1613 Mikhail (/mih*kuh*eel/) Romanov (/roh*muh*nawf/)—a relative of Czarina Anastasia Romanovna—was crowned czar. A young man from a noble family, Mikhail restored order in Russia. His family, the Romanovs, would rule for more than three hundred years.

The Big Question

What did Peter the Great hope to do for Russia?

Czar Mikhail was eventually succeeded by two of his grandsons: Ivan and Peter, who were half brothers. Ivan was older and not as able as his younger brother Peter. Peter, who was born in 1672, had a quick mind and was very intelligent. The boys were crowned together and sat upon a special double throne. However, because they were still quite young, their older sister Sophia stepped in as ruler.

Young Peter

As a teenager, Peter explored Moscow's German Quarter, the section of town where Moscow's Germans and other foreigners lived. Its residents wore Western European clothes and ate Western European food. Their Western ways fascinated Peter.



In 1613, Mikhail Romanov was crowned czar of Russia.

By age twenty-three, Peter was a man who towered over his **subjects** in every way. In his boots, he stood nearly seven feet tall, which would be considered very tall even by today's standards. Back in 1695, he was such an unusually tall man that people sometimes called him "Peter the Giant."

Vocabulary

subject, n. a person governed by the laws of a czar, king, or queen

reign, v. to rule over a country as its czar, king, or queen

Eventually, his sister was overthrown, his half brother died, and Peter **reigned** alone. Czar Peter set out to make Russia a modern European nation.

The Traveling Czar

In 1697, Peter began a lengthy tour of Western Europe. He planned to travel in disguise, but it was difficult to disguise a nearly seven-foot czar. Peter brought home chests filled with weapons and scientific tools. He even brought home a stuffed crocodile. He also returned to Russia with a group of European engineers, soldiers, and scientists who would teach their skills to his people. Two barbers were among Peter's group of Europeans. The czar had decided that his noblemen should get rid of their old-fashioned, long Russian-style beards.

"Shave off your beards . . . or else," Peter ordered, and his order became the law of the land. Any upper-class Russian who wanted to wear a beard had to pay a beard tax. Then, and only then, would he be allowed to keep his whiskers.

Peter used his power as czar to put his new ideas into action. He replaced the old Russian calendar with the newer European

calendar—the Gregorian Calendar—which numbered the years from the birth of Jesus. He had engineers design canals to link Russian rivers, and he had instructors teach Russians mathematics and navigation.

Peter did modernize Russia, but not all aspects of Russian life moved forward. Even under Peter's rule, the serfs

continued to live in terrible poverty. As a result, the gap between Russia and Western Europe widened. Serfdom had died out in Western Europe. In Russia, it spread. As Russia expanded, more and more serfs spent their entire lives working the land and paying taxes to landowners. Others labored long hours building roads and canals. Unlike some of the poor farmers in Western Europe who were enjoying new freedoms, Russia's serfs remained controlled by landowners and had no freedoms.

Seeking a Warm-Water Port

While Peter made many changes in Russia, he could do nothing to change its geography. Russia's first seaports were on the Baltic Sea and the Arctic Ocean. If you look at a map of Russia, you will find



Under Peter the Great's orders, Russian noblemen had to have their beards cut off or pay a beard tax.

that these large bodies of water are located along the northern coast of the country. In winter, they are choked with ice.

As a result, early Russia was a country bordered by oceans that froze in the winter. For centuries, Russian rulers had fought bloody wars to gain a **warm-water port** where they could trade year-round. They especially wanted a port on the Black Sea, but their efforts had been unsuccessful. Peter the Great also tried to gain a warm-water port for Russian trade, but at this he failed.

Vocabulary

“warm-water port,” (phrase), a port with waters that do not freeze during the winter; ships can use a warm-water port all year long

marsh, n. an area of waterlogged land, usually overgrown with tall grasses; a swamp

Window on the West

Czar Peter did succeed in building a city. Peter found Moscow a gloomy place. He decided to build the city of St. Petersburg and make it his capital. He hired French and Italian architects to help him plan and build a city that had grand structures like the ones found in the major cities of Western Europe—Paris, Amsterdam, and London.

Peter chose a swampy site near the Baltic Sea for his new city. When serfs were forced to drain the **marshes**, thousands fell ill and died. People began to call St. Petersburg the “city built on bones.”

Many of the nobles did not want to leave Moscow, but Peter ordered them to build costly homes in St. Petersburg. He was sure this new city, which he called his “window on the West” would establish Russia as a European power. More than anything, Peter



The Winter Palace in St. Petersburg was built in the style of Western architecture of the time.

wanted Russia to look westward and to align itself with the nations and culture of Western Europe. He feared that a lack of progress would weaken Russia in the political world.

A Great Title

In his last years as czar, Peter signed a treaty with Sweden that protected the lands around St. Petersburg. To celebrate, Peter decided to call himself “Peter the Great, Emperor of Russia.”

By the time he was fifty-two years old, illness had drained Peter’s energy. One winter’s day he waded into the icy sea to rescue some fishermen. He saved the men, but it took all his strength. On January 28, 1725, Czar Peter died.

Chapter 6

Catherine the Great

A German Princess Following the death of Peter the Great in 1725, a series of weak rulers governed Russia for thirty-seven years. Toward the end of this period, a dynamic young woman from Germany became a part of Russian history.

The Big Question

Why did serfdom continue in Russia?

Vocabulary

principality, n. a small territory or land usually ruled by a prince

Picture this situation: In a small **principality** in Germany, the ruler asked his fifteen-year-old daughter, “What do you think, Sophia? How would you like to marry a Russian grand duke?”

Young Sophia considered the offer. After all, this particular grand duke, Peter III, was in line to become Russia’s czar. It would be a good match for an ambitious German princess, even if Peter was rumored to be a bit of a fool and far from handsome. “Well,” thought Sophia, “as grand duchess, I might sooner or later rise to power myself.”



Catherine the Great was born a German princess but became one of Russia's greatest rulers.

The princess traveled to Russia to meet the sixteen-year-old grand duke. Peter, who had spent much of his life in Germany, was willing to marry the girl chosen for him. Before the wedding in 1744, Sophia converted to the Russian Orthodox religion. She also took a new name, Catherine.

As grand duchess, Catherine learned Russian and made many new friends. She was, however, less pleased with her husband. Peter seemed young for his age and uninterested in his bride. It is said that he liked to play with toy soldiers.

Catherine Takes the Crown

As expected, Peter inherited the throne of Russia. Czar Peter III made few friends and many enemies. Some of his royal orders were just plain silly. One of his laws allowed nobles to hunt in the streets of St. Petersburg. Finally, he went too far. He threatened to involve Russia in a war against Denmark. His enemies sprang into action. They planned to replace Peter with his capable wife.

Catherine agreed to the overthrow of her husband, and Peter was soon arrested. A few days after Peter's arrest, Catherine received a note saying that her husband was dead. He had been murdered. It is unclear whether Catherine had a role in his death, but his death was her path to the throne.

At age thirty-three, Catherine became an empress—a crowned ruler with absolute power. Like Peter the Great, Catherine admired Western Europe. She read many books by French writers that filled her mind with new ideas. She asked her nobles to speak French and to adopt French styles.

Catherine, following in Peter the Great's footsteps, put people to work. She made officials find ways to improve roads and rebuild towns and cities. She offered free education for some Russian boys and girls. However, free education was not offered to the children of Russia's serfs. Since the serfs made up the vast majority of the population, most boys and girls in Russia did not receive an education.



After the death of her husband, Catherine was crowned empress of Russia. Catherine's crown has five thousand diamonds and two rows of pearls. The diamonds are arranged in a tree branch and wreath pattern.

No Change for the Serfs

Although she was intelligent and forward thinking, Catherine, like Peter the Great, continued to support serfdom. Actually, Catherine did study the idea of freeing Russia's serfs, but she decided against it. She feared that the end of serfdom would weaken her country and displease the nobles. In fact, the number of serfs actually increased as Catherine's empire grew. She even *donated* hundreds of thousands of serfs to various noblemen as rewards for their loyalty and service. Life became harder for the serfs during Catherine's reign.



For more than three centuries, Russia's serfs were almost like enslaved people under the control of Russian nobles.

As long as serfdom was linked to the creation of wealth and a successful economy, it would not be easily reformed or abandoned. Likewise, other countries were struggling with the idea of slavery. Southern plantation owners in the British colonies of North America would not even consider freeing their enslaved workers. They, too, saw slave labor as an essential part of a growing economy. So it is not surprising that Catherine the Great could not see a way for Russia to free its serfs.

A Stronger Russia

Catherine shared Peter the Great's goal of gaining a warm-water port. After a war against the Turks, Catherine achieved that goal. She conquered the northern shore of the Black Sea and built a



The painting shows the Russians capturing a Turkish fortress during the Russo-Turkish War (1787–1792).

warm-water port called Odessa. The treaty of peace with the Turks gave Russian ships on the Black Sea free passage through the narrow strip of Turkish-controlled water between the Black Sea and the Mediterranean. At last, Russian ships could sail and trade when northern seas were frozen.

In 1796, Catherine died at the age of sixty-seven. Even the last years of her life had been active ones. She set up a fur-trading colony in Alaska and continued to run her government.

Fifty-two years had passed since the young German princess dreamed of power and glory. In some ways, she did not do much to help her people. Most of her subjects, the serfs, remained little more than enslaved workers. Yet in other ways, she brought Russia into the future by building roads and schools, and by securing the warm-water port Russian czars had been seeking for hundreds of years.

Glossary

A

architect, n. a person who designs buildings (29)

B

boyar, n. a rich landowner in medieval Russia (19)

C

czar, n. from the word “Caesar,” the title of an emperor of Russia before 1917; sometimes spelled tsar (20)

czarina, n. the wife of a czar (27)

E

empire, n. a group of countries or territories under the control of one government or one ruler (4)

G

“Grand Prince,” (phrase), mainly Russian, the leader of all the people and head of the government of a city-state or region (15)

K

kremlin, n. a central fortress built to protect a Russian city; today the term generally refers to the fortress in central Moscow (22)

M

marsh, n. an area of waterlogged land, usually overgrown with tall grasses; a swamp (34)

missionary, n. a person on a journey for the purpose of spreading a particular religious belief (6)

N

noble, n. a person who belongs to the highest social class of a country (9)

P

persecute, n. to treat people cruelly and unfairly (29)

priest, n. a person who has the training or authority to carry out certain religious ceremonies or rituals (24)

principality, n. a small territory or land usually ruled by a prince (36)

R

reign, v. to rule over a country as its czar, king, or queen (32)

S

serf, n. a peasant who is not free; a person living on a feudal estate who was required to work for the lord of the manor (21)

serfdom, n. an agricultural system in which people (serfs) were not free, but required to stay and work for a landowner as the owner demanded (21)

Slav, n. a person who belongs to an ethnic group of people that settled in Eastern Europe many years ago; the Slavs include Russians, Ukrainians, Poles, and Czechs. (4)

steppe, n. grassland plain (10)

strategic, adj. useful or important to achieving a goal or completing a plan, especially in a war (14)

subject, n. a person governed by the laws of a czar, king, or queen (32)

T

time zone, n. one of twenty-four zones around Earth within which everyone observes the same time (2)

tribute, n. payment of money or goods by a people or their ruler to another country or ruler in exchange for protection (6)

Turkic, adj. related to one of the languages spoken in western and central Asia (13)

W

“warm-water port,” (phrase), a port with waters that do not freeze during the winter; ships can use a warm-water port all year long (34)



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Battle between the Russian and Tatar troops in 1380, 1640s (oil on canvas), Russian School, (17th century) / Art Museum of Yaroslavl, Russia / Bridgeman Images: 14, 16–17

Capture of the Turkish Fortress, Izmail, 11th December 1790, 1953 (oil on canvas), Grachev, Mikhail Frolovich (1913–2001) / Central Naval Museum, St. Petersburg, Russia / Bridgeman Images: 41

Coronation of Ivan IV aka Ivan the Terrible (1530–1584) as czar of Russia, January 16, 1547, engraving / Photo © Tallandier / Bridgeman Images: 27

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Ivan IV Vasilyevich (Ivan the Terrible 1530–1584) Tsar of Russia from 1533, leading his army at the Siege of Kazan in August 1552, 1850 / Universal History Archive/UIG / Bridgeman Images: Cover B, i, iii, 25

Peter I, the Great (1672–1725) Tsar of Russia from 1682 cutting a Boyar's beard / Universal History Archive/UIG / Bridgeman Images: 33

Portrait of Princess Yekaterina R. Vorontsova-Dashkova (oil on canvas), Russian School, (18th century) / Russian State Archive of Literature and Art, Moscow / Bridgeman Images: Cover A, 37

Reverse of Ivan III's seal from 1472, (b/w photo), French School, (19th century) / Private Collection / Bridgeman Images: 20

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Russia: Sacking of Suzdal by Batu Khan in February, 1238. Mongol Invasion of Russia. A miniature from the 16th century chronicle of Suzdal / Pictures from History / Bridgeman Images: 11

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The Christening of Grand Duke Vladimir (c.956–1015), 1885–96 (mural), Vasnetsov, Victor Mikhailovich (1848–1926) / Vladimir Cathedral, Kiev, Ukraine / Bridgeman Images: 9

The Conversion of Olga (d.969) from the Madrid Skylitzes (vellum) , Byzantine School, (12th century) / Biblioteca Nacional, Madrid, Spain / Bridgeman Images: 8

The Election of the Tsar Michael Romanov (1596–1676) on March 14th 1613, 1798–1800 (oil on canvas), Ugryumov, Grigoriy Ivanovich (1764–1823) / Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow, Russia / Bridgeman Images: 31

The Moscow Kremlin in the time of Tsar Ivan III (1440–1505) (crayon), Vasnetsov, Apollinari Mikhailovich (1856–1933) / Memorial Estate Museum, Kislovodsk, Russia / Bridgeman Images: 22

The Winter Palace as seen from Palace Passage, St. Petersburg, c.1840 (colour litho), Perrot, Ferdinand Victor (1808–41) / Pushkin Museum, Moscow, Russia / Bridgeman Images: 35

Tsar Ivan III (1440–1505) Tearing the Deed of Tatar Khan, 1862 (oil on canvas), Shustov, Nikolai Semenovich (c.1838–69) / Sumy Art Museum, Sumy, Ukraine / Bridgeman Images: 19

View of the walled city of Constantinople, from the Nuremberg Chronicle by Hartmann Schedel (1440–1514) 1493 (woodblock), German School, (15th century) / Private Collection / The Stapleton Collection / Bridgeman Images: 7

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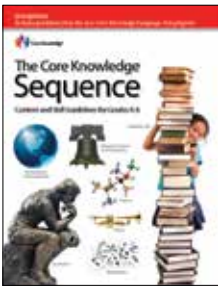
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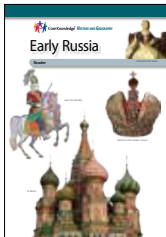
Early Russia

Core Knowledge Sequence History and Geography 5



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