Dear Educators,

Welcome to the first edition of the University of Kansas Center for Russian, East European, & Eurasian Studies K-12 Outreach Webzine. Every fall and spring we hope to bring you entertaining and informative articles about the CREES area of study, along with useful lesson plans, curriculum development, and updates on upcoming KU CREES events.

One of the most commonly asked questions about CREES is “Where exactly is this area of study?” This question not only applies to the area’s geographical location, but also to the more philosophical definitions of identity. What is the best reference point for contextualizing this part of the world? Are we talking about Europeans? Asians? Slavs? Freezing North? Desert South? Christians? Muslims? Mongol Empire? World Wars? Revolution? Soviet Union? Space race?

The short answer is, “Yes.”

The name CREES Crossroads was specifically chosen because Russia, Eastern Europe, and Eurasia are the world’s crossroads. From a geographical standpoint, they reside in the periphery where the European continent meets with the Asian, and stretches from the freezing tundras of the arctic circle all the way down to the deserts of the Middle East. They exist in that philosophical ambiguity where Western “European” meets Eastern “Asiatic;” where Jewish and Christian cultures meet with Muslim and Buddhist, and where everybody, at one point or another, has had their identity, religion, and culture redefined by the ruler of the moment.

Despite these influences, the regions of Eastern Europe, Russia, and Eurasia are distinctly unique, an amalgam of languages, cultures, and religions – less a melting pot and more a boiling cauldron of diversity.

Each edition of CREES Crossroads is separated into three sections: Russia, Eastern Europe, and Eurasia. Each of these sections has its own informative article with accompanying classroom activity covering a wide array of subjects and interests.

In this edition we begin with a brief history of the Cyrillic alphabet. The accompanying activity teaches the Russian variant of the Cyrillic alphabet and uses US geography as a means of exercising new language skills. The lesson can be adapted for most grade levels.

In the Eastern Europe section, we discuss turbo-folk, a genre of music in Southeast Europe. The accompanying lesson plan challenges middle and high schoolers to think critically about what kind of music they listen to and what it represents about their society.

Lastly, this edition ties Europe and Asia together as it delves into the mystery behind Eurasia’s classic book, Ali and Nino. A well-known romantic novel, Ali and Nino is a unique alternative for educators seeking new literature options for their classroom.

As always, CREES will continue to work hard bringing new ideas and resources to educators throughout the Great Plains region. We hope you find CREES Crossroads useful and interesting, and encourage you to share it with your fellow educators. Anyone is eligible to sign up for the free webzine on the Crees website or you can send me an email at creesoutreach@ku.edu.

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