

# RUSSIA

## RUSSIAN LANGUAGE: A BRIEF HISTORY

The Russian language is the largest native language in Europe, it is the primary language of 175 million people living in Russia, Belarus, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan, and is unofficially spoken in most of the countries that were once republics of the USSR, making it the most geographically widespread language of Eurasia.

Despite its widespread use, for many of us in the Western world, Russian remains a mystery.

For starters, Russian uses a different alphabet known as “Cyrillic.” The name of the alphabet often confuses people because it does not identify a commonly known reference of origin. Some even refer to Cyrillic as the “Russian alphabet” because Russia is the most populous and influential user of the alphabet. Many would be surprised to discover that Russian is, in fact, just one of dozens of languages using a Cyrillic derived alphabet.

The history of Cyrillic traditionally begins in the 9th century when the ruler of an early Slavic state in Eastern Europe, Moravia, requested the Byzantine Emperor send missionaries to Christianize his subjects. Emperor Michael III nominated two brothers, the monks Cyril and Methodius, to spread Christianity among the Slavic peoples of Bulgaria, Great Moravia and Pannonia (Central and Southeast Europe). Their legacy would leave an indelible mark on the cultural development of



**Countries that use a Cyrillic alphabet among their official languages (Mongolia not shown).**

all Slavs, for which they are still venerated by the Orthodox Church as saints.

Cyril and Methodius are credited with devising the Glagolitic alphabet, the first alphabet used to write Old Church Slavonic. Cyril, Methodius, and their disciples used Glagolitic to standardize Old Church Slavonic in order to translate the Bible and other Ancient Greek ecclesiastical texts. The alphabet was based primarily on the Greek alphabet, and became widely used in Great Moravia (Central Europe) for government and religious documents and books.

St. Clement of Ohrid, one of Cyril and Methodius’ best known disciples, is traditionally accredited with simplifying Glagolitic into the earliest form of Cyrillic. New scholarship, however, suggests that the earliest known form of Cyrillic was actually created at the Preslav Literary School in the Bulgarian Empire. Whether or not he invented it, St. Clement used Cyrillic in his prolific translations. It is his writings that spread throughout the Slavic area.

The new Cyrillic alphabet was popular because it was not only simpler than Glagolitic, but it also augmented Glagolitic ligatures and consonants for sounds used

12th century until it was the lingua franca of Eastern Europe.

Over the course of the next 9 centuries, the Cyrillic alphabet has adapted to changes in spoken language, developed regional variations to suit the features of different nations, and was subjected to academic reforms and political decrees. Today, over 90 languages throughout Europe and Asia write with a Cyrillic derived alphabet, including Russian.

For those of us who grew up speaking English with no exposure to Slavic languages, learning Russian can be quite difficult. According to the United States Intelligence Community, Russian is a “hard target” language, due to both its difficulty for English speakers and its critical role in American foreign policy. It is fortunate, then, that Russian is largely a phonetic language – it looks the way it sounds. If you can learn the Russian variant of the Cyrillic alphabet, you can read the words out loud...whether or not you know what they mean, however, depends on how much you study.

If you’re feeling adventurous, take a look at the Russian Cyrillic alphabet chart in the following pages. Can you translate the words?



First complete Bible printed in Cyrillic, 1663.

### Sources and Information

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cyrillic\\_alphabet](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cyrillic_alphabet)

[www.russianlessonsonline.com](http://www.russianlessonsonline.com)

[www.volgawriter.com/VW%20Cyrillic.htm](http://www.volgawriter.com/VW%20Cyrillic.htm)

[www.smu.edu/bridwell\\_tools/specialcollections/Highlights2010/HIGHLIGHTS.Bibles9.htm](http://www.smu.edu/bridwell_tools/specialcollections/Highlights2010/HIGHLIGHTS.Bibles9.htm)

# lesson plan alphabet soup!

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**Grade:** 4th - 12th

## RUSSIAN CYRILLIC EDITION

### Overview

The modern Russian alphabet is a variant of the Cyrillic alphabet and contains 33 letters. To non-native speakers, it may look intimidating, but it's actually quite easy to learn!

In this activity, students will compare Russian and English letters and their sounds. They will then use this knowledge to fill out a worksheet identifying American geographical locations by their Russian language cognates.

### Objectives

**Student will be able to:**

- Identify all 33 letters of the Russian alphabet;
- Pronounce 33 letters of the Russian alphabet;
- Use the Russian alphabet to spell out American geographical locations.

### Materials

All materials are included in this lesson plan.

### Activities

Introduce students to the Russian language by reading out-loud the attached article "Russian Language: A Brief History." Give an overview of the Russian alphabet (provided on page 4). Show students the chart of the Russian alphabet and its equivalent English letters and sounds. Sound out all 33 letters of the alphabet together. Explain that "cognates" are words in two languages that share a similar meaning, spelling and pronunciation. Give examples from the worksheet ("Russians pronounce 'America' same as we do, even if their writing of it looks different!") Ask students to fill in the attached worksheet using the Russian alphabet chart as a key. Encourage students to find the English letter equivalent to the Cyrillic, and to not focus on pronunciation until after they have spelled the word out.

### Adaptations

This lesson can be used for younger grades, although the teacher will need to help with the spelling of American geographical locations.

To make the lesson more challenging, have students read the article and identify suggested vocabulary words.

### Evaluations

Assessment of the student's capability of identifying Russian alphabet letters will be determined by how many answers they get correct on the attached worksheet.

### Additional Resources

A useful website for teaching Russian language can be found at:

[www.russianlessononline.com](http://www.russianlessononline.com)

Here you will find interactive video and audio resources for learning and teaching Russian Cyrillic. Some of the website's resources, like the "History of the Cyrillic Alphabet" video should be viewed critically as it is entirely over simplified and even inaccurate at certain points. That said, it is a fun cartoon that is easily accessible for younger students and may work as an easy introduction to Slavic languages.

Students may also enjoy a Russian Sesame Street version of the "Alphabet Song."

### Extra Credit

Offer extra credit to students who are able to figure out how to spell their name and/or hometown in Russian using the chart..

### Vocabulary:

[Alphabet](#)

[Augment](#)

[Byzantine](#)

[Cyrillic](#)

[Cognate](#)

[Consonant](#)

[Derive](#)

[Ecclesiastical](#)

[Ligature](#)

[Lingua Franca](#)

[Phonetic](#)

[Prolific](#)

[Slavic](#)

[Translate](#)

# cyrillic alphabet chart

Many letters in the Russian alphabet are pronounced the same as letters in the English alphabet, while some are entirely unique sounds. There are even some letters in the Russian alphabet that make no sound at all – rather they indicate how the letter before them should be pronounced. Follow the chart and pronounce as many of the Russian letters as you can out loud! \* Indicates no comparable English letter.

For help with pronunciation, visit [Language Helpers](http://LanguageHelpers.com) and click on each letter to hear how the letter is pronounced.

Russian Letter	English Letter	English Pronunciation
А	A	ah
Б	B	beh
В	V	veh
Г	G	geh
Д	D	deh
Е	E	yeh
Ё	*	yoh
Ж	J	zheh
З	Z	zeh
И	I	ee

Russian Letter	English Letter	English Pronunciation
Й	Y	yih
К	K	kah
Л	L	ell
М	M	em
Н	N	en
О	O	oh
П	P	peh
Р	R	err
С	S	ess
Т	T	teh

Russian Letter	English Letter	English Pronunciation
У	*	oo
Ф	F	eff
Х	*	kh
Ц	*	ts
Ч	*	ch
Ш	*	sh
Щ	*	shch
Ъ	*	hard sign
Ы	*	y
Ь	*	soft sign
Э	*	eh
Ю	*	you
Я	*	ya

## russian alphabet soup!

Имя (Name): \_\_\_\_\_

The following are all states and cities in the United States, only they are written in Russian. Can you translate them? Fill out the answers using the Russian Cyrillic Alphabet Chart. Find the English letter equivalents!

Example: АМЕРИКА = America

1. КАНЗАС

11. САН ФРАНЦИСКО

2. ВАШИНГТОН

12. ЛОС АНДЖЕЛЕС

3. МОНТАНА

13. ЮТА

4. КЕНТУКИ

14. ФИЛАДЕЛЬФИЯ

5. КАНЗАС СИТИ

15. КАЛИФОРНИЯ

6. БОСТОН

16. МИССУРИ

7. ЦИНЦИННАТИ

17. НЬЮ ЙОРК

8. ЧИКАГО

18. МИЧИГАН

9. АРКАНЗАС

19. КОЛОРАДО

10. НЕБРАСКА

20. МИССИСИПИ

Answer Key: 1. Kansas; 2. Washington; 3. Montana; 4. Kentucky; 5. Kansas City; 6. Boston; 7. Cincinnati; 8. Chicago; 9. Arkansas; 10. Nebraska; 11. San Francisco; 12. Los Angeles; 13. Utah; 14. Philadelphia; 15. California; 16. Missouri; 17. New York; 18. Michigan; 19. Colorado; 20. Mississippi.