***Breaking Stalin’s Nose*** by Eugene Yelchin, A Newbery Honor book

A great novel for 5th-7th graders in language arts or social studies.

**Lesson 1**: Before beginning the novel, it is important to understand the struggle of Capitalism vs. Communism, and become acquainted with a brief history on the time period in which the novel takes place – during the Stalinist era (1924-1953).

**Summary:** Ten-year-old Sasha Zaichik looks forward to the day when he can join the Young Soviet Pioneers and build the cause of Communism. His whole world is turned upside down when his father, the most faithful Communist of all, is unjustly arrested. This novel is based on the true story of the author’s experiences growing up in the Soviet Union (officially known as the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics or the USSR). The author’s father survived “the Great Terror.”

**Vocabulary**

Capitalism – a system in which people own and control most of the ways to produce goods and services. Example: A person owns a business that makes t-shirts, or a restaurant.

Communism – a system where all property is public, and people work and are given things by the government according to their needs. Example: A person is given all the food and clothes that their family needs as part of their job.

Young Soviet Pioneers – A youth organization for children ages 9-15 in the Soviet Union (similar to Boy Scouts).

\*\*Young Soviet Pioneers learn skills, social cooperation, hard work, and loyalty to the ideals of Communism and the Communist party. Joining the Young Soviet Pioneers was a source of great pride and an important milestone in the life of each child.

Learn more about the history of the **Young Soviet Pioneers**:<https://russiapedia.rt.com/of-russian-origin/pioneers/>

The Great Terror – A period of terror during the 1930s (and especially from 1936 to 1938) when Joseph Stalin, the leader of the Soviet Union, ordered millions of people to be arrested, sent to labor camps, or killed. Anyone considered a possible threat to his authority was arrested.

**Setting**: After Bolshevik leader Vladimir Lenin (1870-1924) died, Joseph Stalin rose to power. Joseph Stalin ruled the Soviet Union (present day Russia) from 1924 to 1953. He was a dictator, who implemented a series of five year plans to turn the Soviet Union into a modern industrialized country. He collectivized farming and had potential enemies arrested or sent to forced labor camps.

During the 1930s, all citizens of the Soviet Union were encouraged to spy on their neighbors and report their wrong doings. Because anyone could be arrested at any time, people lived in a culture of intense fear. **Propaganda** (fake news) was spread that **Communism** was great, and that **Capitalism** (an economic system used in the United States and other West European countries) created a terrible divide between the rich and the poor.

**Research the Differences between Capitalism and Communism**

Learn more about these two economic and political systems at the following websites, and then complete the “Differences between Communism and Capitalism” handout.

Animated Video – What is Capitalism? <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CrsHJ8Yk5SM>

Britannica Kids on Communism - <https://kids.britannica.com/kids/article/communism/352989>

Britannica Kids on Capitalism - <https://kids.britannica.com/kids/article/capitalism/352909>

Capitalism and Communism PDF - <https://crees.ku.edu/lesson-plans> (Scroll down to “Resources” and you’ll be able to open this pdf).