

CAT 4 RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT

The Brezhnev Era

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ABSTRACT

The Brezhnev Era comprises of an interactive website integrated with 2 episodes of animation and a short story depicting the lives of the people during Brezhnev Era. We aimed to garner secondary students' interest in history while providing complementary knowledge to our history syllabus. Our information is an compilation of various written papers, literature, websites and databases, with cross referencing to ensure accuracy. By combining graphics with words and a symbolic animation which gives insights to the Brezhnev Era and the its on both the USSR and the world, our package seeks to appeal to the younger generation.

1) INTRODUCTION

1.1 Rationale

The group members decided to embark on an interdisciplinary project that blends both history and digital arts together. We noticed that the Brezhnev Era is a commonly neglected period in the Russian history of the school syllabus, and that many students had an understanding gap when it came to this era. Furthermore, there were few sources available regarding the Brezhnev Era.

1.2 Objectives

The Brezhnev Era's objectives were to

- Supplement the secondary school Russian History syllabus in the aspect of the Brezhnev Era
- Allow secondary school students to harbour interest for history
- Provide accurate and compiled information regarding the Brezhnev Era and the USSR

1.3 Target Audience

Secondary 1 - 4 students (especially Sec 2-3 students who are studying Modern World History and Russian History)

1.4 Resources

The resources we created were an interactive website with compiled text-based knowledge and graphics (timelines, images). An animation with 2 episodes was also created illustrating the key events of the Soviet Era and the lives of the people during the Brezhnev Era. Furthermore, we created a short story depicting the life of a musician in the harsh times of Brezhnev's rule. All resources were uploaded to the website.

2) REVIEW

In many textbooks and literature on the USSR, such as *Animal Farm* (Moran, D., & Orwell, G., 2001), the Brezhnev Era was a neglected period. They tended to focus more on the general history of the USSR, as well as the Stalin and Lenin periods.

Websites, like *Empire, USSR As* (Encyclopedia of Russian History, 2004) and *Soviet Union* (History.com Staff, 2017), and videos on the USSR were mostly in texts and pictures, and there were very few animations within them. They were hence brief and unappealing to the digital generation. Furthermore, they did not touch on the lives of people living in that era.

In past HCI projects, there were only few projects on Russian History, and none for the Brezhnev Era.

In conclusion, the current resources were limited and not systemically compiled. The existing literature was unappealing to most youths and no past projects had been made of this era.

3) METHODOLOGY

3.1) Needs Analysis

We conducted a needs analysis in the form of a questionnaire to ascertain the relevance of such a project. A total of 65 secondary school students were inquired on their familiarity with the Brezhnev Era, and indeed, numerous students had low understanding of that period of time. The upper sec students were particularly interested in the Brezhnev Era and affirmed our project's focus.

3.2) Survey Results

65 responses

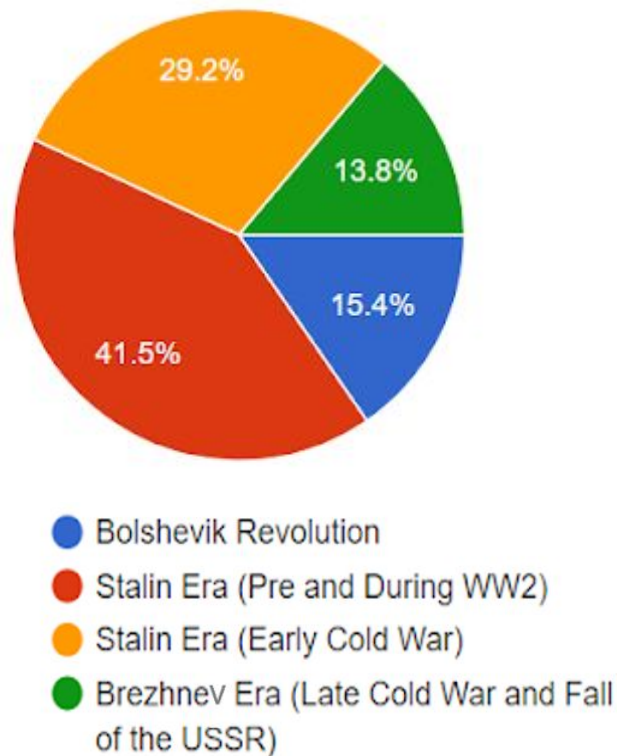


Figure 1. Student's responses on what Soviet era they were most familiar with.

On a scale of 1-10, rate your understanding of the USSR (Soviet Union), with 10 being the highest level of understanding.

65 responses

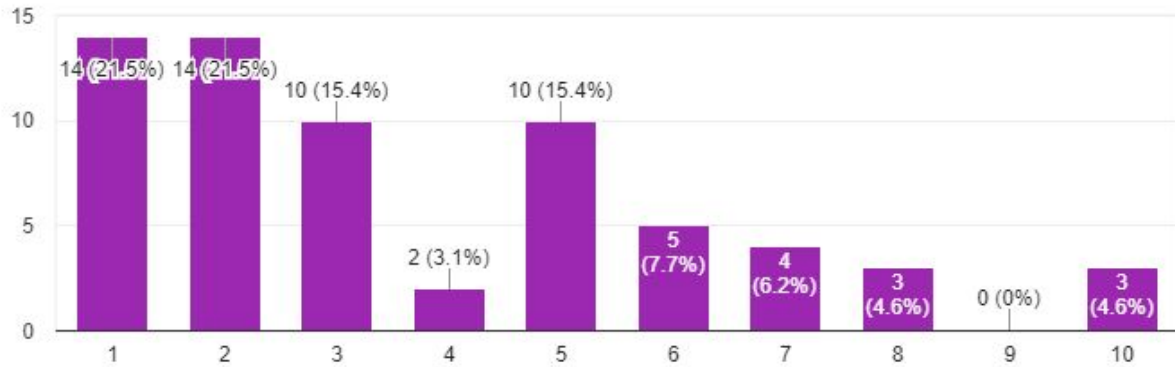


Figure 2. Students' responses on their general level of understanding on the USSR. On a scale of 1 (nothing) to 10 (everything)

Tick at least 3 types of resources that you would like to be in this package.

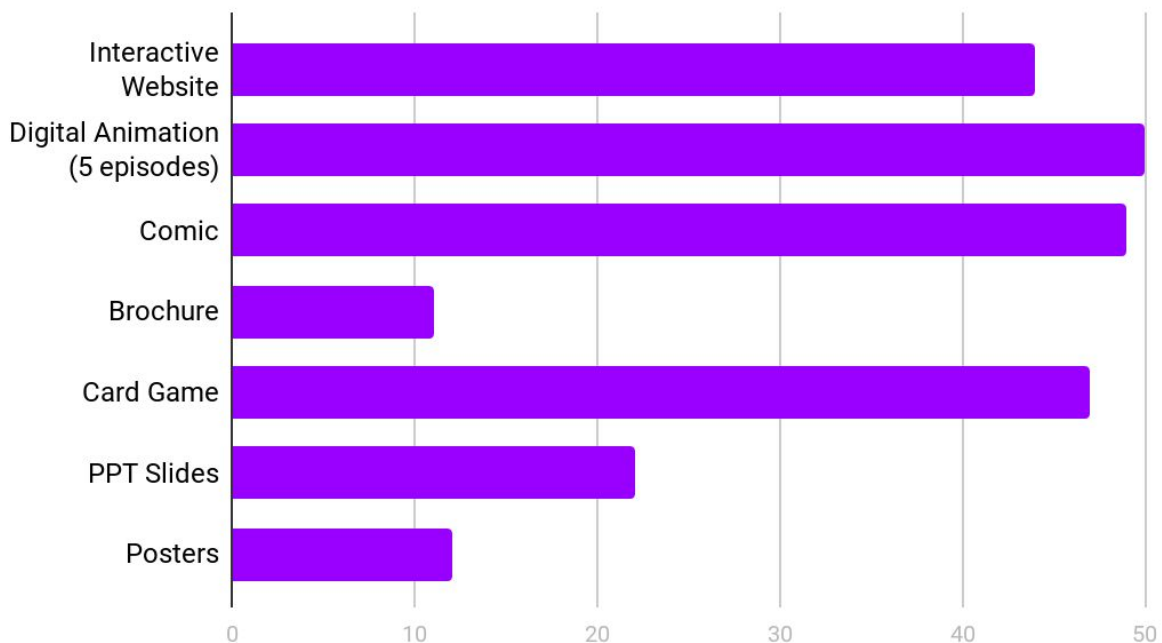


Figure 3. Student responses to preferred resources

The top 4 results are as follows:

Interactive Website-67.7%

Digital Animation-76.9%

Comic-75.4%

Card Game-72.3%

Which period of the USSR do you want to learn more about / the resource package to focus on?

65 responses

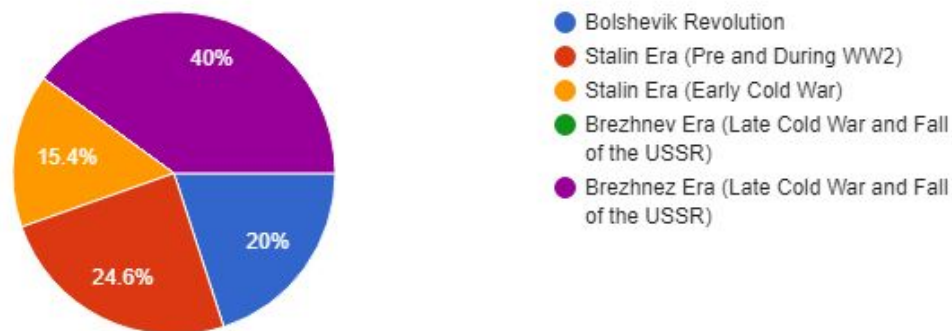


Figure 4. Student responses on preferred focus.

3.3) Development of Resources

We studied an array of literary works, websites, videos and papers on the Brezhnev Era, and cross referenced the information gathered. They were then consolidated into one WIX website, and 2 episodes of animation, hand drawn and put together with Adobe Animate. The first episode shows the key events of the USSR, while the second dwells into the Brezhnev Era. A short story about a composer facing fear of censorship was also written (inspiration from life of Russian composer, Shostakovich), describing the life of someone living in that era, in words.

3.4) Pilot Test

We introduced the Brezhnev Era through a website, animation episodes and a short story. Everything was incorporated into the website, and this provided the people accessing the website with both digital and textual methods to learn more about the Brezhnev Era. All these were demonstrated to Ms Ong Bee Young, a history teacher, and about 60 Secondary 2 students and 5 upper sec seniors. They were shown the website and an episode of the animation. Then, they were asked to give feedback regarding the resource. They gave feedback on how we could include impacts of the Brezhnev Era on the world and this helped to make our content more heavy. Opinions were generally positive. It was commented that our project gave them more insight on the Brezhnev Era.

On a scale of 1 to 5, how helpful was the animation?

60 responses

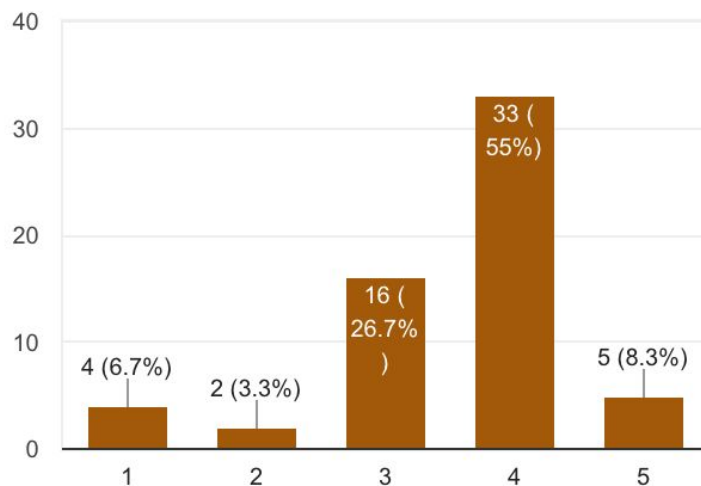


Figure 4. Student responses on Animation's viability

After looking at our website and watching the animation, how much do you know about the Brezhnev Era and the USSR?

60 responses

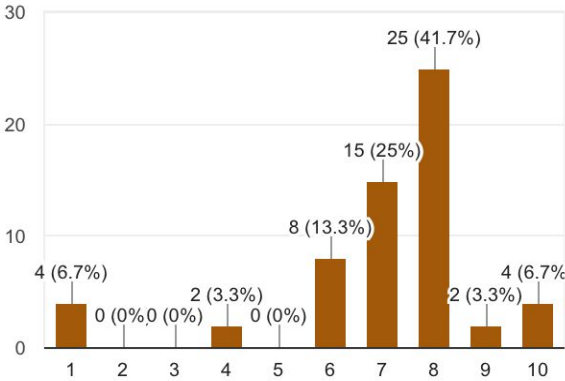


Figure 5. Student responses on resource package's usefulness

On a scale of 1 to 5, how helpful was the animation?

60 responses

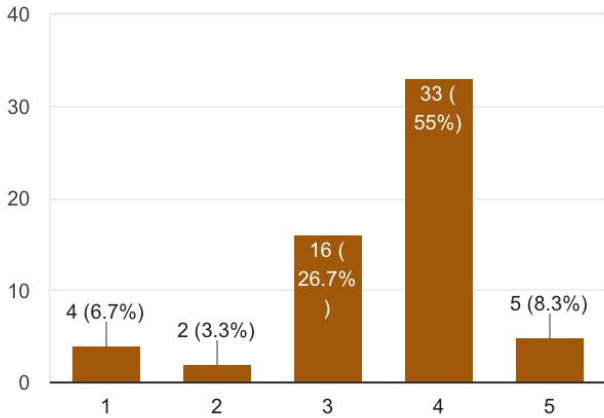


Figure 6. Student responses on Animation's viability

4) OUTCOME & DISCUSSION

The project received positive feedback when pilot tested, and we reflected on the comments the judges gave us for the previous evaluations. In the end, we decided to change the font color, background and layout of the website to from red and yellow (colours of the USSR) to a easier-to-read beige while maintaining the special feel of our old site with different title font designs. We also realised that 3 episodes of animation seemed lengthy so we shortened it to 2 episodes.

The content regarding the USSR's impact on the world stage and to the future was added to make it more relevant to students and thus make our package more appealing.

The animation was made smoother and more informative. There could also be more movement in the frames as the video was mostly made up of still frames. Interactivity on the website could also be improved on.

5) CONCLUSION

The Brezhnev Era was a challenging project because the era was rarely touched upon, and research on it was thus far more difficult than researching on other aspects of Russian history. The whole project had enabled the group members to develop several skills. One such skill, for example, was communication. Communication was key we worked in two teams, one that researched on the history and relayed the exact details of what happened to the other two members working on the animation. We had different expectations for the animations and had to rework it multiple times. Finally, perseverance and hard work were the elements that enabled the completion of the project since the digital group ran into problems with the animation software, and the research group ran into problems with the story and animation. We had to work extremely hard to complete the tedious process of animating. All in all, it had been a very enriching, though challenging experience.

6) ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank our classmates who participated in the needs analysis and pilot test. Their responses were constructive and essential and some suggestions greatly improved our package.

We would also like to express our deepest gratitude to Ms Ong Bee Young, our project mentor, for guiding us throughout our journey, ready to help whenever we were lost.

Special thanks to our senior, David Choo, who is studying in HCJC now for giving us inspiration to start a history project and insight into the upper sec syllabus.

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