

One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich

Read the story One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1bcmpJKF4RWh3_HvpFVuHF1HNRtKIs-k6HX-XgQV3OQQ/edit

(You may also listen to the audio book if you have the ability)

Watch the movie One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hlwags-Suvw&feature=youtu.be>

Complete the study guide questions listed below for either assignment:

BACKGROUND & INTRODUCTION

One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich by Alexander Solzhenitsyn is an excellent reading choice for high school students. Not only does it fit thematically with other works typically studied in a literature curriculum, but it corresponds quite well with a world history curriculum, reinforcing a cross-curricular approach. The novel concentrates on one man, Ivan Denisovich Shukhov, as he attempts to survive another day in a Soviet concentration camp, or gulag, with dignity and humanity. The conditions of the camp are harsh, reflecting a world that has no tolerance for independence. Camp prisoners rely almost totally on each other's productivity and altruism, even for the most basic human need, food. The dehumanizing atmosphere of the gulag ironically forces prisoners to discover means to retain their individuality while conforming to the stringent rules, spoken and unspoken, of the camp. Although the setting of the novel is foreign to most high school students, the themes of Ivan Denisovich provide a strong connection to what these students value. American tend to have a strong identification with their own regional heritage.

This regional identification coupled with constant news reports of ethnic strife occurring all over the world should help students readily grasp the idea of regionalism and ethnic pride that surfaces throughout the novel. A theme that parallels their own lives is the idea of people being able to work together despite ethnic and cultural differences in an atmosphere of political turmoil in order to preserve some essence of individuality. The characters in Ivan Denisovich bring a liveliness to the novel. The narrator Ivan Denisovich is both insightful and humorous, and students will appreciate the slight irreverence with which he view his situation. The clever way he manages to keep his humanity intact despite his imprisonment is kept in perspective through the other prisoners' attempts at survival. At a time in students' own lives when personal space is so important, they should be able to connect with the prisoner's fierce protection of their "prized possessions" as well.

One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich serves as a powerful reminder of the resilience of the human spirit. Solzhenitsyn provides his readers with a seemingly hopeless situation,

and then gives them characters who struggle fiercely to maintain their individuality. Students will come away from this novel with a confidence in the possibility of success despite a cruel environment. The organization of this teacher's guide is as follows: a brief overview of the novel, followed by teaching ideas to use before, during, and after reading it. The "Detailed Study Questions" that are to be answered after reading the novel are arranged by the sequence of Ivan's day: Early Morning, Before Breakfast; Breakfast; After Breakfast; Before Work; the March to Work; The Workday; Before Lunch; Lunch; Building the Wall; the March Back to Camp; and Back in Camp.

LIST OF CHARACTERS (IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE)

Ivan Denisovich Shukhov: Central character of novel; a Stakhanovite who has been in labor camps for the past eight years.

Shukhov was imprisoned as a traitor during World War II; in reality, Shukhov had been a prisoner of war in a German camp and was able to return to his country where he was sentenced for high treason. Officially believed he had surrendered to the Germans and had returned to spy on his country. Neither Shukhov nor the investigator could say what Shukhov's "mission" was, but Shukhov was placed at the work camp at Ust-Izhma as punishment for his "crime."

Kuziomin: "Old timer" at Ust-Izhma. Shukhov's first squad leader who instills survivalist ideas in Shukhov's lifestyle. For instance, Kuziomin hates squealers, for they don't survive the camps.

"One and a half" Ivan: Guard at Shukhov's current camp. His outside appearance is seedy, but Shukhov considers him one of the "safer" guards.

Aloysha the Baptist: One of the most dependable members of Shukhov's squad, the 104th. Survives through his religious faith; he has a New Testament which he hides in the wall. Shukhov calls him "heavenly" and says that he "shed the hardships of camp life like water off a duck's back."

Buinovsky: Ex-naval captain who is a newcomer at the camp. Has great difficulty assimilating into camp existence, because he is used to having power and giving orders.

The Tartar: Guard at the camp who does everything by the book. Has a "choking" voice and is not bothered by the cold. Looks for people to pick on.

Pantleyev: The squealer, a creature truly despised by all prisoners.

The Estonians: Two men, as close as brothers, who rely extensively on each other for survival. They "hung on to each other so closely that you'd think one would suffocate unless he breathed the same air as the other."

Senka Klevshin: A "quiet, luckless fellow," one of Shukhov's squad members who is deaf. The other members of the squad protect him somewhat by accommodating for his weaknesses.

Fetiukov: Member of Shukhov's squad who survives with little pride. Shukhov calls him a "jackal" and "a pat master at cadging." Although generally despised by Shukhov, Fetiukov manages to find his own means of survival.

Vdovushkin: Medical supervisor of the camp and a writer.

Volkovoi: Lieutenant of camp. A "wolf" who carries a whip and stripsearches the prisoners.

Andrei Tiurin: Well-respected leader of the 104th squad. Hand-picked Shukhov to be in his squad when he arrived at the work camp. Extremely fair.

Pavlo: Unofficial second in command of the 104th. Cares about the survival of all members of the squad, and especially believes in helping the weaker members while they are learning the "rules" of surviving.

Gopchik: Fresh-faced Ukrainian boy in camp, as "pink as a suckling pig." Shukhov admires the speed with which he adapts to the work camp life and "adopts" the boy to fill the void left by his own son who died young.

Kilgas: Works in the 104th with Shukhov as a mason. Although he has only been in the camp two years, he is considered an "old timer" by Shukhov because he has learned the rules of survival quickly. Cheerful because he received two parcels per month.

Tsezar: Rich prisoner who is treated as a guest. He is the only prisoner who lives in warmth and can survive on the parcels he receives in the mail. He is not required to work, and spends his days conversing about the luxuries of the outside world, such as the artistic merit of Sergei Eisenstein's Ivan the Terrible.

Der: Building foreman who looks for ways to punish the squads.

The Moldavian: A prisoner who is rumored to be a spy, missing from the lineup because he had gotten in a crawl space to do some plastering, had gotten warm, and had fallen asleep.

"The Limper": Mess orderly who is disabled, but a "hefty S.O.B." who is armed with a birch club with which he hits anyone who comes up the steps without his permission. Shukhov says, "he hit the down-and-outs."

Mess Chief: One of the few prisoners who wears no numbers.

The Lett: a prisoner who sells tobacco, one of the few pleasures a prisoner still has.

SYNOPSIS

Despite the horrible conditions in the gulag, Shukhov makes the most of every day through hard work and ingenuity. His day begins with reveille, which he never oversleeps. Shukhov spends the ninety minutes of the day which are totally his doing services for others, such as laying out other prisoner's shoes for them. He is often rewarded with extra food for these services. At breakfast Shukhov is glad there are no liens at the mess hall, and that Fetiukov, the prisoner with the lowest position in the squad, had kept his breakfast for him. A day of work without breakfast would have been almost too hard to endure. The squad leader, Tiurin, returns, announcing that they were able to bribe the camp leaders with a

pound of salt port from a mail parcel to prevent the 104th squad from going to the “Socialist Way of Life” settlement where they would have worked outside in the brutal cold.

At the work site the squad is assigned the job of setting cement blocks on the second-story walls of a building. Shukhov is a mason, so while the others get their tools from the camp’s collection, Shukhov retrieves “his”-the best one which he has stolen from the collection-from a hiding place inside a brick. To help warm the work site, Shukhov and Kilgas retrieve a bolt of stolen roofing felt from under some flooring planks to cover the windows for insulation. At the worksite, the squad falls into the routine of spirit and enthusiasm, for the better their work is, the better their food rations will be. At lunch, Shukhov aides his squad by recounting the number of bowls the squad has received and informing the cook of his “mistake.” The cook gives Shukhov some extra portions. Shukhov brings Tsezar his bowl of food and his portion of bread. he is amazed by the warmth in Tsezar’s office. Outside Tsezar’s office, Shukhov finds a bit of a hacksaw in the snow and pockets it as a tool for later. The squad’s mood is bright when Shukhov returns; Tiurin was able to write the work report for the previous day even though no work was actually done. This means the squad will get extra rations for the next four days. The squad begins to work on the wall, and as they get into a rhythm of work, they begin to get warmer. At the end of the day, the 104th is the first squad to make it to the checking lines, which means they will be the first to eat at dinner. Shukhov waits in line to be searched, offering to stand in the parcel line for Tsezar after supper. Shukhov hopes that Tsezar will reward him for doing this by giving him some of the parcel. After the recounts, Shukhov heads to the parcelsoffice for Tsezar. Shukhov asks if he can bring Tsezar his dinner. Tsezar refuses, telling Shukhov that he may have it. Shukhov checks his bunk to reassure himself that the guards did not find his cache of bread, then goes to the mess hall.

Shukhov can be the one to serve his squad. Shukhov watches the cook carefully as he serves the bowls, looking for the bowls of soup that are the least watery. Shukhov keeps the bowls with the thickest stew nearest to him. They are givenbread according to the amount of work they have done, and Shukhov selects a crusty piece. Shukhov leaves the mess hall to buy tobacco form the Lett with money he receives from doing private jobs, then visitsTsezar to view his parcel and to deliver his bread. Tsezar gives his bread to Shukhov, but offers none of his parcel to him. Shukhov returns to his bunk, plans to make a cobbler’s knife from the hacksaw blade, and hides it. Buinovsky and Tsezar ask to borrow Shukhov’s “ten days” (knife) to cut some sausage. They pay him by sharing some of the sausage. The squad is called out of the bunk for another count, and Shukhov is amazed at Tsezar for eating his parcel out in the open, when someone is likely to steal it while they are gone. Shukhov offers to guard the parcel for him by being one of the first to return to the barracks. When they return, Shukhov places his boots near the stove and guards both the parcel and his boots. Tsezar thanks Shukhov, who returns to his bunk to prepare his bed for sleep. Just as most men have gotten warm, the squad is called out for a second count. Tsezar hands him some food as they move out, and Shukhov offers to hide his parcel for him, since everyone knows Shukhov never receives one. Back in his bunk, Shukhov considers that Aloysha never does favors that get paid back, and hands him a biscuit. Aloysha thanks Shukhov, believing that Shukhov has nothing. Shukhov eats a bit of the

sausage left from Tsezar's parcel and saves the rest for before roll call the next day. He sleeps, fully content.

BEFORE READING THE NOVEL

THE LANGUAGE OF ONE DAY IN THE LIFE OF IVAN DENISOVICH

A concern in the teaching of Ivan Denisovich is the occasional use of profanity in the novel. The appropriateness of this language relative to the harsh setting and political climate of the novel should be addressed during the introduction to the novel. The vocabulary of Ivan Denisovich is relatively simple; however, Solzhenitsyn uses many Yiddish and Russian words that may be difficult for young readers. A research project involving Yiddish may be incorporated into the teaching of this novel. (An excellent sourcebook for such research is Jacques Rossi's *The Gulag Handbook*.) The following are examples of Yiddish and Russian words that may need explanation before students begin reading the novel.

valenki: Knee-length felt boots for winter wear.

kolkhoz: A collective farm of the former USSR

gulag: Forced labor camp in the former USSR

taiga: Swampy coniferous forest of Siberia beginning where the tundra ends.

zeks: Prisoners in the gulags.

kasha: A mush made from coarse cracked buckwheat, barley, millet, or wheat.

oprichniki: Member of an imperial Russian police force; Ivan the Terrible's palace guards

kulak: Rich peasants who were considered oppressors by the communists and who were penalized with fines or the confiscation of their property.

Tartar: A native inhabitant of Tartary of Mongolic or Turkic origin; a person of irritable, violent, or intractable temper.

STUDY GUIDE QUESTIONS:

THEME

1. Resilience of the human spirit is perhaps the novel's most important theme. The following questions will help students

- What schools rules would you be willing to break to maintain the respect of your peers as well as your own self-respect?
- What unspoken or "unofficial" rules do you follow in order to maintain the respect of your peers as well as your own self-respect?
- What hardships have you overcome that threatened to rob you of your pride and self-confidence?

2. Another major theme is the trust between individuals and their leaders and peers, a relationship necessary for day-to-day living. To explore this theme, students might research group dynamics and then apply the information to their own group of friends, their families, their school hierarchy, etc.

3. Personal pride or dignity is a theme that might be explored by having students brainstorm their own definitions of this quality and then:

- describe people from their own lives who exemplify this quality.
- identify the characters from the novel who have the most pride or dignity.
- identify the characters from the novel who have the least pride or dignity.

4. Overcoming prejudices based on ethnic and cultural differences for the good of the group is another of the novel's themes.

5. The evil created by institutions permeates the novel's setting and affects every aspect of the characters' lives. Trace why each of the characters is sentenced to their term in the gulag.

- Look at ways the system uses the work squads to control the prisoners through peer pressure. What moral compromises do prisoners have to make in order to survive?

Most societies see prisoner labor as more than simple punishment; as a reformatory experience by which the transgressor "repays his debt to society" and learns how to be a productive member of the community. Explore the ironies and institutionalized conceptions of a gulag system existing in the "worker's paradise."

THE GULAG SYSTEM

Using the "Introduction" by Marvin L. Kalb in the Signet Classic edition of *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* as a beginning, have students research the life of Joseph Stalin, the gulag system under Stalin, the gulag system before and after Stalin, and the life of Alexander Solzhenitsyn. (See the Bibliography at the end of this teaching guide for information.) Stalin, and the life of Alexander Solzhenitsyn. (See the Bibliography at the end of this teaching guide for information.)

DETAILED STUDY QUESTIONS

EARLY MORNING, BEFORE BREAKFAST

1. How and when did the guard sound reveille, and why did he not sound it for long?
2. Why does Shukhov never oversleep reveille?
3. What advice did Kuziomin (the first squad leader) give the new men?
4. Which part of his advice does Shukhov dispute and why?
5. Why does Shukhov linger in bed this morning?

6. Why does Tiurin (the squad leader) look worried this morning? What is his very important “job” this morning?
7. How will Tiurin accomplish this “job?”
8. Who is “One-and-a-half,” and how does he figure into Shukhov’s decision to stay in bed?
9. What is the orderlies’ first job in the morning, and what does this job reveal about living conditions in the camp?
10. What makes Shukhov decide to report sick?
11. How does Shukhov’s decision to stay in bed go awry?
12. What is Shukhov’s reaction to his punishment? Why does he react this way?
13. What do all articles of Shukhov’s outer garments have in common?
14. At what temperature is it too cold to send the prisoners out to work? What does this tell you about working conditions in the camp?
15. What is Shukhov’s actual punishment for sleeping in? What is his reaction to the Tartar’s justice?
16. Describe the different types of footwear Shukhov has worn while a prisoner. How has this experience affected the way he treats his footwear?
17. Describe Shukhov’s dental condition. What was its cause?
18. How does Shukhov wash the guards’ floor? Why does he do it this way?
19. What is the difference between working the knowing and working for a fool? Why is this knowledge important?

BREAKFAST

20. Why does Fetiukov keep Shukhov’s breakfast for him?
21. Why does Shukhov eat his cold breakfast slowly? What does this say about his life?
22. Describe the typical breakfast served in the camp.
23. What is the best and worst time of the year to eat in the camp?
24. Describe the rules of etiquette that Shukhov follows at breakfast.
25. Describe Shukhov’s most prized possession and how he cares for it.

AFTER BREAKFAST, BEFORE WORK

26. Why does Shukhov avoid the Tartar?

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27. What is the physician’s assistant’s reaction to Shukhov’s reporting sick that morning?

28. What is Shukhov's reaction to sitting in the clean, warm infirmary?
29. How often do the prisoners bathe?
30. What is the new doctor's attitude toward the sick prisoners and work?
31. Why was Vdovushkin chosen as a medical assistant?
32. After his temperature is read, what are Shukhov's options?
33. What can be assumed about general health care in the camp?
34. How is the time after breakfast, before the march to work, used by the guards and prisoners?
35. What is waiting on Shukhov's bunk when he comes back?
36. How does Shukhov put his skill as a tailor to work to save his bread?
37. What is Aloysha's most prized possession, and how does he protect it?
38. What does Shukhov wear to go to work? What does this say about the conditions under which he will be working?

THE MARCH TO WORK

39. What is Tiurin's reaction to the junior guard's complaint that squad 104 is late? What does this say about Tiurin?
40. Why do the squad members immediately give Tiurin a share of any food they get from the outside?
41. What is the problem with the numbers each prisoner must wear?
42. Why does Tsezar give his cigarette butt to Shukhov instead of Fetiukov?
43. Why does Shukhov say Volkovoi is named appropriately?
44. How did the morning and evening prisoner searches differ?
45. What is the purpose of the morning's extra vigilante searches?
46. Why are the guards so vigilant in their counting of the prisoners?
47. Describe the rules the prisoners must follow during their march.
48. Why is Shukhov unexcited about the prospects of writing home?
49. What is Shukhov's wife's dream for when he returns? What is his reaction to this dream?
50. Why does Shukhov describe Tiurin as a "true son of the Gulag?"
51. What is the importance of the squad leader? How do his men treat him?
52. What do the men do as soon as they step onto the building site?

53. How did Tsezar get his job as assistant to the rate inspector?

54. What is the “proper” way to eat?

55. What is Shukhov’s opinion of Estonians?

THE WORKDAY, BEFORE LUNCH

56. Why is Fetiukov such a jackal?

57. Why are snowstorms both good and bad?

58. What is Shukhov’s first work assignment, and why was he chosen for it?

59. What is Shukhov’s attitude toward good tools, and to what lengths will he go to support this attitude?

60. Why do the prisoners work so hard?

61. Who does Tiurin give the wheelbarrow jobs to and why?

62. What is the most important thing a squad leader does?

63. What has Gopchik already learned? What proof does Shukhov give?

64. How are days and years different in the camps?

LUNCH

65. Why must you never put your feet up to the stove?

66. Why do the men consider Shukhov “lucky?”

67. Why is Shukhov skeptical about his “luck?”

68. Why is Shukhov in prison? What really happened?

69. What do the men know about Senka?

70. What “new” thing had been happening at the camp?

71. How much grits does each man get for lunch? Why don’t they get more?

72. What is Shukhov’s job at lunch? What does this job say about the conditions there?

73. How does Shukhov use his wits to secure more food at lunch?

74. Why doesn’t Shukhov automatically get an extra bowl of food?

75. What important transformation is Captain Buinovsky undergoing? Why is it so important?

76. How does Tsezar’s job compare to that of the other men in the company?

77. What does Shukhov find on the ground, and what does he do with it and why?

78. Why is Tiurin in a good mood after lunch? Why is this important?

79. Why was Tiurin kicked out of the army?

80. How did Tiurin get on the train? What good fortune did he have once he was on board? How did he repay this good fortune in the future?

BUILDING THE WALL

81. What is the difference between the guards' power over the men and the squad leaders' power over them?

82. What makes Pavlo work so hard that day?

83. What kind of worker is Shukhov? What is the advantage of having an attitude like his?

84. How does nature conspire to force the masons into doing a good job?

85. What is one of the benefits of hard work?

86. What kind of worker is Fetiukov, and how does Tiurin "reward" him for his efforts?

87. Why does Der threaten Tiurin, and how do Tiurin and his men react?

88. Why does Shukhov insist that Pavlo and Senka let him set the last few blocks of the day?

89. Why did it take an agreement among the squad leaders to get the squads to quit at the same time?

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90. Why were the men anxious to not be late reporting to the gate?

91. What does Shukhov's refusal to throw away the mortar tell us about him?

THE MARCH BACK TO CAMP

92. What was the most frightening part of arriving at the gate late?

93. What made the guards' recounting so irritating?

94. Why was it so important to be the first column back to the camp?

95. What game did the prisoners and the superintendent play every night before the men left the work site?

96. Which prisoner was missing at the camp? What was special about him?

97. What would the zeks do the missing prisoner if the guards gave him to them? Why?

98. How did Fetiukov mess-up the count? What was the guard's response?

99. Why is S311 in the camp? What is ironic about this?

100. Why do the zeks refuse the guard's order to "step lively?"

101. Why do the zeks decide to run after all?
102. Why were the zeks from the machine works so thoroughly searched?
103. Who did Shukhov say was the zeks' main enemy? Why?
104. What does Shukhov offer to do for Tsezar? Why does he make this offer?
105. What does Shukhov realize just before the guards search him? What decision does he make? Why does he decide to do this?
106. By which guard does Shukhov choose to be frisked? Why did he choose this one?
107. Why does Shukhov fear being thrown in the prison?
108. What makes the dinner soup so dear to the prisoners?

BACK IN CAMP

109. What is the writing surface of choice in the camp? Why?
 110. How do the guards handle and distribute the parcels? Why do they do it this way?
 111. Why did Shukhov tell his family to stop sending him parcels?
 112. What bad news did Shukhov learn while standing in line? What does he attribute it to?
 113. Who breaks line in front of the zeks? How do they get away with this?
 114. Why does Shukhov offer to bring Tsezar his supper to the barracks?
 115. How does "the Limper" decide whom to hit and whom not to hit? What does this say about him?
 116. Describe the head cook. Why is he so powerful?
 117. Why does Shukhov say Gopchik will do well?
 118. What two things does Shukhov have to take care of while passing out the stew?
 119. Why was the dinner stew usually thinner than the morning stew?
 120. Why is this a "red-letter day" for Shukhov? What does this say about life in the camp?
 121. Describe prisoner U81. What makes him stand out?
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122. Why is money not so important in the camp? What can be purchased with it?
 123. How did Shukhov earn money?
 124. Why does Shukhov refer to the tobacco as the "stuff"?
 125. What was one "good thing" about the camps that was better than at Ust-Izhma?

126. Why didn't Shukhov ask Tsezar if he had received his parcel?
127. What makes getting a parcel not as wonderful as it first seems?
128. What happened to Fetiukov that makes Shukhov prophesy he won't make it to the end of his term? What is wrong with Fetiukov?
129. Why does borrowing someone's knife obligate you to give him something in return?
130. When dealing with the guard, "Snubnose," how does Tiurin once again prove his skill as squad leader?
131. What happens to those who serve ten "hard" days in the cells? Fifteen days?
132. How does Tsezar demonstrate his lack of understanding of camp life? How does Shukhov help him?
133. What happens anytime a zek gets warm? Why?
134. What is Shukhov's response when Aloysha urges him to pray?
135. Why does Aloysha say you should not pray for freedom?
136. What does freedom mean to Shukhov? Why has he quit hoping for it?
137. How does Shukhov sleep to keep warm?
138. Why did Shukhov go to sleep content?