Big Idea

Absolute Monarchy in Russia

Essential Question

How did Peter the Great use absolutism to gain and maintain power in Russia?
Words To Know

Tsar - another name for the king of Russia.

Westernization - the adoption of Western ideas, technology, and culture.

Serfdom - the status of many peasants in Russia and under feudalism in Europe. Serfdom is a form of slavery.

Autocratic - a king with sole power and rules with unlimited authority/power.

Centralize Power - power in the hands of one person, most likely an absolute monarch.

Let’s Set The Stage...

In the early 1600s, Russia was still a medieval state, untouched by the Renaissance or Reformation and largely isolated from Western Europe. Russia was suffering from disorder and foreign invasions until the reign of the first Romanov tsar in 1613 restored order. Not until the end of the century, however, did a tsar emerge who was strong enough to regain the absolute power of earlier tsars. Peter the Great, as he came to be called, used his power to put Russia on the road to becoming a great modern...
Peter, just 10 years old when he took the throne in 1682, did not take control of the government until 1689.
In 1691, Peter visited European cities to learn about western ways.

Peter visited factories, art galleries and spoke with doctors about new discoveries in medicine.
In England, Peter was impressed by Parliament. “It is good,” he said, “to hear subjects speaking truthfully and openly to their king.”
Peter brought to Russia a group of technical experts, teachers and soldiers he had recruited in Europe. He then embarked on a policy of westernization, the adoption of Western ideas, technology and culture.

Taking Control

Peter wanted to strengthen the military, expand Russian borders and centralize royal power. To achieve his goals, he brought all of Russia under his control, including the Russian Orthodox Church.
Reforms

After from the West, Peter made landowning nobles shave their beards. He also forced them to replace their old-fashioned robes with Western-style clothes.

To end the practice of isolating upper-class women in separate rooms, he held grand parties at which women and men were expected to dance together.
Peter also passed laws strengthening serfdom.
Using autocratic methods, Peter pushed through social and economic reforms. He imported Western technology, improved education, simplified the Russian alphabet, and set up schools for the study of mathematics, science and engineering. He improved waterways and canals, developed mining and textile manufacturing and backed new trading companies.

Peter had no mercy for any who resisted the new order. When elite palace guards revolted, he had more than 1,000 of the rebels tortured and executed. Then, as an example of his power, he left their rotting corpses outside the palace walls for months.
From his earliest days as tsar, Peter worked to build Russia’s military power. He created the largest standing army in Europe, built a world-class navy from scratch, and set out to extend Russian borders to the west and south.

Expanding Russia’s Borders

Russian seaports, located along the Arctic Ocean, were frozen over during the winter. To increase Russia’s ability to trade with the West, Peter desperately wanted a warm-water port—one that would be free of ice all year round.
The nearest warm-water coast was located along the Black Sea. To gain control of this territory, Peter had to push through the powerful Ottoman Empire. In the end, Peter was unable to defeat the Ottomans and gain his warm-water port.

In 1709, Peter defeated Sweden and won territory along the Baltic Sea.
Peter signed a treaty with China that recognized Russia’s claim to lands north of China.

Building St. Petersburg
On the land won from Sweden, Peter built a magnificent new capital city, St. Petersburg.
Seeking to open a “window on the West”, he forced tens of thousands of serfs to drain the swamps.
Many thousands died, but Peter’s plan for the city succeeded.
Just as Versailles became a monument to French absolutism, St. Petersburg became a great symbol of Peter’s effort to forge a modern Russia.

When Peter died in 1725, he left a mixed legacy. He expanded Russian territory, gained ports on the Baltic Sea and created a mighty army. He had also ended Russia’s long period of isolation.
Like earlier tsars, Peter the Great also used terror to enforce his absolute power.

---

**Essential Question Answered**

How did Peter the Great use absolutism to gain and maintain power in Russia?

Peter the Great visited European cities to learn about western ways.

Peter brought to Russia a group of experts, teachers and soldiers he had recruited in Europe and embarked on a policy of westernization.
Essential Question Answered

How did Peter the Great use absolutism to gain and maintain power in Russia?

To achieve his goals, Peter brought all of Russia under his control, centralizing his power.

Peter made social reforms, such as the shaving the beards of nobles, forcing people to wear western-style clothing and strengthening serfdom.

Essential Question Answered

How did Peter the Great use absolutism to gain and maintain power in Russia?

Peter imported Western technology, improved education, simplified the Russian alphabet, and set up schools for the study of mathematics, science and engineering.

Peter improved waterways and canals, developed mining and textile manufacturing and backed new trading companies.
### Essential Question Answered

**How did Peter the Great use absolutism to gain and maintain power in Russia?**

- Peter created the largest army, world class navy and expanded Russia’s borders.
- Peter killed more than 1,000 soldiers when they did not follow his orders.
- Peter also built the palace at St. Petersburg.