

CIE

IGCSE English Literature

Activities and Exam Practice

The Siege

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Narrative Sequence 1: *Before the siege* (Chapters 1–5)

Focus: Characters

By the end of Chapter 1, we have met four out of five of the main characters in the novel, Anna, Mikhail, Kolya and Marina. Russian people generally have up to four names: a first name; a patronym (father's name) usually ending with '-ich' for a male and '-ovna' for a female; a family name; a 'pet name' used by family or close friends.

Activity 1: The characters

- Using Chart 1 (on a separate sheet), fill in the details for each of the four characters, as they occur.

Keep the chart safe, adding to it as you read through the novel, with page references and brief quotations cited as evidence. Use the chart to make a record of what you learn about each character.

Activity 2: Character traits

Consider the three main adult characters, Anna, Mikhail and Marina. Who do you think is:

- the most practical?
- the most unrealistic?
- caring?
- thoughtful?
- the most altruistic (thinks most of others)?
- artistic?
- formal in speech?

Find evidence in the text to support your choice as you read. There may be more than one of the characters with each trait.

Activity 3: Who is Anna?

We are told in the chapters in **Narrative Sequence 1** that Anna works as a nursery assistant for a woman called Elizaveta Antonovna.

- Imagine that you are Elizaveta and you have to write a report about her. Make the report very formal, including the following headings:
 - Full name
 - Family background
 - Attitude to work
 - Attitude to the children
 - General character
 - Recommendations

Refer closely to the text as you write the report.

Narrative Sequence 1: *Before the siege* (Chs. 1–5) cont.

Focus: Setting

Narrative Sequence 1 takes place mostly outside Leningrad.

Activity 4: The countryside around Leningrad

- Write a brief descriptive paragraph about each of the following:
 - *Anna's dacha (country house)*
 - *Marina's dacha*
 - *The journey Anna makes from her dacha to Marina's*
- Using details from the text, imagine the appearance of each of these. Also try to suggest what it might feel like to live in a dacha, or take Anna's journey.

Activity 5: Leningrad

The first two and a half pages of the novel describe Leningrad.

- Using an atlas, or an online program such as *Google Earth*, draw a sketch map of the city and its surroundings. On the map, try to add the following features mentioned in these pages:
 - *The Admiralty*
 - *The Neva river*
 - *The Strelka*
 - *The Dvortsovy (Palace) Bridge*
 - *Universitetskaya Embankment*
 - *Lieutenant Schmidt's Bridge.*

Remember, an up-to-date atlas, or *Google Earth*, will refer to the city as *St Petersburg*.

Activity 6: Life under Stalin

The paragraph beginning “These are hard times ...” on page 1, and ending “... in that van this time.” on page 2 refers to life in the Soviet Union under the leader Stalin in the period leading up to the Second World War.

- Why is this paragraph important at the beginning of the novel?
- What does it tell you about the lives of ordinary people in Leningrad before the siege begins?
- In what ways does this paragraph convey the sense of terror that everyone lived under during this period? Consider the language used, the sentence lengths and the images used.

Narrative Sequence 1: *Before the siege* (Chs. 1–5) cont.

Focus: Themes

Activity 7: Life

The conflict or *tension* between life and death is a major theme in *The Siege*. Much of **Narrative Sequence 1** is about life and living.

- Consider Anna and her father, Mikhail. Write two paragraphs of a diary entry for each of these characters, one describing a typical day when they are in the city, the other describing a typical day in the dacha.

Activity 8: Death

In Chapter 1, we read about the life and death of Anna's mother, Vera. Anna is told about her mother's death by the nurse who was with her when she died.

- Imagine that you are the nurse. Write a letter to your mother describing what you know about Vera, and your thoughts about her death and its effect on Vera's family.

Activity 9: Dreams and memories

Although the story unfolds in the present tense for most of the time, we learn about the past partly through dreams and partly through memories.

- Think about the difference between dreams and memories.
- Fill in Chart 2 (on a separate sheet) listing the dreams and memories that occur in **Narrative Sequence 1**. The column headed *True/Imagined* needs particular care here.

The Siege – Teachers' notes to sample

Narrative Sequence 1

Activity 1

Teachers could distribute five copies of Chart 1 for students to complete. (The fifth one is for Andrei when he appears in the novel later.) A lesson or two spent completing the initial responses here could help students to grasp the nature of the task.

Activities 2 and 3

Some discussion of the nature of 'character traits' may be useful here, perhaps including a group activity in which students try to discover their own and their colleagues' 'traits', so that the meaning is clearer for them.

For students who are only used to the Western European method of naming, it is often a fun activity to ask them to change their own names to the Russian version, using the patronymic and the 'pet name'. Students from other cultures or backgrounds may already have a similar pattern to their names.

About the author

David Kearns is a teacher with nearly thirty years experience in teaching English at secondary level, many of which have been in international schools, mainly in the Arabian Gulf area, mostly for the IGCSE examinations.

Also available for IGCSE

IGCSE First Language English, by Mark Eyre, Head of English at Qatar International School.

For further details, see English page on www.qaresources.co.uk.

Activity 5

As with all the research-based activities, material prepared by the teacher may assist when there is only limited access to the internet. Equally, for teachers who have access to an interactive white-board, or a teaching group equipped with laptop computers, this activity could be introduced into the teaching environment more immediately.

Activity 6

As many history courses at GCSE or IGCSE level deal with the first fifty or sixty years of the twentieth century, students may already have covered this material. Teachers could liaise with colleagues in the History or Humanities departments to create a cross-curricular approach to the period.

Activity 8

Sensitivity and a knowledge of individual students' personal circumstances are obviously required with this activity. It is perhaps best avoided if any student is likely to find the task disturbing.