Set a Purpose

- Explain how Peter the Great tried to make Russia into a modern state.
- Identify the steps Peter took to expand Russia’s borders.
- Describe how Catherine the Great strengthened Russia.

Build Background Knowledge

- Plan
to recall what they know about the tsars, boyars, and serfs of Russia. Ask them to predict whether Russia’s absolutism during this time would act similarly to or differently from absolute monarchies elsewhere in Europe.

Focus

- Focus on the following objectives to help them answer the Section Focus Question and master core content.

- Read the selection aloud or play the audio.

Have students study the photos, captions, and Witness History text on this page. Ask them to predict the role of both Western European and Russian traditions on Catherine’s rule.

Focus

- Focus on the core content of the section using the Guided Questioning strategy (TE, p. T20). As they read, tell students to refer to this question and write it on the board. Tell students to refer to this question as they read. (Answer appears with Section 5 Assessment answers.)

- Preview

- Have students preview the ideas of Peter the Great and Catherine the Great before they begin.

- Note Taking

- Have students read this section using the Guided Questioning strategy (TE, p. T20). As they read, have students fill in the Venn diagram with details about the reigns of Peter the Great and Catherine the Great.

Read and Note Taking Study Guide, p. 72

Section Focus Question

- How did Peter the Great and Catherine the Great strengthen Russia and expand its territory?

Objectives

- Explain how Peter the Great tried to make Russia into a modern state.
- Identify the steps Peter took to expand Russia’s borders.
- Describe how Catherine the Great strengthened Russia.

Terms, People, and Places

- Peter the Great
- St. Petersburg
- westernization
- autocratic
- Catherine the Great
- partition

Vocabulary Builder

- Peter the Great
- Westernization
- autocratic
- Catherine the Great

High-Use Word

- stipulate

- to make a specific demand

The palace (left) of Catherine the Great (far left) reflects both European and traditional Russian architectural styles.

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WITNESS HISTORY

A Foreign Princess Takes the Throne

For twenty years, the German princess Catherine lived at the Russian court, enduring an arranged marriage to the Russian heir apparent, who was widely considered to be insane. She filled her time reading, studying French philosophy, building alliances behind the scenes, and hiding her time. When her husband became emperor in 1762, she called on her allies to act. Within a few months he had been deposed and Catherine proclaimed empress of Russia. Like Peter the Great before her, Catherine would rule with intelligence, a firm hand, and a mind set on modernization.

Focus Question

How did Peter the Great and Catherine the Great strengthen Russia and expand its territory?

Peter the Great Modernizes Russia

Peter, just 10 years old when he took the throne in 1689, did not take control of the government until 1698. Although he was not well educated, the young tsar was immensely curious. He spent hours in the “German quarter,” the Moscow neighborhood where many Dutch, Scottish, English, and other foreign artisans and soldiers lived. There, he heard of the new technology that was helping Western European monarchs forge powerful empires.

Journey to the West

In 1697, Peter set out to learn about Western ways for himself. He spent hours walking the streets of European cities, noting the manners and homes of the people. He visited factories and art galleries, learned anatomy from a doctor, and even had a dentist teach him how to pull teeth. In England, Peter was impressed by Parliament. “It is good,” he said, “to hear subjects speaking truthfully and openly to their king.”

In the early 1600s, Russia was still a medieval state, untouched by the Renaissance or Reformation and largely isolated from Western Europe. As you have read, the “Time of Troubles” had plunged the country into a period of disorder and foreign invasions. The reign of the first Romanov tsar in 1613 restored a measure of 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 power.

Peter the Great

Terms, People, and Places

- Peter the Great
- westernization
- autocratic
- Catherine the Great
- partition

Peter the Great

Westernization

autocratic

Catherine the Great

partition

Vocabulary Builder

- Peter the Great
- Westernization
- autocratic
- Catherine the Great

High-Use Word

- stipulate

- to make a specific demand

The palace (left) of Catherine the Great (far left) reflects both European and traditional Russian architectural styles.
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, that is, the adoption of Western ideas, technology, and culture. But pursuing fellow Russians to change their way of life proved difficult. To impose his will, Peter became the most autocratic of Europe’s absolute monarchs, meaning that he ruled with unlimited authority.

Controlling the Church and the Nobles

Peter pursued several related goals. He wanted to strengthen the military, expand Russian borders, and centralize royal power. To achieve his ends, he brought all Russian institutions under his control, including the Russian Orthodox Church. He also forced the wealthy boyars, or landowning nobles, to serve the state in civilian or military positions.

Some change had a symbolic meaning. For example, after returning from the West, Peter personally cutting off the beards of a boyar. He also forced them to replace their old-fashioned robes with Western-style clothes. To end the practice of secluding upper-class women in separate quarters, he held grand parties at which women and men were expected to dance together. Russian nobles opposed this radical mixing of the sexes in public, but they had to comply.

Peter knew that nobles would serve the state only if their own interests were protected. Therefore, he passed laws ensuring that nobles retained control over their lands, including the serfs on those lands. In doing so, Peter strengthened serfdom. Under his rule serfdom spread in Russia, long after it had died out in Western Europe. Further, he forced some serfs to become soldiers or to work as laborers on roads, canals, and other government projects.

Modernizing With Force

Using autocratic methods, Peter pushed through social and economic reforms. He imported Western technology, improved education, simplified the Russian alphabet, and set up academies for the study of mathematics, science, and engineering. To pay for his sweeping reforms, Peter adopted mercantilist policies, such as encouraging exports. He improved waterways and canals, developed mining and textile manufacturing, and hooked 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.

Seeking a Warm-Water Port

Russian seaports, located along the Arctic Ocean, were frozen over during the winter. To provide Russia with an all-year trading port, Peter expanded the Russian border. 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 sent out to sea Russian ships to solidify his control over the nobles.

Peter Expands Russia’s Borders

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.

A Russian cartoon shows Peter the Great personally cutting off the beard of a boyar. A warm-water port—one that would be free of ice all year round. Some changes had a symbolic meaning. For example, after returning from the West, Peter personally cutting off the beard of a boyar.

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Peter Expands Russia’s Borders

Instruct

■ Introduce: Key Terms Ask students to find the key term warm-water port (in blue) in the text and define it. Then display Color Transparency 99: Russia Needs a Warm-Water Port. Ask students to explain why ports are important to a nation, particularly to one of Russia’s size. (for trade)

■ Teach As you describe Russia’s expansion, refer to the map two pages ahead. Ask What happened in Peter’s war with Sweden? (At first he was defeated, but after rebuilding the army he won land along the Baltic.) How was St. Petersburg different from Moscow? (It was a seaport, closer to Europe, European in design.) Then refer students to the Infographic on this page. Discuss how the navy helped turn Russia into a world power.

■ Quick Activity Show students Peter the Great from the Witness History Discovery School video program. Then have students discuss whether they think Peter was a great monarch or a monstrous tyrant. As they name achievements and misdeeds, list them in two columns on the board. Ask students to weigh the evidence on the board. Then take a class vote on the matter.

Independent Practice

Web Code nhp-1651 will take students to an interactive map. Have students complete the interactivity and then answer the map skills questions in the text.

Monitor Progress

Read aloud the Primary Source selection on the next page or play the accompanying audio. Then ask students to explain what Pushkin is referring to.

Answers

Map Skills
1. Review locations with students.
2. Those on the Baltic were frozen for part of the year.
3. Russia’s territory would be smaller, and it would not have expanded as much in coastal areas.

Link to Geography

Siberia Russia’s absolute monarchs needed a place to exile both criminals and political opponents for long periods of time. What place was better than the arctic region of Siberia? Siberia was far away from everything Russian and had an extremely inhospitable climate; temperatures could average −59°F (−51°C) in winter. There was little chance of escape, as it was almost impossible to survive alone in the vast, frozen, sparsely populated region. In fact, 10 to 15 percent of the exiles never made it to Siberia; they died along the way. The number of exiles grew from a trickle in the early 1600s to 2,000 a year by the early 1800s. After a revolt in 1825, the tsar sent 150,000 people off to their freezing fate. Today, the expression “sent to Siberia” still implies that a person is being punished or has become an outcast.

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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, but the later Russian monarch Catherine the Great would achieve that goal before the century ended.

The Great Northern War

In 1700, Peter began a long war against the kingdom of Sweden, which at the time, dominated the Baltic region. Early on, Russia suffered humiliating defeat. A Swedish force of only 8,000 men...
defeated a Russian army five times its size. Undaunted, Peter rebuilt his army, modeling it after European armies. Finally, in 1709, he defeated the Swedes and won territory along the Baltic Sea.

Building St. Petersburg. On this land won from Sweden, Peter built a magnificent new capital city, St. Petersburg. Seeking to open a "window on the West," he located the city on the Baltic coast along the swampy shores of the Neva River. He forced tens of thousands of serfs to drain the swamps. Many thousands died, but Peter's plan for the city succeeded. He then invited Italian architects and artisans to design a new capital in Western style. Peter even planned the city's parks and boulevards himself. Just as Versailles became a monument to French absolutism, St. Petersburg became a great symbol of Peter's effort to forge a modern Russia.

Blazing Trails to the Pacific. Russian traders and raiders also crossed the plains and rivers of Siberia, expanding the Russian empire to the east. In the early 1700s, Peter hired the Danish navigator Vitus Bering to explore what became known as the Bering Strait between Siberia and Alaska (see map on the next page). After Peter's death, Russian traders built outposts in Alaska and northern California. Few Russians moved east of the Ural Mountains at this time, but the expansion made Russia the largest country in the world. It still is today, nearly 300 years later.

Peter the Great's Legacy. When Peter died in 1725, he left a mixed legacy. He had expanded Russian territory, gained ports on the Baltic Sea, and created a mighty army. He had also ended Russia's long period of isolation. From the 1700s on, Russia would be increasingly involved in the affairs of Western Europe. Yet many of Peter's ambitious reforms died with him. Nobles, for example, soon ignored his policy of service to the state.

Like earlier tsars, Peter the Great had used terror to enforce his absolute power. His police contributed to the growth of serfdom, which served only to widen the gap between Russia and the West that Peter had sought to narrow.

Checkpoint: What impact did Peter's defeat of Sweden have on Russia's expansion?

Catherine the Great Follows Peter's Lead

Peter died without an heir and without naming a successor. This set off a power struggle among the boyars that Russia had come since the early 1600s. Under a series of ineffective rulers, Russian nobles asserted their independence. Then, a new monarch took the reins of power firmly in hand. She became known to history as Catherine the Great.

History Background

Bering's Explorations. Young Vitus Bering, a Danish navigator, joined the newly created Russian navy in 1703. In 1725 he was sent by Peter the Great to explore Asia's northeast coast. It took two years to move men and supplies across Siberia. Finally, he sailed through what is now the Bering Strait, proving that Russia was not connected to North America. On his return across Siberia, he became ill, and five of his children died. In 1741 he set off again, this time to explore the northwest coast of North America. He discovered the Aleutian Islands, but fell ill. Bering and 28 of his men died there on a barren island. Following his expedition, Spain rushed to establish settlements on North America's west coast. Russia, however, was more interested in the fur trade than in expanding onto a third continent.

Catherine the Great

Instruct

■ Introduce. Read aloud the following quote from Catherine: “The Extent of the Dominion [of Russia] requires an absolute Power to be vested in that Person who rules over it.” Use the Think-Write-Pair-Share strategy (TE, p. T23) and ask students to explain her reasoning and whether there is any basis for it in history.

■ Teach. Point out that Catherine followed largely in Peter's footsteps, though many argue that she was even more powerful and ruthless. Ask What changes did Catherine bring to Russia? (She reorganized government, created public education, encouraged Western culture, intensified serfdom, and expanded Russia's borders.) Why did both Peter and Catherine increase burdens on serfs? (to keep the loyalty of the boyars)

Quick Activity. Display Color Transparency 100, "Partitions of Poland, 1791-1795." Use the lesson suggested in the transparency book to guide a discussion about the carving up of Poland.

Primary Sources

Primary Source. Sample: He portrayed himself as both imaginative and powerful.

Answers

Primary Source. Sample: He portrayed himself as both imaginative and powerful.
Independent Practice

Have students fill in the Outline Map Eastern Europe in 1796.

Monitor Progress

- Check Reading and Note-Taking Study Guide entries for student understanding.
- Circulate to make sure students are filling in their Outline Maps accurately.

Thinking Critically

1. He knew he would learn more if people thought he was a commoner, not a ruler.
2. Peter, driven by curiosity, had more dealings with common people than did Louis, who surrounded himself by nobles in Versailles. However, Peter treated some common people—serfs—more harshly than other European rulers.

Rise to Power

A German princess by birth, Catherine came to Russia at the age of 15 to wed the heir to the Russian throne. She learned Russian, embraced the Russian Orthodox faith, and won the loyalty of the people. In 1762, a group of Russian army officers loyal to her deposed and murdered her mentally unstable husband, Tsar Peter III. Whether or not Catherine was involved in the assassination is uncertain. In any case, with the support of the military, she ascended the Russian throne.

An Enlightened Ruler

Catherine proved to be an efficient, energetic empress. She reorganized the provincial government, codified laws, and began state-sponsored education for both boys and girls. Like Peter the Great, Catherine embraced Western ideas and worked to bring Russia fully into European cultural and political life. At court, she encouraged French language and customs, wrote histories and plays, and organized performances. As you will read in the next chapter, she was also a serious student of the French thinkers who led the intellectual movement known as the Enlightenment.

Expansion of Russia, 1689–1796

Map Skills: During the 1600s and 1700s, Russia expanded its power and influence both eastward and westward to become the largest nation in the world.

1. Locate (a) Sweden (b) Baltic Sea (c) St. Petersburg (d) Black Sea (e) Siberia (f) Bering Sea
2. Place Why were ports on the Black Sea more appealing to Russia than those on the Baltic?
3. Predict Consequences: How might this map look different if Peter the Great had not developed a modern navy?

Differentiated Instruction

Solutions for All Learners

Gifted and Talented

1787, Catherine the Great made a grand tour of her newly conquered lands in Ukraine and Crimea. Her deputy and former lover, Grigory Potemkin, had helped to conquer these lands from the Ottoman Empire, and Catherine put him in charge of their development. Potemkin colonized southern Russia with Bulgarians, Germans, Greeks, Jews, and Romanians, as well as Russians, and he developed the new port of Sevastopol. There he built Russia’s first Black Sea naval fleet. Some believe he was the power behind the throne who helped Catherine achieve many of her dreams. Have students research this controversial figure and outline the plot and some scenes for a movie about his life.
A Ruthless Absolute Monarch

Catherine was also an absolute monarch, like other European rulers of the time, and often she was among the most ruthless. She granted a charter to the boyars outlining important rights, such as exemption from taxes. She also allowed them to increase their stranglehold on the peasants. When peasants rebelled against the harsh burdens of serfdom, Catherine took firm action to repress them. As a result, conditions grew worse for Russian peasants. Under Catherine, even more peasants were forced into serfdom.

Like Peter the Great, Catherine was determined to expand Russia’s borders. Waging the Russo-Turkish war and the Ottoman Empire gained a warm-water port on the Black Sea in 1774. She also took steps to seize territory from neighboring Poland.

The Partitions of Poland

In the 1770s, Catherine, King Frederick II of Prussia, and Emperor Joseph II of Austria hungrily eyed Poland. As you have read, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth had once been a great European power. However, its rulers were unable to centralize their power or diminish the influence of the Polish nobility. The divided Polish government was ill-prepared to stand up to the increasing might of its neighbors, Russia, Prussia, and Austria.

To avoid fighting one another, the three monarchs agreed in 1772 to partition or divide up Poland. Catherine took control of the eastern Polish lands, where many Russians and Ukrainians lived. Frederick and Joseph took control of Polish territory in the west. Poland was further partitioned in 1793. Then in 1795, Austria, Prussia, and Russia each took their final slices and the independent country of Poland vanished from the map.

Net until 1815 would a free Polish state reappear.

Looking Ahead

By the mid-1700s, absolute monarchs ruled four of the five leading countries in Europe. Britain, with its strong Parliament, was the only exception. As these five nations competed with one another, they often ended up fighting to maintain a balance of power. At the same time, new ideas were in the air. Radical changes would soon shatter the French monarchy, upset the balance of power, and revolutionize European societies.

Assess and Reteach

Assess Progress

- Have students complete the Section Assessment.
- Administer the Section Quiz.

Teaching Resources, Unit 1, p. 67

- To further assess student understanding, use 3. Reteach

If students need more instruction, have them read the section summary.

Reteach

- Reading and Note Taking Study Guide, p. 73
- Adapted Reading and Note Taking Study Guide, p. 73
- Spanish Reading and Note Taking Study Guide, p. 73

Extend

See this chapter’s Professional Development pages for the Extend Online activity on absolute rulers.

Answer

They both wanted to increase the power of the monarch, extend Russia’s borders, and make it a modern European country.