I was a galvanizing event for the country. Although the majority of Russian people were disillusioned with the tsar, the advent of World War I was a galvanizing event for the country.

Discuss the events of the Great Retreat (p. 140) and how “For many, it was the last straw . . . the vital psychological moment . . . when [soldiers]’ loyalty to the monarchy snapped.”

Why does a monarchy needs loyalty to survive? Discuss the concept of scapegoating and how the Russian people made German-born Alexandra their scapegoat.

How did Rasputin take advantage of Alexandra’s insecurity, religious obsession, and paranoia? Discuss why the Russian army was ill-prepared to fight the German army and why the tsar was clueless about the predicament.

Discuss how quickly the power of “the people” begin to consolidate power upon his return from Switzerland? How was Lenin a natural leader, and how did he begin to consolidate power upon his return from Switzerland?

What are the pros and cons of “fanatical faith” in a movement or cause (p. 192)?

What, other than anger and revenge, would the Bolsheviks want to eliminate the royal family?

On page 192, the author describes what the royal family chose to bring with them from Tsarskoye Selo. Read this passage and discuss their choices. How do their choices reveal their collective state of mind?

What did Lenin mean by “History will not forgive us if we do not take power [soon]”? Why, in later years did the Soviet Union “mythologize” the October Revolution?

Discuss Lenin’s methods for creating a system of equality. Do you agree with his tactics and his treatment of the elite?

Discuss the treatment of the royal family in “The House of Special Purpose.” Do you feel that the family deserved this form of treatment?

How was the murder of the royal family public relations for the Bolshevik-led government? Discuss the murders of the royal family. Do you think they deserved this fate?

Discuss how life under Lenin, and eventually Stalin, resembled life under the tsar.

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ABOUT THE BOOK

To quote author Candace Fleming, The Family Romanov: Murder, Rebellion, and the Fall of Imperial Russia “is essentially three stories in one.” The first is an intimate look at the Romanovs, “the last royal family of Russia, and how their unyielding belief in divine right would ultimately lead to their demise.” The second details the “sweep of revolution” that took place between the Romanov reign. The third traces the “juxtaposition of their excessively privileged lifestyle are the miserable lives of the Russian peas-antry and factory workers, whose first-person accounts of suffering and desire for change set the stage for a revolution that would change the course of history.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Candace Fleming says, “I have always been a storyteller. Even before I could write my name, I could tell a good tale.” She is the award-winning author of many picture books and novels. In addition to The Family Romanov: Murder, Rebellion, and the Fall of Imperial Russia, her histori cal works include The Great and Only Barnum: The Tremendous, Stupendous Life of Showman P. T. Barnum; The Lincolns: A Scrapbook Look at Abraham and Mary; and Amelia Earhart: The Life and Disappearance of Amelia Earhart. Candace Fleming lives outside Chicago. Learn more at CandaceFleming.com.

PRE-READING ACTIVITY

Make two columns on the blackboard or digital Smartboard. At the top of one column write Have. At the top of the other, write Have-Not. Read aloud the opening of the book, “Russia, 1903.” For each column, ask students to offer examples from the reading that pertain to these two extremes of society, such as “masses of fresh roses, lilacs, and mimosa” (Have), and “primitive log huts clustered around rutted roads” (Have-Not). Discuss how the rest of the book shows Imperial Russia from these vastly different points of view. The privilege of the royal family versus the poverty and standard living conditions of the peasantry. Lead students in identifying a segment of the community in lower classes of Russian society. Encourage students to keep in mind the idea of juxtaposition as they read through the text.

PART ONE: Before the Storm

For Discussion

Tzar Nicholas II and the tsars who came before him were autocrats: rulers who exercise complete control. They believed their ruling authority was a divine right bestowed upon them by God. Discuss the notion of absolute power and divine right and why it is so dangerous. Review the passage on page 20 that begins, “Public safety was not the first priority” and contrast the examples given with systems of democratic government. Discuss the characteristics that made Nicholas II a weak and ineffectual leader. Discuss the tsar’s decision to move to Tsarskoe Selo, thereby isolating himself from his ministers and advisors. After the precession panic that killed an estimated fourteen hundred people, Nicholas II went forward with social plans. How did this decision make a poor first impression on the Russian people and begin to sour his relationship with those that took place in 1905 illustrate his ineffectiveness as a leader: “Do you mean that I am to regain the confidence of the people, or that they are to regain my confidence?” (p. 114).

Curriculum Connection

How does the following statement made by Nicholas II in 1905 illustrate his ineffectiveness as a leader: “Do you mean that I am to regain the confidence of my people, or that they are to regain my confidence?” (p. 114).

How does the belief in divine right allow the Russian people to dismiss the tsar’s responsibility for their miserable living conditions? How did this notion change after the March massacre of January 22, 1905, Bloody Sunday?

Discuss Tolstoy’s statement on page 63: “Autoocracy... no longer answers the needs of the Russian people.” To prevent revolution, he said, the government must “give the masses the opportu nity to express their desires and demands...[and] improve men’s lives.” What specific actions could the tsar have taken to improve men’s lives?

What is meant by the term fool’s paradise, and how does this term describe the tsar and his choices?

How did the tsar ultimately agree to the October Manifesto (page 66)? How did the manifesto offer hope to the Russian people?

Discuss the meaning of anti-Semitism and how Nicholas II sanctioned and proliferated anti-Jewish sentiment.

Read and discuss the first-person account on pages 71 to 73, “Beyond the Palace Gates: House No. 13.” Why was the type of violence described in this passage considered acceptable under Nicholas II?

Discuss the meaning of revolutionary and how Lenin’s writings from Geneva helped advance his cause.

Discuss the meaning of Lenin’s statement, “The point is not about victory, but about giving the masses a shake and attracting the masses to the movement.” (p. 78).

Discuss the tsar’s tactics for suppressing rebellion. How did he use his charms to influence the empress?

Compare and contrast the lives of the royal children with the girls whose stories are described on pages 96 and 97.

PART TWO: Dark Clouds Gathering

For Discussion

How can reading books give people ideas and dreams for a better life?

Discuss the concept of a labor strike. Compare peaceful strikes that occur in democratic societies with those that took place in Russia under Tsar Nicholas II.

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Curriculum Connection

Throughout The Family Romanov, the author uses examples of the anti-Semitism endemic in Russia under Tsar Nicholas II. Review some of these examples from Part II. Assign students a research project to discover and examine contemporary examples of anti-Semitism in the United States, Russia, and other parts of the world. Give students time to present their findings to the class.

Discuss the threat that precipitated such an abundance of security.

Why did the Russian people celebrate the birth of the future tsar, Alexei, when their current tsar did nothing to improve their lives?

What is social unrest, and how did the events and examples from Part I hasten its beginnings in Imperial Russia?

Discuss the mean-