



HOW DID THEY CELEBRATE A PUBLIC HOLIDAY?

Educational aim: Through an analysis of the May celebrations from 1980, students get an image of the form and social function of celebrations during the Normalization period. They formulate further questions that allow them to better understand the everyday perspective of life in a dictatorship.

Keywords: *normalization, everyday life, celebrating anniversaries, historical significance, questioning*

Instructions for individual slides:

Notes:

1 AN EXAMINATION OF THE PHOTOGRAPH (5 minutes)

Looking at the photograph using the magnifier.

2 A DESCRIPTION OF THE PHOTOGRAPH (5 minutes)

Marking and describing individual features of the town hall's decoration. Reading the captions.

This photo captures the May celebrations in front of a town hall building in Polička in 1980. On the facade of the building there are a number of signs, pictures, and symbols. Students may notice the portraits of Engels, Marx, Lenin and Klement Gottwald, the first communist president and the head of the postwar communist party; it is not necessary that they identify all of them. Other important features are the years, the state name abbreviations, the symbol of the star, the flags (Czechoslovak and Soviet) and a sign noting the XV. Congress of the KSČ (the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia) and the anniversary of the Red Army's liberation from nazism.

3 A DESCRIPTION OF WHAT'S GOING ON IN THE PHOTOGRAPH (5 minutes)

Writing into the text box. Answering the question: Who took part in celebrating the state holiday?

Students may notice that the people in the photograph are assuming various postures, which apparently reflect their social significance. Some people are standing on the platform, some are under it and facing the audience, others are standing by the town hall wall with banners or in the band, and most of the people are in the crowd of listeners. Important details (folk and pioneer costumes, uniforms, medals, musical instruments, or banners) can all be used to interpret the photograph.

4 INTERPRETATION (10 minutes)

Students answer the concluding questions and sum up the results of their investigation in the two text boxes: (?) What do you think was the significance of the celebration, and why did people take part? (?) What about the photograph or the event would you like to learn more about?

Interpretations of the significance of the public celebration can be varied. On an ideological level, the holiday refers back to the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia's leading role and reminds people of the conclusions of the XV. party congress, which were binding for the whole society. At the same time, reminding people of the Soviet liberation from nazism during the Normalization period strengthened the positive view of the Red Army and the Soviet Union, which the occupation of Czechoslovakia by the armies of the Warsaw Pact starting in August of 1968 had disrupted.

Students are usually interested in whether participation was required and why so many people joined in. The teacher can confirm that various forms of social control did force people to participate (required school participation, potential sanctions at work), but there could also have been other strategies at work. For normal citizens living outside of the center in the periphery, the May celebrations might have provided a welcome disruption to the weekly working rhythm, entertainment, and an opportunity to meet up with people and commemorate loved ones who did not survive the war.

Other ways of engaging with this material

The activity generates new questions and urges students to compare it with the situation in the areas where they live or study. You can use a school chronicle, if it's available, and introduce students with how similar events took place right at their school. This will help them understand the scale of the celebrations. Students can ask their grandparents how they experienced holidays during the communist period, or they can find former students at their school to ask. They can go to their town centers and find people who may have witnessed the event, and then ask them for an explanation of what was going on in the photo. Personal memories of similar celebrations can considerably enrich the interpretation phase of working with the photos.