

One day in the life of ivan denisovich critical essay

[Engineering](#), [Computer Security](#)



CJ Raia August 20th 2012 Mr. Balazs AP European History One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich “ One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich,” the Nobel Prize winning novel by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, describes life in a Russian gulag during the mid-20th century. The novel describes one day in the gulag through the eyes of Ivan Denisovich or “ Shukhov” as he is referred to in the book. It shows how Shukhov’s day begins with waking at five in the morning to negative forty degree temperatures. He then eats breakfast, which consists of “ skilly,” a watery soup made of old vegetables, and moldy bread. After breakfast, he proceeds to be forcefully marched to the work field where he and his “ gang” toil in the freezing cold constructing a power plant. While dressed in nothing but rags, and some felt boots, Shukhov lays mortar while being buffeted by the harsh winds of the Siberian tundra. After a full 12-hour workday, he is then marched back to the gulag where he has dinner, which is again skilly, and old bread. This particular day ends up being a good day for Shukhov because he is able to get two portions for lunch and dinner, and a small pinch of tobacco.

This routine is repeated every day for Shukhov’s “ light” ten-year sentence. This novel gives the reader a glimpse of life in a “ gulag. ” It shows the reader how during Stalin’s Communist reign over the USSR, those people considered socially dangerous, disruptive, suspicious, or disloyal were thrown into labor camps to serve out their sentences. The novel gives us an idea of how harsh these camps were and how they were used to provide the communist regime with cheap labor. In addition, the book gives the reader a taste of the distrust that was circling around the USSR at the time.

We see that many of the prisoners thrown in the gulag were considered spies or anti-communists. However, it is shown that the majority of these prisoners, including Shukhov, were in fact innocent. This gives us an idea of how oppressive the Communist government under Stalin was during the 1940's. In this novel, there are many different themes. Through the character, Solzhenitsyn shows how humans can endure the most severe conditions. He shows how Shukhov and his inmates maintain their humanity through small acts and routines.

Routines like, not licking empty bowls and removing one's hat before meals. Throughout the book, the prisoners work hard to maintain their humanity and dignity. They do so despite the horrible conditions and the imprisonment. Another theme that Solzhenitsyn touches upon is the destruction of human solidarity. In the book it says, " The zek's main enemy is another zek. " Solzhenitsyn shows us throughout the novel that the distrust and conflict between prisoners just worsens prison life.

He shows how prisoners with powerful positions, such as the foreman or the cook, abuse their power and take from other prisoners. This shows how the rough life in camp and lack of necessities forces the zeks to turn against each other while imprisoned. Another theme identified in the novel was the possession of time. Since much of the prisoners day was structured and filled with work the small amounts of time in the morning, during meal times, and in the evening were precious to the zeks.

They used this time to perform small jobs to earn money or go about business that would help ensure their survival. Since these small amounts of time were so precious, the zeks acted like the time was theirs and when it was

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taken away, they felt cheated out of something extremely valuable. The last theme identified in the novel is the importance of faith. Solzhenitsyn demonstrates how faith can help the human mind endure through and even make light of a difficult situation. The character Alyoshka, a devout Baptist, exhibits how faith can be a way of survival and happiness while stuck in the camps.

At the conclusion of the novel, Shukhov experiences a sensation of inner peace, which resembles the feeling that Alyoshka experiences. This shows that religious faith gives strength in times of hardship. Overall, this novel was very helpful to me because it taught me a lot about Soviet history. It gave me insight on how brutal the Soviet gulags were. It allowed me to see what type of everyday hardships the inmates went through while imprisoned there. It also gave me insight into how severe the Soviet government was during the 1930's and 40's.

It really taught me what labor camps were and how they deeply affected the nation's people. The fact that this book was a novel also helped me learn about history in a more effective way. Seeing life through Shukhov's eyes almost let me experience the harshness of the gulag. Personally, I think novels are much more helpful when it comes to learning about history because not only do they supply you with facts, but they also allow the reader to experience history through the characters. The plots in novels also help in learning about history.

Unlike non-fiction, books, which are generally just dry facts, novels, supply a plot that can be exciting for the reader. It makes the reader actually concerned or excited for those characters participating in the plot line.

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Reading “ One day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich” by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn not only was a very helpful tool in learning about Soviet Labor camps during the early-mid 20th century but also a very enjoyable read. Personally, I enjoyed the book very much due to its vivid description of the harsh life in the gulag and enthralling account of Shukhov’s actions to survive.

The story of just one man’s day in such a camp and his ability to overcome the adversity not only sparked my interest but also my appreciation for people in history. This novel made me respect those who actually went through these camps and survived. It gave me a new perspective on history. Not only was this novel a fascinating story but also a very well written one. Solzhenitsyn beautifully captured the emotions of the characters throughout the book. It really gave me a sense that I was feeling the hopelessness or the drive for survival that many of the characters felt.