

# Ivan denisovich shukhov essay sample



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

Ivan Denisovich Shukhov wakes up to the same setting he has woken up to for several years. As one of millions of prisoners in the Siberian labour camps, he is forced to suffer sub-zero temperatures and a lack of food on a daily basis. He is not a unique or heroic figure; he is not the only innocent prisoner in a camp crowded with criminals. This book is about just one day in the life of this prisoner and talks about his experiences within this work camp.

In the morning there is a reveille. Shukhov almost never oversleeps, since by waking up early he can have ninety minutes of free time before the prisoners assemble to go to work. He earns money during this time by sewing mittens, bringing prisoners their valenki (felt boots), sweeping the warehouses, or collecting dishes from the mess halls.

‘ Shukhov always arose. But this day he didn’t. He had felt queer the evening before, feverish, with pains all over his body.’

However this particular morning he is feeling feverish, he lies in bed and listens to what is happening around him.

‘ He couldn’t see, but his ears told him everything going on in the barrack-room and especially in the corner his team occupied.’

He thinks that it is one of the guards who would let him off if he were not to wake up but to his surprise the Tartar finds him still asleep and sentences with three days penalty with work. Shukhov is led into the staff quarters and told to clean the floor of the guardroom, as he is being let off. He thanks the guard, knowing that he can leave as soon as he has finished. This was quite

lucky for Shukhov and made him quite pleased as he avoided the three days and he could still go to have his breakfast.

Through inadequate objects and quantities of food, the men of the camp communicate their longing for a more pleasant and comfortable life. In this same way, they place great importance on the moments of peace and rest they experience. When Ivan discovers that his only punishment for waking up late will be to scrub the guardroom floor, he is not only relieved but also pleased that the task is simple and he will still have time to eat. Life in the ‘ gulag’ has reduced all of the prisoners to their simplest urges and desires.

Shukhov is part of a team called the 104th. Shukhov is part of the Stalinist Work Camps therefore must complete work during his time in the camp. The PPD or the Production planning department issues the work that they do, and where it is to be done. The work camp in which Shukhov is situated in is in Siberia in sub-zero conditions. Shukhov’s team were originally sent to the ‘ Socialist Way of Life Settlement’, which is one of the worst places to work because it would have been twenty degrees of frost, and wind. There would be no shelter or fire.

‘ There wouldn’t be a warm corner for a whole month’

Their team leader, Tiurin, only saved the team. He must have bribed them with pork fat. This pleased Shukhov as they got a better place to work.

Shukhov is more upset about where his work could be, and not that he has to work.

‘ Tiurin must have greased them with that kilogram of pork fat, for the 194th had gone back to its old place in the column.’

During lunchtime, Shukhov received an extra bowl of Kasha. He did this by deceiving the cook. The cook was handing out the teams bowls, however he needed some more and therefore Shukhov gave them to the Estonians and told Pavlo that they had fourteen when in fact they had sixteen and the cook believed them and therefore the team received two extra bowls of Kasha. Pavlo handed in one bowl although kept him anxious and gave another to Tsezar. His trickery and quick thinking gave him an extra bowl of Kasha and gave him satisfaction for himself.

“ Fourteen,” Pavlo said with a shrug. Himself, he wouldn’t have filched the extra bowls, for as a deputy team-leader he had to maintain his dignity: but as he was simply repeating what Shukhov had said – he could always blame him for the mistake.’

Tiurin, the team leader, had fixed the work quota into the teams favour. He had to deliberate over the ‘ percentage’ meaning a paper stating the amount of work done and the percentage of the plan it amounts to, on which the team’s rations for the next five day depended. The hundred and fourth had a clever team leader, who concentrated on the work-report than the work itself.

‘ A clever team leader was one who concentrated on the work-report. That was what kept the men fed.

Tiurin had to prove that work, which had not been done, had been done, to turn a job that was rated low, into one that was rated high. Tiurin did this and came back with a good one, which was surprising considering that they did not actually do any work during the day. This also meant that Shukhov was content that he was definitely having food for the next five days.

During his work he had to build a wall being a fine mason. He built a wall with Senka and Kilgas. He enjoyed building the wall due to he was very skilled at it; he built the way with great pace and accuracy. He became warm due to doing it so fast which was essential to survive in the camp. He was building much faster than the rest of the team and they were struggling to keep up with him. He was enjoying himself so much that he did extra work when his time was up. These little pleasures please the men in these harsh conditions.

‘ And now Shukhov and the other masons felt the cold no longer. Thanks to the urgent work, the first wave of heat had come over them.’

Shukhov had also found a piece of a hacksaw blade whilst walking along a path.

‘ As he walked along the path he caught sight in the snow of a short length of steel – a bit of a hacksaw blade.’

At first he could conceive no immediate use for it, but then you can never tell what you might need in the future. So he picked it up. Many people if seeing that on the floor normally would just ignore it and walk on. However Shukhov was an opportunist. He saw an opportunity that could make his life slightly

easier and therefore grabbed it. He was pleased he got it. However he forgot about this hacksaw blade and only realised just before he was going to be frisked.

‘ His choice had to be swift as the wind. Should he take cover behind the row in front of him and toss the bit of metal in the snow (it’d be noticed but they wouldn’t know who the culprit was) or keep it on him?’

He successfully smuggled it through which pleased him.

Also during the day he had earned some extras by doing favours for Tsezar. Firstly he waited in line at the parcel office for Tsezar and earned an extra bowl of skilly. Quite valuable for a little favour.

‘ That bowl of soup – it was dearer than freedom, dearer than life itself, past, present and future.’

He also earned Tsezar’s bread ration too, which is quite fortunate. This meant another 200g of bread. He also looked after Tsezar’s parcel during the recount by thinking of a good plan to make sure it does not get stolen. For this he earned two biscuits, two lumps of sugar and a slice of sausage. This was turning out to be quite a good day for Shukhov for earning extra food.

After his bowls of Kasha Shukhov was longing for a smoke and therefore borrowed some of his other team mates, the two Estonians. By not being a jackal he earned this and thoroughly enjoyed his smoke. He also bought two glass filled of tobacco from a Lett in hut 7 for two roubles. He felt he had bought some good tobacco, which made his day quite a good one as he enjoyed having a smoke as well.

At first when he woke up Shukhov felt ill, and thought that he ought to go to the infirmary. He first thought that he might not be able to go on with the pain, which was aching back and around his joints. At first it was giving him pain, however as the day wore on he got better and by the end of the day he had forgotten about his illness.

In the conclusion of the day Shukhov recalls:

‘ Shukhov went to sleep fully content. He’d had many strokes of luck that day: they hadn’t put him in the cells; they hadn’t sent the team to the settlement; he’d pinched a bowl of kasha at dinner; the team leader had fixed the rates well; he’d built a well and enjoyed doing it; he’d smuggled that bit of hacksaw-blade through; he’d earned something from Tsezar in the evening; he’d bought that tobacco. And he hadn’t fallen ill. He’d got over it. A day without a dark cloud. Almost a happy day.’

The reason that it was only ‘ almost a happy day’ is because he is in a work camp in hard conditions where he must try and survive. Also he comments on not having a dark cloud. He forgets the re-count at night and the hold up after work, however still finds the day to be a good one. Also certain things could have gone wrong that would have made his day a bad one. He could have been sent to the cells, he could have been caught with the hacksaw blade; also he could have been confiscated of his hidden food. This could have been down to luck or even good planning.