

Russian school propaganda

1. Note down definition of unknown words to the left.
2. On the right, make a list of all of the things the article indicates Russia is doing to indoctrinate children. Explain each action in your own words and highlight the relevant section of the article
3. In a paragraph of 50-100 words explain the difference between how Russian schools deal with this conflict and what your experience has been regarding this conflict has been in school

Putin's war propaganda becomes 'patriotic' lessons in Russian schools, Mary Ilyushina, [washingtonpost.com](https://www.washingtonpost.com)

Riga, Latvia — In a dingy Russian classroom with worn-out rugs, elementary school students lined up to form the shape of the letter Z: the symbol used on much of Russia's military equipment in Ukraine and an emblem of support at home, showing up on everywhere from bus stops to car stickers to corporate logos.

Now it has become part of the classroom lessons as the Kremlin expands its anti-Ukraine propaganda to students as young as kindergarten. It's another front in President Vladimir Putin's sweeping crackdowns to criminalize dissent and enforce an unquestioning brand of patriotism even as Russia grows increasingly isolated.

Over the past three weeks, thousands of posts appeared on Russian social media featuring schoolchildren — up to high school age — attending special "patriotic lessons" or posing for pictures forming Z and V-for-victory signs.

"I'm for the president. I'm for Russia!" a teacher exclaims in a clip posted Saturday by an official page for the Nizhny Novgorod region, about 250 miles east of Moscow.

"We are united and therefore invincible!" a choir of young children screams into the camera, holding balloons in the white-blue-red colors of the Russian flag.

Russia's education minister, Sergey Kravtsov, openly described schools as central to Moscow's fight to "win the information and psychological war" against the West. At the same time, Russia has imposed laws against spreading "fake" news or "discrediting" the Russian armed forces — prompting many journalists and activists to leave Russia.

The country's Internet regulator, Roskomnadzor, also ordered media outlets to delete reports using the words "invasion" or "war" and only rely on official government sources, which call the Ukraine war a "special operation." Russian state TV removed all entertainment shows from its programming, filling the broadcasts with propaganda-filled talk shows and state-vetted news.

On March 3, Kravtsov said more than 5 million children across Russia watched a lesson called "Defenders of Peace." It's part of a government-produced series broadcast online in schools or given to teachers in the form of a slide show for mandatory lessons. The series includes other episodes, including "Adult Conversation About the World," all pushing Putin's historical revisionist speeches justifying the Ukraine invasion.

(Recordings of these lessons were reviewed by The Washington Post.)

Children are told that Ukraine never truly existed as a country and was once just a tiny piece of land called Malorossiya. A slide show of maps follows, claiming that modern Ukraine is a construct of the Soviet Union and areas such as the Crimean Peninsula — which Russia forcibly annexed in 2014 — accidentally fell into Kyiv's hands after the Soviet collapse in 1991.

The lesson shifts to the World War II era, noting a historical truth that some factions in Ukraine collaborated with the Nazis, although many Ukrainians fought against the Axis. But then the lesson goes on to echo Putin's agitprop of using "Nazi" smears against the current government of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky.

Events of the past few weeks, such as Russian attacks on civilian targets including a maternity ward in Mariupol and a school near the western city Kharkiv, are presented as fake news. The narrative of "Washington-created" attempts to "whitewash Ukraine" is especially emphasized in sessions for high-schoolers and university students, who are more likely to shun state TV and get most of their information online.

Major Western platforms such as Instagram and Facebook have been banned in Russia, forcing people to use virtual private networks, or VPNs, to bypass the blocks. In turn, Russian authorities blocked more than 20 of the most popular VPN services.

In one school presentation obtained by the London-based Dossier Center, an investigative outlet funded by self-exiled Russian oligarch Mikhail Khodorkovsky, Russian attempts to shift the blame for attacks on residential areas in Kharkiv.

"Fake: Russian military is attacking residential areas in Kharkiv. True: High-precision Russian weapons only strike military targets and don't hit civilians, which the Ministry of Defense said many times," it said.

The presentation also urges children to only trust official sources, such as websites of the Russian Defense Ministry, Putin and state-run media.

Some parents, outraged by the political indoctrination involving children, sought to cancel the photo-ops involving Z imagery.

Igor Kostin's daughter, who attends high school in the Krasnodar area east of Crimea, was told to "dress warm and be pretty" for an event on Friday.

"She said they would only tell what is this for the next day," Kostin said in an interview.

"Even the children were not told what they would be taking part in."

Kostin texted the teacher and learned the school had to participate in "Crimean Spring"

— a celebration of the eight years since Russia annexed the peninsula following Ukraine's Maidan revolution, which ousted a pro-Moscow president.

Putin also used the date to organize a pro-war rally in Moscow to extol Russia's

"Christian values" and portray the fight as a necessary measure to stop "neo-Nazis and extreme nationalists" in Ukraine from committing "genocide."

Kostin told the school that his daughter would not attend the celebration, citing laws on education that prohibit bringing politics into the classroom.

"Out of the 22 students in the class, only five parents sent their children to school that day," he said.

But he said there were no public displays of opposition from other parents. "Maybe they quietly agreed with me ... but people are terrified," Kostin said. "Those for the president can say this openly, but everyone else is very much intimidated."

In a video Kostin showed The Post, dozens of students from other classes are seen marching and dancing with Russian flags to a patriotic war song with Z signs on their chests made out of St. George ribbons, a symbol of World War II in Russia.

"This is what my daughter was supposed to be a part of?" he said. "At the end, they lined up the children to form Z as well."

A mother of a young son from Gatchina, about 30 miles south of St. Petersburg, told The Post that she was worried about the war propaganda creeping into the son's school.

"So I carefully asked my son if they were being forced to participate in something," said the mother, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to avoid drawing attention from authorities.

"And on Friday [March 18], he said that several kids from his class who were in white T-shirts were asked to form the letter V and wear Saint George ribbons," she said. "[My son] didn't participate in the photo, but I still got angry."

After a collective complaint to the teacher, the photo was taken down from the school's social network page.

"[The teacher] was terribly upset with us," the mother said. "She says the administration reprimanded her because of us and that we let her down."

Kamran Manfly, a 28-year old geography teacher from Moscow, refused to hold "the patriotic lessons." As the invasion went on, the school ordered the faculty to use only state-approved language when discussing the "special operation" with students, he said.

On March 8, Manfly wrote on Instagram: "Recently at school, I was told I couldn't have any other stance other than the official, state one. You know what? I have one! I do not want to be the mirror of state propaganda."

Manfly told the Russian-language outlet Meduza that the school administration fired him the next day. He claimed one of the school guards attacked him when he returned to get his personal belongings.

"[Teachers] immediately fled to their offices, so as not to help and not to participate, which the is the saddest part. Everyone is keeping their mouth shut, either afraid or supportive," he told Meduza, adding that out of 150 school employees, only one teacher called him and expressed support.