



**Peter the Great Gallery Walk**

## Introduction

Russia was a huge landlocked country and was much less developed than other countries in Europe. While the Mongols had taught the Russians how to create a strong government, they also cut Russia off from the advancements in Western Europe that came about during the Renaissance. Russia was also constantly at war with other countries because they wanted access to the ocean and ports to help with travel and trade. In addition to geographic problems, Russia was also a land of serfs (peasants) and boyars (nobles). Serfs were treated like property and there was no possibility of social mobility. The absolute ruler of Russia, or the czar (also spelled tsar), tried to keep up with other nations at the time, but had largely been unsuccessful until Peter the Great.



# Peter the Great

Born the 14th child of the Czar Aleksey I in 1672, Peter's path to greatness wasn't obvious right away. After his father's death in 1682, Peter had to share power because he had been named joint-czar with his older half-brother, Ivan. Ivan was clearly favored by the Moscow elite and as a result, Ivan's even older full sister was named regent of the throne. As such, Peter, although still just a boy, was ostracized at court. As a result, Peter was forced to live outside Moscow with his mother in partial political exile.

Peter's exile would actually become a blessing in disguise. He was allowed to learn and mature outside the stifling political atmosphere of Russian court life. He gained passions for sailing, military games, and math. Later, Ivan's sister was displaced from the regency, causing Peter to gain considerable power at the Russian court. When Ivan died in 1696, Peter ascended to the throne as Czar Peter I.

Soon after taking the throne, Peter centralized power in the monarchy by ruthlessly breaking the power of the Boyars, the traditional nobles in Moscow who had originally obstructed Peter from power. He continued to shut out the Boyars throughout his reign, often by elevating accomplished advisors and generals of lower social rank to important positions normally reserved for the Boyars.

Раскольникъ говоритъ  
слушай шырляникъ  
я бороды стригъ не  
хочу бо твѣ днѣ на  
тебѣ скоро крестъ закручу

Шырляникъ хо  
детъ раскольнику  
бороды стригъ •



## Russian Fashion

Peter sought to modernize all aspects of Russian society, including Russian fashion. He ordered his noblemen to wear fashionable Western clothes instead of their old-fashioned long coats.

Peter also sought to get rid of his nobles' long beards and would personally cut off the beards of his noblemen. After Peter returned to Russia at the end of his European voyage a party was thrown in his honor. During this party the crowd's mood went from excitement to horror as Peter unexpectedly pulled out a massive barber's razor. After Peter greeted his friends he began shaving off their beards' with his own hands! Given Peter's power, none of his associates dared to question his actions. If the nobles refused to cut their beards then they would have to pay Peter's yearly beard tax and wear a medal proclaiming, "Beards are a ridiculous ornament."



## Religious Control

During Peter's reign he took over the Russian Orthodox Church to help establish his rule. As an absolute ruler, Peter thought it was unacceptable for the church to have power separate from himself. He was also interested in the church because it was a rich institution with a lot of land and it represented the "old," or backward, ways of thinking.

Peter the Great's takeover of the church was relatively painless. When the head of the church died in 1700, Peter simply did not replace him. Next Peter transferred the church land to a government department and under the czar's control. He also created new laws for how the clergy could do. In essence, these rules were designed to control the clergy's daily life so that they became under the state's control.





## **Russian Military Ambitions and Reforms**

Before the rule of Peter the Great, the Russian army was based on villagers going into battle with no or little knowledge about military leadership. There were some professionals in the army but they were few and far between.

Peter wanted a warm water port that would give him and Russia access to the world via the sea year round. In order to gain a port he waged a 21 year long war with Sweden. In 1721 Peter succeeded in gaining a port along the Baltic coast in northern Europe. As a celebration of his accomplishment he declared Russia an Empire and named himself the first Russian emperor.

Technology from Western Europe proved very important in the development of an efficient Russian navy. When Peter returned to Russia, a large shipbuilding industry was established. By the end of Peter's reign, 28,000 men were serving in the Russian navy on 49 ships and 800 smaller vessels.

Peter also recruited specialists to help organize and expand the navy. About sixty specialists from England traveled back with the Tsar after his trip to Europe. These included master shipbuilders. Over the next hundred years, England continued to provide many high-ranking officers for the Russian navy. Russian sailors also trained on British ships. After Peter's reign as tsar, Russian industry and armed forces were completely reorganized, and the country became a successful naval power.



## Peter's European Tour

With his place on the throne secured, the young Czar Peter set off on a grand European tour. Although one of his main justifications for his tour was garnering allies for Russia in its fight against the Ottoman Turks on its Southwestern border, Peter did far more than play diplomatic games. He even traveled in disguise sometimes, visiting schools, factories, museums, and shipyards, learning about European practices.

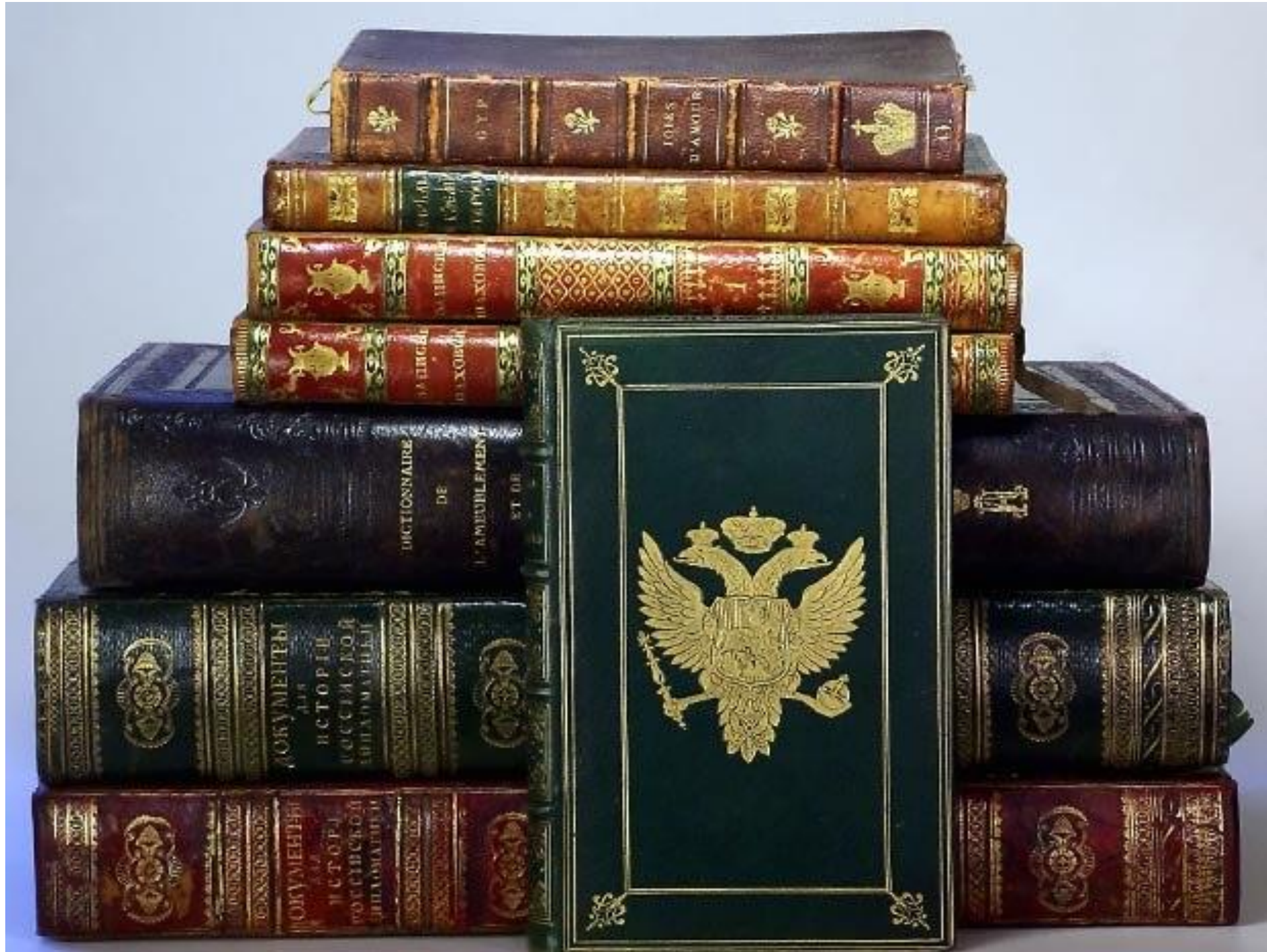
Many of these European practices Peter planned to implement upon his return to Russia. Perhaps most important of these was Peter's fascination - likely stemming from his boyhood love for sailing - with the grand European war fleets of Great Britain, France, and others. Many historians contend that it was on this tour that Peter resolved to build a Russian fleet - nonexistent at the time - and wage war against the Swedes who had shut the Russians off from the Baltic Sea in the previous century. He was serious about this ambition; later in his reign Peter sent 50 boys of noble birth to Italy, Great Britain, and Holland to study shipbuilding and master European naval techniques.



## **Economic Reform**

The port Peter won on the Baltic was not simply meant to provide a naval base. Peter also hoped to improve Russian trade relations with the mercantilist (trade/ investment) powerhouses of Western Europe. In keeping with the principles of mercantilism, Peter encouraged industrial production throughout Russia. He even invited foreign experts to Russia to direct industrial development, in order to create goods for the European market.

Most industry was dominated by the state, which was the source of capital, raw materials, and labor, as well as being the main purchaser of finished goods. With the direction of the state, factories producing a wealth of materials and products were established. The state fixed prices and had the right to purchase the first goods from the producers. The profits made by private businesses' were limited to the surplus of produce left over from the state.



## Education

Education also had to be modernized if Russia was going to survive as a power in Europe. During his travels in Europe, Peter had seen the importance of the knowledge of science and math for military success.

In 1707, a School of Medicine was created and in 1712 a School of Engineering. Thirty math schools were created in the provinces and in 1724, a year before Peter's death, a School of Science was established. For the educated public, a newspaper was established in 1703. It was issued by the state. Peter believed that military leaders had to be educated but that a loyal public should also be if Russia was to shake off its reputation of being backwards.

Many young noblemen were encouraged to do as Peter had done – go to Western Europe and experience what it was like and also learn. Young Russian noblemen were encouraged to learn about the latest technology, economic theory and political science. Peter believed that these young educated noblemen were of great benefit to Russia's development and did not view them as a threat.

Peter also changed the capital of Russia from the city of Moscow to St. Petersburg. He built it on the western part of Russia so he would have a “window on the west.” He wanted everyone in Russia to embrace the new ways of learning and created a city to represent these new views.





## St Petersburg

With Peter's modernizations and Europeanization of Russia in full swing, Peter wanted a new capital emblematic of the new country he felt he was building. He began building an entirely new city on the Gulf of Finland in 1703 where only a few fishing huts had resided previously. The location was of strategic importance as it blocked the entrance the Neva River. This protected the region from rival naval fleets.

In order to build the city Peter need labor. Peter promised high wages to talented carpenters and masons from abroad to plan his city, and every province was required to send general laborers to the Northern site. As a result, the sprawling edifices, which make up modern St. Petersburg, were completed in record time, despite several attempts made by the Swedes to take the city in its early years. Peter wanted a city that resembled and would rival those of Europe he had visited on his travels. Naming it St. Petersburg after his namesake, Peter officially moved the Russian capital there in 1712.

## Analysis Questions

**Directions:**

**Answer the following based on the information that you have gathered through the gallery walk. Answer must be given in complete sentences.**

- 1. In what ways was Peter the Great an absolute monarch?**
- 2. What drove Peter to undertake the ambitious reforms seen in the gallery walk?**
- 3. Was Peter successful in creating a “western” and modern European state in Russia? Explain why or why not.**
- 4. Which two of Peter’s reforms do you think were the most significant? Explain.**
- 5. Which two of Peter’s reforms do you think were least significant? Explain.**
- 6. What do you think will be the lasting effect of the policies of absolute rulers such as Peter the Great and Louis XIV of France?**