Portraits and Power

How public praise shaped Stalin's image

TOT.C.8.2.E "the cult of personality that glorified Stalin"

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline three ways Stalin was glorified, circle one fact the official image left out, and number a sentence that helps explain why public praise may not show what people privately believed.

The Leader Everywhere

1 In a Soviet classroom in 1937, a pupil might see Stalin's portrait above the blackboard and read a newspaper calling him the wise guide of the country. Such praise was not simply a teacher's opinion. Under Stalin, the Communist Party directed newspapers, schools, and public celebrations to present him as an exceptional leader. Posters placed his face beside smiling workers and children. Together, these messages made loyalty to Stalin seem like loyalty to the Soviet Union itself. Repetition mattered: people encountered the same image at school, at work, and in the streets.

2 The state also shaped how people remembered the past. Official accounts increasingly credited Stalin with guiding the 1917 revolution and the nation's later achievements, even when many others had played essential roles. Editors removed disgraced rivals from some photographs and publications, making them less visible in the public record. Newspapers celebrated new factories and farm production as proof of Stalin's wisdom. Yet these accounts left out the human costs of forced collectivization, including famine, and the violence of political purges. By selecting achievements and suppressing evidence of suffering, propaganda turned a complicated history into a story about one supposedly flawless leader.

3 Praise was backed by pressure as well as persuasion. During the Great Terror of 1936 to 1938, officials arrested people accused of disloyalty, often on false charges. A citizen who questioned the official picture of Stalin could risk punishment, while public praise offered a safer path. This does not mean everyone who admired him was pretending; some people sincerely supported him or valued the changes they saw. But portraits, controlled stories, and fear made it difficult to tell free approval from required approval. The cult of personality was this organized glorification of Stalin, not merely his fame.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How could seeing Stalin's image at school, at work, and in the streets shape a person's idea of his role in the Soviet Union?

2. How did official accounts of the 1917 revolution and the removal of rivals from publications work together to glorify Stalin?

3. What impression did reports about factories and farm production create, and what did those reports leave out?

4. Why would widespread public praise of Stalin not prove that everyone freely approved of him?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a five-sentence museum label for an imagined 1937 train station displaying Stalin's portrait and a newspaper headline praising him. Explain two ways the display glorifies him, name one reality it leaves out, and explain why public praise alone cannot prove everyone agreed.

ANSWER KEY

Portraits and Power

HIGH SCHOOL · TOT.C.8.2.E

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline three ways Stalin was glorified, circle one fact the official image left out, and number a sentence that helps explain why public praise may not show what people privately believed. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How could seeing Stalin's image at school, at work, and in the streets shape a person's idea of his role in the Soviet Union?	**Repeated images presented Stalin as central to Soviet life and made loyalty to him seem like loyalty to the country.**
2	How did official accounts of the 1917 revolution and the removal of rivals from publications work together to glorify Stalin?	**They increased Stalin's apparent importance while making other people's contributions less visible.**
3	What impression did reports about factories and farm production create, and what did those reports leave out?	**They presented achievements as proof of Stalin's wisdom while leaving out suffering linked to forced collectivization, including famine, and the violence of political purges.**
4	Why would widespread public praise of Stalin not prove that everyone freely approved of him?	**Questioning the official image could bring punishment, so some people may have praised Stalin for safety, although others sincerely supported him.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

This train station displays Stalin's portrait beside a headline that calls him the nation's guide. Travelers who see his face every day may come to think he is central to Soviet life. The headline gives one leader credit for progress that depended on many people's work. Neither display mentions the famine linked to forced collectivization. Some travelers may have admired Stalin, but the risk of punishment for questioning him means their public praise cannot prove they freely agreed.

Accept explanations that connect repeated images, selective accounts, or fear to Stalin's glorification. For the museum label, look for five original sentences that address both methods, one omission, and the limits of public praise as evidence.