Behind the Work

Trace how the GULAG connected state power, labor, and human cost.

TOT.C.8.2.G "the GULAG forced labor network"

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline how people entered and moved through the GULAG, circle the work prisoners did, and number two human costs. Use your marks to trace how the network operated.

The GULAG as a Network

1 Under Joseph Stalin, the Soviet government expanded a network of prisons, labor camps, and labor colonies called the GULAG. The name came from the agency that administered many of these sites. From the 1930s into the early 1950s, authorities sent millions of people through this system. Some were convicted of ordinary crimes; others were accused of political offenses, sometimes on little or false evidence. Police arrests and court decisions, including rulings by special bodies outside ordinary courts, supplied the camps with prisoners. Guards then moved many prisoners long distances by rail or other transport, cutting them off from their families and familiar places.

2 The camps were spread across the Soviet Union, not gathered in one place. Prisoners cut timber in forests, mined coal and gold, and built roads, rail lines, and canals. Officials assigned workers to projects the state considered important, including projects in remote regions where attracting free workers was difficult. This arrangement linked arrests in one region to work thousands of kilometers away. Prisoners received little or no choice about their jobs and could be punished for failing to meet work demands. The labor helped build infrastructure and extract resources, but forced work and weak protections exposed prisoners to injury and exhaustion.

3 A railway built with camp labor might look like a sign of progress to someone who saw only the finished tracks. For prisoners, conditions could mean crowded housing, inadequate food, disease, harsh weather, and separation from family. Conditions varied among camps and over time, but many prisoners died. After Stalin died in 1953, the government released large numbers of prisoners, and the camp system changed and contracted; it did not disappear overnight. The GULAG was therefore more than a set of isolated prisons: state decisions sent people across a vast territory, used their labor for economic goals, and imposed severe human costs.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did arrests and transportation work together to supply distant GULAG camps with labor?

2. Why did officials assign prisoners to projects in remote regions? Name two kinds of work prisoners did there or elsewhere in the network.

3. How could a finished railway hide the human cost of GULAG labor?

4. What changed after Stalin's death in 1953, and what does that change show about the government's role in the network?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a 65 to 85 word museum label for a display of work gloves. Explain how this everyday object could represent the connections among state power, labor, and human cost in the GULAG, using at least two details from the passage without inventing a prisoner's story.

ANSWER KEY

Behind the Work

HIGH SCHOOL · TOT.C.8.2.G

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline how people entered and moved through the GULAG, circle the work prisoners did, and number two human costs. Use your marks to trace how the network operated. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did arrests and transportation work together to supply distant GULAG camps with labor?	**Arrests and rulings sent people into the system, and guards transported many of them long distances to camps where they were assigned work.**
2	Why did officials assign prisoners to projects in remote regions? Name two kinds of work prisoners did there or elsewhere in the network.	**Attracting free workers to remote regions was difficult. Prisoners' work included cutting timber, mining, and building roads, rail lines, or canals.**
3	How could a finished railway hide the human cost of GULAG labor?	**The railway could appear to be progress while hiding the prisoners' forced work, harsh living conditions, separation from family, and risk of death.**
4	What changed after Stalin's death in 1953, and what does that change show about the government's role in the network?	**The government released large numbers of prisoners, and the system contracted without disappearing immediately. Government decisions could reshape the network.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

A pair of work gloves symbolizes labor that prisoners could not freely refuse. Soviet authorities sent people accused of crimes or political offenses to distant camps, where officials assigned them to projects such as cutting timber or building rail lines. The work supplied resources and infrastructure, but prisoners faced exhaustion, inadequate food, and separation from family. A visitor looking only at a finished railway would miss the state power and human suffering behind it.

Accept other passage-supported examples of work and human costs. The museum label should connect government decisions to forced labor and its effects, not claim that the displayed gloves belonged to a particular prisoner.