When Silence Spreads

The Great Terror in the army and everyday life

TOT.C.8.2.H "purges of the military officer corps and terror against the citizenry"

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two details about the purge of army officers, circle two details about terror against civilians, and number two sentences that show how fear affected both groups.

Fear in Stalin's Soviet Union

1 In 1937, a Red Army commander in the Soviet Union could lose his position after an accusation of disloyalty. Joseph Stalin's government arrested many officers during the Great Terror of 1937 and 1938. Among those executed was Marshal Mikhail Tukhachevsky, a senior military leader convicted in a secret trial on false charges. Other officers were dismissed, imprisoned, or executed. The government presented these actions as protection against enemies. Yet accusations often rested on forced confessions or fabricated evidence. Removing experienced commanders disrupted the army's leadership and warned those who remained that questioning the government could be dangerous.

2 At night, a knock on an apartment door could mean that officers of the NKVD, the Soviet secret police, had come to arrest someone. Civilians could be accused of criticizing Stalin, hiding an enemy, or simply knowing a person already arrested. Investigators used pressure and torture to obtain confessions, while denunciations by neighbors or coworkers could trigger suspicion. Many prisoners were sent to forced-labor camps; others were executed. Families also suffered when a relative disappeared or when they themselves faced punishment. Because an ordinary conversation might be reported, people learned to guard their words even at home.

3 These campaigns were connected, not separate storms. An officer who saw colleagues arrested had reason to obey orders and avoid speaking openly. Civilians who feared denunciation had less freedom to question the arrests or demand proof. Official announcements described the accused as dangerous enemies, but secret trials and forced confessions make those claims unreliable evidence of actual guilt. The same fear that silenced people outside the army could also limit honest reports within it. Historians cannot know what every Soviet citizen thought, but the arrests show how Stalin's government used terror to tighten its control over both institutions and daily life.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How could the purge change the Red Army beyond the loss of individual officers? Use a detail from the passage.

2. How could a denunciation harm a civilian who had not committed a crime?

3. What effect did fear have on both officers and civilians? Give one example for each group.

4. Why should a historian question the government's claim that the arrested people were dangerous enemies? Give two details.

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a 70 to 90 word museum label explaining a chain of at least three linked effects that connects the officer purges to terror against civilians. Use two specific details from different paragraphs, and state one limit on what the evidence can tell us.

ANSWER KEY

When Silence Spreads

HIGH SCHOOL · TOT.C.8.2.H

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two details about the purge of army officers, circle two details about terror against civilians, and number two sentences that show how fear affected both groups. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How could the purge change the Red Army beyond the loss of individual officers? Use a detail from the passage.	**Removing experienced commanders disrupted leadership, and remaining officers could fear questioning the government.**
2	How could a denunciation harm a civilian who had not committed a crime?	**A neighbor's or coworker's denunciation could trigger suspicion, leading to arrest, a forced confession, imprisonment, or execution.**
3	What effect did fear have on both officers and civilians? Give one example for each group.	**Officers had reason to obey orders and avoid speaking openly. Civilians guarded their words because conversations might be reported.**
4	Why should a historian question the government's claim that the arrested people were dangerous enemies? Give two details.	**Charges could rely on fabricated evidence or forced confessions, and some convictions followed secret trials.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Stalin's government removed experienced Red Army commanders. Officers who remained saw that an accusation could end a career or a life, so fear could keep them from reporting problems honestly. Outside the army, denunciations by neighbors could lead to arrests. Civilians who feared arrest might not demand proof when officers disappeared. Together, these silences could make government actions harder to challenge. Still, the arrests and the silence cannot tell us what every officer or civilian privately believed.

Accept other passage-supported links between the purges, fear, and reduced willingness to speak openly. For the museum label, look for a clear chain of effects, details from different paragraphs, and a valid limit on what the evidence shows.