



Hungarian Revolution

1956

"Today we observe the 30th anniversary of that unforgettable day, October 23, 1956, when the people of Budapest – workers, students, soldiers – rose up in revolt against communism and Soviet occupation, and for freedom and nationhood. Today we commemorate the shining example of idealism, patriotism, and sheer courage that is the immortal legacy of the Freedom Fighters of the Hungarian Revolution."

Ronald Reagan, October 23, 1986



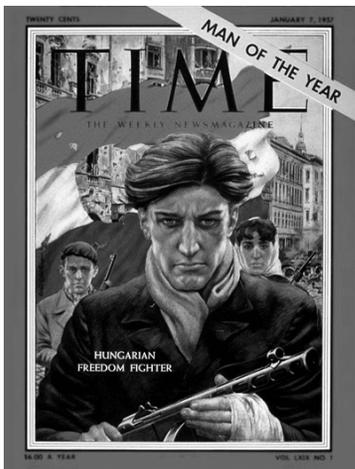
"October 23, 1956, is a day that will live in the annals of great men and free nations. It was a day of courage, conscience and triumph. No other day since history began has shown more clearly the eternal unquenchability of man's desire to be free, whatever the odds against success, whatever the sacrifice required."

John F. Kennedy
October 23, 1957



THE
HUNGARY INITIATIVES
FOUNDATION

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revolutionary education



Dear Readers,

We're excited you are here to help us commemorate and celebrate the Hungarian Revolution of 1956. This booklet will provide some historical context for 1956 and explain this modern-day David vs. Goliath struggle to the next generation.

Fill out this booklet with your kids! Use it as a guide to walk through exhibits about '56. Find more information online at FreedomFighter56.com and MemoryProject.online, and keep this booklet around to read again and again.

As Winston Churchill famously said, "Those who fail to learn from history are doomed to repeat it." The lessons from 1956 are timeless. And the effect from the Revolution - when an unlikely band of freedom fighters from a tiny country in Central Europe brought the mighty Soviet Union to its knees when no one else in the world dared - continue to ripple today.

We dedicate this booklet to the freedom fighters of 1956 - and to our freedom-loving family members who made sure this story was passed on!

Andrea Lauer Rice

Piroska Nagy

Cover Photo by Miklós Bedő and Katalin Korbuly, Hungarian National Museum

Booklet Design by GrazierDesign.com - *Design that matters for people who care.*

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The Aftermath

After the Revolution was defeated, the Soviet Union went about re-establishing control and punishing those involved. Imre Nagy and other cabinet members were kidnapped, executed on June 16, 1958, and buried in unmarked graves. The Soviet Union installed a new dictator, János Kádár, in Hungary.

- More than 2,000 killed (most under the age of 30)
- More than 20,000 wounded
- More than 300 Hungarians executed
- More than 20,000 imprisoned
- Thousands lost their jobs for participating
- More than 200,000 Hungarians fled
- 33 more years of communism



In 1989, Hungarians were finally able to commemorate 1956.
Photo by Piroska Nagy

Although the Revolution was defeated, it showed the true and terrible face of Soviet occupation and communist dictatorship to the world. The Hungarian Revolution of 1956 had made the first crack in the Iron Curtain.

1989 - Fall of The Iron Curtain

In the 1980s more and more people living in Soviet block countries began demonstrating against Soviet occupation and communism and for democracy. Eventually the Soviet Union could no longer maintain its rule over all the nations it occupied. In 1989, the largest country in the world disbanded and Hungary and the other countries behind the Iron Curtain finally became free. It all started with 1956.



In 1989, freedom fighters were reburied with honors. Just like in 1956, Hungarians marched together to demand the withdrawal of Soviet troops. *Photos by Piroska Nagy*

ACTIVITY: The Story of the Melbourne Olympics

The 1956 Winter Olympics were held in Melbourne, Australia. On December 6, the semi-final water polo match between Hungary and the Soviet Union took place less than one month after the Soviets had crushed the Revolution. Tensions were high. Break the code below to find out what happened!

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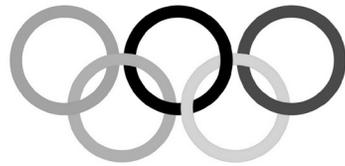
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Ervin Zádor, Hungarian water polo player



In 1956, the people of Hungary were not free. They were ruled by the Soviet Union, a foreign power that had occupied the country and forced communism on much of the Central and East European region. But that year, Hungarian people from all walks of life joined together and rose up to fight for their freedom. This booklet is about that struggle.

Revolutionary flag hanging at Corvin Passage
Photo courtesy of Leslie A Tóth,
Hungarian National Museum



Szervusz! That's Hungarian for hello. My name is András. (Pronounced On-drosh) I'm Hungarian and I love history! I'd like to tell you the story of what happened in my country 60 years ago.

Hi! My name is Susan. I LOVE words! There are words in this booklet we don't use often, so you might want some help understanding them. Look for the underlined words.



1) Hungary beat the USSR and went on to win the gold medal! 2) The match was called "Blood in the Water" when a Soviet player hit a Hungarian player and drew blood.

ACTIVITY: But first, where in the world is Hungary?

Hungary is a country in Central Europe. At the end of World War II (1939-1945) Hungary was liberated from German occupation by the Soviet Union. However, the Soviet troops did not leave. Instead they occupied Hungary and stayed until 1989.



Use green to color in Hungary (marked with an H). Use pink to color in all the countries marked with an I (that stands for Iron Curtain). Color the USSR red. *Map by Barton Rice*

What does liberated mean?

It means to be freed.

What does occupation mean?

It means to be taken over.



ACTIVITY: Matching Game

The Hungarian refugees of 1956 were from all walks of life – intellectuals, workers and students, male and female, young and old. This wave of immigration is known as one of the most successful in US history in terms of the impact this group had on life in the United States.

See if you can match some of these famous Hungarians with their accomplishments. All of them escaped in 1956 and are now American citizens:

- | | |
|---------------------------|---|
| 1. Andy Grove | All-Pro Football Players |
| 2. Adrienne Vittadini | White House Advisor for Cancer |
| 3. Peter Gergely | Inventor of Soft Tissue Micro-surgery |
| 4. Andy Vajna | Aircraft Leasing Pioneer |
| 5. Dr. George Olah | Drummer |
| 6. Zsigmond Vilmos | Nobel Prize Winner in Chemistry |
| 7. Stephen Udvar-Hazy | Acclaimed Photographer |
| 8. Tommy Ramone | Producer, Hollywood Legend |
| 9. Pete & Charlie Gogolak | Jazz musician |
| 10. Dr. Geza Jako | Legendary Cinematographer (1) |
| 11. Gabor Szabo | Chairman & Founder of Intel |
| 12. Sylvia Plachy | Founder, Nat'l Ctr for Earthquake Engineering |
| 13. Laszlo Kovacs | Legendary Cinematographer (2) |

And a few famous children of '56-ers:

- | | |
|---------------------|---|
| 14. Tim Howard | Olympic Gold Medalist, Beach Volleyball |
| 15. Kati Marton | Goalie, US National Soccer Team |
| 16. Karch Kiraly | Journalist, Best-selling Author |
| 17. Robert Varkonyi | Award-winning Actor |
| 18. Adrien Brody | Poker World Series Champion |

1. Andy Grove, Intel; 2. Adrienne Vittadini, Fashion Designer; 3. Peter Gergely, Earthquake Engineering; 4. Andy Vajna, Hollywood Airplane Leasing; 5. George Olah, Nobel Prize; 6. Zsigmond Vilmos, Cinematographer; 7. Steven Udvar-Hazy, Aircraft Leasing; 8. Tommy Ramone, Drummer; 9. Pete & Charlie Gogolak, Football Kickers; 10. Geza Jako, White House Advisor; 11. Gabor Szabo, Jazz Musician; 12. Sylvia Plachy, Photographer; 13. Laszlo Kovacs, Cinematographer; 14. Tim Howard, Soccer Goalie; 15. Kati Marton, Journalist; 16. Karch Kiraly, Volleyball; 17. Robert Varkonyi, Poker Champion; 18. Adrien Brody, Actor.

Immigration

In 1956 and 1957, more than 35,000 Hungarians immigrated to the US from Hungary, most frequently by escaping across the border to Austria. Oftentimes, they left behind parents or grandparents who were sick, elderly or just didn't want to become refugees in a new country where they didn't speak the language. At that time, no one knew if they would ever see each other again.



The Hungarian refugees all came through Camp Kilmer, an army camp near New Brunswick, NJ, that had been reopened to process the Hungarians. It was known as Operation Mercy.

Hungarian refugees awaiting transport to the US

The Soviet Union or U.S.S.R. was a country in Eurasia made up of 16 republics. Created in 1922, it was the largest country with the longest border in the world, measuring 1.5 times the circumference of the Earth.

The Soviet Union and its satellite states were NOT free and democratic, but dictatorships based on a political ideology of communism.



So many new words... What does dictatorship mean?



It means that all the power is held by one person who has absolute authority. A dictator is not elected by the people.



But what is communism?



Communism is an idea invented by Karl Marx in the 19th century. It says, among other things, that there should be no private ownership and that society is more important than the individual. The problem is that when an idea like this is forced on others, basic human rights - that Americans take for granted - are taken away.



There were two words I didn't understand there - immigrated and refugees - what do those mean?



People immigrate to another country when they are afraid for their lives or want a better life. When they first come into the new country, they are refugees.

When the Soviet Union occupied Hungary in 1945, its dictator was Joseph Stalin. Stalin was a tyrant who used terror to force communism on the people.



People were forced to participate in parades on communist holidays.
Photo courtesy of Fortepan Photographic Archive

Stalin, one of the worst dictators in history, was responsible for the death of tens of millions - not only in Hungary, but in all of the countries behind the Iron Curtain and the Soviet Union!

Everyday Heroes of the Revolution



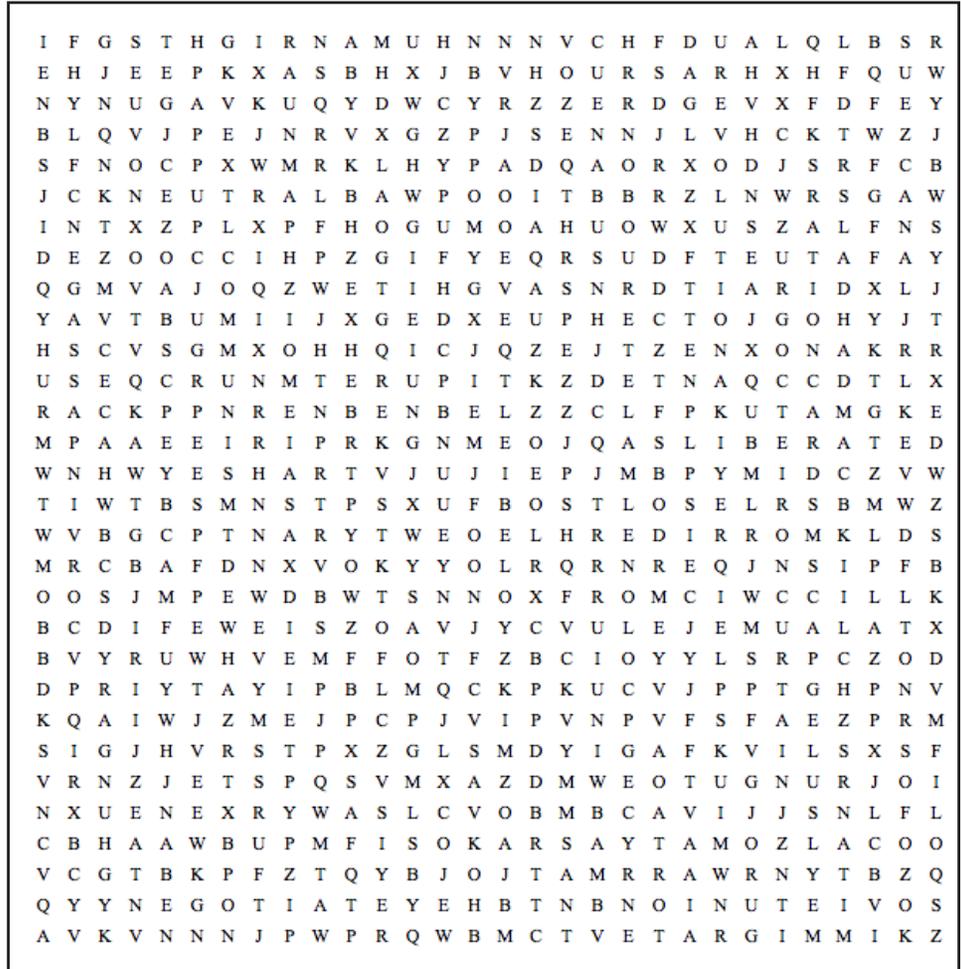
The Boys of Pest playing on a tank.
Photo courtesy of Dr. Tibor Szentpétery

The Boys of Pest

The Boys of Pest were the foot soldiers of the Revolution. They were young and had very little training and even fewer weapons, so they were inventive. They made Molotov cocktails (firebombs made of glass bottles and gasoline) to combat Soviet tanks. Some smeared homemade jam on tank windows so the drivers couldn't see. Others turned soup bowls upside down on the streets to look like mines that could explode. The Boys of Pest were vital to the Revolution's success, and paid a heavy price for their bravery.

ACTIVITY: Word Search

This word search contains all of the underlined words Ándras and Susan have introduced throughout the book. There are also new names of important locations and people from the Revolution. If you are at an exhibit, do your best to find out a bit more about them... if you're at home, check with your parents and look online!



Word List

- | | | |
|-----------------|---------------|---------------|
| BOYS OF PEST | HUMAN RIGHTS | OCCUPATION |
| BRIDGE AT ANDAU | HUNGARY | RATION CARDS |
| CAMP KILMER | IMMIGRATE | REFUGEE |
| COLONEL MALETER | IMRE NAGY | REVOLUTION |
| COMMUNISM | IRON CURTAIN | SECRET POLICE |
| CORVIN PASSAGE | LIBERATED | SOVIET UNION |
| DICTATORSHIP | MATYAS RAKOSI | SUEZ CANAL |
| FREEDOM FIGHTER | NEGOTIATE | TYRANT |
| | NEUTRAL | |

But, on November 4, 1956, at 5:00 am, the people of Budapest awoke to the rumble of tanks. They had been tricked! The Soviet Union had lied to them about leaving. They only wanted more time to get tanks and soldiers from the Soviet Union to Hungary.



A tank rounding the corner - Photo courtesy of Hungarian National Museum

And this time, the freedom fighters were truly outgunned and outnumbered. The Soviets came back into Hungary with 60,000 soldiers and 2,000 tanks!



Hungarians escaping across the border to Austria - Photo by Ata Kandó

When it became clear that the Revolution was defeated and the days of Soviet terror would return, some 200,000 Hungarians left their homeland. Many were afraid they would be put into prison or even executed for the role they had played in the Revolution. Some just wanted a better life.

Life under communism

Everyday life under communism was very difficult. The government controlled everything. No one was allowed to own property. There were constant food shortages. The government decided who could go to school, what job each person should take, how much money they could make, what information they could listen to and what they could say. People lived in fear of doing or saying the wrong thing. It was truly a police state.

Under communism, Hungarian statues and symbols were covered up or torn down and replaced with Soviet monuments and symbols. A huge statue of Stalin was put up near Heroe's Square in Budapest. The red star, the major symbol of communism, was put up on every important building. No one could be openly proud of being Hungarian.



To make sure people obeyed his orders, Stalin appointed local communist dictators whom he controlled in every country. These leaders would use terror to keep the people in line.

What would happen if they didn't obey?

They would be punished by being put into prison or sent to a hard labor camp. Many people were tortured and even executed.



Basic human rights were taken away

Human rights are all the things you are allowed to do, or to be or to have as a human being. In the US, these are protected by the Bill of Rights. But under communism, these basic human rights are taken away:

- ✗ **No freedom of expression**
No one could say that they did not agree with the government. Newspapers, books and movies were censored.
- ✗ **No freedom of assembly**
Small groups of people could not gather together without permission.
- ✗ **No freedom of religion**
People could not go to church or pray openly.
- ✗ **No freedom of movement**
Hungarian borders were closed off and heavily guarded. No one could travel, even to visit family, without permission.
- ✗ **No freedom of the press**
Newspapers only reported information the government wanted to share. Only heavily censored news was allowed from America and the West.

All of these rules were strictly enforced by the state security police, the ÁVO. They drove around in big black cars and had informants (people who secretly gave information to the government about other people) everywhere. Sometimes, they would knock on the door in the middle of the night and take someone away to prison. People were afraid.



Watchtower and barbed wire fence along the border of Austria and Hungary to prevent anyone from leaving the country

The Revolution had won!



Hungarians bringing down the hated red star - Photo courtesy of Fortepan Photographic Archive

During the next few days the people of Hungary started practicing their newfound freedoms. They published their own newspapers that had actual news instead of communist lies and Soviet propaganda. They took down any symbol of the hated Soviet dictatorship – for example, the red star.

They were able to speak freely with each other, go to church and even sing the Hungarian national anthem. Many wrongly imprisoned political prisoners were freed and reunited with their families. Things were finally changing!



Cardinal József Mindszenty

Cardinal József Mindszenty

Cardinal Mindszenty, leader of the Catholic Church in Hungary, publicly opposed communism. The Soviets tortured him and gave him a life sentence for this stance. During the Revolution, he was freed and immediately went back to work. When it became clear the Revolution would not succeed, he was granted political asylum at the US Embassy in Budapest. He lived at the US Embassy for 15 years until he was finally allowed to leave in 1971.

On the streets of Budapest and other major towns, the people of Hungary fought bravely against the biggest army in the world!

Imre Nagy accepted the wish of the people and became the Prime Minister. He declared that Hungary would be a neutral country with a multi-party democracy and free elections, independent of the Soviet Union.



Prime Minister Imre Nagy

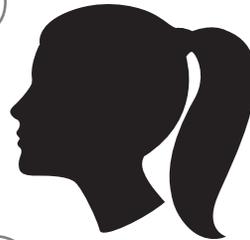


What does the word neutral mean?

It's when a country doesn't take sides.

And negotiate?

It's when people talk about something and try to agree.

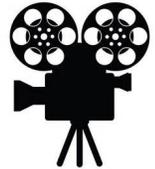


Freedom Fighters
Photo courtesy of Hungarian National Museum

The freedom fighters fought valiantly for their freedom. The new Hungarian government negotiated with the Soviets about the withdrawal of their troops and on October 30, 1956 miraculously the Soviet tanks began pulling out of Hungary! Many people who were falsely charged and wrongfully imprisoned were freed.

ACTIVITY: What was allowed in communist Hungary?

Now that we know a little about human rights, see if you can choose what activities would have been allowed in Hungary in 1956 without government permission. Circle what was allowed, put an X through what was not:



Everyday Heroes of the Revolution



Photo by Vagn Hansen,
Hungarian National Museum

Erika Szeles (1941-1956)

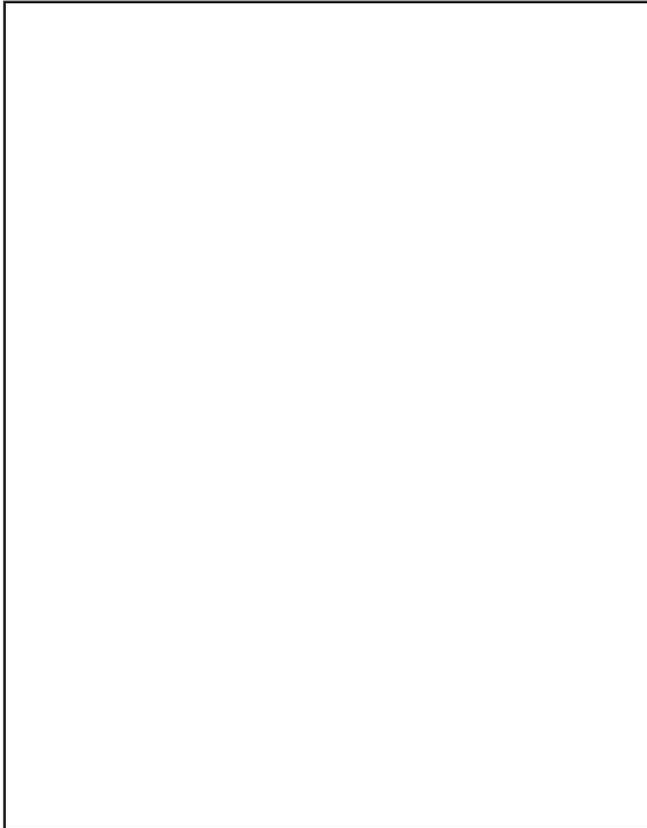
Raised by a single mom, Erika Szeles was studying to be a chef in 1956. When the Revolution broke out, she became an armed freedom fighter, but was later convinced by friends to become a Red Cross nurse because it was considered safer. While tending to wounded freedom fighters on Nov. 8, Erika was shot and killed by Soviet soldiers. She was 15 years old.

ACTIVITY: Draw your own poster

Here are some examples of hand-drawn posters that were used to communicate during the Revolution. In the space below, design your own poster that uses 1 - 3 words and an image. Example words: Fight for Freedom, Soviets Go Home!



Hand-drawn posters from the Revolution. Photos by Dr Tibor Szentpétery, Tibor Ország and Károly Szabó



For the next several days, Hungarian freedom fighters fought against the Soviet soldiers. Many freedom fighters were very young and had no military training.



A young freedom fighter - Photo courtesy of the International Rescue Committee

Freedom fighters tore up cobblestones from the streets to make barricades to stop Soviet tanks. Locals organized Revolutionary Councils in towns and villages across the country and began practicing their democratic rights, such as electing new leaders.



Barricades made of cobblestones from the streets - Photo courtesy of Hungarian National Museum

The demonstrators took the list of demands to Hungarian Radio to broadcast them across the country. Suddenly shots were fired from the rooftops. The ÁVO shot into the peaceful protestors! Hungarian soldiers were ordered to shoot, but many of them refused to fire on their own countrymen. They joined the freedom fighters and gave them their weapons. That's how the Revolution began.



Hungarian Radio - where the first shots were fired - Photo courtesy of Hungarian National Museum

As the fighting continued into the night, a group of freedom fighters toppled the Stalin statue using blowtorches and ropes tied to trucks.



Stalin's boots - Photo by Géza Kisvarsányi

By morning, only Stalin's boots remained.

On October 23, 1956, the people of Hungary said, "Enough!"

On October 22, 1956, university students got together and made a list of the things they wanted to change:

- We demand the immediate evacuation of all Soviet troops.
- We demand the election by secret ballot.
- A new government must be formed under the leadership of Imre Nagy.

They took to the streets the next day - October 23, 1956 - to share their demands with others. Soon there were tens of thousands of people - from all walks of life - marching for freedom.

But who was Imre Nagy?

He was the leader of Hungary for a short time in 1953, and became popular with the people after making reforms. But he was quickly replaced by Soviet officials.



ACTIVITY: Color this Hungarian Revolutionary Flag

The hole was cut out to remove the symbol of Soviet control in Hungary. The top stripe is red, middle is white and bottom is green.

