

Suggested Reading List for Russia

Books

Russian History: A Very Short Introduction *Geoffrey Hosking*

All of Russian history in the palm of your hand, literally. A good read by an important historian. Perfect if you want a grand sweep in a nutshell, and if you find you are eager for more, you can read his larger work, *Russian and the Russians* (2nd ed., 2011). Or you might try the classic *The Icon and the Axe: An Interpretive History of Culture* by James Billington.

Red Plenty *Francis Spufford*

If you want to imagine the Soviet view of the Cold War, if you want a sense of how the grand Soviet Experiment could generate both hope and skepticism, or if you just want a good story, read this. A seamless mix of fiction and non-fiction by an enormously gifted writer.

The Possessed: Adventures with Russian Books and the People who read them *Elif Batuman*

A smart and amusing set of essays on Russian literature and more by a New Yorker essayist and graduate student of comparative literature. Isaac Babel might not seem an obvious point of a departure for a laugh-out-loud essay, but Batuman somehow pulls it off even as she reveals his genius. And if you weren't yet inclined to read Babel or Tolstoy or Dostoevsky in preparation for this trip, this book will surely spur you on.

Catherine the Great: Portrait of a Woman *Robert K. Massie*

A larger than life personality, described with compassion, insight, and style – it's everything you want a biography to be. Massie is the great chronicler of the Romanov dynasty. Once you finish it, you will probably want to read his Pulitzer Prize-winning *Peter the Great: His Life and World* (1980, now available in *Modern Library Edition*), and *Nicholas and Alexandra* (1967, also available in *Modern Library Edition*), an account made all the more compelling by Massie's experience as the father of a haemophiliac.

Breaking Stalin's Nose *Eugene Yelchin*

The perversity of Stalinist Russia is explored in this powerful melding of story-telling and illustration. Written for young readers, the book is compelling for adults too. *The Whisperers: Private Life in Stalin's Russia* by Orlando Figes, a book for grown-ups, treats the same era in a scholarly and accessible fashion.

Enchantments *Kathryn Harrison*

The fate of the last Romanovs has intrigued novelists, historians, scientists, movie-makers, and con artists. This is a novelist's lyrical imaginings of their final days, told from the vantage point of Rasputin's daughter. Robert Massie has own account — *The Romanovs: the Final Chapter* (1995) — which brings together the documentary and scientific evidence. And don't forget Ingrid Bergman's Oscar-winning performance in *Anastasia* (1956), a movie inspired by the most famous Romanov imposter.

A History of Russian Cinema *Birgit Beumers*

This is a serious study of Russian film from its beginnings to now. If you're tired of reading books, skip it and just queue up some of the films of Sergei Eisenstein (*The Battleship Potemkin*; *Ivan the Terrible* [1944-1947] *Andrei Tarkovsky* (*Andrei Rublev* [1966]; *Solaris* [1976]) or *Nikita Mikhalkov* (*A Slave of Love* [1969]; *Burnt by the Sun* [1994]). Beumer's book can suggest others.

Armageddon Averted: The Soviet Collapse 1970-2000 *Steven Kotkin*

An analysis of recent history by an astute observer and highly regarded Princeton professor. For a journalist's perspective on Russia under Putin, look to the writings of Anna Politkovskaya (*Is Journalism Worth Dying For? Final Dispatches (2011)* or *A Russian Diary (2007)*). Until she was shot by an unknown assailant in 2006, Politkovskaya was a fierce and fearless critic of Putin's regime.

OTHER TITLES OF NOTE

Crime and Punishment *Fyodor Dostoevsky*

Paintings in the Hermitage *Colin Eisler*

Natasha's Dance: A Cultural History of Russia *Orlando Figes*

The Oligarchs: Wealth and Power in the New Russia *David E. Hoffman*

Hidden Treasures Revealed: Impressionist Masterpieces and Other Important French Paintings Preserved by the State Hermitage Museum *Albert Kostenevich*

The Hermitage: 250 Masterworks *Mikhail Piotrovsky et al.*

The Bronze Horseman *Alexander Pushkin*

Lenin's Tomb: The Last Days of the Soviet Empire *David Remnick*

Peter the Great and the Emergence of Russia *Benedict H. Sumner*

War and Peace *Leo Tolstoy*

Films

Russian Ark (2003)

Alexander Sokurov's unique journey through Russian history was the first feature-length narrative film shot in just a single take. Filmed entirely at St Petersburg's Winter Palace, the film explores the country's landmark moments and key figures from the past centuries, such as the spectacular rise of Catherine the Great, the demise of the Romanovs, and the dramatic Revolution, by way of the dreamlike visions of a spectral narrator.