



## *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*

by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn offers a remarkable view inside a life largely unknown to us in the West. Only in the past two decades have we really been able to learn details about the Gulag camps of the former Soviet Union. Cobbling together stories of friends and his own harrowing experiences in the Gulag, Solzhenitsyn portrays a man attempting to survive another day in camp with dignity and humanity. And survival is by no means guaranteed. Millions of people died as a result of brutal incarceration during the decades when the camps were operational.

Thank you for taking an interest in this important story, not only important in the context of 20th century world history, but also as an example of institutionalized inhumanity and the resiliency of the human spirit that rises to overcome the inhumanity.



Prisoners waiting for their daily ration of food.  
*Drawing by Jacques Rossi*



Prisoners work at Belbaltlag, a Gulag camp for building the White Sea-Baltic Sea Canal. From the 1932 documentary film, *Baltic to White Sea Water Way*.  
*Courtesy of the Central Russian Film and Photo Archive.*

Between the Russian Revolution in 1917 and the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, some 25 million people were held in the Soviet forced labor camp and internal exile system known as Gulag. The combination of endemic violence, extreme climate, hard labor, meager food rations, and unsanitary conditions led to extremely high death rates in the camps.

The National Park Service, in a unique partnership with the Gulag Museum at Perm-36, the International Memorial Society, and Amnesty International USA, presents the first exhibition on the Soviet Gulag in the United States.

Manzanar National Historic Site and Eastern California Museum host "*GULAG: Soviet Forced Labor Camps and the Struggle for Freedom*" FEBRUARY 17 TO OCTOBER 21, 2007. The exhibit will be on display at Eastern California Museum in Independence, CA.

Admission is Free. Learn more at [www.nps.gov/manz](http://www.nps.gov/manz).

## *Questions for Discussion*

1. How does the structure of the novel (no chapters) reflect the plot-line?

2. How does the author's style reflect the bitter cold in the novel?

3. Why does the author use a "good" day as the subject of the novel?

4. What are Shukhov's rules for survival in the camp? What do they tell you about his character?

5. Shukhov generalizes people by their ethnic heritage. What are some of the generalizations that he makes?

6. How do the prejudices that Shukhov has about other ethnic groups affect his working relationships with them? How do his prejudices correspond with prejudices in your world?

7. What effect does the last paragraph of the novel have on the reader?

8. What accounts for the stratification in camp? How is this ironic in light of the "crimes" that placed many of the prisoners in the camp?

9. Why does Shukov take such pride in his work? What are the rewards of this ethic and who shares it with him?

10. What qualities make Tiurin such a good leader? Give examples of his leadership skills.

11. Shukhov believes that personal pride or dignity is necessary for long term survival. Give examples that defend or refute his belief.

12. The communist government in the former Soviet Union came to power under the banner of equality. How does Shukhov's imprisonment (and the entire gulag system) inform what we know about the collapse of the Soviet system?