

A TEACHER'S GUIDE FOR **STRONGMAN**

FOR USE
WITH COMMON
CORE STATE
STANDARDS

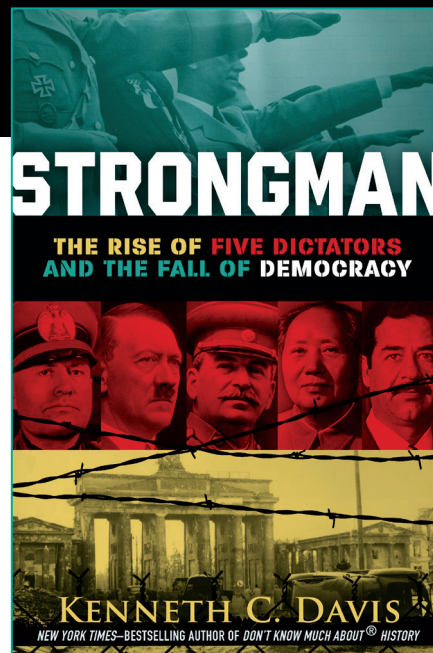
THE RISE OF FIVE DICTATORS AND THE FALL OF DEMOCRACY

ABOUT THE BOOK

What makes a country fall to a dictator? How do authoritarian leaders—strongmen—capable of killing millions acquire their power? How are they able to defeat the ideal of democracy? And what can we do to make sure it doesn't happen again?

By profiling five of the most notoriously ruthless dictators in history—Adolf Hitler, Benito Mussolini, Joseph Stalin, Mao Zedong, and Saddam Hussein—Kenneth C. Davis seeks to answer these questions, examining the forces in these strongmen's personal lives and historical periods that shaped the leaders they'd become.

Meticulously researched and complete with photographs, *Strongman* provides insight into the lives of these five leaders who callously transformed the world and serves as an invaluable resource in an era when democracy itself seems in peril.



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kenneth C. Davis is the *New York Times* bestselling author of *America's Hidden History* and *Don't Know Much About® History*, which gave rise to the Don't Know Much About® series of books for adults and children. He is also the author of the critically acclaimed *In the Shadow of Liberty*, which was an ALA Notable Book and a finalist for the YALSA Award for Excellence in Nonfiction, as well as *More Deadly Than War*, which was named a *Washington Post* Best Childrens' Book of the Month. A frequent guest on national television and radio and a TED-Ed educator, Davis lives in New York City.

This guide is intended to support your classroom instruction. The standards listed throughout are aligned with the Common Core State Standards for grade seven, but the activities and questions can be applied to multiple grade levels. Please adapt the activities and questions to meet the needs of your students. You know your students better than anyone else!

BEFORE READING

1. Davis ends his introduction with a warning about democracy: “It requires work, participation, and sometimes sacrifice. And it can be very fragile. Democracy can die quickly. And that is where we begin.” How does this hook the reader and convince them to keep reading?

CCSS.RI.7.5 Analyze the structure an author uses to organize a text, including how the major sections contribute to the whole and to the development of the ideas.

2. Choose one of the dictators included in the book (Mussolini, Hitler, Stalin, Mao, or Hussein). Research the time period that they were in power and design an infographic to show what you’ve learned using a free online infographic tool like [Canva](#).

CCSS.W.8.7 Conduct short research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question), drawing on several sources and generating additional related, focused questions that allow for multiple avenues of exploration.

DURING READING

1. How did Hitler and the Nazi Party use the Reichstag fire to limit freedoms and gain power in Germany?

CCSS.RI.8.1 Cite the textual evidence that most strongly supports an analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

2. How were the founders of the United States influenced by both the Greek and Roman forms of democracy as well as by the Enlightenment in Europe?

CCSS.RI.8.1 Cite the textual evidence that most strongly supports an analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

3. How did the events known as “bread and circuses” showcase how far Rome had fallen as a democracy?

CCSS.RI.8.3 Analyze how a text makes connections among and distinctions between individuals, ideas, or events (e.g., through comparisons, analogies, or categories).

4. Compare and contrast socialism and capitalism and describe the origins of each.

CCSS.RI.8.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including analogies or allusions to other texts.

5. Explain what a “cult of personality” is and how dictators use this strategy to take and keep control of their country’s government.

CCSS.RI.8.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including analogies or allusions to other texts.

6. How did Hitler’s experiences in World War I lead him to consider politics as a future endeavor? Do you agree with Ian Kershaw’s analysis that “the First World War made Hitler possible”?

CCSS.RI.8.8 Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, assessing whether the reasoning is sound and the evidence is relevant and sufficient; recognize when irrelevant evidence is introduced.

7. Hitler’s ideas and those of the Nazi Party gained popularity by restoring Germans’ confidence in themselves and their country and by pushing the idea of the master race. Which country’s racial codes were a model for some of Germany’s laws regarding racial purity?

CCSS.RI.8.3 Analyze how a text makes connections among and distinctions between individuals, ideas, or events (e.g., through comparisons, analogies, or categories).

8. Define genocide and explain the connection to the Soviet Union and the programs and policies of Stalin.

CCSS.RI.8.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including analogies or allusions to other texts.

9. How did “the Long March...become a part of the foundation legend of Mao Zedong’s Communist China”?

CCSS.RI.8.1 Cite the textual evidence that most strongly supports an analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

DURING READING (CONT'D)

10. How did the Great Leap Forward give Mao complete control of China? Was this program a success?
CCSS.RI.7.2 Determine two or more central ideas in a text and analyze their development over the course of the text; provide an objective summary of the text.
11. How is Mao remembered in China?
CCSS.RI.8.3 Analyze how a text makes connections among and distinctions between individuals, ideas, or events (e.g., through comparisons, analogies, or categories).
12. Hussein was inspired by Stalin in many ways. Compare and contrast the ways they controlled their respective countries.
CCSS.RI.8.1 Cite the textual evidence that most strongly supports an analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.
13. Due to a series of investigations, it has been discovered that the United States also participated in mistreatment of prisoners in Abu Ghraib, one of Hussein's prisons. How does Davis explain the actions of the United States and how does this further defend his overall claim?
CCSS.RI.8.2 Determine a central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text, including its relationship to supporting ideas; provide an objective summary of the text.

AFTER READING

1. Davis starts each chapter with a series of quotes. How does this help structure the flow of the text? How do the quotes impact the reader?
CCSS.RI.6.5 Analyze how a particular sentence, paragraph, chapter, or section fits into the overall structure of a text and contributes to the development of the ideas.
2. In the introduction Davis outlines his claim. How does he defend his claim throughout the book and build to a conclusion in the final chapter? Summarize his argument and explain how he supports his argument throughout the text.
CCSS.RI.8.2 Determine a central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text, including its relationship to supporting ideas; provide an objective summary of the text.
3. Davis breaks down the meaning of words using definitions of their Greek and Latin roots. How does this strategy help the reader build a greater understanding of the topics covered in the book?
CCSS.RI.7.5 Analyze the structure an author uses to organize a text, including how the major sections contribute to the whole and to the development of the ideas.
4. One of the ways dictators gain control and maintain it is by controlling the message given to youth through clubs, groups, and education. Using what you learned from the book, create a guide for young Americans on how to prevent the fall of their democracy. Include specific lessons learned from the dictatorships of all five dictators.
CCSS.W.8.2 Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas, concepts, and information through the selection, organization, and analysis of relevant content.
5. The English historian Lord Acton said, "Power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely." Use one of the dictators in the book to prove this statement and research a ruler from any country and time period to disprove this statement.
CCSS.W.8.1 Write arguments to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence.

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