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Che Guevara: Hero or Villain?

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*Che Guevara:
Hero or Villain?
Day 1*

Alberto Ramos
St. Cloud State University
2020



This is a unit in the course *Global Citizenship* for **B2 CEFR** EFL college students

In this unit, students will be able to...

- Listen for understanding
- Work collaboratively in groups
- Read texts critically
- Understand and recall key vocabulary relating to Che and his political views
- Compare and Contrast Marxism and Capitalism
- Demonstrate critical thinking through public speaking
- Write an organized personal response paper on Che's revolutionary ideology

Unit Plan and Activities

Each day is designed for a 50 minute class period

Day 1 Listening, Reading, and Speaking

- **10 minutes- Introduce topic with warm up activity** : general discussion questions with the whole class and an overview of the class period and unit
- **8 minutes- Listening Activity**: Watch a brief video with an overview of Che with a fill-in-the-blank sheet
- **12 minutes- Introduce key vocabulary terms and definitions** – instructor will have students read words/definitions out loud
- **15 minutes- Reading comprehension**: in small groups of 4-5, students will read a reflection on Che' Guevara's life and answer two discussion questions
- **5 minutes- Wrap up**: in front of the whole class, students will answer what new word(s) they learned popcorn style, and homework will be presented (watch *The Motorcycle Diaries* and write a one-page summary)

Day 2 Comprehension and Speaking

- **5 minutes- Warm up**: with large group recap discussion questions and an overview of the class period
- **10 minutes- Listening Activity**: Lecture on timeline order of Che's life up until Cuban Revolution for developing listening comprehension
- **25 minutes- Developing Speaking Skills and Assessing Listening Comprehension**: Debate on Marxism vs. Capitalism
- **10 minutes- Wrap Up**: Reflection on debate and introduce personal response paper

Day 3 Comprehension and Writing

- **5 minutes- Warm up**: Review key vocabulary Terms and overview of the class period
- **15 minutes- Vocabulary Comprehension Activity**: Students will take a fill in the blank quiz on key vocabulary
- **5 minutes- Listening Activity**: Lecture on timeline order of Che's life after the Cuban Revolution until his death for developing listening comprehension
- **5 minutes- Developing Writing**: teach how to write a personal response paper
- **5 minutes- Discussion on Writing**: students will answer discussion questions based on what was just learned regarding writing
- **5 minutes- Writing Activity**: Explain writing assignment and answer any questions students may have about assignment
- **10 minutes- Unit Wrap Up**: Reflection and remind of homework assignment
- **Instructor Assessment**: Instructor will reflect on the various activities to answer if this unit effectively helped students in listening, reading, speaking, and writing for comprehension. Personal Response paper will help determine student grasp of concepts and demonstrate overall unit effectiveness and the quiz grades will also determine how effective students grasped the key vocabulary terms

Intro/Warm Up Questions- whole class (10 minutes)

- In this unit we will be learning about Che Guevara by: watching a video, reading an article, getting a historical overview of his life, and doing several interactive activities that will help develop listening, reading, speaking, and writing.
- Today we will be watching a Ted History video on Che and you will do a fill in the blank worksheet as we listen. We will learn some key vocabulary terms, read a short article in small groups with discussion, and end with some large group reflection.

Ask the class:

- Have you ever heard of Che Guevara? What have you heard of Che Guevara?
- Do most people view Che Guevara as a hero or a villain?
- What do you know about the differences between Marxism and Capitalism?

Listening Activity: Watch Ted Video and fill in the blank from transcript (8 minutes)

- [History vs. Che Guevara - Alex Gendler - YouTube](#)



Fill in the blank activity: transcript of video with answers

His face is recognized all over the world. The young medical student who became a **revolutionary** icon. But was Che Guevara a **heroic** champion of the poor or a **ruthless** warlord who left a legacy of **repression**? Order, order. Hey, where have I seen that guy before? Ahem, your Honor, this is Ernesto Che Guevara. In the early 1950s, he left behind a **privileged** life as a medical student in Argentina to travel through rural Latin America. The **poverty** and **misery** he witnessed convinced him that saving lives required more than medicine. So he became a terrorist seeking to violently **overthrow** the region's governments. What? The region's governments were brutal **oligarchies**. **Colonialism** may have formally ended, but **elites** still controlled all the **wealth**. American corporations bought up land originally seized from **indigenous** people and used it for **profit** and export, even keeping most of it uncultivated while locals **starved**.

Couldn't they vote to change that? Oh, they tried, your Honor. In 1953, Che came to Guatemala under the **democratically**-elected government of President Árbenz. Árbenz passed **reforms** to **redistribute** some of this uncultivated land back to the people, while **compensating** the landowners. But he was overthrown in a CIA-sponsored **coup**. The military was protecting against the **seizure** of private property and **communist** takeover. They were protecting **corporate** profits and Che saw that they would use the fear of communism to overthrow any government that **threatened** those profits. So he took the lessons of Guatemala with him to Mexico. There, he met **exiled** Cuban revolutionaries and decided to help them **liberate** their country. You mean help Fidel Castro turn a vibrant Cuba into a **dictatorship**. Dictatorship was what Cuba had before the revolution. Fulgencio Batista was a **tyrant** who came to power in a military coup. He turned Havana into a luxury playground for foreigners while keeping Cubans **mired** in poverty and killing thousands in police crackdowns. Even President Kennedy called it the worst example of "economic colonization, humiliation, and **exploitation** in the world."

Whatever Batista's faults, it can't compare to the **totalitarian** nightmare Castro would create. Forced labor camps, **torture** of prisoners, no **freedom** to speak or to leave. But this isn't the trial of Fidel Castro, is it? Che Guevara was instrumental in helping Castro seize power. As a **commander** in his **guerilla** army, he unleashed a **reign** of terror across the countryside, killing any suspected spies or dissenters. He also helped **peasants** build health clinics and schools, taught them to read, and even recited poetry to them. His harsh **discipline** was necessary against a much stronger **enemy** who didn't hesitate to burn entire villages suspected of **aiding** the **rebels**. Let's not forget that the new **regime** held mass **executions** and killed hundreds of people without **trial**. As soon as they took power in 1959. The executed were officials and collaborators who had **tormented** the masses under Batista. The people supported this revolutionary justice. Which people? An angry mob crying for blood does not a democracy make. And that's not even mentioning the forced labor camps, **arbitrary** arrests, and repression of LGBT people that continued long after the revolution. There's a reason people kept **risking** their lives to flee, often with nothing but the clothes on their backs.

So was that all this Che brought to Cuba? Just another **violent** dictatorship? Not at all. He oversaw land redistribution, helped establish **universal** education, and organized volunteer **literacy** brigades that raised Cuba's literacy rate to 96%, still one of the highest in the world. Which allowed the government to control what information everyone received. Guevara's **idealistic** incompetence as Finance Minister caused massive drops in productivity when he replaced worker pay raises with moral certificates. He **suppressed** all press freedom, declaring that newspapers were instruments of the **oligarchy**. And it was he who urged Castro to host Soviet nuclear weapons, leading to the Cuban Missile Crisis that brought the world to the brink of **destruction**. He was a leader, not a **bureaucrat**. That's why he eventually left to spread the revolution abroad. Which didn't go well. He failed to rally rebels in the Congo and went to Bolivia even when the Soviets disapproved. The Bolivian Government, with the help of the CIA, was able to **capture** and neutralize this terrorist in 1967, before he could do much damage. While doing plenty of damage themselves in the process. So that was the end of it? Not at all. As Che said, the revolution is **immortal**. He was publicly mourned in cities all over the world. Not by the Cubans who managed to escape. And his story would inspire young activists for generations to come. Ha. A trendy symbol of rebellion for those who never had to live under his **regime**. Symbols of revolution may become **commodified**, but the idea of a more just world remains. Maybe, but I'm not sharing my coffee. Che Guevara was captured and **executed** by government forces in Bolivia. His remains would not be found for another 30 years. But did he die a hero or had he already become a villain? And should revolutions be judged by their **ideals** or their **outcomes**? These are the questions we face when we put history on trial.

Introduce Key Vocabulary- 12 minutes

1. **Hero-** *a person who is admired for having done something very brave or having achieved something great*
2. **Villain-** *a bad person who harms other people or breaks the law*
3. **Revolution-** *a change in the way a country is governed, usually to a different political system and often using violence or war*
4. **Violence-** *actions or words that are intended to hurt people*
5. **Racism-** *policies, behaviors, rules, etc. that result in a continued unfair advantage to some people and unfair or harmful treatment of others based on race*
6. **Poverty-** *the condition of being extremely poor*
7. **Inequity-** *the fact that a situation is not fair, or something that is not fair in a situation*
8. **Uprising-** *an act of opposition, sometimes using violence, by many people in one area of a country against those who are in power*
9. **Privilege-** *unearned advantage that individuals or groups of people have*
10. **Class-** *a group of people within society who have the same economic and social position*
11. **Injustice-** *(an example of) a situation in which there is no fairness and justice*
12. **Oppression-** *a situation in which people are governed in an unfair and cruel way and prevented from having opportunities and freedom*
13. **Repression-** *the use of force or violence to control a group of people*
14. **Suppression-** *the act of preventing something from being seen or expressed or from operating*
15. **Corrupt-** *dishonestly using your position or power to get an advantage, especially for money*
17. **Dictator-** *a leader who has complete power in a country and has not been elected by the people*
18. **Commander-** *an officer who is in charge of a military operation*
19. **Regime -** *a particular government or a system or method of government*
20. **Overthrow-** *to defeat or remove someone from power, using force*
21. **Capitalism-** *an economic, political, and social system in which property, business, and industry are privately owned, directed toward making the greatest possible profits for successful organizations and people*
22. **Colonialism-** *the belief in and support for the system of one country controlling another*
23. **Marxism-** *a social, political, and economic theory based on the ideas of Karl Marx, who imagined a society where the methods of production would be owned and controlled by all its members*

Instructional Activity

- Instructor will provide note cards to all students
- Students will write down definitions on one side, with the word on the other side

Note Card Side 1

Hero

Note Card Side 2

*a person who is admired for
having done something
very brave or
having achieved something great*

15 minutes Reading Activity: Students will read and discuss in small groups

In the year 2020, the world has experienced two horrific pandemics: Co-vid19 and Racism. Co-vid developed in 2019, but Racism has been around much much longer. Co-vid 19 exacerbated the inequities that exist between people of various racialized groups. While Co-vid 19 exacerbated the inequities, nothing was more obvious than the internationally observed video of the murder of George Floyd by Minneapolis police officer, Derek Chauvin, on May 25th, 2020. As mentioned above, racism has been around for a long time but this year in particular has created an uprising against injustice. Racism is a form of injustice. In this reflection we will examine the history of Che Guevara's life and his personal uprising against injustice. This reflection will critically examine Che's response to the racism and injustice that he observed. We will end with a question: Can one respond to oppression without violence?

Che Guevara was born and grew up in Buenos Aires, Argentina. He grew up with a lot of privilege and had the opportunity to go to medical school. While he was in his studies, he decided to embark on a journey throughout the entirety of Latin America. During his journey, he saw so much poverty. Poverty is another form of oppression. He observed firsthand how Capitalism, brought from the United States, had wreaked utter devastation in these countries. While Che observed so much devastation, he also observed that not everyone in these countries was experiencing devastation. Some were benefitting from the exploitation of workers and were getting more and more wealthy, while others were dying of starvation. The gap between the people was so great in Latin America. Che wanted to remove this gap.

After finishing his journey, Che finished Medical School, but still felt a passion to remove the huge gap between the people. He became involved in various revolutions to overtake the corrupt governments across Latin America. One of the most corrupt governments in Latin America was that of Fulgencio Batista in Cuba. Batista initially came to power in 1940 as an elected President. Batista became more and more corrupt, even as his relationship with the United States grew stronger and stronger and was a military dictator from 1952-1959. Under his dictatorship, the upper class became more and more wealthy, while the poor became poorer. The same gap that Che had seen in his journey was growing in Cuba. Many people in Cuba became furious with Batista and made the decision to do something about it. A revolution began. Fidel Castro was the leader of this revolution and Che decided to join him.

The revolutionaries saw problems with capitalism and wanted to get rid of it. They were ready to do anything if it meant the end of capitalism. This willingness to do anything led to many people being killed. Anyone who didn't agree with the revolutionaries was killed. Those who were so upset about the oppression of capitalism actually became oppressive. Some might even say they were acting more oppressive than the adherents to Capitalism. Eventually, the revolutionaries won and Capitalism was overthrown and replaced with Marxism in 1959. Fidel Castro appointed Che Guevara as commander of the La Cabana Fortress System. In this role, he executed between many people through a firing squad. Fidel's regime continues even today in Cuba through his brother Raul.

This leaves us to consider two questions. When there is oppression like racism or poverty, how should we respond? Che, Fidel, and the rest of the revolutionaries decided to respond with violence and more oppression. Does that make Che Guevara a hero or a villain? Can one respond to oppression without violence?

Small Group Discussion Questions

- Do you think it is possible to respond to oppression without violence?
- What do you think the author's opinion is?
- Was Che Guevara a hero or a villain?
- What do you think the author's opinion is?

Wrap up 5 min

- What new word(s) did you learn today?
- Explain homework activity for extra credit: Watch The Motorcycle Diaries film and write a brief 300-500 word reflection of the movie
- The reflection is simply answering: ***What did you learn from the movie?***

*Che Guevara:
Hero or Villain?
Day 2*

Global Citizenship
GLC 2300



5 minutes: Warm up with large group recap discussion questions and an overview of the class

- What are some of the words we learned in the last class period?
- For those who watched *The Motorcycle Diaries*, what was the most surprising thing from the movie?
- Explain what the class will be doing today: Learning a timeline of Che's life, learning more about Marxism and Capitalism, having a debate with the whole class

Timeline Lecture 10 minutes

- Che's Early Years
- Che's Motorcycle Journey
- Che's 2nd Journey to Guatemala and other countries
- Che's Time in Mexico City
- Che's Involvement in the Cuban Revolution
- Che's Involvement in Literacy and Reform
- Marxism and Capitalism

Che's Early Years 1928-1952

Che was born in June 1928 in Rosario, Argentina. He had access to a large amount of books and played a lot of chess. Che started studying medicine at the University of Buenos Aires. During this time, he took a break from his studies and traveled throughout rural Argentina in the summer of 1950

Che's Motorcycle Journey (January-September 1952)

Che traveled more than 8,000 km with his friend Alberto Granado throughout Latin America. They visited Argentina, Chile, Peru, Ecuador, Colombia, Venezuela, Panama, and Florida. Che became angry because of all of the poverty he saw and connected the poverty with the results of Capitalism.

Che's 2nd Journey to Guatemala and other countries (1952- 1954)

Che graduated from Medical School and visited other countries in Latin America. He became further convinced of the problems with Capitalism from the United States. He attempted to help newly elected Guatemalan President to reduce poverty in Guatemala. Che also became more and more interested in Marxism during his time.

Che's Time in Mexico City (1954- 1956)

Che served as a doctor helping the poor in Mexico and got married to Hilda Gadea. He also met Fidel and Raul Castro and joined the 26th of July Movement during this time.

Che's Involvement in the Cuban Revolution (1956-1959)

Che and the group fled to hills during the rebellion against Batista and began a Rebel Radio broadcast. The rebels entered the capital city of Havana and began to institute the new government. Guevara and Castro oversaw the execution of many who were followers of Batista and started seeing another woman and divorced his wife. Che also became a Cuban citizen during this time.

Che's Involvement in Literacy and Land Reform, Bay of Pigs, Cuban Missile Crisis (1959-1964)

The land was taken from those who owned it and redistributed to the Cuban government (including land owned by American companies). A movement began to increase the literacy of the peasant population by building new schools and training more teachers. Also, the revolutionaries won the Bay of Pigs invasion (a group of 1,400 Cuban exiles attempted to overthrow the new regime with help from the United States). The Cuban Missile Crisis (JFK put a blockade in place so that the Soviets could no longer bring missiles to Cuba) also occurred during this time. Because of it, the Soviets agreed to remove their missiles from Cuba and Che viewed this as a Soviet betrayal.

Marxism vs Capitalism Core Beliefs/Differences

Individualism

- Capitalism places the rights of the individual above the group

Adam Smith states in *The Wealth of Nations* “that the pursuit of a rational self-interest in a market free from regulation would result in economic and social well-being”

- Marxism believes that capitalism dehumanizes people and the only way to true freedom is through equality of all

Private Property

- Capitalism believes in the natural right of property ownership gained through his own labor
- Marxism seeks to abolish personal private property and that collective ownership leads to human freedom, Karl Marx (the man who created the Marxist belief) believed that the pursuit of ownership led to the dehumanization of man into an object

Profit

- Capitalism allows the individual to determine the profit margin for personal gain
- Marxism believes that all profits should be given to public sources for redistribution to society equally

Speaking Activity: Class Debate Marxism vs Capitalism- 25 minutes

- Divide class into 2 Groups
- Groups have 10 minutes to prepare their defense

Rules:

- Debate why your view is better
- Only one group can speak when it's their turn
- Separate personal beliefs and emotions about your topic
- Everyone must demonstrate respect by beginning statements with: "You have an interesting point, however...." or "Thank you for sharing your view, from what we've come to understand....."

Wrap- up 10 minutes: Post debate reflection and introduce personal response paper assignment

- What was the most difficult part of debating your view (Capitalism or Marxism)?
- What did you learn from this debate about how to show respect and how to show disrespect in conversations?
- What was like to separate your personal beliefs from your topic?
- Remind students of quiz for next class period

Explain personal response paper: Begin thinking about your personal response 2 page paper, you will answer the following question: *Was Che a hero or a villain? Why?*

*Che Guevara:
Hero or Villain?
Day 3*

Global Citizenship
GLC 2300



Warm Up: Key Vocabulary Review (5 minutes)

Teacher will have students take notes for their memorization

1. **Hero-** *a person who is admired for having done something very brave or having achieved something great*
2. **Villain-** *a bad person who harms other people or breaks the law*
3. **Revolution-** *a change in the way a country is governed, usually to a different political system and often using violence or war*
4. **Violence-** *actions or words that are intended to hurt people*
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6. **Poverty-** *the condition of being extremely poor*
7. **Inequity-** *the fact that a situation is not fair, or something that is not fair in a situation*
8. **Uprising-** *an act of opposition, sometimes using violence, by many people in one area of a country against those who are in power*
9. **Privilege-** *unearned advantage that individuals or groups of people have*
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Quiz for Vocabulary Acquisition Answer Key (20 minutes)

1. **Corrupt**- *dishonestly using your position or power to get an advantage, especially for money*
2. **Poverty**- *the condition of being extremely poor*
3. **Hero**-*a person who is admired for having done something very brave or having achieved something great*
4. **Villain**- *a bad person who harms other people or breaks the law*
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Timeline day 2- 5 minutes

Algiers, the Soviets, and China (1964-1965)

- Che denounced discrimination and segregation (particularly in South Africa and United States) at the UN assembly
- Took a three month long tour visiting Communist China and North Korea and also visited Arabia, Ireland, and several countries in Africa
- Him and his wife Aleida had a son- Ernest Guevara
- Returned to Cuba in 1965 and resigned from government. He believed his true calling was to bring about revolutions in other countries

African Congo (1965-1966)

- Che left Cuba for Africa and visited several countries including Congo, with the aim of bringing Communist revolutions
- Earned his reputation as dangerous
- Had to admit defeat and sought refuge in the Tanzanian Cuban embassy

Bolivia and Che's Death (1966-1967)

- Traveled throughout South America one last time and ended with joining a revolutionary group in Bolivia
- Led a successful attack against the Bolivian army
- Survived an attack from the Bolivian army
- Eventually was captured and executed on October 9th, 1967

Teach how to organize a paper- 5 min

Tenses

- Focus for answering *Was Che a villain or a hero?* :
- Present tense, present perfect, and past tense
- Examples: present- I think, I believe, present perfect- I have learned, I have observed, Che was, past -Che acted, etc.
- Focus for answering *Is it possible to response to oppression without violence?*
- Present tense, present perfect, future tense
- Examples: present- I think, I believe, present perfect- I have learned, I have observed, future- Society will benefit, people will change, oppression will end, etc.

Transition Words

- Therefore, First, Second, Third, Also, Because
- Example: I believe Che was a villain. Because I believe he was a villain, I also believe Marxism is bad.
- Example: I think it is possible to respond to oppression without violence. Therefore, violence must end.

Organization

- Introduction with a thesis statement (example: In this paper, I will describe why I believe Che was a hero)
- Body that further explains your reaction
- Conclusion with a summary of what you've discussed and a strong ending statement using conditional word of may, might, or must (example: Therefore, the violence caused by wars must end.)
- Resource for further study: [Purdue OWL // Purdue Writing Lab](#)

Instructional Activity- 5 minutes

- In Large group students will answer...

What is an example of present tense? Present perfect tense? Past tense? Future tense?

What order should your paper be structure?

What are some possible transition words?

Explain Writing Activity and Grading Rubric 5 min:
students will write an informed personal response paper of 2 pages answering one of the following questions

- Was Che a hero or a villain? Why?

Or

Is it possible to respond to violence without oppression?

Requirements: 2 pages, double-spaced, Times New Roman, include at least 10 key vocabulary words from list

Rubric for Personal Response Paper

A

- Writing has little to no errors
- Meets 100 percent of requirements for assignment

B

- Writing has only a few errors
- Meets 75 percent of requirements for assignment

C

- Writing has more than a few errors,
- Meets 50 percent of requirements for assignment

D

- Writing has several errors
- Meets 25 percent of requirements for assignment

F

- Writing has mostly errors
- Meets 0 percent of the requirements for the assignment

Final unit wrap-up - 10 min

- What was the most surprising thing you learned from the unit ?
- Which activity was your favorite and why?
- Which activity was your least favorite and why?
- What new word(s) did you learn?

For Further Study and Other Assignments

- *Read Socialism and the Man in Cuba- Che Guevara/Fidel Castro*
- Watch Cuba Libre- Netflix Series
- Watch Che- Movie
- Students could write a narrative essay timelining Che's life

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