



# One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich

By Alexander Solzhenitsyn

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## **One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich** By Alexander Solzhenitsyn

Ivan Denisovich Shukhov has been sentenced to a camp in the Soviet gulag system, accused of becoming a spy after being captured by the Germans as a prisoner of war during World War II. He is innocent but is nonetheless punished by the government for being a spy. The final paragraph suggests that Shukhov serves ten years. Those in the camps find everyday life extremely difficult. For example, one rule states that if the thermometer reaches  $-41^{\circ}\text{C}$  ( $-42^{\circ}\text{F}$ ), then the prisoners are exempt from outdoor labor that day; anything below that is considered bearable. The reader is reminded in passing, through Shukhov's matter-of-fact thoughts, of the harshness of the conditions, worsened by the inadequate bedding and clothing. The boots assigned to the zeks rarely fit (Cloth has to be added or taken out, for example), and the thin mittens issued are easily ripped. The prisoners are assigned numbers for easy identification and in an effort to dehumanize them; Ivan Denisovich's prisoner number is ?-854. Each day, the squad leader receives their work assignment of the day, and the squad are then fed according to how they perform. Prisoners in each squad are thus forced to work together and to pressure each other to get their work done. If any prisoner is slacking, the whole squad will be punished. Despite this, Solzhenitsyn shows that a surprising loyalty exists among the work gang members, with Shukhov teaming up with other prisoners to steal felt and extra bowls of soup; even the squad leader defies the authorities by tar papering over the windows at their work site. Indeed, only through such solidarity can the prisoners do anything more than survive from day to day.

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