STUDENT HANDOUT

Kupiansk: The Synkivka Winter

Synkivka and the northeastern approaches to Kupiansk, Ukraine · 6 October 2023 to 25 January 2024

Information as of October 2026

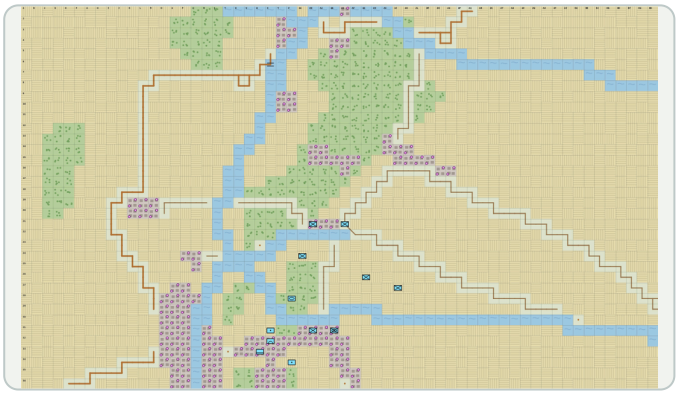
Review provenance

AI reviewed: sources, guide, assessment and model controls. Source attribution and reconstruction limitations remain.

No named human subject-matter reviewer or external validation is recorded. Material completeness is not certification. Instructors should check factual claims, sensitive content, age suitability and local context before use.



Scenario illustration · AI generated



Student map · own side only · Simulation situation map · reconstructed terrain and estimated deployments; not verified historical positions.

Learning objectives

- Locate Synkivka between the forest and Kupiansk.
- Distinguish a local damage mission from capturing the city.
- Read official claims alongside reporting and physical geography.

Run time and a good result

Default run clock: 5 minutes 0 seconds at 1×, excluding pauses, briefing and discussion. Time controls change elapsed play time.

Objective: Put eight represented Russian groups out of action. This is a local damage and delay mission.

Kupiansk: The Synkivka Winter: Put eight represented Russian groups out of action. This is a local damage and delay mission. Put at least 8 represented opposing units out of action; decoys do not count. The authored limit is 300 simulation seconds across 2 stages. Compare objective progress, time, losses, drone expenditure and recorded civilian harm with a second run. A strong classroom result also explains the source evidence and reconstruction estimates; it does not verify a historical casualty count.

Atrocity notice

The UN Commission found war crimes by Russian authorities, including killings, torture and sexual violence, and a small number of violations by Ukrainian forces. Its March 2023 findings are context, including for later scenarios.

These reports describe the wider conflict. They do not establish that every crime occurred in this modeled battle.

Studying or commanding a side does not endorse its conduct. Drone Front never lets players target civilians, hospitals, schools or places of worship. Civilian harm from simulated strikes is counted and shown in the debrief, including nonzero harm. Civilian massacres are never playable operations. Designated terrorist forces and Wagner remain computer controlled; Gaza war events remain excluded from play.

▼ Dated reports and findings

- 2023-03-16 · UN Commission of Inquiry: war crimes in Ukraine

Learn more: the laws of war

- ICRC: Geneva Conventions and commentaries
- ICRC: Customary IHL database
- UN: Genocide Convention (9 December 1948)
- UN: Rome Statute (17 July 1998), articles 6–8

Historical source notes

Failure to capture a city can still leave its surrounding villages badly damaged.

Drone observation and attacks accompany conventional ground fighting.

A preserved force and a captured settlement are different outcomes.

Civilian harm

The Kyiv Independent reported damaged homes after a Russian airstrike, citing regional authorities.

Evidence for learning objectives

On 11 December 2023, Ukrainska Pravda attributed the report of reserve assault formations to Syrskyi, not independent verification.

The simulation's disruption of 8 represented groups is an authored assessment threshold; counters are selected formation functions, not a complete casualty census.

The 1 January 2024 Kyiv Independent report separates Kucherivka housing damage from a district death; the death's location within this map is not established.

Timings

For 60 minutes, brief for 15, run with pauses for 25 and review for 20. For 90 minutes, compare sides. For 180 minutes, compare sources and the two dated phases.

Session	Plan
45 minutes	Brief: 10 min; Run: 15 min; Collect: 5 min; Review: 15 min
60 minutes	Before questions: 5 min; Brief: 10 min; Run: 20 min; Collect: 5 min; Debrief and after questions: 15 min; Discussion: 5 min
90 minutes	Before questions: 5 min; Brief: 10 min; Run 1: with drones: 20 min; Run 2: without drones: 15 min; Collect: 5 min; Compare and discuss: 25 min; After questions: 10 min
180 minutes	Before questions: 10 min; Brief and staff roles: 15 min; Run 1: with drones: 25 min; Run 2: without drones: 20 min; Break: 10 min; Run 3: syndicates: 30 min; Collect: 10 min; Seminar replay and debrief: 40 min; After questions: 10 min; Close: 10 min

Staff roles

commander
Track the limited historical mission.

intelligence
Separate sources, claims and assumptions.

fires
Record simulated effects and civilian exposure.

droneOps
Compare observation and attack roles.

Opposing staff objective

Preserve enough of the represented force to finish below eight groups lost. Russia did not capture Kupiansk during this episode; your goal is limited preservation.

Decision points

- Opening: what changed with the renewed offensive?
- Winter: what do additional reserves establish about a battle?
- Review: which outcome did each side actually achieve?

Before and after questions

1. **Who is the named source for the 11 December 2023 report of reserves near Synkivka?**

   A. An independent census of all local formations.
   B. The Ukrainian Ground Forces commander Syrskyi.
   C. The simulation's authored reinforcement schedule.
   D. A jointly agreed Russian and Ukrainian loss audit.

2. **Can Syrskyi's November loss figures in that article be used as this Synkivka map's totals?**

   A. Yes; eastern-front figures are a local census.
   B. Yes; reserve arrivals verify each reported death.
   C. No; the wider eastern claim lacks this map's scope.
   D. No; only the eight-group model can count real deaths.

3. **At the Synkivka time limit, what does meeting the eight-group objective establish?**

   A. Kupiansk's entire territory has changed control.
   B. Eight real Russian battalions were destroyed.
   C. The model has verified all local historical deaths.
   D. The represented-loss threshold has been met.

4. **What does the Synkivka model's 300-second duration with timeScale=2688 mean?**

   A. A run compresses an authored span of 2688 hours.
   B. Every counter records 2688 hours of actual fighting.
   C. The winter fighting lasted just 300 historical seconds.
   D. Losses are multiplied by 2688 to estimate real casualties.

5. **What is justified by the 1 January 2024 report about Kucherivka and Kupiansk district?**

   A. The district death occurred in a mapped Kucherivka home.
   B. Housing damage is reported; the death's map location is unproven.
   C. The report provides the episode's full civilian casualty total.
   D. Damaged homes can replace missing civilian death records.

Discussion

- Why can a front move little while destruction grows?
- How do aggregate campaign figures differ from local force counts?
- What does a simulation omit about displacement?

Debrief rubric

Strong
Meets the objective or explains why it was not met; uses the published sources and run evidence, separates known facts from assumptions, compares both sides' losses and cost exchange, and evaluates precautions against civilian harm.

Adequate
Describes the objective and main decisions, identifies at least one source and model limitation, reports losses and harm, and gives a reasoned change for a second run.

Weak
Reports only victory or points, treats teaching settings as real performance, gives unsupported historical claims, or omits uncertainty and civilian harm.

Published readings

1. Al Jazeera, John Psaropoulos: Russia tries to spoil Ukraine counteroffensive before winter, 11 October 2023
2. Ukrinform: Russian forces have no strategic success in eastern direction, AFU, 23 October 2023
3. Ukrainska Pravda, Stanislav Pohorilov: Russians storm Synkivka to block Kupiansk, commander says, 11 December 2023

Complete source list

Wikipedia: Luhansk Oblast campaign, accessed 4 October 2026
Al Jazeera, John Psaropoulos: Russia tries to spoil Ukraine counteroffensive before winter, 11 October 2023
Ukrinform: Russian forces have no strategic success in eastern direction, AFU, 23 October 2023
Ukrainska Pravda, Stanislav Pohorilov: Russians storm Synkivka to block Kupiansk, commander says, 11 December 2023
Ukrinform: Russian gun hit by Ukrainian drone in Kupiansk direction, 14 October 2023
Ukrinform: Border guards report drone attack on Russian EW station in Kupiansk sector, 27 October 2023
The Guardian, Luke Harding and Alessio Mamo: How drones froze Ukraine frontlines, 25 January 2024
ACLED: Ukraine Conflict Update, 6 to 12 January 2024
The Kyiv Independent: Russian shelling kills civilian in Kharkiv Oblast, 1 January 2024
UK Home Office: Proscribed terrorist groups or organisations, updated 7 July 2026