

## The Cuban Missile Crisis

### Overview

In this lesson, students will gain an understanding of the tensions that existed among world powers during the Cuban Missile Crisis. After participating in a mock air-raid, students will listen to the actual speech President Kennedy gave during the Crisis to address the Soviet threat coming from Cuba, and discuss the implications for American citizens during the period. Finally, students will compose a letter to Khrushchev from the perspective of the President, indicating how they believe a resolution could be reached.

### Grade

11

### North Carolina Essential Standards for American History II

- AH2.H.1.2- Use Historical comprehension...
- AH2.H.1.3- Use historical analysis and interpretation...
- AH2.H.1.4- Use historical research...
- AH2.H.2.1 - Analyze key political, economic, and social turning points since the end of Reconstruction in terms of causes and effects (e.g., conflicts, legislation, elections, innovations, leadership, movements, Supreme Court decisions, etc.).
- AH2.H.2.2 - Evaluate key turning points since the end of Reconstruction in terms of their lasting impact (e.g., conflicts, legislation, elections, innovations, leadership, movements, Supreme Court decisions, etc.).
- AH2.H.4.1 - Analyze the political issues and conflicts that impacted the United States since Reconstruction and the compromises that resulted (e.g., Populism, Progressivism, working conditions and labor unrest, New Deal, Wilmington Race Riots, Eugenics, Civil Rights Movement, Anti-War protests, Watergate, etc.).
- AH2.H.6.1 - Explain how national economic and political interests helped set the direction of United States foreign policy since Reconstruction (*e.g., new markets, isolationism, neutrality, containment, homeland security, etc.*).
- AH2.H.6.2 - Explain the reasons for United States involvement in global wars and the influence each involvement had on international affairs (e.g., Spanish-American War, WWI, WWII, Cold War, Korea, Vietnam, Gulf War, Iraqi War, etc.).
- AH2.H.7.1 - Explain the impact of wars on American politics since Reconstruction (e.g., spheres of influence, isolationist practices, containment policies, first and second Red Scare movements, patriotism, terrorist policies, etc.).
- AH2.H.7.2 - Explain the impact of wars on the American economy since Reconstruction (e.g., mobilizing for war, war industries, rationing, women in the workforce, lend-lease policy, WWII farming gains, GI Bill, etc.).
- AH2.H.7.3 - Explain the impact of wars on American society and culture since Reconstruction (e.g., relocation of Japanese Americans, American propaganda, first and second Red Scare movement, McCarthyism, baby boom, Civil Rights Movement, protest movements, ethnic, patriotism, etc.).

### Materials

- Alarm sound (to simulate air raid drill)
- Images of 1950 air raid shelters and shelter handbook, attached
- Optional: "Duck and Cover" YouTube video: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-2kdpAGDu8s> (Since many school districts block access to YouTube, teachers should check access before class and download the video from a home computer if necessary.)
- Overview of the Cuban Missile Crisis, attached

- Recording of Kennedy's Speech to the US during the Cuban Missile Crisis, available for download or streaming audio online at <http://www.archive.org/details/jfks19621022>
- Guided Listening Questions, attached

### Duration

1-2 periods

### Preparation

Students should have a basic understanding of World War II and the relationships among countries involved in the conflict immediately following the War. Additionally, students should have a basic understanding of the communist ideology and how it differs from democracy.

### Procedure

#### Simulating Air Raids

1. Once all students have entered the room and taken their seats, tell them not to be scared, but as a security measure, all schools are required to have periodic "air raid" drills to properly prepare students in the unlikely event of an attack by terrorist groups. Tell them that when they hear the alarm, they are to get under their desks, put their heads between their legs, and fold their arms over their heads to shield themselves against debris. You may need to demonstrate the position. Once you have explained the procedure sound an alarm and have them practice. You will very likely be met with disbelief or hostility. Tell students it is for their own good, it is only practice, and ask them to please participate in the drill.
2. After students have assumed the position, turn off the alarm and have them return to their seats. Ask probing questions about their thoughts and feelings concerning the drill. For example:
  - How did you feel when you first heard we would be having an air raid drill?
  - How did you feel about having to get under your desk?
  - Does the thought of a possible attack scare or worry you?
  - If one day during class, we heard an air raid drill sound, without there having been any warning of a "test," would you feel differently crawling under your desks? Explain.
  - Do you think air raid drills are a good thing to practice? Why or why not?
3. Inform students that in actuality, there are no current threats against the United States that warrant air raid drills, and that the drill was really a simulation to give them an appreciation of the very real **nuclear threat** Americans faced for decades after World War II, during what is referred to as the "**Cold War**." Tell them that this nuclear threat was particularly intense over a 14 day period in 1962 called the **Cuban Missile Crisis**, probably the most intense 2 weeks of the entire Cold War.
4. Next, show the following 10 minute educational film from the 1950's regarding air raid drills: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-2kdpAGDu8s>. (Since many school districts block access to YouTube, teachers should check access before class and download the video from a home computer if necessary.) Share the following background information with students before showing the video;
  - "Duck and Cover" was a social guidance film produced in 1951 by the United States federal government's Civil Defense branch shortly after the Soviet Union began nuclear testing. Written by Raymond J. Mauer and directed by Anthony Rizzo of Archer Productions and made with the help of schoolchildren from New York City and Astoria, New York, it was shown in schools as the cornerstone of the government's "duck and cover" public awareness campaign. The movie states that nuclear war could happen at any time without warning and thus U.S. citizens should keep this constantly in mind and always be ready.
5. Play the video and once finished, discuss the following questions:
  - Do you think this video is an effective teaching tool? Why or why not?

- Is “ducking and covering” an effective way to avoid being hurt during a nuclear attack?
  - Why do you think the government would produce this film when in actuality ducking and covering is useless against a nuclear attack?
  - Can you think of other measures the government has taken to make the populace feel safer, but that are ultimately useless?
6. Ask students to think about how old their grandparents are today (or how old they would be if they were still alive). Tell them that if they are over the age of 56, then they lived through this period. If their grandparents are older than 61, it means they were old enough to go to school during the early 1960s, it is very likely that they had to participate in similar drills or even worse. Present students with the attached picture of an actual public school drill from the 1950s. Point out that while they might have felt foolish “hiding” under their desks, at least they did not have to go out in the hallway and lay on the ground face down. Discuss the images and students’ reactions to them.

### Introduction to the Cuban Missile Crisis

7. To gauge prior knowledge, ask students what they already know about the Cold War or the Cuban Missile Crisis. Once students have exhausted what they know, or think they know, give them some background information:
- The Cold War was the rivalry that developed between the **United States** and the **Soviet Union** after **World War II**, which persisted for nearly 40 years.
  - While the United States and Soviet Union were allies during WWII, their alliance quickly broke down after **Germany** surrendered because **Joseph Stalin**, the Soviet leader, began setting up **totalitarian governments**—governments that controlled all aspects of peoples’ lives—instead of **democratic governments** in Eastern Europe as he originally promised.
  - The Cold War describes the tense and hostile relationship that developed between the Soviet Union and the U.S. following WWII. The communist government of the Soviet Union wanted to convert other countries to **communism**. The US pledged to support free countries so they could resist communism. Both countries had **nuclear weapons** and were capable of launching a **nuclear war**.
  - Other countries took sides in this international conflict. Many Western European countries sided with the US to form **NATO (National Atlantic Treaty Organization)** in 1949. Many Eastern European countries signed the **Warsaw Pact** and formed an alliance with the Soviet Union. **Cuba**, located only 90 miles off the coast of Florida, sided with the Soviet Union after **Fidel Castro** came to power in 1959.
  - The **Cuban Missile Crisis** was one of the major climaxes of the Cold War, bringing the world the closest it has ever been to a nuclear war.
  - During the Cuban Missile Crisis nuclear weapons in Cuba were aimed at the US, and at the same time nuclear weapons in the US were aimed at Cuba. With the push of a button on either side, a nuclear weapon capable of destroying entire cities could be deployed. As soon as a weapon was deployed, the other side would inevitably retaliate, leading to a full-scale nuclear war and possibly even nuclear **annihilation**. Many people who lived during the time feared that if one side launched a nuclear weapon, the entire planet could be virtually destroyed, if not from the destruction caused directly by nuclear weapons then by the nuclear fallout which would make huge areas of land uninhabitable for extended periods of time.
8. Redirect student attention back to the warm up and discuss:
- Imagine that you are living during the years of the Cuban Missile Crisis. How do you think it would feel to know that nuclear weapons were aimed at your city, and could be deployed at any minute?
  - Consider the feelings you expressed earlier on having to participate in an air raid drill. Do you think your opinion would be different if you were living during the Cuban Missile Crisis? Explain

### Fallout Shelters

9. Explain to students that many people worried about the possibility of nuclear fallout and thus took precautions to protect themselves. Project the attached images of an air raid shelter and a fallout shelter and ask students to guess what they think they are looking at. Once students have discussed, explain that one such precaution some people took during the Cold War was to build a **fallout shelter**, which is an enclosed space designed to protect occupants from radioactive debris, or “fallout,” that results from a nuclear explosion. Once a nuclear weapon had been fired, in the months after the explosion this radiation would be deadly to anyone coming into contact with it. Thus, fallout shelters were designed to allow their occupants to minimize exposure to harmful fallout until radioactivity has dissipated to a safer level. These shelters were generally built below ground, at depths where radiation would not seep. Allow students to discuss:
  - How do you imagine it would feel to live in one of these shelters, below ground, for months?
  - As you lived there, what difficulties might you experience? What worries would you have?
10. To enrich the conversation, project or handout the attached primary source images from a 1960s handbook on fallout shelters. Additional images are available at <http://wardomatic.blogspot.com/2006/11/fallout-shelter-handbook-1962.html>. Ask students to discuss:
  - What do you think the purpose of this handbook was?
  - What is the purpose of this image in particular?
  - What do you notice about the people, objects, etc. in the image?
  - How do these images compare/contrast to something you might see today?

### Overview of the Cuban Missile Crisis

11. Distribute the attached overview of the Cuban Missile Crisis. Read aloud as a class, taking time to address the “take-away”/discussion questions following each brief section.
12. Once the class has completed their discussion of the Cuban Missile Crisis overview, distribute or project the “Guided Listening Questions,” attached. Tell students that you will be listening to the first 11 minutes of President Kennedy’s address to the people of the United States during the height of the Cuban Missile Crisis. Instruct them to listen carefully and answer the guided listening questions as they hear them addressed. Play the recording, which can be downloaded or played in streaming audio at: <http://www.archive.org/details/jfks19621022>.
13. After students have had an opportunity to listen to the speech, discuss their answers to the guided listening questions. (Answers are provided on the attached question sheet). Additionally, facilitate a follow-up discussion using the following questions as a guide:
  - What is the difference between **defense** and **offense**? Why was it okay for the Soviets to have defensive missiles but not offensive ones?
  - Do you think President Kennedy “beat around the bush” or was he very straight forward with the American people? Explain.
  - How do you think your average American citizen would have felt in reaction to the speech? How do you think you would have felt if you lived in a major city, like Washington, D.C., Norfolk, Virginia, or New York, New York?

### Write a Letter to Khrushchev

14. As a culminating activity (or for homework) ask students to pretend they are the President of the United States during the Cuban Missile Crisis, and they just received a letter from Khrushchev, the Soviet Premiere, who just listened to your speech. His letter states the following:

*“The Soviet government considers the violation of the freedom of navigation in international waters and air space to constitute an act of aggression propelling humankind into the abyss of a world nuclear-missile*

*war. Therefore, the Soviet government cannot instruct captains of Soviet ships bound for Cuba to observe orders of American naval forces blockading this island. Our instructions to Soviet sailors are to observe strictly the generally accepted standards of navigation in international waters and not retreat one step from them. And, if the American side violates these rights, it must be aware of the responsibility it will bear for this act. To be sure, we will not remain mere observers of pirate actions by American ships in the open sea. We will then be forced on our part to take those measures we deem necessary and sufficient to defend our rights. To this end we have all that is necessary."*

15. Inform your students that this excerpt was taken from an actual letter written to President Kennedy from Khrushchev. Then, as a writing exercise, have students assume the persona of President Kennedy and compose a letter in response to Khrushchev. Students should use their knowledge of the Cuban Missile Crisis to express their feelings about the Crisis and what they believe needs to happen in order to avoid nuclear war.

### **Additional Activities**

- Have students interview parents/grandparents or an elder community member about what it was like to be alive during the Cold War, and present their findings to the class. Some sample questions might include:
  - When you were a child, did you hear people talking about nuclear bombs? If so, how did people seem to feel about nuclear bombs? Do you remember if you had any feelings about nuclear bombs when you were a child?
  - Did you understand who the enemy was? What did you think of the enemy? What did you think of the United States as a nuclear power?
  - When you were a child, did your school have air-raid drills? What did the students have to do during an air-raid drill? Why?
  - When you were younger, did you ever hear about or see a bomb shelter? What supplies did people put in bomb shelters? Why? What feelings did you have (and do you have) about bomb shelters?
  - When you were younger, were you afraid that the United States or the world would be blown up by bombs or missiles?
  - Do you remember being young and reading books or seeing movies or television shows about nuclear destruction? How did the books and movies make you feel?
  - Did you stop being afraid of nuclear war as you grew up? Why or why not?
  - How did you feel when Reagan and Gorbachev started talking about reducing nuclear armaments? How do you feel now about the threat of nuclear war?
- Source: <http://school.discoveryeducation.com/lessonplans/programs/reaganlegacy-starwars>
- Instead of sending students out to do one-on-one interviews, consider inviting to class someone who went to an American public school in the 1950s, when the Cold War started. Ask the guest to talk about how the fear of nuclear war manifested itself in day-to-day school life. Let the students, as a group, ask questions of the guest.

## Air Raid Images

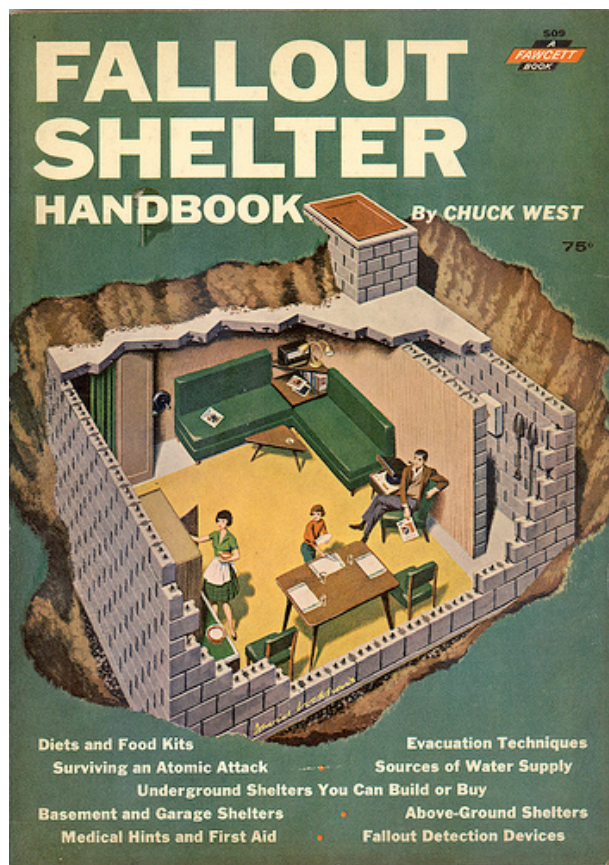


Lincoln High School Air-Raid Drill, 1950



## Fallout Shelter Images





## While You Are in Shelter

Shelter living requires patience and devices to pass the time

**Y**OUR life in shelter for two weeks, or a month, will depend much upon your mental attitude toward the situation. If you are determined to stick it out, if you realize this will be the hardest part, and a future awaits you because you will be alive, then you will be equipped to weather this all-important storm. Many people have false ideas about life in a shelter. Others merely shun the thought of such a life completely. These people can accept no type of life unless it involves the bridge table and the television set. Their chances for survival are, indeed, small.

Several tests have been made with people living in shelters. The reactions to life in a shelter by these people have been studied in an effort to uncover some of the psychological problems that will be faced by people living in shelter during a real emergency.

One such test was conducted last fall by Mr. Edgar M. Perkins, 38, his wife, Jeanine, 31, their children, Richard, 10, and Sharon Ann, 5. This family spent seven days in a shelter test conducted near Washington in Prince Georges County, Maryland. During this time, they lived in a space, 9 feet wide by 10 feet long by 7 feet 4 inches high.

The first day for the Perkins family was fairly routine. They had no real problems, although the children got a little restless before dinner. This family, however, learned two important lessons the first day:

1. Space is limited, and everything must be kept in place, or you tend to become frantic.

2. Everyone needs to be busy, especially the children. Provide plenty of coloring books, reading material, games, and a





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## **The Cuban Missile Crisis**

### **An Overview**

The world has never come closer to the brink of nuclear war than it did during the Cuban Missile Crisis of October 1962, one of the most dramatic episodes in U.S. diplomatic history.

### **Discovery of the Missiles**

The crisis began on October 14, 1962 when photographs taken during a reconnaissance flight over Cuba by a US U-2 spy plane revealed that the Soviet Union--America's Cold War adversary--had secretly started building bases for medium-range ballistic missiles (MRBMs) on the island, located less than 90 miles from the U.S. coast. Scholars still debate why the Soviet Union took this confrontational step. Some argue that the Soviets wanted to protect their ally Cuba from the United States, which had tried various times to topple Fidel Castro following his assumption of power.

### **Take-Away Questions:**

1. How did the US know there were missiles in Cuba? Why was this such a big concern for the US?
2. What is one possible reason the Soviet Union took the drastic step?

### **The "ExComm" Deliberates**

President John F. Kennedy learned the news two days later and met with his top advisers--later dubbed the Executive Committee (ExComm) of the National Security Council--to decide how to respond. Since the missiles, if operational and equipped with nuclear warheads, could quickly destroy targets within the United States, Kennedy and his advisers agreed that the weapons presented a grave threat and needed to be removed. The ExComm debated how best to do so. At first, Kennedy and the ExComm favored a military response, with options ranging from airstrikes on the missile bases to an all-out invasion of Cuba. The military alternative lost favor, however, as ExComm members became more and more concerned that it could provoke a Soviet response that might lead to a full-scale war. Such worries gained greater credence when the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) reported that some Soviet MRBMs in Cuba were already operational, probably armed with nuclear warheads, and capable of reaching targets in the United States.

### **Take-Away Questions:**

3. What did President Kennedy and his advisors think of the step taken by the Soviet Union? How would you have felt if you were the President?
4. Why didn't the US respond with airstrikes or an invasion of Cuba? If you had been a member of ExComm, what advice would you have given to the President? Why?

### **MAD: The Doctrine of Mutual Assured Destruction**

Mutual assured destruction (MAD) is the doctrine of military strategy in which a full-scale use of nuclear weapons by two opposing sides would effectively result in the destruction of both the attacker and the defender. It is based on the theory of "deterrence" which basically says that simply having weapons (or even making the enemy think you do) can threaten the enemy and prevent them from using the very same weapons. The strategy must be employed by both sides to avoid the worst possible outcome--nuclear annihilation. Kennedy and his advisors took MAD very seriously during the Crisis.

### **Take-Away Questions:**

5. Explain the doctrine of Mutual Assured Destruction in your own words.

### **The Quarantine**

Ultimately, Kennedy elected not to strike the missile bases in Cuba. The President, during an ExComm meeting held on October 20, instead chose to surround Cuba with a naval blockade, called a "quarantine," which technically was a violation of international law. The blockade, designed to prevent the Soviet Union from introducing more weapons or warheads into Cuba, offered several advantages over a military strike. While signaling the United States' determination, it was flexible, offering Kennedy and his advisers the option of increasing pressure on the Soviet Union to remove its missiles if need be. The President's brother, Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy, argued at an October 19 ExComm meeting that a blockade, unlike a military attack, allowed Soviet Premier Nikita S. Khrushchev "some room for maneuver" as well.

The crisis and the White House response remained secret until October 22, when President Kennedy, in a nationally televised address, informed the American people about the missiles and announced the quarantine of Cuba. The public waited as the world seemed poised on the brink of nuclear war. How would the Soviet Union react? Would the Khrushchev launch a nuclear strike on cities in the United States? Would the Soviets obey or challenge the blockade?

**Take-Away Questions:**

6. What advantages did a "quarantine" have over an airstrike or invasion? What do you think may have been some disadvantages? Why?
7. How might you have felt if you were living in the United States during the Cuban Missile Crisis? How do you think the Soviet leader felt about the blockade, which as technically illegal.

**The Crisis Averted**

Answers came two days later, October 24, when several Soviet ships turned back from the quarantine line. When he learned the news, Secretary of State Dean Rusk said, "We're eyeball to eyeball, and I think the other fellow just blinked." Then, the Soviets, through numerous channels, including a letter from Khrushchev to President Kennedy on October 26, proposed a solution. The Soviet Union would remove its missiles if the United States lifted the blockade and pledged not to invade Cuba. A second letter from Khrushchev arrived the next day adding a new condition: he would remove Soviet missiles in Cuba if the US removed missiles stationed in Turkey, located on the Soviet Union's border. Meanwhile, a U-2 spy plane was shot down over Cuba and its pilot killed, one of several events that threatened to escalate the crisis.

**Take-Away Question:**

8. How would you have responded to the letters if you were in Kennedy's shoes? How do you think he responded?

In an October 27 letter to the Soviet Premier, President Kennedy deliberately ignored Khrushchev's second letter and accepted the terms outlined in his first--removing the missiles in exchange for lifting the blockade and issuing a non-invasion pledge. Privately, however, the Attorney General assured Soviet Ambassador Anatoly F. Dobrynin that the United States would remove its missiles from Turkey. On October 28, Khrushchev replied positively to Kennedy's letter, thereby peacefully ending a potentially catastrophic crisis.

The Cuban Missile Crisis has long been remembered as a lesson in effective diplomacy and crisis management. Kennedy and his advisers responded cautiously but firmly to the Soviet emplacement of nuclear missiles in Cuba, opting for a flexible blockade rather than a potentially escalatory military alternative. While that characterization is accurate in many respects, evidence about near misses, accidents, and unauthorized actions recently has come to light suggesting that the crisis came dangerously close to spinning out of control. Given the tensions of October 1962, the downing of a U-2 over Cuba or the straying of a U.S. aircraft over Soviet airspace-- both of which actually happened--could have been interpreted by either side as a deliberate provocation requiring a military response.



In any event, the superpowers pulled back from the nuclear brink in the wake of the crisis. Within a year, Kennedy and Khrushchev signed the Limited Nuclear Test Ban Treaty, the first international agreement on nuclear weapons. And the superpowers installed a "hotline" to improve communication between the White House and the Soviet Union.

**Take-Away Questions:**

9. What do you think the relationship between the US and Soviet Union was like after the crisis was averted? Why?

*Source: Bureau of Public Affairs, U.S. Department of State*

**President Kennedy's Speech to the American People  
During the Cuban Missile Crisis:**

**Guided Listening Questions**

**Directions:** Listen carefully to the first 11 minutes of President Kennedy's speech and answer the following questions as you hear them addressed. Be prepared for a follow-up discussion.

1. How many distinct types of installations did US surveillance discover in Cuba?
2. How far did Kennedy say medium-range ballistic missiles were capable of traveling? What about intermediate-range ballistic missiles?
3. On Sept. 11, 1962, what did the Soviet government say publicly the missiles were "exclusively designed for?"
4. What did Kennedy say about the Soviet quote?
5. What does Kennedy say American citizens have "become adjusted to?"
6. What does Kennedy say aggressive conduct, such as the building up of missiles in Cuba, will lead to?
7. In order to act "in defense of our own security, and of the entire western hemisphere," what are the first 3 "initial steps" Kennedy says will be taken immediately?

**President Kennedy's Speech to the American People  
During the Cuban Missile Crisis:**

**Answers:**

- 1) Two
- 2) 1000 miles, Twice as far
- 3) Defensive purposes
- 4) It was false;
- 5) Living in a bulls eye
- 6) War
- 7) Quarantine, Continued surveillance, Any missile launched will lead to a full-scale military response