

RESOURCE LIBRARY  
LESSON

## Kennedy's Presidential Leadership and Cuba

Students will examine the Bay of Pigs invasion and the Cuban Missile Crisis to evaluate Kennedy's leadership toward Cuba during the Cold War.

**GRADES**

9 - 12+

**SUBJECTS**

*Social Studies, U.S. History, World History*

**CONTENTS**

2 Activities, 2 PDFs

## Program

KILLING  
**KENNEDY**

ACTIVITY 1: KENNEDY IN CASTRO'S EYES:  
THE IMPACT OF THE BAY OF PIGS INVASION  
ON FIDEL CASTRO | 1 HR

## DIRECTIONS

**1. Introduce information about the Bay of Pigs invasion.**

Divide students into pairs or small groups and ensure that each group has computer access. Direct students to the JFK Library: Bay of Pigs website. Ask students to read the information on the page and take notes by filling out the Five Ws Chart.

**2. Role play a scene from *Killing Kennedy*.**

Have two students read the Bay of Pigs Scene excerpted from the *Killing Kennedy* script. Assign one student to play the role of John F. Kennedy and another to play the role of Jackie Kennedy. Before the two volunteers read the selection, instruct students to write down adjectives that would describe President Kennedy's behavior in the scene as they listen.

Have the two student volunteers read the dialogue aloud for the class. After reading, bring the class together for a whole class discussion. Ask:

- *What adjectives would you use to describe President Kennedy's behavior in this scene? Why?*
- *Based on the scene, how did President Kennedy view the Bay of Pigs invasion?*
- *Make a prediction: If President Kennedy felt this way after the Bay of Pigs invasion, how do you think Fidel Castro must have felt about the Bay of Pigs invasion?*

### **3. Discuss the Bay of Pigs Invasion.**

Write the following four questions on poster paper or the whiteboard for students to see.

- What was the objective of the Bay of Pigs invasion?
- Why did the American leaders want to overthrow the government of Fidel Castro?
- What actually happened?
- Based on the American objectives, was the Bay of Pigs invasion a success or a failure? Why?

Ask students to use what they learned from reading the Bay of Pigs Invasion handout to respond independently to the questions written on the poster paper or whiteboard. Give students approximately 10 minutes to complete their responses in their notebooks.

Have students form pairs to discuss their responses to the questions. Then, bring the class together and ask each pair to summarize one main point from their discussion. Clear up any misconceptions before moving on.

### **4. Use primary sources to analyze the impact of the Bay of Pigs invasion on Castro.**

Tell students they will use a reading strategy called SOAPSTone to analyze a primary source document about Fidel Castro and the Bay of Pigs invasion. Distribute the SOAPSTone worksheet and the Castro and the Bay of Pigs Invasion worksheet. Lead students in

completing together the speaker, occasion, and audience sections of the SOAPSTone worksheet. Tell students they will add to these sections while they read Castro's speech. Ask students to read Castro's speech and, as they read, to complete the subject, purpose, and tone sections of the SOAPSTone worksheet.

After students have had enough time to read Castro's speech and complete the sections of the SOAPSTone worksheet, lead students in a discussion about the speech. Ask:

- *What is Castro's critique of the United States? Support your answer with evidence from the text.*
- *Why does Castro consider the United States to be hypocritical? Support your answer with evidence from the text.*
- *Which leaders does Castro compare to JFK? Why?*
- *Why does Castro believe Cuba is not a threat to the United States?*
- *Is Castro justified in calling the Americans "imperialists"? Are his claims valid? Why or why not? Support your answer with evidence from the text.*

## **5. Write a letter as Fidel Castro to Nikita Khrushchev.**

Tell students the following: *The Bay of Pigs invasion had a major impact on the way Castro viewed the United States. Castro, believing that American leaders would soon attempt another attack against him, sought out support from the other global power of the day, the Soviet Union. Now, you will put yourself in Castro's shoes and imitate his letter to Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev.*

Explain to students that they will write a letter from Castro's first-person perspective, appealing to the Soviet Union. Distribute the Write a Letter to Khrushchev worksheet, read aloud the directions, and distribute and review the Write a Letter to Khrushchev Rubric so students understand the expectations of this exercise. Have students read and review the Bay of Pigs Invasion and the Fidel Castro Speech handouts before writing their letters. Ask students to use SOAPSTone as a pre-writing strategy and to refer to their earlier SOAPSTone work if they need guidance.

After students hand in their letters, lead them in a discussion about their experiences in this activity. Answer questions students may still have about the Bay of Pigs invasion, Fidel Castro's reactions to the invasion, and the relationship between Castro and the Soviet Union/Khrushchev.

# Modification

APPARTS or a different reading strategy of your choice can be used as an alternative to the SOAPSTone strategy.

## Tip

Check for understanding throughout the lesson by asking students to summarize the impact of the Bay of Pigs invasion on Fidel Castro.

# Modification

If computers are not available for students, step 1 may be assigned as homework the previous night.

# Modification

If you have already taught the Bay of Pigs invasion to students, forgo the informational text in Step 1 and rely on students' prior knowledge.

## Tip

To ensure active participation and engagement, be sure to establish clear criteria for class discussions before beginning any discussion. For more information on establishing norms for discussions, see [Human Rights Education Associates: Establishing Rules for Discussion](#).

## Tip

To ensure students are successful in meeting the objectives of this activity, facilitate student thinking by reminding them throughout the activity to answer the questions and support their responses with evidence from the sources. Avoid telling students answers if they are stuck. Pose additional questions to support student thinking.

# Alternative Assessment

Review students' letters using the Write a Letter to Khrushchev Rubric. Excellent letters will describe Castro's attitude after the Bay of Pigs invasion and propose a potential relationship between Cuba and the Soviet Union. Check all letters for specificity and clear explanations of reasoning.

## OBJECTIVES

# Subjects & Disciplines

### **Social Studies**

- U.S. History
- World History

# Learning Objectives

Students will:

- identify and describe the causes and outcomes of the Bay of Pigs invasion by reading and discussing an informational text
- describe Castro's attitude toward Kennedy and the United States by reading and analyzing a primary source document
- evaluate the impact of the Bay of Pigs invasion on Castro's mindset toward the United States by writing a letter to Nikita Khrushchev arguing for a Soviet-Cuban alliance

# Teaching Approach

- Learning-for-use
- Object-based learning

# Teaching Methods

- Discussions
- Reading
- Writing

# Skills Summary

This activity targets the following skills:

- 21st Century Student Outcomes
  - Information, Media, and Technology Skills
    - Information Literacy
  - Learning and Innovation Skills
    - Critical Thinking and Problem Solving
- Critical Thinking Skills
  - Analyzing
  - Creating
  - Understanding

# National Standards, Principles, and Practices

## NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR SOCIAL STUDIES CURRICULUM STANDARDS

- Theme 9:

Global Connections

## ISTE STANDARDS FOR STUDENTS (ISTE STANDARDS\*S)

- Standard 1:

Creativity and Innovation

- Standard 4:

Critical Thinking, Problem Solving, and Decision Making

### Preparation

## BACKGROUND & VOCABULARY

### Background Information

Throughout the first half of the twentieth century, Cuba—located 145 kilometers (90 miles) off the coast of Florida—was extremely important for large U.S. corporations. According to a Department of Commerce survey released in 1956, American firms controlled 90 percent of

Cuba's telephone and electric services, 50 percent of Cuba's public railways, and 40 percent of Cuba's raw sugar production. As a result, the United States government actively supported the pro-American dictator Fulgencio Batista, a brutal authoritarian ruler who thrived in opulence as poverty decimated most Cuban people.

In this climate of oppression, the Cuban people rallied to an enigmatic guerrilla fighter, Fidel Castro, who toppled Batista's government and eventually promised to bring socialism to Cuba. Unhappy with this outcome, the CIA, under authorization from President Eisenhower, developed plans to overthrow Castro. President Kennedy, less than three months after his inauguration, authorized the plan. This plot became the failed Bay of Pigs invasion, in which American-backed Cuban exiles failed to start a popular uprising against Castro.

While the Bay of Pigs invasion was an abject failure for the United States and President Kennedy, the event had equally large repercussions on Cuba, allowing Castro to consolidate his authority over the Cuban political system and pushing him into a closer alliance with the Soviet Union.

## Prior Knowledge

["General understanding of the origins of the Cold War and U.S. distrust of communism and the Soviet Union", "Basic understanding of first-person narratives (e.g., letters, diary entries) "]

## Recommended Prior Activities

- None

## Vocabulary

Term	Part of Speech	Definition
communism	noun	type of economy where all property, including land, factories and companies, is held by the government.
dictator	noun	person with complete control of a government.
exile	noun	forced ejection from a country, or a person who feels forced to leave.

Term	Part of Speech	Definition
guerrilla	adjective	having to do with warfare conducted by organized groups of civilians, not soldiers or the military.
revolution	noun	overthrow or total change of government.
socialism	noun	system of organization or government where all property, industry, and capital is owned by the community, not individuals.
Soviet Union	noun	(1922-1991) large northern Eurasian nation that had a communist government. Also called the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, or the USSR.

## PARTNER



# Before Moving on to the Next Activity

Ask students: *Was Kennedy an effective leader at the Bay of Pigs invasion? Why or why not?* Discuss responses as a class and tell students they will have another opportunity to evaluate Kennedy's leadership in the next activity on the Cuban Missile Crisis.

## ACTIVITY 2: 13 DAYS: PRESIDENT KENNEDY AND THE CUBAN MISSILE CRISIS | 1 HR 30 MINS

### DIRECTIONS

#### 1. Read an excerpt from the *Killing Kennedy* script.

Assign students to play the different roles in the Cuban Missile Crisis Scene selection from the *Killing Kennedy* script. Have students act out the scene. Before reading, ask the remaining students to listen to identify what problem President Kennedy faces in this scene. After, ask: *What problem did President Kennedy face in this clip?* Explain to students that this problem has come to be known as the Cuban Missile Crisis. It occurred in 1962. For thirteen days, the world teetered on the brink of nuclear war. Ask: *Why did missiles in Cuba pose a threat to the United States?*

## **2. Review Kennedy's policy options in the face of the Cuban Missile Crisis.**

Explain to students that they will be acting as Kennedy's advisers during this thirteen-day period. They will need to research and analyze the documents that Kennedy's real advisers had available to them, and then present their findings to the president (you).

Tell students that President Kennedy had several options in responding to the threat posed by the placement of missiles on Cuban soil. Ask students what options they think Kennedy had. List student responses on poster paper or on a whiteboard. Use the discussion to prompt students to include all of the options listed below. You may wish to project the list for students to read.

1. Do nothing: American vulnerability to Soviet missiles was not new. Newly placed missiles in Cuba made little strategic difference in the military balance of power.
2. Diplomacy: Use diplomatic pressure to get the Soviet Union to remove the missiles.
3. Warning: Send a message to Castro to warn him of the grave danger he, and Cuba, were facing.
4. Blockade: Use the U.S. Navy to block any missiles from arriving in Cuba.
5. Air strike: Use the U.S. Air Force to attack all known missile sites.
6. Invasion: Launch a full force invasion of Cuba and overthrow of Castro.

## **3. Students research Kennedy's policy options using primary resources and role-playing as EXCOMM.**

Explain to students that after the failure of Bay of Pigs invasion, Kennedy encouraged dissent among his advisers. If an idea was bad, Kennedy wanted his advisers to tell him; he did not want "yes men" to help him make decisions. Explain to students that during the Bay of Pigs invasion, members of Kennedy's staff who disagreed with the action refused to voice their negative opinions, not wanting to criticize the larger group. After this failure, Kennedy altered his leadership style, wanting to explore all options before making a decision.

Tell students they will now be role-playing as national security advisers to President Kennedy, a group known during the Cuban Missile Crisis as EXCOMM. Each student group will be assigned one policy option brainstormed earlier and will be responsible for:

- List of pros and cons for the group's policy choice

- Visual aid—on poster paper—to present pros and cons to the class

Divide the class into groups and assign one policy option per group for further exploration. Distribute the Confidential Files to each group. Tell students they will use these Confidential Files to support their policy choices. Distribute a T-Chart to each group and instruct them to use it to make a pros/cons chart. Distribute poster paper and markers to each group to develop a visual aid that will identify their policy option as well as the pros/cons of that option.

#### **4. Acting as EXCOMM, students present their policy arguments and the class comes to consensus on one response.**

After groups finish drafting their pros and cons with visual aids on poster paper, have each group present their policy and its accompanying pros and cons. After each group presents, students may ask questions about the group's policy and thinking. Have the whole class summarize the presentation by determining the most significant pro and con for the policy. Ask students to support all statements with evidence taken from the Confidential Files.

After all groups have presented, have students discuss all the options that were presented.

#### **5. Compare the EXCOMM class consensus to Kennedy's actual response to the Cuban Missile Crisis.**

Play the Red Threat video clip to the class. After watching, ask:

- *What policy choice did Kennedy make in response to the Cuban Missile Crisis?*
- *Compared to the pros and cons lists developed earlier, do you believe Kennedy made the best possible decision? Why or why not?*

#### **6. Examine the outcomes of the Cuban Missile Crisis.**

Explain to students the following outcomes of the Cuban Missile Crisis. Project these points in a PowerPoint presentation or write them on a piece of poster paper.

- After the blockade, Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev sent a letter to Kennedy. Khrushchev agreed to remove missiles from Cuba if the United States promised not to invade Cuba and to eventually remove missiles from Turkey.
- Kennedy agreed. The United States secretly removed missiles from Turkey. Khrushchev openly removed missiles from Cuba, ending the Cuban Missile Crisis.

Close the activity with a discussion of the questions below. Ask:

- *To what extent was Kennedy a successful leader in this crisis?*
- *Why was Kennedy more successful in the Cuban Missile Crisis than he was during the Bay of Pigs invasion? In what ways?*

## Modification

Instead of discussing summary questions, formally assess students by asking them to respond in writing to the final discussion questions.

## Tip

In Step 2, if students brainstorm other feasible options, you may choose to incorporate them into the activity at your discretion.

## Tip

This activity is extremely student-centered, involving small group work and student-led discussion. For more information on establishing procedures for these types of activities in your classroom, please refer to the Other Notes in the Preparation section.

## Informal Assessment

Have students respond to the following questions, supporting their responses with evidence from the activity. *To what extent was Kennedy a successful leader in this crisis? Why was Kennedy more successful in the Cuban Missile Crisis than he was during the Bay of Pigs invasion? In what ways?*

## Extending the Learning

Have students research the politics of détente and the period of relaxed tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union following the Cuban Missile Crisis.

# OBJECTIVES

## Subjects & Disciplines

### **Social Studies**

- U.S. History
- World History

## Learning Objectives

Students will:

- argue in favor of one course of action for President Kennedy in the Cuban Missile Crisis by identifying the pros and cons of that action from primary source evidence
- evaluate President Kennedy's leadership in the Cuban Missile Crisis by identifying the outcomes of the event

## Teaching Approach

- Learning-for-use

## Teaching Methods

- Brainstorming
- Cooperative learning
- Decision-making
- Discussions
- Issue analysis
- Reading
- Role playing

## Skills Summary

This activity targets the following skills:

- 21st Century Student Outcomes
  - Information, Media, and Technology Skills
    - Information Literacy
  - Learning and Innovation Skills
    - Communication and Collaboration
    - Creativity and Innovation
    - Critical Thinking and Problem Solving
  - Life and Career Skills
    - Leadership and Responsibility

# National Standards, Principles, and Practices

## NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR SOCIAL STUDIES CURRICULUM STANDARDS

- Theme 6:

Power, Authority, and Governance

- Theme 9:

Global Connections

### Preparation

## BACKGROUND & VOCABULARY

### Background Information

Following the Bay of Pigs invasion in 1961, Fidel Castro, the communist leader of Cuba, became convinced that at some point the United States would attempt to remove him from power. As a result, he grew increasingly defiant of American policymakers and courted the leaders of the Soviet Union to bolster the strength of his small island country. In 1962, Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev offered to place Soviet nuclear missiles on Cuba just 145 kilometers (90 miles) off the coast of Florida. Castro eagerly accepted Khrushchev's offer, believing nuclear missiles in Cuba would deter American aggression and secure Cuba's safety.

An American spy plane eventually discovered the existence of missile sites off the coast of Cuba, sparking what would come to be known as the Cuban Missile Crisis. President John F. Kennedy demanded that all nuclear missiles be removed from Cuba and blockaded the island to prevent further deliveries of nuclear warheads. During the thirteen-day standoff between the United States and the Soviet Union, the world teetered on the brink of nuclear war. Eventually, Soviet Premier Khrushchev acquiesced to Kennedy's demands, agreeing to remove the missiles from Cuba publically if the United States military would promise not to invade Cuba and secretly remove missiles from Turkey, averting potential disaster and ending the Cuban Missile Crisis.

## Prior Knowledge

["Understanding of the Cold War and the causes of American-Soviet tensions", "Understanding of the Bay of Pigs invasion", "Understanding of and experience in using historical thinking and producing arguments/persuasive writing", "Basic understanding of the concepts of deterrence and containment"]

## Recommended Prior Activities

- None

## Vocabulary

Term	Part of Speech	Definition
communism	noun	type of economy where all property, including land, factories and companies, is held by the government.
democracy	noun	system of organization or government where the people decide policies or elect representatives to do so.
socialism	noun	system of organization or government where all property, industry, and capital is owned by the community, not individuals.
Soviet Union	noun	(1922-1991) large northern Eurasian nation that had a communist government. Also called the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, or the USSR.

PARTNER

# Rubric

Distribute the Kennedy and Cuba Leadership Assessment worksheet. Ask students to complete the graphic organizer to generate a thesis, and then respond to the summative question in a well-written essay, supporting their response with evidence learned in class. Collect the response and assess student work on the provided rubric.

## PARTNER