

# On the Brink of War: The Cuban Missile Crisis

*Karen Campbell, WVPT*

## Overview

**Topic:** Cuban Missile Crisis, Cold War. The Cuban Missile Crisis brought the world to the brink of nuclear war. In this lesson, students will investigate the events leading to and during those critical “fourteen days in October” when the superpowers of the world were at a virtual standoff. Students will work together to create a multimedia presentation reporting the major events of the crisis. This lesson is written to be used by a classroom teacher with one Internet connection; the lesson could be easily adapted for use by students in a computer lab.

## Length of Lesson

2 40-minute class periods

## Video/Technology Hardware & Software

*Breaking the Mold* #2, Cracking the Mold:  
1953-1960

*Breaking the Mold* #4, Recasting the Mold:  
1959-1979

TV/VCR with remote  
computer with access to the WWW  
printer  
LCD Projector or similar presentation device  
HyperStudio

## Web Applications

The following website is used for instruction and research: Fourteen Days in October  
<[hyperion.advanced.org/11046/](http://hyperion.advanced.org/11046/)>

## Learning Objectives

The student will be able to:

- identify the major political leaders involved in the Cuban Missile Crisis

- relate the major events of the Cuban Missile Crisis
- explain the role of the United States, the Soviet Union, and Cuba in the confrontation during the Cuban Missile Crisis
- evaluate the causes and results of the Cuban Missile Crisis
- locate, evaluate, and use material from electronic resources
- plan, write, and present a multimedia presentation on a significant event of the Cuban Missile Crisis (This lesson addresses Va. SOLs History and Social Science 6.7, 6.8, 6.10, 6.11; English 6.5, 6.7, 6.8; Computer/Technology 8.1, 8.4)

## Materials and Teacher Preparations

For each student:

- 4 student activity sheets

For the group:

- hula-hoop
- flip chart and marker (Use a flip chart to provide visual assistance for students. Make three columns. Label the first column EVENT and the second column WHY, and the third column RESULTS.)



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- recording of a song from the '50s
- recording of an air raid siren [Note to the teacher: You can download this from the following website: <[www.terminator3armageddon.com/conspira/airraid.html](http://www.terminator3armageddon.com/conspira/airraid.html)>]

### Preparatory/Pre-Viewing Activities

1. Tell the students that today we are going to take a trip into the past. Hold up the hula-hoop. Ask: What is this? Put on a recording of a song from the '50s and allow a student or two to try the hula-hoop. Ask: What time period does this bring to mind? (1950s) Ask: What was America like during the 1950s? Accept student responses.

2. Play a recording of an air raid siren. Do you know what to do in case you heard this? (Accept student response). Say: During an air raid "drill" you would go into the under your desk or into the hall, kneel, and cover your head. Let's simulate an air raid drill. When you hear the siren, you know what to do. Play recording again while students recreate an air raid drill. Return to seats and ask: How do you think children felt when that was happening? (Students should understand that was very frightening for children)

#### Pause vs. Stop

When using a video interactively with students, teachers need to decide when to use **PAUSE** and when to use **STOP**. **PAUSE** the video when the anticipated discussion or activity will take less than two minutes. **STOP** for longer periods. Pausing for too long at one time can cause video heads on the VCR to become clogged which may require cleaning to correct.

3. Say: Today we are going to be studying an important crisis in American history, but before we can do that we need to understand the mood of the American people going into the crisis. As we watch the video clip, watch for the two very different feelings that influenced the American people during the end of the '50s and the early '60s. **PLAY** *Breaking the Mold* #2, starting just after the blue credit screens. **PAUSE** to check comprehension at 1:35

after the commentator says ". . . and yet a country full of fear." Ask: What were the feelings in America during this time? (prosperity, fear) Ask: What caused the feeling of prosperity? (end of war, producing goods for consumption, more time) What caused the feelings of fear? (threat of nuclear attack). Discuss what it would have been like to be their age and dealing with those fears.

#### Time Cues

To synchronize your VCR with the time cues that are included with this lesson, zero/reset your time counter at the very beginning of the program, before the introduction and titles. Time cues are expressed as "minutes:seconds;" for example, 3:15 means three minutes and fifteen seconds.

4. **Focus:** What country posed the greatest threat to America at this time? (Soviet Union) Have a student locate the Soviet Union on a map or globe. Ask: What do we call the main part of the Soviet Union today? (Russia) During the next clip, look for why Americans were afraid of war with the Soviet Union. **RESUME**. **STOP** at 1:54 when the announcer says ". . . that an amicable meeting between their leaders seemed impossible." Ask: What caused the Americans to be afraid of war with Russia? (division between Communism and the free world) Discuss the way that Americans felt about Communism.

5. Change tapes (if necessary) and **START** at the beginning of *Breaking the Mold* #4 just after the opening credits. **Focus:** The tension between the United States and the Soviet Union is going to increase as we move into the 1960s. As we watch the next video clip, note the event that brought us into direct confrontation. **PLAY** video. **PAUSE** at 0:41 when the announcer says ". . . contributed to a direct confrontation between the two super powers." Ask: What event contributed to the confrontation? (discovery of missiles in Cuba) What could missiles in Cuba mean to the U.S.? (Accept student responses. Students should understand the close proximity of Cuba to the United States.)

**6. Focus:** How do you think the United States reacted to finding the missiles in Cuba? Why? Accept student responses, then say: As we continue, listen for President Kennedy's reaction. **RESUME. STOP** at 1:12 when Kennedy says ". . . provocative threat to world peace." Ask: How did President Kennedy react? (Any missile launched would be considered an attack, called on Khrushchev to eliminate the threat to world peace.) Ask: Why do you think Kennedy reacted in this way? (Accept student response) This sets the stage for our study of the Cuban Missile Crisis.

### Focus for Viewing/Other Technology

Say: The Cuban Missile Crisis is considered the closest that the United States has been to nuclear war. As we study the events of the crisis, we will try to understand the events leading up to and during the crisis. (Hand out the student activity sheet Student Event Report. Use the flip chart to provide visual assistance for students. Make three columns. Label the first column EVENT and the second column WHY, and the third column RESULTS.) As we watch the video clip and use the Internet site, we will log the events and analyze why they happened.

### Viewing and/or Online Activities

**1. FAST FORWARD** *Breaking the Mold* #4 to 8:09 to picture of Castro hanging on wall. **PAUSE** on picture. Ask: Who is this? (Castro) He was leader of what country? (Cuba) Why was the United States so worried about him leading Cuba. (ties with the Soviet Union)

**2. Focus:** President Kennedy is speaking in front of Congress. Find out his goals for the upcoming year. **RESUME. PAUSE** at 8:25 after Kennedy says ". . . but turn it we must." Ask: What did President Kennedy pledge to do? (free the Americas of foreign domination) Who do you think he was talking about? (Cuba, Castro) Why was this important to the U.S.?

**3. Focus:** What was President Kennedy's plan to stop Cuba? **RESUME. PAUSE** at 9:06 at people

picketing when the announcer says, "It failed." What was Kennedy's plan? (to start a revolution among the Cuban people and topple Castro) Was it successful? (no) How do you think the plan and its failure affected the relationships between Kennedy, Castro, and Khrushchev? Discuss how the relationships changed and what else may have happened.

**4. Focus:** Continue watching the video to find out what happened as a result of the failed plan. **RESUME. STOP** at 9:58 when Castro pulls out a cigar and the announcer says, "Castro officially declared himself a Marxist Leninist in December of 1961." Ask: What were the effects of the failed coup? (Castro was seen as standing up to U.S.; U.S. was seen as hesitant to use power; Castro brought closer to Soviet Union). Why was this important? Add this event to the flip chart page and student activity sheet. Event: Bay of Pigs; why: (to stop Cuban/Communism in the Americas) and the results: (listed above).

**5. Focus:** The failed Bay of Pigs had serious consequences. Watch the video to find how Castro benefited as a result of this. **PLAY** video. **STOP** at 10:40 when the announcer says "The result was the greatest crisis in the history of mankind." Ask: How did Castro benefit? (military aid, missiles) Why did the Soviet Union give Castro the military support? Why is this important? Discuss and then add details to chart.

**6. Focus:** The United States response to the missiles gives us our next major event. Listen for it as we continue the video. **PLAY** video. **PAUSE** at 11:12 when the announcer says ". . . waited to see what their bosses in the Kremlin were to do." Ask: What was the United States' response? (naval quarantine) Discuss possible ramifications of this action. Add the event to the chart.

**7. Focus:** The superpowers are locked in a standoff. Would one back down or would there be nuclear war? Let's see how each country reacted to the crisis. **RESUME. PAUSE** at 12:10 when the Russian historian says, ". . . we lived under mortal danger of nuclear war." Ask: What did the United States do during this time? (American ambassador at the UN; school practice drills) What was going on in the

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Soviet Union? (people were not told) Discuss why there was such a difference in the way each country reacted.

**8. Focus:** How was the crisis finally resolved?  
**RESUME. STOP** at 13:07 on picture of Kennedy in motorcade when the announcer says, “. . . because of Kennedy’s assassination.” Ask: How was the crisis resolved? (missiles returned to Soviet Union; U.S. promises not to invade Cuba, removes missiles from Turkey) Add the event to the chart, discussing the reasons and results.

**9.** Say: We now have a basic idea of what happened during the Cuban Missile Crisis. However, the people of the Soviet Union were not the only ones that were not given all of the information. There were many things going on of which the American people were not aware.

### Post-Viewing and/or Online Activities

**1.** Say: Recall that early in the video the announcer said, “As far as the American people knew the crisis started on October 22.” The crisis actually started a week earlier on October 15 when a photograph taken by a U-2 pilot revealed missiles in Cuba. Hand out the student activity sheet Student Briefing Report. For a closer look at the events of these two weeks, we will go to the website, Fourteen Days in October <[hyperion.advanced.org/11046/](http://hyperion.advanced.org/11046/)>.

**2.** On the opening screen, discuss the three leaders.

**3.** Go to the Briefing Room. It contains a day-by-day account of the events of the Cuban Missile Crisis. Use the LCD projector or other presentation device to project the website for all students to see. It will be helpful to go through the briefing together with the students, giving them time to work on their worksheets.

**4.** Read through the Causes of the Crisis. Discuss the relationships between the leaders and how this led to the crisis.

**5.** Read through the day-by-day account of the crisis together, adding details to the events chart that was

started during the viewing. Discuss reasons for the events and the results of each.

**6.** Read the Conclusion and discuss the implications of poor communication on the crisis. Have students predict how the crisis may have been different with today’s communication.

**7.** Go to the Quiz and take the online quiz. This should be a good review for the students and a comprehension check.

### Assessment

Students will be assessed by their participation in class. The quiz may be used to check comprehension. The presentation may be assessed by the attached rubric.

### Action Plan: Culminating Activities

Have students use the information collected during their study of the Cuban War Crisis to create a multimedia presentation using HyperStudio. Have students work in pairs to research important events of the crisis, then write a newspaper report on the event. Students then can use HyperStudio to create a three-slide presentation. The first slide should have the headline, the second slide the newspaper account, and the third slide should have an editorial (analysis). The student presentations can be linked into a class presentation that can be shared with other classes. The attached student activity sheets, Storyboard and Hyperstudio requirements will help to guide students’ work.

### Action Plan: Community Connections

Invite parents or grandparents of students to share their memories of the events during the Cold War or specifically of where they were during the Cuban Missile Crisis and how they felt.

## Extensions

**Science:** Have students research the development of the atomic bomb using the website: Race for the Superbomb <[www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/bomb/](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/bomb/)>.

### English:

- Have students prepare a class newspaper reporting the events of the Cuban Missile Crisis.
- Have students interview their relatives for a writing assignment on their experiences during the Cuban Missile Crisis and/or Cold War.

**Special Needs Students:** Provide appropriate modifications for the special needs students based on their IEP. Some examples of modifications:

- The website provides auditory accounts of the events.
- Websites can be printed and used as visual aids.
- Students may work in groups to facilitate understanding.

## About the Author

### Karen K. Campbell

Karen has been a Master Teacher for the NTTI since 1994. After teaching science for 16 years, Karen moved out of the classroom when she became the Technology Resource Teacher for Page County Schools. In this capacity, she works with the teachers in all of the county schools to assist them in the integration of technology into the curriculum. Karen has been involved with technology in Page County since the early days of Apple II computers. She serves on the division-wide technology committee and has served as technology trainer. Karen was named Page County Teacher of the Year in 1996. She received her B.S. degree from JMU. She is a member of the NEA, VEA, PC (Page County) EA, and VSTE. In her spare time, Karen enjoys hiking and camping.

# **CUBAN MISSILE CRISIS STUDENT BRIEFING REPORT**

## **Causes of the Crisis**

1. Name the three countries and the leader that represented each country involved in the Cuban Missile Crisis.
2. Explain the differences in the way the Soviet Union and the United States reacted to Castro coming to power.
3. Discuss the three factors that led to the placement of missiles in Cuba.

## **The Crisis Begins**

4. What was the name of the group of Kennedy's advisors?

## **Soviet Denial**

5. What did the government do to keep the press and the American people from finding out about the crisis?
6. When did the press learn about the missiles? Did they report it immediately? Why or why not?

## **The Public Phase**

7. When was the American public notified?
8. What did Cuba do in response to Kennedy's speech to the American people?

## **Confrontation and Compromise**

9. What happened when the Russian ship approached the quarantine line?
10. When was the U.S. at its highest military alert? What did this mean?
11. What was the worst day of the crisis? Why?

## **Conclusion**

12. Explain how poor communication affected the Cuban Missile Crisis.



## CUBAN MISSILE CRISIS HYPERSTUDIO STACK REQUIREMENTS

1. Each group's stack must include 3 cards:  
 Headline - grabs the viewer's attention  
 News - provides a factual account of what happened  
 Editorial - gives an analysis of the event
2. Each card must include an appropriate graphic.
3. Sounds or video clips may be used but are not required.
4. The stack will be evaluated using the following rubric:

	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Stack Appearance</b>	Less than required number of cards.		Has required number of cards.
	No graphics.	Graphics do not enhance meaning of the cards.	Graphics enhance the meaning of the card.
	Cards are not linked.	Not all links work.	Cards are linked.
<b>Content</b>	Inaccurate information.	Accurate information. Incomplete content.	Information is accurate and complete.