

12th History Cuban Pre-Interview

Interviewer: Why did you choose to teach this lesson?

Teacher: This lesson is on the Cuban Missile Crisis. This is the culmination of our unit on America's involvement abroad from World War II and into the years following. We talked about why we got involved in World War II, the way the world changed because of that, how we were involved in that change. We talked about the arms race, and then now this is sort of the culmination of that time in history and idea that we're not going to think about the world only as the next war's going to nuclear annihilation, but there's going to be a different type of war afterwards. We'll go on and talk about the Vietnam War. It was never going to be a nuclear contest. It's a different sort of thing. Cuban Missile Crisis is the end of that.

Also, the lesson deals a lot with collaboration and problem solving, dealing with the international relations of that time period, so there's other components. It's really a transition. It's the last lesson of this unit before we get into more of the at home things. We'll talk about the Civil Rights Movement next.

Interviewer: What are the learning outcomes for the lesson and how are they related to the larger sequence?

Teacher: They need to understand the basic idea of how the Cuban Missile Crisis fit into the broader idea of the Cold War, why putting missiles in Cuba was an imbalance, how close we came to catastrophe there, some of the political gutsy-ness it took to make the whole thing happen in the end. Those would be the key parts. They do need to understand the final deal, the idea that there was a trade, in a way; missiles out of Cuba in exchange for whatever else, because that helps them understand sort of the long lasting time period of the Cold War, why we agreed to never fight about it, so we just let everything sit. That's going to be an important outcome of the lesson.

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Interviewer: How would you describe the lesson as meaningful, useful, or relevant to students?

Teacher: This is one where they're going to playing Kennedy's advisors. Three times in the lesson, they're going to get new information. "Two days have passed and now you know this" or "You sent a letter Khrushchev and now he's responded with this." They're the advising team rather than Kennedy himself. This is a role, I think, they're going to play a lot in life, not as advisors to the president in crisis, but they're going to be working at a business and their boss is going to put them down with a team and say "What should we do?" or "You need to set up ..." Some of the students now, they work at stores at the mall. Then no doubt they get told by their boss "You and your ..." whoever else that works with them "Go make a display." They're going to have to collaborate and figure out what's going on and what's the best route to take or give advice. This is a good chance to practice.

Interviewer: What are the big questions you're using to drive student discussion?

Teacher: During the role play, there's three points. It's essentially every time is "What should Kennedy do?" Then in the first two setups, there's a series of options. "He should implement an embargo. He should order a full scale attack. He should do nothing and wait and see." Then the final one is the point where Kennedy had to be most creative, and so I don't give a set of options. I said "This is your last chance to prevent nuclear war, now what?" and see what they can come up with.

Interviewer: How are you planning to check for understanding or assess student outcomes?

Teacher: Each point, I present the new information. Then they discuss in groups and I walk around and monitor the groups and I'll ask questions to try and clarify what they're thinking. Then they share out so they can see how similar their thinking is to other people. Then I can ... If a group is a really pressing an alternative idea, then I can kind of probe into there and see what's their thinking. Sometimes we can tease out some really interesting ideas through that process.

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Interviewer: How would you describe this lesson as engaging for students?

Teacher: It's like a puzzle. In a way it's a little like a video game, like when you're a little kid and you read the story that says "Choose your own adventure. You choose this, turn to page fourteen." It's like that. In fact, when I first envisioned the whole lesson, I thought I might play at something like that originally. Then I decided that it would be a little more strictly historical rather than a total make up your own adventure where I was rewriting history. That was the original idea, that it was sort of like a game.

Interviewer: How do you plan to manage student behavior throughout the lesson, starting with expectations?

Teacher: This one, again, like the lesson before, there's a Power Point that guides it. It sets up the beginning, it sets up sort of the ground rules about how to play. The instructions are on the screen, "Read these two documents. Complete the first decision page on page three of the packet." Then it's all pretty well written out to guide them through.