

The Cuban Missile Crisis: Educational Activity

This activity is designed to help students gain a thorough understanding of the events that constituted the Cuban Missile Crisis. Prime Minister Diefenbaker hesitated when President Kennedy told him to raise Canada's military status to DEFCON 3, drawing a variety of responses from the public. Students will have the opportunity to examine letters addressed to the Prime Minister that express both support for and criticism of his decision. This activity also provides an ideal forum in which students can discuss current events related to the nuclear issue. Consult the online primary documents and website text as resources.

Introduction

- Begin by having students discuss what they already know about NATO and NORAD agreements
- Encourage students to investigate the Cuban Revolution, including the conditions under Batista's government. Review Fidel Castro's biography.
- Introduce students to JFK's famous presidential address
- Review the "Cuban Missile Crisis Timeline" handout
 - Outline important events and people.
 - Outline the various responses that the Ex Comm considered; discuss the pros and cons of each.
 - Outline the Soviet reaction and how the conflict was resolved
- Discuss the Canadian response
 - Distribute primary sources
 - Discuss Diefenbaker's reasoning for hesitating to aid the U.S.
 - Outline / discuss the consequences for Diefenbaker's decision
 - Optional: Discuss the United Nations role in the event or discuss how Castro benefited after the event

Refer to the following links:

- JFK Presidential Library – Cuban Missile Crisis
- Homeland Security Emergency Pamphlet
- Office of Civil and Defense Mobilizations (United States). "The Family Fallout Shelter (1959)".
- Office of Civil Defense (United States). "Ten for Survival: Survive Nuclear Attacks (1961)"
- Meserve, Jeanne. "Duct Tapes Rise Amid Terror Fears." CNN (Tuesday, Feb. 11, 2003)
- Chang, Kenneth and Judith Miller. "Threats and Responses: Protective Devices; Duct Tape and the Plastic Sheeting Can Offer Solace, if Not Real Security." New York Times (Feb. 13, 2003).

Activity:

- With students working in small groups, evenly distribute the primary documents. Each student should have a different document.
- Give the students 5-10 minutes to read the article. Have them fill out the primary document question sheet. (pdf)
- After the students have finished reading the article, have them assemble into their groups. Have each partner share / discuss / share notes on the article they read. (5-10 minutes)

- Have each group brainstorm the reasons for Diefenbaker's decisions.
- Encourage each group to share their comments and participate in a class discussion.
- To conclude, discuss:
 1. *Why do **you** think John Diefenbaker hesitated to raise Canada's military status to DEFCON 3?*
 2. *What would **you** have done if you were Prime Minister during the Cuban Missile Crisis? Would you have acted the same? Why or why not?*
 3. *Diefenbaker often used his public correspondence (letters) as a way to gauge the public opinion of his decisions as a Prime Minister. Do you think this was effective? Why or why not?*

Optional Activities

- Encourage your students to research public reactions to current decisions made by Prime Minister Stephen Harper. After this, have them write a letter to Prime Minister Harper expressing their opinion on a matter.
- Additional resources available upon request from the Diefenbaker Canada Centre for extended learning opportunities.