

## Cold War Containment | Lesson Plan

Target Audience: 11th Grade Honors History

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### Rationale:

**Why did America get involved in Vietnam and why was it difficult to get out?** The objective of this lesson is to allow the students the opportunity to understand the actions of presidents during the Cold War. The goal is to expose the students to multiple primary source presidential documents that show the goals of the administrations in containing communism. It will be the student's responsibility to link their primary sources to the buildup of troops in Vietnam and the complexities of withdrawal.

This lesson is for a 11<sup>th</sup> grade honors history class with 30 students. The class period would be 60-90 minutes, depending on the time allotted for discussion and reading. While most documents are 2-4 pages, the Nixon address is longer. A video clip has been included, however, the text could also be edited for brevity. US History topics such as domino effect, massive retaliation, containment and troop buildup are addressed using Presidents Truman through Reagan as their sources.

A recent goal of social studies in Virginia is to focus on skills that teach students to evaluate, problem solve and communicate effectively. Rather than just answer content-based questions on each document, the students are creating comparing and contrasting two forms of government, creating a timeline to show change in views over time, and examining the policy of America's leaders related to Vietnam. Encouraging students to communicate diverse opinions on controversial topics fosters civil discourse.

### Virginia and United States History [Standards of Learning](#):

STANDARD VUS.1 The student will demonstrate skills for historical and geographical analysis and responsible citizenship, including the ability to

- a) identify, analyze, and interpret primary and secondary source documents, records, and data, including artifacts, diaries, letters, photographs, journals, newspapers, historical accounts, and art, to increase understanding of events and life in the United States;
- b) evaluate the authenticity, authority, and credibility of sources;
- c) formulate historical questions and defend findings, based on inquiry and interpretation;
- d) develop perspectives of time and place, including the construction of maps and various timelines of events, periods, and personalities in American history;
- e) communicate findings orally and in analytical essays or comprehensive papers;
- f) develop skills in discussion, debate, and persuasive writing with respect to enduring issues and determine how divergent viewpoints have been addressed and reconciled;
- g) apply geographic skills and reference sources to understand how relationships between humans and their environment have changed over time;
- h) interpret the significance of excerpts from famous speeches and other documents;
- i) identify the costs and benefits of specific choices made, including the consequences, both intended and unintended, of the decisions and how people and nations responded to positive and negative incentives.

STANDARD VUS.13 The student will demonstrate knowledge of United States foreign policy since World War II by

- a) describing outcomes of World War II, including political boundary changes, the formation of the United Nations, and the Marshall Plan.
- b) explaining the origins of the Cold War, and describing the Truman Doctrine and the policy of containment of communism, the American role in wars in Korea and Vietnam, and the role of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in Europe.
- c) explaining the role of America's military and veterans in defending freedom during the Cold War.

- d) explaining the collapse of communism and the end of the Cold War, including the role of Ronald Reagan in making foreign policy.

### Objectives:

The Student Will Be Able To:

- Recall previous information (Remember)
- Interpret primary source documents for their significance during the Cold War (Apply)
- Compare and contrast the governments of two superpowers (Analyze)
- Develop perspectives of time and place, including the construction of timelines of events, periods, and personalities in American history (Create)
- Formulate historical questions (Create)
- Communicate findings orally (Understand)
- Critique the actions of past world leaders (Evaluate)

### Background:

The Students will have covered the end of World War II and Kennedy's administration prior to the activity. It will allow them to recall information from the previous presidents and begin to look at the policies of LBJ, Nixon at the height of the war in Vietnam. Skipping two presidents to the Reagan document, students should note the same concept of American victory over communism, but start to see the focus shift to the economy.

### Materials:

- Truman Inaugural [Address](#) 1949, five copies or digital access
- Eisenhower farewell [address](#) 1961, five copies or digital access
- Kennedy [letter](#) to South Vietnam 1961 **AND** Kennedy Berlin [Speech](#) 1963 (*Kennedy letters are shorter*), five copies or digital access
- Johnson Anguish in North Vietnam [Memo](#) 1965, five copies or digital access
- Nixon Address to the Nation on the Situation in Southeast Asia 1970 [text](#) ([video](#) of the speech - Nixon's Cambodian Incursion Speech) , five copies or digital access
- Ronald Reagan First Inaugural [Address](#) | 1981, five copies or digital access
- One piece of butcher/poster paper and markers for each group
- Highlighters and scratch paper if using paper copies

**Set up:** Place five groups of six students with one document from each of the presidents (Kennedy will have two). This can be with paper copies or with laptops open to the PBS Learning Media website. Highlighters and scratch paper should be at each station if using paper copies. This grouping will accommodate 30 students – adjust groups as needed if numbers do not match. Butcher paper and markers for each group will be needed later.

### Activity Instructions:

- This lesson is structured for a class of 30 honors students. Students should be in five groups of six to *discuss together the terms containment and domino theory*.
- Allow two to three minutes, then ask each student in the group to *select one of the presidents* listed – Truman, Eisenhower, Kennedy, Johnson, Nixon or Reagan – until each president is assigned to one group member. Students then read the primary source document for their one president, and address the following:

- What document do you have and from what year is it?
- Note the main theme of your document and any topic of significance
- Highlight or record one amazing quote from the source
- In addition, students should highlight or take notes on:
  - Communism
  - Democracy
  - Freedom
  - Allies or treaties
  - Vietnam
  - Troop numbers or deaths
- Split the original groups up and each person goes to sit with the other five people in the class that share the same president. Students with the same president discuss what they have highlighted, sharing insights and information until they feel that they are experts on their presidential document. Take additional notes here if needed. *Does it appear your president would increase or decrease the American presence in Vietnam?*
- Return back to your original group and *discuss what you found for each president.*
- Next, as a group, *create a T-chart of democracy and communism*, pulling ideas from each document. *How are the two viewed by American leaders over time?*
- Finally, as a group, *create a timeline of your presidents and their policies on Communism*. Include any quotes or facts you find significant, whether they are building up American troops to go abroad, etc. Allow 10-15 minutes.
- Add in other events studied in class that are not in the documents, but should be on a Cold War timeline (example – Korean War, Cuban Missile Crisis, Berlin Wall, etc).
- Closure activity – hang up each timeline *and discuss as a class – Why did America get involved in Vietnam and why was it difficult to get out?* Students can pull facts from their documents or recall broader historical concepts.
  - Extension questions: *What was the impact of the Cold War on American foreign policy? Do you think the Cold War ended – if so, when? Do current US/Russian events threaten the peace so many presidents mentioned? Why might the Reagan address focus on things other than just foreign policy – will our nation still be fighting communism when we reach the 1980s in the curriculum? What additional questions would you want answered by one of these leaders?*

**Assessment:** The timeline reflects comprehension of the US History Standards of Learning content goals. The activity and discussion act as Performance Based Assessments to evaluate how well students demonstrate interpretation of primary sources, mastery of oral communication and skills for historical analysis.