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HVL LESSON TITLE:

JUST AS CLOSE

DEVELOPED BY: ERIN COGGINS

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GUIDING QUESTION:

How did the Cuban Missile Crisis' brink of nuclear war affect young people?

OVERVIEW:

Students will watch the video on Paul Reeves detailing his work with nuclear weapons during the Cuban Missile Crisis as well as read the accounts of young people during this scary time in American history.



SUBJECT(S):
English/Creative Writing



VETERAN(S):
Paul Reeves



DURATION:
60 min.

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“And it was my job then to train a crew of six to arm and place the bomb, and another six people who would guard it on our way to the point where we would place it.”

Paul Reeves

OVERVIEW:

Students will watch the video on Paul Reeves detailing his work with nuclear weapons during the Cuban Missile Crisis as well as read the accounts of young people during this scary time in American history.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT:

The Cuban Missile Crisis of October 1962 was a direct and dangerous confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cold War and was the moment when the two superpowers came closest to nuclear conflict.

OBJECTIVES:

At the conclusion of this lesson, students will be able to

- Recognize the fear that younger citizens in both America and Cuba experienced during the tense moments of the Cuban Missile Crisis.

STANDARDS:

ELA: AL: 9.a

Write a memoir, narrative essay, or personal or fictional narrative, poem to convey a series of events, establishing a clear purpose and using narrative techniques.

ELA: AL. 6

Compare and/or contrast the perspectives in a variety of fiction, nonfiction, informational, digital, and multi-modal texts produced from diverse historical, cultural, and global points of view, not limited to the grade-level literary focus.

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MATERIALS & DOCUMENTS

[Paul Reeves HVL Video](#)

Doc A: Cuban Missile Crisis Handout

[Childhood Memories of the Cuban Missile](#)

[Crisis Article](#) (read aloud option)

Doc B: Memories Graphic Organizer

Doc. C: Poem Directions

Computers with Internet Access

PROCEDURES

ACTIVITY 01

- Show students the Paul Reeves HVL video. Have students jot down the responsibilities he had when it came to nuclear bombs.
- After the video, ask students to share some of the duties they recorded while watching the video.
- Tell students that America was the closest they have ever been to nuclear war during the Cuban Missile Crisis.

ACTIVITY 02

- Direct students to Doc. A-Cuban Missile Crisis Handout.
- Teacher can either instruct students to read the document and answer the questions so they understand the Cuban Missile Crisis.
- **NOTE:** If the Cuban Missile Crisis has been covered, the teacher may just go over the high points of the event.

ACTIVITY 03

- Instruct students to the Childhood Memories of the Cuban Missile Crisis article. Direct them to the directions on Doc. B Memories Graphic Organizer.
- Inform students that they will be reading two accounts of the Cuban Missile Crisis from a young person's perspective: one an American, the other a Cuban. As they read the accounts, they should complete the graphic organizer.
- Give students 15-20 minutes to complete the reading and the graphic organizer.
- Instruct students that they will write a 3-4 stanza poem (in any format they wish) from a young person's perspective about the fear produced from the Cuban Missile Crisis.

METHODS FOR EXTENSION

- Teachers could have students present the poem in a coffee house setting.
- Students could be instructed to write another poem from the adult perspective.



CUBAN MISSILE CRISIS HANDOUT

<https://www.history.com/topics/cold-war/Cuban-missile-crisis>

Discovering the Missiles

After seizing power in the Caribbean island nation of Cuba in 1959, leftist revolutionary leader Fidel Castro (1926-2016) aligned himself with the Soviet Union. Under Castro, Cuba grew dependent on the Soviets for military and economic aid. During this time, the U.S. and the Soviets (and their respective allies) were engaged in the Cold War (1945-91), an ongoing series of largely political and economic clashes.

The two superpowers plunged into one of their biggest Cold War confrontations after the pilot of an American U-2 spy plane piloted by Major Richard Heyser making a high-altitude pass over Cuba on October 14, 1962, photographed a Soviet SS-4 medium-range ballistic missile being assembled for installation.

President Kennedy was briefed about the situation on October 16, and he immediately called together a group of advisors and officials known as the executive committee, or ExComm. For nearly the next two weeks, the president and his team wrestled with a diplomatic crisis of epic proportions, as did their counterparts in the Soviet Union.

A New Threat to the U.S.

For the American officials, the urgency of the situation stemmed from the fact that the nuclear-armed Cuban missiles were being installed so close to the U.S. mainland—just 90 miles south of Florida. From that launch point, they were capable of quickly reaching targets in the eastern U.S. If allowed to become operational, the missiles would fundamentally alter the complexion of the nuclear rivalry between the U.S. and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), which up to that point had been dominated by the Americans.

Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev had gambled on sending the missiles to Cuba with the specific goal of increasing his nation's nuclear strike capability. The Soviets had long felt uneasy about the number of nuclear weapons that were targeted at them from sites in Western Europe and Turkey, and they saw the deployment of missiles in Cuba as a way to level the playing field. Another key factor in the Soviet missile scheme was the hostile relationship between the U.S. and Cuba. The Kennedy administration had already launched one attack on the island—the failed Bay of Pigs invasion in 1961—and Castro and Khrushchev saw the missiles as a means of deterring further U.S. aggression.

Kennedy Weighs the Options

From the outset of the crisis, Kennedy and ExComm determined that the presence of Soviet missiles in Cuba was unacceptable. The challenge facing them was to orchestrate their removal without initiating a wider conflict—and possibly a nuclear war. In deliberations that stretched on for nearly a week, they

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CUBAN MISSILE CRISIS HANDOUT

DOC A



came up with a variety of options, including a bombing attack on the missile sites and a full-scale invasion of Cuba. But Kennedy ultimately decided on a more measured approach. First, he would employ the U.S. Navy to establish a blockade, or quarantine, of the island to prevent the Soviets from delivering additional missiles and military equipment. Second, he would deliver an ultimatum that the existing missiles be removed.

In a television broadcast on October 22, 1962, the president notified Americans about the presence of the missiles, explained his decision to enact the blockade and made it clear that the U.S. was prepared to use military force if necessary to neutralize this perceived threat to national security. Following this public declaration, people around the globe nervously waited for the Soviet response. Some Americans, fearing their country was on the brink of nuclear war, hoarded food and gas.

Showdown at Sea: U.S. Blockades Cuba

A crucial moment in the unfolding crisis arrived on October 24, when Soviet ships bound for Cuba neared the line of U.S. vessels enforcing the blockade. An attempt by the Soviets to breach the blockade would likely have sparked a military confrontation that could have quickly escalated to a nuclear exchange. But the Soviet ships stopped short of the blockade.

Although the events at sea offered a positive sign that war could be averted, they did nothing to address the problem of the missiles already in Cuba. The tense standoff between the superpowers continued through the week, and on October 27, an American reconnaissance plane was shot down over Cuba, and a U.S. invasion force was readied in Florida. (The 35-year-old pilot of the downed plane, Major Rudolf Anderson, is considered the sole U.S. combat casualty of the Cuban missile crisis.) "I thought it was the last Saturday I would ever see," recalled U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara (1916-2009), as quoted by Martin Walker in "The Cold War." A similar sense of doom was felt by other key players on both sides.

A Deal Ends the Standoff

Despite the enormous tension, Soviet and American leaders found a way out of the impasse. During the crisis, the Americans and Soviets had exchanged letters and other communications, and on October 26, Khrushchev sent a message to Kennedy in which he offered to remove the Cuban missiles in exchange for a promise by U.S. leaders not to invade Cuba. The following day, the Soviet leader sent a letter proposing that the USSR would dismantle its missiles in Cuba if the Americans removed their missile installations in Turkey.

Officially, the Kennedy administration decided to accept the terms of the first message and ignore the second Khrushchev letter entirely. Privately, however, American officials also agreed to withdraw their nation's missiles from Turkey. U.S. Attorney General Robert Kennedy (1925-68) personally delivered the message to the Soviet ambassador in Washington, and on October 28, the crisis drew to a close.

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CUBAN MISSILE CRISIS HANDOUT

DOC A



With what discovery did the Cuban Missile Crisis begin?

How did this become a “diplomatic crisis of epic proportions” for both the U.S. and the Soviet Union?

What caused the tension between Cuba and the U.S. prior to the discovery of the missiles?

Summarize President Kennedy’s options on how to deal with the Crisis.

What option did JFK choose and how did it work out?

How did the crisis end?

If you could ask Paul Reeves one question about the Cuban Missile Crisis, what would it be?

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MEMORIES OF THE CUBAN MISSILE CRISIS

DOC B



American Perspective: Marta Darby

What were Marta's initial feelings when she heard about the Cuban Missile Crisis?

How does Maria describe the preparations made by the U.S.?

What types of words does Marta use to describe the Cuban Missile Crisis?

What impact did the Cuban Missile Crisis have on Marta's life?

Cuban Perspective: Maria Salgado

What were Maria's initial feelings when she heard about the Cuban Missile Crisis?

How does Maria describe the preparations made by Cuba?

What types of words does Maria use to describe the Cuban Missile Crisis?

What impact did the Cuban Missile Crisis have on Maria's life?

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POEM DIRECTIONS

DOC C



NAME: _____

DIRECTIONS: Compose a poem (3-4 stanzas) in any format you choose. The poem must address the perspective of a young person living through the Cuban Missile Crisis.