
Workshop dates: May 10-13, 24-27, 2004

Grade level: 5, 6, 11

SOL connections: USI.1, USI.9; USII.1, USII.7, USII.8; VUS.7; VUS.12

Workshop Summary: In 1860, America faced a crossroads with the November presidential election. One candidate – Bell, Breckinridge, Douglas, or Lincoln – would steer the country set on a course for Civil War. Was the conflict inevitable? What decision making processes would be required of the new president? What issues were on the minds of voters in this tumultuous time?

Similarly, America found itself on the brink of world-altering events in October, 1962. With evidence of weapons of mass destruction located in Cuba, President Kennedy engaged the Soviet Union for thirteen days with the threat of global warfare behind every communication and decision. How did he handle the decision-making process in such a delicate and consequential event? How did the events of the negotiations fit together?

The use of primary sources to teach American history gives students an opportunity to investigate the past in a hands-on, interactive way. These two events offer a dramatic, explicit context for discussing and analyzing the decision making process of major governments as well as excellent content for a sophisticated comparison of cause and effect relationships. This workshop focused on using content primary sources in activities that emphasize time and sequence and decision making. Ultimately, students are asked to evaluate the lessons of the past and apply those lessons to their current and future choices.

Featured Resources: Digital primary source images were used in workshop activities with permission from the following sites:

National Security Archive: http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/
John F. Kennedy Presidential Museum Online: www.jfklibrary.org

Handout material included

• “The Cuban Missile Crisis: Considering its Place in Cold War History” (2nd edition) written by The Choices Program at Brown University. This collection of resources probes the complex relationship between the United States and Cuba, and examines the crisis that brought the world to the brink of war. The unit incorporates ground-breaking research on the Cuban missile crisis. For more information, visit their website: http://www.choices.edu/index.cfm

• “Harpers Ferry: Election of 1860” was filmed and created by Maunder Studios. This DVD featuring over 2 hours of video of Harpers Ferry National Historic Park's Election 1860 Living History Program. www.maunderstudios.com/MaunderStudiosMenu.htm