

Lesson Plan

# The Origins of US Cold War Fears, 1946–1961

**Length**

2 periods

**Grade Level**

High School

## Learning Objectives

Students will be able to

- Analyze primary source documents using close-reading strategies
- Identify and describe the historical context and main points of a document
- Identify and describe the point of view and purpose of a document
- Draw conclusions based on direct evidence found in the text
- Evaluate and group documents based on shared categories
- Collaborate effectively with classmates to develop and express positions and viewpoints

[Complete lesson plan with handouts](#)



## Overview

**\*\*Click the link above for the full plan with readings and handouts.\*\***

This unit has been developed by the Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History in partnership with CFR Education from the Council on Foreign Relations. These lesson plans were developed to enable students to understand, summarize, and evaluate original documents of historical significance. Students will learn and practice skills that will help them analyze, assess, and develop knowledgeable and well-reasoned points of view on visual and textual source materials.

In the two lessons in this unit the students will analyze and assess various documents, including speeches, government documents, and images from 1946 to 1961. The objective is to have students recognize the origins of the Cold War conflict between the US and the USSR by analyzing key elements of primary source materials. The students will examine, define, interpret, and organize the documents with the goal of answering the essential question: What fears led the United States into the Cold War? As an assessment, students will engage in a small-group seminar to critically evaluate the origins of these US fears.

## Lesson 1: Exploring the Fears (Document Analysis)

**\*\*Click the link above for the full plan with readings and handouts.\*\***

In the first lesson, students will identify, examine, and analyze the language and imagery of primary source documents related to the fears that led the United States into the Cold War from 1946 to 1961. They will work with a variety of primary source materials including speeches, government documents, and images. They will determine the historical context, summarize key ideas, and analyze the point of view and purpose of each document. At the end of the lesson, the class will come together to discuss the fears that led the United States into

the Cold War.

1. Divide the class into small groups (e.g., three to five is an ideal number for each group).
2. Hand out the Historical Background for homework before Lesson 1 or “share read” it in class. This is done by having the students follow along silently while you begin reading aloud, modeling prosody, inflection, and punctuation. After a few sentences, ask the class to join in with the reading while you continue to read aloud, still serving as the model. This technique will support struggling readers as well as English language learners (ELL).
3. Optional: Depending on the time available and the needs of your students, you can have them complete the Important Phrases activity sheet for homework or in class, as a whole-class exercise or individually.
4. Hand out the Cold War primary sources (#1–12). If possible, have a copy of Document 1 projected so that everyone can see it and you can refer to it easily.
5. Share read the excerpt from the first document with the students as described above.
6. The students will encounter vocabulary that they do not know. One benefit of having the students work in groups is that they can reason out together the meanings of words in context. If the students are truly stuck on a word that is critical to the passage, you can open up a class discussion. As a last resort, you can provide the meaning.
7. Go through the activity with the students as a class, modeling how to answer the different sections.
  - o “Historical Context of the Document”: The students can use the provided Historical Background, their textbook, and appropriate websites (such as World101’s Historical Context module Global Era) to help them identify the historical context of the primary sources in the lesson. They should identify some of the larger, or broader, events taking place that help explain the meaning and purpose of the document (e.g., the “Historical Context of the Declaration of Independence” would be the end of the Seven Years’ War, the massive British debt, the end to Salutary Neglect, the failure of compromise and reconciliation between the colonies and the British, etc.).
  - o “Summarize Key Ideas”: The students should select three main ideas in the document and put those ideas in their own words.
  - o “Point of View” and “Purpose”: The students must determine whose point of view is being expressed in the primary source and the purpose of the primary source, providing evidence from the document to support their position.
8. After you complete Document #1 as a class, the groups should complete the rest of the activity sheets.
9. Wrap-up: Discuss final conclusions and clarify points of confusion.

## Lesson 2: Exploring the Fears (Small-Group Seminar)

**\*\*Click the link above for the full plan with readings and handouts.\*\***

In the second lesson, students will group the primary source documents from Lesson 1, and the Cold War fears they represent, into categories—social, political, religious, intellectual, technological, and economic. At the end of the lesson, they will participate in small-group seminars to respond to the prompt “Evaluate the relative importance of the fears that led the United States into the Cold War between 1946 and 1961.”

1. Divide the class into the groups from Lesson 1 or new groups.
2. Make sure students have their Cold War documents and activity sheets from Lesson 1.
3. Hand out the “Categorizing Cold War Fears” activity sheet. If possible, have a copy projected so that everyone can see it and you can refer to it easily.
4. Students should work in groups to complete the activity. You may want to model the categorization of the first document for them. Let them know that there is no right or wrong way to categorize the documents. The purpose of the activity is to have the students think about the characteristics shared by different types of documents. This understanding will also be important for the later small-group seminar, when the students will be asked to take a position on the seminar prompt, “Evaluate the relative importance of the fears that led the United States into the Cold War between 1946 and 1961.”
5. Hand out the “Ranking Causation” activity sheets and ask students to complete the activity on their own, not with their groups.
6. Divide the students into new groups. Depending on the class size, you may want to divide up the class in three different ways.
  - o For a small class, you may choose to keep the students together in one group.

- For a medium-sized class, you may choose to divide the class into two groups. Arrange the students into an inner and an outer circle. Have the inner group start the seminar and then switch in the middle, allowing the outer group to finish the discussion. Usually, the outer group completes another task while the inner group is in discussion (e.g., taking notes on the inner group's discussion).
  - For a large class, you may choose to divide the class into groups of five, each group seated in a circle. Each circle will be a self-contained seminar group.
7. Read the seminar prompt to the class: "Evaluate the relative importance of the fears that led the United States into the Cold War between 1946 and 1961."
  8. Students should take turns sharing their response with their group. The seminar prompt encourages students to consider what the top three categories of Cold War fears were and rank them from most to least important. Each group needs to come to a consensus.
  9. Wrap-up: Discuss final conclusions and clarify points of confusion.