

Lesson Plan from [Contemporary History](#)
Lesson Plan

The Cold War as a Culture War: Visualizing Values and the Role of Pop Culture

Length

2 classes

Grade Level

High School

Learning Objectives

Students will be able to

- Analyze primary source images using analysis strategies
- Identify and describe the historical context of an image
- Identify and describe the evidence in an image
- Interpret meaning based on direct evidence found in an image
- Evaluate and group documents based on shared categories
- Collaborate effectively to develop and express positions and viewpoints

[Complete lesson plan with handouts](#)

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Overview

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

This unit has been developed in conjunction with CFR Education from the Council on Foreign Relations and is a part of the Gilder Lehrman Institute's Teaching Literacy through History resources, designed to align with the Common Core State Standards. These units were developed to enable students to understand, summarize, and evaluate original documents of historical significance. Students will learn and practice the skills that will help them analyze, assess, and develop knowledgeable and well-reasoned points of view on visual and textual source materials.

Over the course of the two lessons, the students will analyze and assess visual primary sources, including political cartoons, art, advertisements, propaganda, and photographs from 1945 to 1992. The objective is to analyze how the Cold War was expressed as a culture war between the United States and the Soviet Union by analyzing key elements of the images in this lesson. The students will examine, define, interpret, and organize the documents to answer the essential question: How did the Cold War manifest itself as a culture war between the United States and the Soviet Union? As an assessment, the students will use their analysis of the images to engage in a small group seminar discussion about the similarities and differences in the values expressed by people in the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cold War.

Lesson 1: The Cold War: A Culture War in Images

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 idea of the Cold War as a culture war. Students will work with political cartoons, propaganda posters, photographs, and other graphic representations of the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union between 1945 and 1992. For each document the students will identify the historical context, physical setting, central figures or objects, action, and mood or theme of the image.

1. Divide the class into small groups of three to five students.
2. The students should be familiar with the historical context of the Cold War. You may share the provided Historical Background with them as well as the Important Phrases activity sheet.
3. Make sure the students have access to a US history textbook or the internet.
4. Hand out the Cold War documents (1–12). If possible, have a copy of Document 1 displayed so everyone can see it and you can refer to it easily.
5. Go through Document 1 with the class, modeling how to complete the different sections.
6. Each document activity sheet contains key vocabulary terms that are essential for helping the students understand the meaning of the image. Students should be familiar with these words before they begin the activity: American abstract expressionism, American consumerism, Apollo 11, Congress for Cultural Freedom, glasnost, Marshall Plan, NASA, NATO, perestroika, Socialist realism, Soviet consumerism, Space Race, Sputnik I, Truman Doctrine,
7. The title, author, and date are not provided on the activity sheets. You can give the students this information (from the Materials list above) or let the students interpret the images without that information.
8. “Historical Context of the Document” asks students to explain some of the larger or broader events taking place that help that document make sense (e.g., the historical context of George Kennan’s “Long Telegram” would be the end of World War II, Stalin’s aggressive gestures toward Iran and Turkey, Truman’s tougher stance in dealing with the Soviets, the uncooperative behavior of the Soviets regarding the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, etc.). They should use the Historical Background, their textbooks, “How Did the Cold War Stay Cold?” and “What Kinds of Government Exist?” from CFR Education, and appropriate online resources to identify the historical contexts.
9. Each image is followed by a table. In the first column, “Observational Evidence,” students will note down evidence about the setting, central figures or objects, action, and mood or theme of the posters, cartoon, or photograph. In the second column, “Meaning of the Observed Evidence,” the students will analyze what the evidence suggests about the meaning of the image.
10. The students should work in their groups to complete the activity sheets for Documents 2–12.
11. Wrap-up: Discuss the groups’ conclusions and clarify any points of confusion that arose in the students’ interpretations and understanding of the Cold War.

Lesson 2: Similarities and Differences in Cultural Values

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

In the second lesson, students will use the images and completed activity sheets from Lesson 1 to identify the similarities and differences in the cultural values of people in the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cold War. The students will determine whether or not each image represents a cultural value that is shared. At the end of the lesson, the students will participate in small group seminars to respond to the prompt: Evaluate the extent of similarities and differences in the cultural values of people in the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cold War.

1. Divide the class into groups. You may use the same groups as in Lesson 1 or create new groups.
2. Make sure students have their Cold War images from Lesson 1.

3. Hand out the “Identifying Cultural Values” activity sheet. If possible, have a copy displayed so everyone can see it and you can refer to it easily.
4. Students should work in groups to complete the chart. You may want to model identifying the first image for them. Let them know there is no right or wrong way to identify the images. The purpose of identifying the cultural value expressed in each image is to have the students think about the overall message of each image. This will be important for the small group seminar, when the students will be asked to take a position on the seminar prompt: Evaluate the extent of similarities and differences in the cultural values of people in the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cold War.
5. Hand out the “Venn Diagram: Similarities and Differences in Cultural Values.” Each student will complete the diagram independently.
6. Divide the students into new groups. Depending on the class size, you may want to divide up the class in three different ways.
 - 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 discussion prompt to the class: Evaluate the extent of similarities and differences in the cultural values of people in the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cold War.
8. Students should take turns, going around the circle, sharing their response to the seminar prompt. Each group needs to come to a consensus.
9. Wrap-up: Discuss the groups’ final interpretations and clarify any points of confusion.