



Decision-Making During the Cuban Missile Crisis

Valuing and Applying Rationality



Grade Level

11th-12th

Suggested Timing

60-75 minutes

Focus Standard

VAR.6 - Recognize, practice, and demonstrate active open-mindedness

Supporting Standard

VAR.1 - Embrace decisions as opportunities

Subject

History/Social Studies

Impact

Decision Education relies on students' ability to practice active open-mindedness while evaluating multiple options. This lesson provides students a case study to examine how President John F. Kennedy evaluated high-stakes options during the Cuban Missile Crisis, and made a decision that impacted the world.

Objectives

- Students will identify a set of decisions as opportunities.
- Students will consider multiple options when making decisions.

Optional Teaching Strategies

- Divide your class into groups representing different advisors, allowing them to work through unique and specific decision-making mindsets.
- After analyzing the options Kennedy had, engage your students in a debate about the effectiveness of the decision he made.
- Teach a follow-up lesson where students use the Kennedy example to guide a challenging decision of their own.

Differentiation

- Show pictures and/or video clips in addition to any background essay.
- Partner students with strong academic skills and students with strong social skills, as they might be able to support each other in building self-awareness.

What To Look and Listen For

- Can students identify the steps of the process Kennedy used to make his decision to remove missiles from Turkey?
- Can students describe what it means to demonstrate active open-mindedness and use a decision as an opportunity?

Engage (10–15 minutes)

By the end of the Cuban Missile Crisis, Kennedy and the United States agreed to remove missiles from Turkey, and the Soviet Union agreed to remove missiles from Cuba. This global event is often used to study decision-making, because both the U.S. and Soviet Union had to work through multiple options to land on a final decision.

Using resources from your textbook or online, provide students with a short background on the Cuban Missile Crisis. News clips from the time are great conversation starters that can supplement an analysis of other primary and secondary sources.

Once the background has been established, start a dialogue with your class by using the following questions with your class.

Suggested Discussion Questions:

- President Kennedy had multiple options in this situation. What were his different options? How would you rank them?
 - What advice did President Kennedy receive? How did it impact his decision-making process?
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Apply (20–25 minutes)

Assign small groups to have your students analyze the primary and secondary sources related to the crisis and Kennedy's decision, noting their thoughts and important ideas about the sources on chart paper.

After analyzing the documents, have each group share their notes, focusing on highlighting connections and adding new ideas.

Ask your students if they were able to identify any additional options and discuss with the class the reasoning for these options and their rankings.

Reflect (20–25 minutes)

Lead a discussion about how Kennedy decided to remove missiles from Turkey in exchange for the Soviet Union removing missiles from Cuba. Have the class analyze if Kennedy demonstrated active open-mindedness as he weighed his options.

Suggested Discussion Questions:

- Did President Kennedy practice active open-mindedness during his decision-making process? Explain.
- What opportunities for diplomacy arose because of President Kennedy's decision? Were there opportunities outside of diplomacy?
- What consequences arose because of President Kennedy's decision?