

Ronald Reagan and the Cold War

Teacher's Guide



Grade Level: 9–12

Curriculum Focus: Social Studies

Lesson Duration: 3 class periods

Program Description

Reagan's Anti-Soviet Principles (7 min.) – Explores Reagan's political views and how they formed during the height of the Cold War. **Reagan's Tough Foreign Policy** (3 min.) – Examines Reagan's strategy of using tough rhetoric to solve the power impasse between the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. **Reagan's Unconventional Political Strategies** (7 min.) – Illustrates Reagan's approach to foreign policy and governing in general. **The Low Point in U.S./Soviet Relations** (4 min.) – Reveals how close the U.S. and Soviet Union came to engaging in a nuclear war and how Reagan maintained a show of strength throughout this danger. **Reagan and Gorbachev End the Cold War** (10 min.) – Recounts how Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev negotiated a plan for lasting peace.

Discussion Questions

- What do you know about the Cold War?
 - Why do you think the Cold War never erupted into a real war?
 - If a nation threatens the security of the United States, how do you think the United States should respond?
 - When the leaders of powerful nations can't get along, how does that affect their citizens and the rest of the world?
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Lesson Plan

Student Objectives

- Describe the background of the Cold War and explain its status at the time Reagan became president.
- Explain Reagan's foreign policy ideas and analyze how they changed the course of world events.
- Research and analyze other factors, in addition to Reagan's determination, that contributed to the fall of the Soviet Union and the Soviets' subsequent willingness to have peaceful relations with the U.S.

- Assess Reagan's approach to dealing with the Soviet Union and weigh the positive outcome of his actions against the risk that those same actions might as easily have led to a nuclear exchange between the two countries.

Materials

- *Ronald Reagan and the Cold War* video
- Computer with Internet access
- Print resources about Ronald Reagan, the Cold War, the U.S.S.R., the nuclear arms race, and thermonuclear weapons

Procedures

1. Ask some general pre-viewing questions and briefly discuss the topic with the class. What do you know about the Cold War? Why do you think the Cold War never erupted into a real war? If a nation threatens the security of the United States, how do you think the United States should respond? When the leaders of powerful nations can't get along, how does that affect their citizens and the rest of the world?
2. View the video.
3. After viewing, ask students to share their general observations about the Cold War, Ronald Reagan, and his style of dealing with leaders of the Soviet Union. What was the background of the Cold War? What was the status of the Cold War at the time Reagan became president? What were Reagan's foreign policy ideas, and how did he expect them to affect relations with the Soviets? How did Reagan's policies actually affect the Soviet leaders and how did he change the course of world events?
4. Discuss the political climate and the mood of the people when Reagan became president. What did the public fear about the Cold War? How did Americans feel about the challenging stance Reagan took with the Soviet Union, another nuclear superpower? How do you think the United States would defend itself in the case of a nuclear missile attack from another country? What effect did Reagan's Strategic Defense Initiative (or SDI) have on U.S.-Soviet relations?
5. Ask students to research and analyze other factors, in addition to Reagan's determination, that contributed to the fall of the Soviet Union. Have students write a report highlighting at least four factors they believe had a significant effect on the Soviets' willingness to have peaceful relations with the U.S. Suggest that students research and consider these conditions in the 1980s: Soviet public opinion, the Soviet economy, world public opinion, and Soviet foreign relations with countries other than the U.S.

Students may begin their project research with the Web sites below, but encourage them to visit other sites, as well as the library.

The following Web sites provide resources for student research:

Wikipedia: History of the Soviet Union

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Collapse_of_the_Soviet_Union



Map: Fall of the Soviet Union

<http://users.erols.com/mwhite28/ussrfall.htm>

End of the Soviet Union

www.soviethistory.org/index.php?action=L2&SubjectID=1991end&Year=1991

FAQ Farm: What are the main factors responsible for the disintegration of the Soviet Union?

www.faqfarm.com/Q/What_are_the_main_factors_responsible_for_the_disintegration_of_the_Soviet_Union

New Times: Why did the Soviet Union break up?

www.newtimes.ru/eng/detail.asp?art_id=1296

BBC: The End of the Soviet State

www.bbc.co.uk/history/war/coldwar/soviet_end_01.shtml

The Cold War Museum: Fall of the Soviet Union

www.coldwar.org/articles/90s/fall_of_the_soviet_union.asp

6. Later in the week, ask students to assess Reagan's approach to dealing with the Soviet Union and to decide whether or not they believe the risks Reagan took might just as easily have led to grave consequences (such as a nuclear exchange prompted by aggravating or frightening Soviet leaders into a first strike) rather than a positive outcome. Tell students to research the issue and prepare to present a debate from one of two points of view: reasons they believe a nuclear war was not likely to occur due to Reagan's policies or reasons they believe it was likely Reagan's stance could have easily caused a nuclear war. Suggest that students consider these questions during their research and that they make notes to use while debating their point of view with students who arrived at the opposite conclusion. Why do they think neither side attacked the other with nuclear weapons? Do they believe we were really on the brink of a nuclear war at some point, as one interviewee in the video asserted? Did Reagan's policies bring us to that point or keep us from crossing it? Did anti-war protests have any affect on the outcome, one way or another? Did the leaders of other nations influence either side of the conflict?
7. Students may begin their project research with the Web sites below, but encourage them to visit other sites, as well as the library.

The following Web sites provide resources for student research:

President Reagan's Evil Empire Speech

www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/evilemp.htm

The 1983 Soviet War Scare

www.cia.gov/csi/monograph/coldwar/source.htm

The Nuclear Arms Control Legacy of Ronald Reagan

www.armscontrol.org/act/2004_07-08/reagan.asp



Did Reagan's Military Build-Up Really Lead to Victory in the Cold War?

<http://hnn.us/articles/2732.html>

Perestroika and the Transformation of U.S.-Soviet Relations

www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB172

CNN: War Games

www.cnn.com/specials/cold.war/episodes/22/spotlight

Reagan's SDI Speech

www.fas.org/spp/starwars/offdocs/rrspch.htm

Have students form debate pairs, with two students representing opposing viewpoints in each pair. (If more than half of the students have arrived at the same conclusion, ask some of the students who represent the less popular view if they will volunteer to debate more than one student with the opposing view.). The pairs will debate, using their research notes as a guide. After each debate, ask the class if anyone wishes to comment on the opinions they heard expressed.

Assessment

Use the following three-point rubric to evaluate students' work during this lesson.

- 3 points: Students clearly described the background of the Cold War and fully explained its status at the time Reagan became president; students explained in detail Reagan's foreign policy ideas and acutely analyzed how they changed the course of world events; students thoroughly researched and analyzed other factors, in addition to Reagan's determination, that contributed to the fall of the Soviet Union and wrote an excellent report explaining those other reasons for the Soviets' willingness to have peaceful relations with the U.S.; students skillfully assessed Reagan's approach to dealing with the Soviet Union and eloquently debated other students about whether or not the risks Reagan took might have led to grave consequences rather than a positive outcome.
- 2 points: Students adequately described the background of the Cold War and explained its status at the time Reagan became president; students explained Reagan's foreign policy ideas and analyzed how they changed the course of world events; students adequately researched and analyzed other factors, in addition to Reagan's determination, that contributed to the fall of the Soviet Union and wrote a good report explaining those other reasons for the Soviets' willingness to have peaceful relations with the U.S.; students assessed Reagan's approach to dealing with the Soviet Union and made a good effort to debate other students about whether or not the risks Reagan took might have led to grave consequences rather than a positive outcome.
- 1 point: Students did not adequately describe the background of the Cold War or explain its status at the time Reagan became president; students did not acceptably explain Reagan's foreign policy ideas or analyze how they changed the course of world events; students did not adequately research or analyze other factors, in addition to Reagan's determination, that contributed to the fall of the Soviet Union and wrote an unacceptable report without

adequately explaining those other reasons for the Soviets' willingness to have peaceful relations with the U.S.; students poorly assessed Reagan's approach to dealing with the Soviet Union and made a minimal effort to debate other students about whether or not the risks Reagan took might have led to grave consequences rather than a positive outcome.

Vocabulary

arms race

Definition: An escalating competition between nations to build more and more powerful weapons and a better equipped military

Context: The arms race between the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. led to the development of bigger and more destructive nuclear weapons.

Cold War

Definition: A political tension between nations, especially between the United States and Soviet Union following World War II

Context: The Cold War began after World War II, when Allied leaders could not agree on how to draw the new national borders in Europe.

Communist

Definition: Adhering to the Communist Party or to an economic system based on communism

Context: Communist nations have an economic system based on the theory that workers should control of the means of producing economic goods.

NORAD

Definition: An acronym for North American Aerospace Defense Command, a binational military organization established in 1958 by Canada and the United States to monitor and defend North American airspace

Context: The United States and Canada created NORAD to detect and track attacks against North America by aircraft, missiles, or space vehicles.

Strategic Defense Initiative

Definition: A plan proposed by President Reagan to use space-based anti-missile systems to protect the United States from nuclear attacks

Context: People sometimes refer to the Strategic Defense Initiative by its acronym, SDI, or by its nickname, Star Wars.

U.S.S.R.

Definition: Acronym for the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, sometimes called the Soviet Union

Context: Reagan's assertion that the United States had already begun developing SDI concerned officials in the U.S.S.R.

Academic Standards

Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL)

McREL's Content Knowledge: A Compendium of Standards and Benchmarks for K–12 Education addresses 14 content areas. To view the standards and benchmarks, visit <http://www.mcrel.org/compendium/browse.asp>.

This program addresses the following national standards:

- Civics—What Is Government and What Should It Do: Understands ideas about civic life, politics, and government.
- Civics—What Are the Basic Values and Principles of American Democracy: Understands the importance of Americans sharing and supporting certain values, beliefs, and principles of American constitutional democracy; Understands the character of American political and social conflict and factors that tend to prevent or lower its intensity; Understands issues concerning the disparities between ideals and reality in American political and social life.
- Civics—How Does the Government Established by the Constitution Embody the Purposes, Values, and Principles of American Democracy: Understands the major responsibilities of the national government for domestic and foreign policy, and understands how government is financed through taxation; Understands what is meant by “the public agenda,” how it is set, and how it is influenced by public opinion and the media; Understands the roles of political parties, campaigns, elections, and associations and groups in American politics; Understands the formation and implementation of public policy.
- Civics—What Is the Relationship of the United States to Other Nations and to World Affairs: Understands how the world is organized politically into nation-states, how nation-states interact with one another, and issues surrounding U.S. foreign policy; Understands the impact of significant political and nonpolitical developments on the United States and other nations.
- Civics—What Are the Roles of the Citizen in American Democracy: Understands the importance of political leadership, public service, and a knowledgeable citizenry in American constitutional democracy.
- History—United States History, Era 10—Contemporary United States (1968 to the present): Understands developments in foreign policy and domestic politics between the Nixon and Clinton presidencies; Understands economic, social, and cultural developments in the contemporary United States.
- Language Arts—Writing: Uses the general skills and strategies of the writing process; Gathers and uses information for research purposes.
- Language Arts—Reading: Uses the general skills and strategies of the reading process; Uses reading skills and strategies to understand and interpret a variety of informational texts.
- Language Arts—Listening and Speaking: Uses listening and speaking strategies for different purposes.

- Language Arts – Viewing: Uses viewing skills and strategies to understand and interpret visual media.
- Life Skills – Thinking and Reasoning: Understands and applies the basic principles of presenting an argument; Understands and applies basic principles of logic and reasoning; Effectively uses mental processes that are based on identifying similarities and differences.
- Life Skills – Working With Others: Works well with diverse individuals and in diverse situations; Displays effective interpersonal communication skills.

National Council for the Social Studies

The National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) has developed national standards to provide guidelines for teaching social studies. To view the standards online, go to <http://www.socialstudies.org/standards/strands/>.

This lesson plan addresses the following thematic standards:

- Culture
 - Time, Continuity, and Change
 - People, Places, and Environment
 - Individuals, Groups, and Institutions
 - Power, Authority, and Governance
 - Production, Distribution, and Consumption
 - Science, Technology, and Society
 - Global Connections
 - Civic Ideals and Practices
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DVD Content

This program is available in an interactive DVD format. The following information and activities are specific to the DVD version.

How to Use the DVD

The DVD starting screen has the following options:

Play Video – This plays the video from start to finish. There are no programmed stops, except by using a remote control. With a computer, depending on the particular software player, a pause button is included with the other video controls.

Video Index – Here the video is divided into sections indicated by video thumbnail icons; brief descriptions are noted for each one. Watching all parts in sequence is similar to watching the video

from start to finish. To play a particular segment, press Enter on the remote for TV playback; on a computer, click once to highlight a thumbnail and read the accompanying text description and click again to start the video.

Curriculum Units – These are specially edited video segments pulled from different sections of the video (see below). These nonlinear segments align with key ideas in the unit of instruction. They include onscreen pre- and post-viewing questions, reproduced below in this Teacher's Guide. Total running times for these segments are noted. To play a particular segment, press Enter on the TV remote or click once on the Curriculum Unit title on a computer.

Standards Link – Selecting this option displays a single screen that lists the national academic standards the video addresses.

Teacher Resources – This screen gives the technical support number and Web site address.

Video Index

I. Reagan's Anti-Soviet Principles (7 min.)

Reagan's political views formed during the height of the Cold War with the Soviet Union. Investigate how previous presidents influenced his ideas about American foreign policy.

II. Reagan's Tough Foreign Policy (3 min.)

The U.S. and U.S.S.R. sought to solve their power impasse with an escalating arms race. Discover how Reagan used tough rhetoric to let the Soviets know Americans would not bow to intimidation.

III. Reagan's Unconventional Political Strategies (7 min.)

Reagan took an unconventional approach to foreign policy and to governing in general. Analyze his political strategies and consider how they helped him achieve his goals.

IV. The Low Point in U.S./Soviet Relations (4 min.)

Despite the danger of all-out nuclear war, Reagan maintained a show of strength to the Soviets. Examine the political and public pressures that sought to make him change his mind.

V. Reagan and Gorbachev End the Cold War (10 min.)

In Mikhail Gorbachev Reagan found a Soviet leader with whom he could negotiate a plan for lasting peace. Analyze the agreements they made and how they ended the Cold War.

Curriculum Units

1. The Cold War

Pre-viewing question

Q: What was the Cold War?

A: The Cold War was a period of time during which competition, tension, and distrust characterized the relationship between the United States of America and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, also

called the Soviet Union or the U.S.S.R. Other capitalist Western nations (such as Great Britain) allied with the U.S. in the Cold War, and other communist nations, such as Cuba, allied with the Soviets.

Post-viewing question

Q: What did the public fear most about the Cold War?

A: That the mutual distrust and enmity might lead to nuclear bomb attacks or even global thermonuclear war.

2. Reagan Takes His Message to the Nation

Pre-viewing question

Q: To which political party did Ronald Reagan belong when he ran for president?

A: Republican.

Post-viewing question

Q: Why did Reagan switch political parties?

A: Reagan believed that the Democratic party and its leaders had been too soft on the Soviet Union and that their attitude had emboldened the Soviets in their competition with the U.S. He was also more interested in talking about international affairs than in the domestic issues that tended to dominate the campaign platforms of Democrats.

3. Reagan's Reaction to an Assassination Attempt

Pre-viewing question

Q: Name U.S. presidents who were victims of assassinations or assassination attempts.

A: Answers may include Abraham Lincoln, John Kennedy, James Garfield, and William McKinley (successful assassinations) as well as Ronald Reagan and Gerald Ford (attempted assassinations).

Post-viewing question

Q: How did the assassination attempt affect Reagan's attitude?

A: He became more convinced that he should fervently pursue his goals of saving the world from communism and the threat of nuclear weapons.

4. The Strategic Defense Initiative

Pre-viewing question

Q: How do you think the United States would defend itself in the case of a nuclear missile attack from another country?

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question

Q: What effect did Reagan's Strategic Defense Initiative (or SDI) have on U.S.-Soviet relations?

A: The Soviets believed Reagan would develop SDI only if he was planning a first strike attack against the U.S.S.R. For this reason tension between the two superpowers increased.

5. Reagan's Rhetoric Heightens Fear of Nuclear War

Pre-viewing question

Q: How do Americans express their concern when they disagree with a president's foreign policy?

A: Answers will vary and may include the following: hold marches, rallies, and demonstrations; write letters or emails and make phone calls to the president and their representatives; vote for someone else in the next election.

Post-viewing question

Q: How did Americans feel about the challenging stance Reagan took with the Soviet Union, another nuclear superpower?

A: Many Americans supported Reagan's foreign policy but many others worried that his confrontational style would escalate tensions and might even lead to all-out nuclear war.