Castro and the United States Lesson Plan

Central Historical Question: How did Fidel Castro view the United States?

Materials:
• Castro and the U.S. PowerPoint
• Copies of Documents A & B
• Copies of Timeline
• Copies of Corroboration Chart

Common Core State Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies: #1 (Gr. 6-12), #6 (Gr. 6-12), #9 (Gr. 6-12)

Plan of Instruction:

Note: Students should be familiar with the context of the Cold War before beginning this lesson.

1. Use the PowerPoint to review background information about the Cuban Revolution. (If your students are familiar with this background information, skip to slide 7 and focus on the events in the timeline.)

   a. Slide 2: Spanish Colony. The first Spanish settlement was established in Cuba in 1511. Cuba slowly grew into a large world supplier of sugar cane.

   b. Slide 3: Wars for Independence. In 1868 and 1879, Cubans made attempts (eventually unsuccessful) to gain their independence from Spain. In 1895, another attempt at independence began. In 1898, the U.S. joined the war on the side of the Cubans. By December 1898, Spain gave up control of Cuba.

   c. Slide 4: Independence. The U.S. took control and ruled Cuba through a military government. By 1902, Cuba achieved full independence; however, the U.S. was still allowed to intervene, particularly in economic or foreign affairs. Many American companies, especially agricultural and sugar companies, operated in Cuba.

   d. Slide 5: Batista Takes Power. In 1933, Fulgencio Batista came to power in Cuba after a massive labor strike motivated by government corruption. During his 26-year rule, Batista implemented some progressive social and economic reforms but later suspended these. Government corruption and brutality grew over time during his administration. The number of American companies operating in Cuba, particularly in the sugar industry, grew, and the U.S. supported Batista until 1958.
e. Slide 6: Attack on Moncada Army Barracks. On July 26, 1953, Fidel Castro, who was educated as a lawyer and became part of a group critical of Batista, led an attack on the Moncada Army Barracks. The group became known as the 26th of July movement; its goals were to overthrow Batista and carry out progressive reforms in Cuba. Castro was arrested and put in jail. He was released in 1955 and moved to Mexico to continue building support for his movement against Batista.

f. Slide 7: The Cuban Revolution. In 1956, Castro and other members of the 26th of July movement snuck back into Cuba and established a base in the mountains. They quietly worked to build more support among the Cuban people. Starting in August 1958, Castro’s armies surrounded major cities and cut off railroads and supply lines. On December 31st, Batista fled Havana, the capital city, and Castro took power.

2. Pass out Timeline.

a. Have students review events in the timeline. Return to final PowerPoint slides.

b. Slide 8: Visiting the U.S. The Eisenhower government recognized Castro as the new leader of Cuba, and in April 1959, Castro visited the U.S. and met with Vice President Nixon.

c. Slide 9: Bay of Pigs Invasion: April 17, 1961. Relations between the U.S. and Cuba quickly soured. The U.S. grew skeptical of Castro. Castro banned foreign ownership of land in Cuba (remember that many American companies owned agricultural land there!) and took over privately owned business. In October 1960, a U.S. embargo of Cuba began—Americans were not allowed to sell anything to Cuba except food and medicine. In April 1961, the CIA funded an invasion of Cuba to try to overthrow Castro. This is known as the Bay of Pigs invasion. The CIA-backed forces were quickly defeated by Castro’s army.

3. Introduce/Review skills of sourcing, contextualization, and corroboration.

a. If necessary, use Historical Thinking posters to review the skills of sourcing, contextualization, and corroboration. (Posters are available at http://sheg.stanford.edu/intro-materials.)

b. Explain that historians make claims based upon evidence found in historical documents. In order to gather credible evidence, historians evaluate the reliability, or trustworthiness, of different historical sources. To help them do this, historians pay careful attention to the source of the document: the point of view of the author, his or her purpose for writing, the audience, and the date the document was produced. They also
corroborate, or compare, information across multiple sources and try to contextualize sources, paying attention to when and where a document was written and what was going on at the time. They think about how this context might influence the content of the documents, which helps them interpret and understand the documents and assess their reliability.

4. Explain to students that they will work on sourcing, contextualizing, and corroborating two documents, both written by Fidel Castro around the time of the Cuban Revolution. After carefully analyzing documents, students will develop a claim addressing the lesson’s Central Historical Question: *How did Fidel Castro view the United States?*

5. Hand out Document A. Explain that first the class will be reading an interview that Fidel Castro completed in 1959.

   a. Model how you would complete the sourcing and contextualization questions in the Graphic Organizer. Begin by reading the headnote and source information and then direct students to look at the timeline and physically note where this interview would fall. Model looking at the events around this interview and speculating how they might affect the interview to help students learn how to contextualize.

   **Sample modeling script:** *So, after the reading the headnote, the first thing I am going to do is read the source note [read source information.] As I source this document, I notice the date. In February 1959 Castro had just come to power and was probably working to establish his rule. Eisenhower had recognized the new Cuban government, and Castro was traveling to the U.S. a few months later, in April. Neither side had taken a firm stance toward the other—the relationship was very new. Furthermore, I notice that this interview was done with U.S. newspaper editors. That makes me wonder if he is trying to get some “good press” in the United States. Now that I’ve thought about the context in which this interview was given, as I read the interview I’ll want to think about how this context might have affected what Castro said about the U.S. This process is called contextualization.*

   *Is this a credible document to help us determine how Fidel Castro viewed the United States? Given what I know so far, it may be, but because it happened so early in Castro’s presidency, it might not give us a really good sense of Castro’s true beliefs because he’s still working to establish his power, and he may be engaged in a public relations campaign here. He’s not sure how the U.S. is going to treat Cuba, and he might want to establish a good relationship with a powerful neighbor. As you read the interview, think about*
how the context in which the interview was given might have influenced what Castro said.

b. Have students read the rest of the document and complete Question 4 in the Graphic Organizer. Share out responses. Students should note that Castro is generally positive about the United States. For example, he says the U.S. sent a “good Ambassador” and he would be willing to meet with Eisenhower.

6. Hand out Document B. Explain that now the class will be reading a speech that Castro gave in 1961.

   a. In pairs, students read Document B, and complete Questions 1-4 in the appropriate column of the Corroboration Chart. Encourage students to use the timeline while they are sourcing and contextualizing the document.

   b. As a whole class, share out and discuss responses in the chart.

      i. Important to note is the context in which the speech from Document B was given: Much has changed in Cuba and with relations between the U.S. and Cuba since Document A. Relations between the U.S. and Cuba have soured substantially — Castro banned foreign companies and took over privately owned businesses; the U.S. began an embargo of Cuba and, just a few weeks before this speech, funded an attempt to overthrow Castro in the Bay of Pigs Invasion. Castro was speaking to a crowd of Cubans in Havana on a holiday celebrating workers.

      ii. As we might expect from the change in context, Castro’s views of the U.S. changed dramatically in this speech. Castro is clear that he does not approve of the U.S.’s government or economic system and says that the U.S. has no business interfering in Cuba’s affairs (he even compares Kennedy to Mussolini and Hitler!). He argues that Cuba’s actions are not affecting or endangering the U.S. and that Cuba’s rights are just as important as the U.S.’s, even if Cuba is a smaller country.

7. Students complete Question 5 on the Graphic Organizer for both documents.

8. Final Discussion:

   a. How did Fidel Castro view the United States?

   b. Why did the documents provide different answers to this question? (Push students to clearly articulate differences in date, audience, and context between the two documents.)
c. *Which of these documents do you find to be a better representation of Castro’s views? Why?*

d. *What do the differences between these documents teach us about the importance of sourcing and contextualizing in history? (Or: If you read these documents without sourcing and contextualizing, what would you conclude about Castro and his view of the United States?)*

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**Citations:**

Document A:  

Document B:  