 Case study – John Fitzgerald Kennedy

Year 12 History Extension - 9 weeks (13.5 hours) plus optional later revision tasks

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Description of unit

Students investigate changing interpretations of the Presidency of John Fitzgerald Kennedy over time. Through close study of the enduring mythology surrounding JFK and his leadership during two major foreign crises, students comprehend the vast variation in historical perspectives on JFK’s leadership, personal qualities and impact on the United States. Students focus on the impact of the historian’s relationship to their subject, on the influence of new evidence and on historian’s context on the construction of history. They progress from teacher-directed learning into a student-directed approach that sees them constructing their own understanding of JFK histories.

Focus questions

* How does the historian’s relationship with their subject influence the construction of history?
* How does the discovery of new evidence influence the construction of history?
* How do the events and politics of the historian’s own context impact on the construction of history?

Outcomes

* HE12-1 analyses and evaluates different approaches to history and the complexity of factors that shape historical interpretations.
* HE12-3 communicates through detailed, well-structures texts to explain, argue, discuss, analyse and evaluate historical issues.
* HE12-4 constructs an historical position about an area of historical inquiry, and discusses and challenges other positions.

Objectives

Knowledge and understanding

Students:

* Develop knowledge and understanding about significant historiographical ideas and methodologies.

Skills

Students:

* Design, undertake and evaluate historical inquiry.
* Communicate their understanding of historiography, changing interpretations and the results of historical inquiry.

Assessment

Formative – take-home essay after the completion of the Case Study. Formative assessment is provided throughout the program.

Summative – trial HSC Exam

| Outcomes/content | Teaching and learning | Evidence of learning |
| --- | --- | --- |
| 1. Camelot – Man and Myth

HE12-1 analyses and evaluates different approaches to history and the complexity of factors that shape historical interpretations.HE12-3 communicates through detailed, well-structures texts to explain, argue, discuss, analyse and evaluate historical issues.HE12-4 constructs an historical position about an area of historical inquiry, and discusses and challenges other positions.Key points of debate:* Was JFK a great President or did he give the impression of being a great President?
* Did JFK’s health issues impact upon his ability to lead?
* Did JFK place the needs of the American people, especially oppressed Americans, above his own?
* How did the Camelot myth come to be?

Focus:* What are the primary schools of history on JFK?

Focus:* How does the historian’s relationship with their subject influence the construction of History?
 | Note – in each text list, the simplest text will be marked with a #. The most complex text will be marked with a \*. This allows for simple content modification.Session one – the history (90 minutes)1. Prior to the session all students should have watched at least one documentary or film on JFK’s life independently. Recommended documentaries include:
2. JFK: Part One, (2013). [TV programme] American Experience Films.
3. JFK: Part Two, (2013). [TV programme] American Experience Films.
4. The Kennedys, (2011). [TV programme] Muse Entertainment Enterprises.
5. Kennedy, (1983). [TV programme]. Alan Landsburg Productions.
6. JFK: A Personal Story, (1996). [TV programme]. A&E Home Video.

Please note: the films in this viewing guide vary dramatically in style, perspective and quality. They are not intended to give students an objective account of JFK’s life, rather, their differences will allow for richer discussion throughout the Case Study.1. Students use one of the Suggested Activities from the Research list to collaboratively summarise JFK’s entire life. Each student should be assigned a period of time (divide the years of the Presidency into smaller sections to ensure fairness).
2. Students are introduced to a range of evidence (short excerpts) that problematise the established narrative of JFK’s Presidency. This could include:
3. Excerpts from Getlen, L 2013, [‘The Kennedy meth’](http://nypost.com/2013/04/21/the-kennedy-meth/), New York Post, viewed 31 July 2017
4. Excerpts from Dallek, R 2002, [‘The medical ordeals of JFK’](https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2013/08/the-medical-ordeals-of-jfk/309469/), The Atlantic, viewed 31 July 2017
5. Excerpts from El-Gingihy, Y 2014, [‘The JFK assassination, Cuba policy and Operation Mongoose’](https://newint.org/blog/2014/11/21/jfk-assassination-anniversary), New Internationalist, viewed 31 July 2017. Note – while any surprising elements of revisionist histories of JFK are appropriate here, teachers should avoid those focused on the Kennedys’ marriage as this is outside of the boundaries of the course.
6. Students discuss ways in which the evidence presented contradicts the class biography and the JFK documentaries/films the students watched pre-session. Use a writing activity from the Suggested Activities list to reflect on the discussion

Session two – the historians (90 minutes)In this session, students will understand the schools of history that have dominated writing on JFK. They will look at writing on the civil rights movement as a case study to encapsulate these changes.1. Prior to Session 2, students should have read and annotated the following resources, with a focus on the way JFK is presented – this can be completed as a jigsaw/ divide class into two groups, one group studies one text, the other studies the other.
2. Dallek, R. (2003). John F. Kennedy: An Unfinished Life (London: Penguin) – Preface
3. Bastian, P. (2001). John F. Kennedy and the Historians (Sydney: HTA NSW) – Chapters 1 and 2

Plus one of the following resources per student1. Getlen, L 2013, [‘The Kennedy meth’,](http://nypost.com/2013/04/21/the-kennedy-meth/) New York Post, viewed 31 July 2017
2. Mailer, N 1960, [‘Superman comes to the supermarket’,](http://www.esquire.com/news-politics/a3858/superman-supermarket) Esquire, viewed 1 August at 2017
3. Hersh, S. (1997). The Dark Side of Camelot (New York: Back Bay Books) – Chapter 1
4. Smith, D. 2017, [‘JFK at 100: Trump comparisons fuel nostalgia for ‘Camelot’,](https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/may/29/jfk-100-john-f-kennedy-donald-trump) The Guardian, viewed 1 August 2017
5. Sorensen, T. (1965). Kennedy: The Classic Biography. (New York: Harper Perennial) – Chapter 1
6. O’Reilly, B. (2013). Kennedy’s Last Days: The assassination that defined a generation (New York: Henry Holt & Co). Note: This is a children’s book on the Kennedy administration, so the whole text could feasibly be read by one student.
7. Students learn about the Camelot, Revisionist, Neo-Camelot and New Revisionist schools of history on JFK – the attitudes that dominate them, the writing style and ideas in each and the perspective on JFK. Students categorise the historians they have read in preparation for the session into the four schools and locate evidence in the readings to justify their decisions.
8. Students focus on JFK’s role as a civil rights leader as a case study that encapsulates historians’ changing attitudes to the President. They start with a brief summary of JFK’s role in the civil rights movement. This could be drawn from Bastian, P. (2001). John F. Kennedy and the Historians (Sydney: HTA NSW) – Chapter 3.
9. Students read four accounts of JFK’s involvement in the civil rights movement drawn from the four schools of history. Examples could include short selections from:
10. Sorensen, T. (1965). Kennedy: The Classic Biography. (New York: Harper Perennial) – Chapter 18 (Camelot)\*
11. Reeves, T (1997). A Question of Character: A Life of John F. Kennedy. (New York: Three Rivers Press) – Chapter 15 (Revisionist)
12. Dallek, R. (2003). John F. Kennedy: An Unfinished Life (London: Penguin) – Chapter 17 (Neo-Camelot)
13. Rieder, J 2013, [‘The day President Kennedy embraced civil rights – and the story behind it’](https://www.theatlantic.com/national/archive/2013/06/the-day-president-kennedy-embraced-civil-rights-and-the-story-behind-it/276749/), The Atlantic, viewed 3 August 2017, (New Revisionist)
14. Students analyse the excerpts closely, focusing on the role each writer offers JFK as a civil rights leader and the language used to describe his involvement in the movement.

Session three – the reasons (90 minutes)1. Prior to Session 3, students should have read and annotated the following resources, with a focus on how the Camelot histories came to be:
2. Pierson, J 2013, [‘How Jackie Kennedy invented the Camelot legend after JFK’s death’](http://www.thedailybeast.com/how-jackie-kennedy-invented-the-camelot-legend-after-jfks-death), Daily Beast, viewed 1 August 2017
3. White, T 1963, [‘For President Kennedy: an epilogue’](https://www.jfklibrary.org/Asset-Viewer/Archives/THWPP-059-009.aspx), LIFE, viewed 3 August 2017
4. Students learn about the origins of the Camelot myth by discussing Jackie Kennedy’s role in constructing the official history of the President. Students could complement this by watching selections from the film Jackie (Jackie. (2016). [DVD] USA: Fox Searchlight).
5. Students are introduced to background information on each historian studied. Focus is on their relationship to JFK and their aims in writing histories of JFK. Based on this, students seek to explain why each historian has presented the President in the way that they have.
6. Students address popular histories of JFK by discussing the films they watched in preparation for Session One. Selections from these films may be screened in class. They categorise each film into a school of history and discuss how the medium of film may coincide with the purposes of popular history to influence the depiction of JFK.

Extension – students investigate the idea of the Obama administration as the new Camelot and the impact this had on writing about JFK. They could compare this to more contemporary writing on JFK under a new US Administration. | * Collaborative timeline of JFK’s life
* Piece of writing on evidence that problematizes the classic narrative of JFK’s life and Presidency
* Annotated copy of both of the assigned texts
* Annotated copy of one of the optional texts
* Detailed notes on the four schools of history on JFK
* Detailed notes on discussion of JFK’s role as a civil rights leader across four historical texts
* Annotated copy of both the assigned texts
* Detailed notes on Jackie Kennedy’s role in constructing the Camelot myth
* Detailed notes on a selection of key historians
* Detailed notes on film depictions of JFK, organised by school of history
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| 1. Role in the Cuban Missile Crisis and/or dealings with Khrushchev

HE12-1 analyses and evaluates different approaches to history and the complexity of factors that shape historical interpretations.HE12-3 communicates through detailed, well-structures texts to explain, argue, discuss, analyse and evaluate historical issues.HE12-4 constructs an historical position about an area of historical inquiry, and discusses and challenges other positions.Key points of debate:* What caused the Cuban Missile Crisis? (The Kennedys’ interventions in Cuba? Soviet expansionism and threats to the USA?)
* How well did JFK lead during the Cuban Missile Crisis? (Was he a world saviour, an exceptional leader? Or did he only succeed thanks to those around him and opposing him?)
* What role did the missile exchange play in resolving the crisis? (Were JFK and Khrushchev indeed ‘eye to eye’ or did Robert Kennedy’s negotiations actually prevent the famed showdown?)

Focus: * How have historical accounts of JFK’s leadership during the Cuban Missile Crisis changed over time?

Focus:* How does the discovery of new evidence influence the construction of History?
 | Session one – the history (90 minutes)1. Students use one of the Suggested Activities from the Research list to collaboratively summarise the Kennedys’ history of involvement in Cuba. The history could be divided into Operation Mongoose, the Bay of Pigs incident and Castro’s history of involvement with the Soviet Union for research purposes.
2. Teacher uses one of the Suggested Activities from the Explicit Teaching list to explicitly teach the events of the Cuban Missile Crisis. New notes made during the activity could be added to the class summary of the Kennedys’ history in Cuba.

Session two – the historians (90 minutes)1. Prior to session 2, students should have read and annotated the following two resources, with a focus on the key points of debate:
2. Dallek, R. (2003). John F. Kennedy: An Unfinished Life (London: Penguin) – Chapter 16
3. Bastian, P. (2001). John F. Kennedy and the Historians (Sydney: HTA NSW) – Chapter 5.

Plus one of the following resources per student, with a focus on the key points of debate:1. Sorensen, T. (1965). Kennedy: The Classic Biography. (New York: Harper Perennial) – Chapter 24
2. Kennedy, R. (1969). Thirteen Days: A Memoir of the Cuban Missile Crisis (New York: WW Norton) – Sections on RFK’s meetings with Dobrynin, particularly Chapter 5
3. Hersh, S. (1997). The Dark Side of Camelot (New York: Back Bay Books) – Chapter 20
4. Matthews, C. (2012). Jack Kennedy: Elusive Hero (New York: Simon and Schuster) – Chapter 14 #
5. Fursenko, A., & Naftali, T. (1998). One Hell of a Gamble: Khrushchev, Castro and Kennedy 1958-1964: The Secret History of the Cuban Missile Crisis. (New York: WW Norton) – Chapter 13 \*
6. Stone, O & Kuznick, P (2012). The Untold History of the United States (New York: Gallery Books) – Chapter 7
7. During Session 2, teacher introduces all of the historians read by presenting students with the following information about each one:
8. Background info (life/career focuses)
9. Methodology
10. Purpose of the work
11. Sources used
12. Form of communication
13. Relationship to JFK
14. Teacher uses one of the Discussion activities in the Suggested Activities list to discuss the nature of Camelot, Revisionist, Neo-Camelot and New Revisionist writing on the Cuban Missile Crisis, with special focus on the key themes.
15. Teacher shows selected scenes from ‘Thirteen Days’ (Thirteen Days, 2000. [DVD] Roger Donaldson, USA: New Line Cinema) that illustrate the key themes.
16. Teachers repeat the activity from the Suggested Activities list to include notes on Popular Histories of the Cuban Missile Crisis.

Extension – students could read Joan Didion’s article on attitudes to JFK in Miami and consider the intersection of race and perspective in writing about the Cuban Missile Crisis: Didion, J. (1987). Miami: “La Lucha”, New York Review of Books (June 11 issue) Session three – the reasons (90 minutes)1. Teachers present students with summaries of/extracts from important new evidence that has influenced writing on the Cuban Missile Crisis. These could include:
2. The EXCOMM Tapes
3. Soviet records
4. JFK’s medical records
5. Students work in pairs to discuss how one new piece of evidence influenced historians in each school of history – for example, referring to Hersh’s interpretation of JFK’s leadership during the crisis after JFK’s medical records were released. They report their findings back to the class and discuss with the teacher. These notes are added to existing notes on the schools of history.
6. Students are placed back into groups and assigned one Focus Question. They trace this focus through the sources they have read and record how each historian discusses this topic. They discuss how the evidence available to each historian may have influenced their perspective on the focus question. Groups report back to the class and discuss with the teacher.
7. Students individually write a structured essay paragraph explaining the account of the Cuban Missile Crisis presented in the work of two historians.
 | * Collaborative timeline outlining background to the Cuban Missile Crisis
* Annotated copy of both of the assigned texts
* Annotated copy of one of the optional texts
* Detailed notes on a selection of historians
* Piece of writing on schools of history and their perspectives on the Cuban Missile Crisis
* Annotated extracts of key pieces of evidence on the Cuban Missile Crisis
* Detailed notes connecting each piece of evidence to an historian’s work
* Structured essay paragraph on new evidence and writing on the Cuban Missile Crisis
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| 1. Role in the Indochina Conflict

HE12-1 analyses and evaluates different approaches to history and the complexity of factors that shape historical interpretations.HE12-3 communicates through detailed, well-structures texts to explain, argue, discuss, analyse and evaluate historical issues.HE12-4 constructs an historical position about an area of historical inquiry, and discusses and challenges other positions.Key questions:To what extent was JFK responsible for American involvement in the war in Indochina?Was JFK involved implicated in the assassination of Diem?Was JFK planning to withdraw from Indochina? Focus:How have historical accounts of JFK’s leadership during the conflict in Indochina changed over time? Focus:How do the events and politics of the historian’s own context impact on the construction of History? | Session one – the history (90 minutes)1. Prior to the session all students should have been exposed to a brief summary of the Vietnam War – its causes, progress and outcomes. Students should also have read the following texts:
2. Dallek, R. (2003). John F. Kennedy: An Unfinished Life (London: Penguin) – Chapter 13
3. Bastian, P. (2001). John F. Kennedy and the Historians (Sydney: HTA NSW) – Chapter 6
4. Students read Senator Kennedy’s 1954 speech on Indochina and identify key phrases that encapsulate his early attitudes on conflict in the region.
5. Students use one of the Research activities from the Suggested Activities List to investigate and outline JFK’s leadership in the early years of the Vietnam War. Note – there are a lot of new historical figures introduced here and complex movement back and forth between Washington and Saigon. Teachers may take the opportunity to explicitly teach students about each of these figures and their roles in the Kennedy Administration
6. Students are presented with a brief overview of the actions of other mid-century Presidents in Vietnam, from Roosevelt to Nixon. Using these and their own outlines of Kennedy’s actions, students work together to seek evidence of continuity in the American position and approach to Indochina. Based on this analysis, students discuss whether JFK’s Administration represented a continuation of American policy in the region or new departures.

Session two – the historians (90 minutes) 1. Prior to session 2, students should have read and annotated one of the following resources, with a focus on the key points of debate:
2. Sorensen, T. (1965). Kennedy: The Classic Biography. (New York: Harper Perennial) – Chapter 23
3. Kennedy, R 1964, [Robert F Kennedy Oral History Interview – JFK](http://mcadams.posc.mu.edu/vietnam.htm), JFK Presidential Library, Boston, viewed 4 August 2017
4. Halberstam, D 1993. The Best and the Brightest. (New York: Ballantine Books) – at least chapters 9-10. Note: interested students would benefit greatly from reading this whole book.
5. Hersh, S. (1997). The Dark Side of Camelot (New York: Back Bay Books) – Chapter 23
6. Kaplan, F 2003, [‘The war room’](http://www.slate.com/articles/arts/books/2003/05/the_war_room.html), Slate, viewed 4 August 2017
7. Bender, B 2005, [‘Archives show JFK sought way out of Vietnam’](http://www.nytimes.com/2005/06/07/world/americas/archives-show-jfk-sought-way-out-of-vietnam.html), The New York Times, viewed 4 August 2017
8. Clarke, Thurston (2014). JFK’s Last Hundred Days: The Transformation of a Man and the Emergence of a Great President (London: Penguin) – selected excerpts on Indochina
9. Galbraith, JK 2003, [‘Exit Strategy: In 1963, JFK Ordered a Complete Withdrawal from Vietnam’](http://bostonreview.net/us/galbraith-exit-strategy-vietnam?_ga=2.68866328.823709489.1501789269-2129472369.1501789269), Boston Review, viewed 4 August 2017
10. Chomsky, N 2003, [‘Letters from Chomsky and Galbraith on JFK and Vietnam’](http://bostonreview.net/world/chomsky-galbraith-letters-vietnam-jfk-kennedy), Boston Review, viewed 4 August 2017
11. Students discuss the features of each school of history’s depiction of JFK as a wartime leader – they could focus on key words, events addressed, etc. Building on this, they categorise each of their texts in a school of history and record evidence for this. This information is shared.
12. Students work independently to construct a piece of writing that summarises changing perspectives on JFK’s leadership in Indochina over time.

Session three – the reasons (90 minutes)1. Prior to session 3, Students read these two texts in preparation for the session:
2. Hawkins, S & Flint, T 2016, [‘Two stories, one America: How political narratives shape our understanding of reality’](http://harvardkennedyschoolreview.com/two-stories-one-america-how-political-narratives-shape-our-understanding-of-reality/), Harvard Kennedy School Review, viewed 4 August 2017
3. Lynd, S & Mirra, C 2006, [‘I am a revisionist historian’](http://historynewsnetwork.org/article/22700), History News Network, viewed 4 August 2017
4. Teacher poses the question: How does an historian’s context shape their work?
5. Students work together to plan a way to answer the inquiry question using all their texts on JFK and Indochina. This activity should be student-led, offering them the freedom to drive their own inquiry after it has been modelled by the teacher several times.
6. The most effective process here will include:
7. Analysing the question
8. Brainstorming initial ideas
9. Re-reading pre-session texts to gather useful ideas and discussing these
10. Re-reading the texts on JFK and Indochina to assess how well the ideas apply to this case study
11. Writing a response to the inquiry question that incorporates the pre-session texts and writing on JFK
12. The teacher should conduct a formative assessment halfway through the session to check students are on the right track and gently redirect if necessary. This could simply be part of a whole-class discussion.
 | * List of JFK’s actions during the war in Indochina
* Notes on how JFK’s Indochina policy compared to that of other Presidents
* Notes on how each school of history depicted JFK’s role in the Indochina conflict
* Piece of writing summarising changing perspectives on JFK’s leadership in Indochina
* Detailed notes on how context shapes historical writing
* Piece of writing presenting a position on the inquiry question with close reference to JFK
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Final essay question

“The great enemy of truth is very often not the lie--deliberate, contrived and dishonest--but the myth--persistent, persuasive and unrealistic. Too often we hold fast to the clichés of our forebears. We subject all facts to a prefabricated set of interpretations. We enjoy the comfort of opinion without the discomfort of thought.”

[JFK’s Commencement Address at Yale University, June 11, 1962]

Assess the extent to which historical debate on JFK is still subject to the dangers of myth, as outlined by JFK himself.

Reflection and evaluation