

Who Was Lee Harvey Oswald?

Teacher's Guide

About the Film:

"Who Was Lee Harvey Oswald?" is an investigative biography of the man at the center of the political crime of the 20th century. The three-hour documentary special traces Oswald's life from his boyhood to that fateful day in Dallas on Nov. 22, 1963, and poses a number of questions: Was Oswald the emotionally disturbed "lone gunman?" Was he one of two gunmen that day in Dallas? Or was he an unwitting scapegoat for the real assassins?

A Note to Teachers:

- For classes in Social Studies, Language Arts and World History; Grade level 9-12

These teaching activities are designed to help students understand the political world that shaped Lee Harvey Oswald and to explore the influences on his life that contributed to his decision to assassinate President John F. Kennedy.

"Who Was Lee Harvey Oswald?" is a documentary film that examines the life of the president's assassin through multiple lenses. Beginning with the family circumstances that shaped his early life, the film follows Oswald's actions leading up to and immediately following President Kennedy's assassination. Interviews and film footage illuminate Oswald's attraction to Marxism and his life in Cold War Russia, as well as his many travels in the U.S. Drawing upon the expertise of several authors and scholars, the film concludes -- as did the Warren Commission report following the assassination -- that Oswald acted as a lone gunman.

The program provides a resource for students to:

- Learn about the Cold War, the Bay of Pigs Invasion and other events that shaped Lee Harvey Oswald's political beliefs in the early 1960s
- Examine the character and motivations of Lee Harvey Oswald
- Think about why people experience the need to search for meaning behind a national trauma such as President Kennedy's assassination or the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks
- Understand the techniques of "truth-telling" in fiction and film-making

LESSON PLANS

PRE-VIEWING LESSON PLAN:

The Era that Shaped Oswald

Students will research the world that shaped Lee Harvey Oswald's political beliefs.

VIEWING LESSON PLAN:

Student Viewing Guide

Students will view the film, paying particular attention to a "character" they have been

assigned to follow.

POST-VIEWING LESSON PLAN:

The "Trial" of Lee Harvey Oswald

Through their participation in a mock trial, students will explore Lee Harvey Oswald's personality and possible motivations for assassinating President Kennedy.

EXTENDING THE LESSON

Trying to Make Sense of the World

Students will explore the reasons why people use a context of coincidence and conspiracy to explain national tragedies.

"Truth" and "Fiction"

Students will examine how reality and fiction are used in storytelling and movie making.

Purchasing the Video

"Who Was Lee Harvey Oswald?" can be purchased from **Shop PBS for Teachers** [<http://teacher.shop.pbs.org/home/index.jsp>].

Credits

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PRE-VIEWING LESSON PLAN

The Era That Shaped Oswald

Lesson Objectives:

In this lesson, students will:

- Learn about the world that shaped Lee Harvey Oswald's political beliefs
- Begin to think about why people might assign so much importance to this assassination

Materials Needed:

- Internet access
- Student Handout: **Part One: What Do You Know About JFK?**
- Student Handout: **Part Two: Checking Your Answers**

Time Needed:

45-80 minutes, depending on the extent of the discussion

Procedure:

1. Instruct students to answer the questions on the student handout entitled "What Do You Know About JFK?"
2. After students have attempted to answer these questions, give them the second handout, "Checking Your Answers," which contains resources for them to follow up on their answers to the first handout.
3. Tell students to return to questions on the first handout and research the answers, using classroom resources and the Internet resources listed on the second handout.

Media literacy note: As with all issues, especially ones charged with controversy, students must learn to be savvy and discriminating readers. No Web site can provide all the information a student needs to know, and teachers should encourage students to "interrogate" Web sites even as they are reading. Guiding questions as they work through these activities should be: What did you learn from this source? What didn't you learn from this source? Who sponsors this source? What bias might the sponsor have?

4. Conduct a classroom discussion about the students' answers.

Methods of Assessment:

Class discussion

Submission of student handout after discussion

7. What is Communism?

8. What is Capitalism?

9. What was the Cuban Missile Crisis? Which world leaders were involved?

10. What was the Bay of Pigs Invasion? Which world leaders were involved?

11. Who was the leader of Cuba when Lee Harvey Oswald killed President Kennedy in 1963?

12. How do you think pro-Castro Cubans might have felt about President Kennedy as a result of the Cuban Missile Crisis and Bay of Pigs Invasion? How do you think anti-Castro Cubans might have felt?

13. Who is the leader of Cuba now?

14. What form of government does Cuba have today?

STUDENT HANDOUT: PART TWO

Checking Your Answers

Directions:

Using the Web sites below, as well as books in your classroom or library and other resources suggested by your teacher, answer or check your answers to the questions from Part One. Make changes or additions if your answers were incorrect or incomplete.

President Kennedy's Assassination

Kennedy is Killed By Sniper As He Rides In Car In Dallas; Johnson Sworn In On Plane
<http://www.nytimes.com/learning/general/onthisday/big/1122.html>

This Nov. 23, 1963 front-page story from *The New York Times* describes the nation's reaction to the assassination of President Kennedy.

Key Political Definitions

Here are some Web sites with important definitions for understanding Lee Harvey Oswald, who called himself a **Marxist** and whose ideas were shaped by the Cold War.

Marxism

<http://dictionary.reference.com/search?q=marxism>

Communism

<http://dictionary.reference.com/search?q=communism>

Capitalism

<http://dictionary.reference.com/search?q=capitalism>

The Cold War

The Cold War

<http://dictionary.reference.com/search?q=cold%20war>

Here is a definition of the Cold War.

CNN Knowledge Bank: Timelines

<http://www.cnn.com/SPECIALS/cold.war/kbank/timeline/>

This Web site, part of the CNN documentary series "The Cold War," has several different chronologies of key events during this period. The two chronologies entitled "Cold War Flashpoints" and "The Bomb Timeline" have descriptions of the Cuban Missile Crisis.

The 1961 Bay of Pigs Invasion

The Bay of Pigs Invasion

<http://www.bartleby.com/65/ba/BayPigsI.html>

Here is a short summary of the invasion from *The Columbia Encyclopedia*.

The Bay of Pigs Invasion

http://college.hmco.com/history/readerscomp/rcah/html/ah_008400_bayofpigsinv.htm

Another short summary of the invasion, from *The Reader's Companion to American History*.

Invasion at Bay of Pigs

<http://www.historyofcuba.com/history/baypigs/pigs.htm>

This Web site gives one Cuban exile's view of the Bay of Pigs Invasion.

The Cuban Missile Crisis

The Cuban Missile Crisis

<http://www.hpol.org/jfk/cuban/>

This Web site, from "History and Politics Out Loud" gives, in its introduction, a good overview of the crisis. It also has a timeline of the crisis and audio of President Kennedy and his staff discussing the events.

The Cuban Missile Crisis, 1962: The 40th Anniversary

http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/nsa/cuba_mis_cri/declass.htm

The introduction to this book from The National Security Archive at George Washington University gives a good overview of the 1962 Cuban missile crisis.

The Cuban Threat Will Be Removed

<http://www.marxists.org/history/usa/government/kennedy/1962/10/22b.htm>

Marxists.org has featured on their site President Kennedy's Oct. 22, 1962 letter to Premier Khrushchev, the leader of Russia, in which he outlines the U.S. position on the Cuban Missile Crisis.

The Cuban Missile Crisis, 1962: A Political Perspective

http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/nsa/cuba_mis_cri/

This Web site was published by the National Security Archive at George Washington University for the Cuban Missile Crisis' 40th anniversary. It contains two chronologies of the incident, declassified documents, photographs, and analysis from a conference featuring U.S., Russian and Cuban veterans of the crisis. Also, this site offers a link to the original *Washington Post* coverage of the Cuban Missile Crisis.

VIEWING LESSON PLAN

Student Viewing Activity: "Who Was Lee Harvey Oswald?"

Lesson Objectives:

In this lesson, students will:

- Watch the documentary, "Who Was Lee Harvey Oswald?"
- Practice critical observation and thinking skills as they view the documentary and take notes
- Follow and take notes on the character, expert, or people they have been assigned. This will allow students to become "specialists" on one aspect of this film and then, through the Post-Viewing Activity, to share their knowledge with their classmates

Materials Needed:

- The video, "Who Was Lee Harvey Oswald?" [Note: This video can be purchased online at **ShopPBS for Teachers**. See the URL on the front page of this guide.]
- Student handout: **Student Viewing Guide**

Time Needed:

Three hours for viewing the documentary (Note: This could be an extra credit assignment for out-of-school viewing)

Procedure:

1. Give students the viewing guide, and assign them a "character," "expert," or "other people" to follow. Depending on the size of your class, you may assign more than one student to each person.
2. Inform them that Oswald's story is a complex one. If students completed the Pre-Viewing Activity, "The Era That Shaped Oswald," their notes will help them as they follow Oswald's life and actions.
3. Inform students that, after viewing the film, they will be using their viewing notes to "testify" on behalf of the person they are following in the trial Oswald might have had if he had not been shot by Jack Ruby.

Method of Assessment:

Students should be prepared to submit the notes they took during the film.

STUDENT HANDOUT
Student Viewing Guide

<u>Main Characters</u>	<u>Experts</u>	<u>Other People</u>
Lee Harvey Oswald Marina Oswald Robert Oswald	Gerald Posner G. Robert Blakey Edward Epstein Priscilla McMillan	Oswald's U.S. Marines commander and fellow Marines People who knew Oswald in Russia (including people from the KGB) People who knew Oswald in the U.S.

Directions:

- As you are watching the film, keep this handout and a pen or pencil in front of you so you can note important facts.
- You should have several entries by the end of the film.
- Use both your observation and interpretation skills as you watch the film, because you will be called upon to "testify" at Oswald's trial.

What character(s) are you following?

What is your character's position or relationship to Lee Harvey Oswald?

Write at least four important things you learn about Lee Harvey Oswald based on your character's interactions with or observations of him. (If you are one of the "other people," write four observations from the film that will help you to build your testimony for the trial. For example, if you are someone who knew Oswald in Russia, pay special attention when the documentary focuses on his life there.)

1)

2)

3)

4)

What else did you learn that surprised or interested you?

POST-VIEWING ACTIVITY

The Trial of Lee Harvey Oswald

Lesson Objectives:

In this lesson, students will:

- Put Lee Harvey Oswald on trial for the assassination of President Kennedy, to decide not *if* he assassinated the President, but *what motivated him* to assassinate the president
- Examine, during the trial, Oswald's personality and possible motivations

Materials Needed:

- Internet access
- Student Viewing Guide Notes

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Time Needed:

One to three class periods, depending on the whether students prepare for the trial during class or as homework

Procedure:

1. Instruct students to consult the notes they took on the Student Viewing Guide and to meet in three groups: **Main Characters**, **Experts**, and **Other People** to plan their testimony.

Note: Students working in the **Other People** group might seek more information on Oswald from the following excerpts from Chapter Six of the Warren Commission's report, subtitled "Investigation of Possible Conspiracy":

Residence in the Soviet Union

http://www.archives.gov/research_room/jfk/warren_commission/warren_commission_report_chapter6.html#residence

Associations in the Dallas-Fort Worth Community

http://www.archives.gov/research_room/jfk/warren_commission/warren_commission_report_chapter6.html#associations

Political Activities Upon Return to United States

http://www.archives.gov/research_room/jfk/warren_commission/warren_commission_report_chapter6.html#political

2. Assign a student to be a psychiatrist testifying about Oswald's life. The "psychiatrist" can find information about Oswald's life from the following links to the Warren Commission report:

Chapter Seven -- Lee Harvey Oswald: Background and Possible Motives

<http://www.jfk-assassination.de/WCR/wcr7.html>

Appendix XIII -- Biography of Lee Harvey Oswald

<http://www.jfk-assassination.de/WCR/app13.html>

3. Assign a student to be the judge and keep order. If it seems more appropriate, the teacher may take the role of judge. In the interests of time, the judge should keep the testimony of each witness short.
4. The teacher should establish the order of testimony and the trial should begin.
Note: The teacher should allow some latitude in legal tactics. The purpose of this exercise is not to teach courtroom strategies. It is to explore the motivations and life of Lee Harvey Oswald.

Method of Assessment:

After the trial, each student should write a three-part evaluation:

Part One: How well did I testify in my role?

Part Two: Which of the witnesses that I heard did I find most convincing? (Take into account both the evidence itself and how the witness presented the evidence.)

Part Three: Based on the testimony I heard, how would I evaluate Lee Harvey Oswald's state of mind and reasons for assassinating President Kennedy?

EXTENDING THE LESSON

Trying to Make Sense of the World

Introductory note:

"Presidents Kennedy and Lincoln were elected 100 years apart. Both men were succeeded by Johnsons, who were also born 100 years apart. Their names each contain seven letters. Their successors' names each contain 13 letters. Their assassins' names each contain 15 letters."

(Source: Widely-circulated bit of urban folklore)

Are the preceding lines examples of coincidence? Or do they show something greater? What about the coincidences in the life and actions of Lee Harvey Oswald in the context of the larger world? Why do some people seek to put national tragedies like the Kennedy assassination or the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks into a context of coincidence and conspiracy?

Some answers the students might propose:

- People feel defenseless when something like an assassination or a terrorist attack occurs. They need to think someone or some malevolent force they can combat must be at fault.
- People fear chaos. A conspiracy theory, even if it is wrong, imposes some order.
- People are sometimes skeptical of answers the government provides (for example, in the case of the Kennedy assassination, the Warren Commission report.)

Lesson Objectives:

- To discuss why events like the assassinations of President Kennedy and the events of Sept. 11, 2001 assume such importance in the U.S.
- To discuss why some people seek to put tragedies like assassinations or terrorist attacks into a context of coincidence and conspiracy

Materials Needed:

If students have completed the Pre-Viewing and Viewing Activities, their notes might be helpful.

Time Needed:

One class period

Procedure:

1. Pose the question: Why do some people seek to put national tragedies like President Kennedy's assassination or the Sept. 11 attacks into a context of coincidence and conspiracy?
2. Instruct students to think of the various issues in the film that experts like Gerald Posner sought to prove were either unrelated or coincidences. [Note: Teachers might want to point students to the section of FRONTLINE's Web site entitled "**Conspiracy: Case For/Case Against**," which lays out some of the main conspiracy theories surrounding the JFK assassination. URL: <http://www.pbs.org/frontline/shows/oswald/conspiracy>]

Method of Assessment:

Students should represent their thoughts on the feelings national tragedies evoke as a painting, poem, or speech.

EXTENDING THE LESSON

"Truth" and "Fiction"

Note to teachers:

The film, "Who was Lee Harvey Oswald?" is a **documentary**. It presents what its filmmakers have identified as facts in order to support the widely accepted view that Oswald was a lone assassin and was not part of a larger conspiracy. But, of course, even what seem like absolute facts are always open to interpretation. Some authors and filmmakers go further, believing that by fictionalizing parts of a true story, they are better able to convey the tone of the times and are therefore able to represent the "truth" more compellingly. For example, if students completed the Post-Viewing Activity of putting Oswald on trial, they acted the roles of composite characters created to represent several people who knew Oswald as a Marine, in the Soviet Union, and in the United States. Similarly, when we allowed a "psychiatrist" to testify in Oswald's "trial," we were creating a fictional character to present facts and ideas about Oswald.

Though it may seem paradoxical, the idea is that including imaginary encounters or conversations may help to convey the reality of a situation. Two well-known contemporary authors, Norman Mailer and Don DeLillo, have used novelistic techniques to write about the Kennedy assassination. Similarly, Oliver Stone, a contemporary filmmaker, has used documentary footage in his film *JFK* as a way of legitimizing fictional scenes.

Lesson Objectives:

- To think about whether we can always draw an exact line between "documentary" and "fiction"
- To consider issues of media awareness and media literacy

Materials Needed:

- If students completed any of the other activities in this guide, their notes will be helpful.
- Either **selections from Norman Mailer's *Oswald's Tale***, [URL: <http://www.pbs.org/frontline/shows/oswald/forum/mailler.html>] a novelistic treatment of aspects of Oswald's life;
Or
- Clips from *JFK*, Oliver Stone's film which uses fictional composite characters to support its conspiracy theory
- NOTE: Students may also want to read a forum FRONTLINE conducted, in which Don DeLillo and two non-fiction authors, Edward J. Epstein and Gerald Posner, debate the "**Myth, Meaning and Mystery**" surrounding Oswald. [URL: <http://www.pbs.org/frontline/shows/oswald/forum>]

Time Needed:

One to two periods, depending on whether students read the excerpts or view the film clips in class or at home.

Procedure:

1. Present a short excerpt from any of the works listed above (e.g. the written excerpt from Mailer, the FRONTLINE forum, or a video clip from *JFK*.)
2. Discuss how viewers or readers can tell what is "true" and what is "fiction."
3. Discuss what happens when it is difficult to discern the difference between "truth" and "fiction."

Note to Teachers: If you are using the *JFK* clips, you may also want to point students to "**Hollywood and History: The Debate Over *JFK*,**" on FRONTLINE's Web site. [URL: <http://www.pbs.org/frontline/shows/oswald/conspiracy>]

Method of Assessment:

Students should write a page agreeing or disagreeing with the following statement:

Once an author or a film director mixes fact and fiction, their work becomes useless as a means of discovering truth.

INTERNET RESOURCES:

In addition to the Web resources included in the guide, students and their teachers might want to look further.

Media literacy note: As with all issues, especially ones charged with controversy, students must learn to be savvy and discriminating readers. No Web site can provide all the information a student needs to know, and teachers should encourage students to "interrogate" Web sites even as they are reading.

Guiding questions as they work through these activities should be: What did you learn from this source? What didn't you learn from this source? Who sponsors this source? What bias might the sponsor have?

Who Was Lee Harvey Oswald?

<http://www.pbs.org/frontline/shows/oswald>

The companion Web site to the FRONTLINE film offers more on Oswald's life and activities, including a forum in which Don DeLillo, Edward Epstein and Gerald Posner discuss the "Myth, Meaning, and Mystery" surrounding Oswald. Also, a look at the major conspiracy theories surrounding JFK's assassination.

The Kennedy Assassination

<http://mcadams.posc.mu.edu/home.htm>

This comprehensive Web site supports the theory that Oswald was a lone assassin. Filled with informative links, it will be useful for students who want to check on their notes from the film about main characters and issues.

JFK -- The Assassination Movie

<http://mcadams.posc.mu.edu/jfkmovie.htm>

This site systematically addresses both the distortions and the possible agenda behind them in Oliver Stone's film, *JFK*.