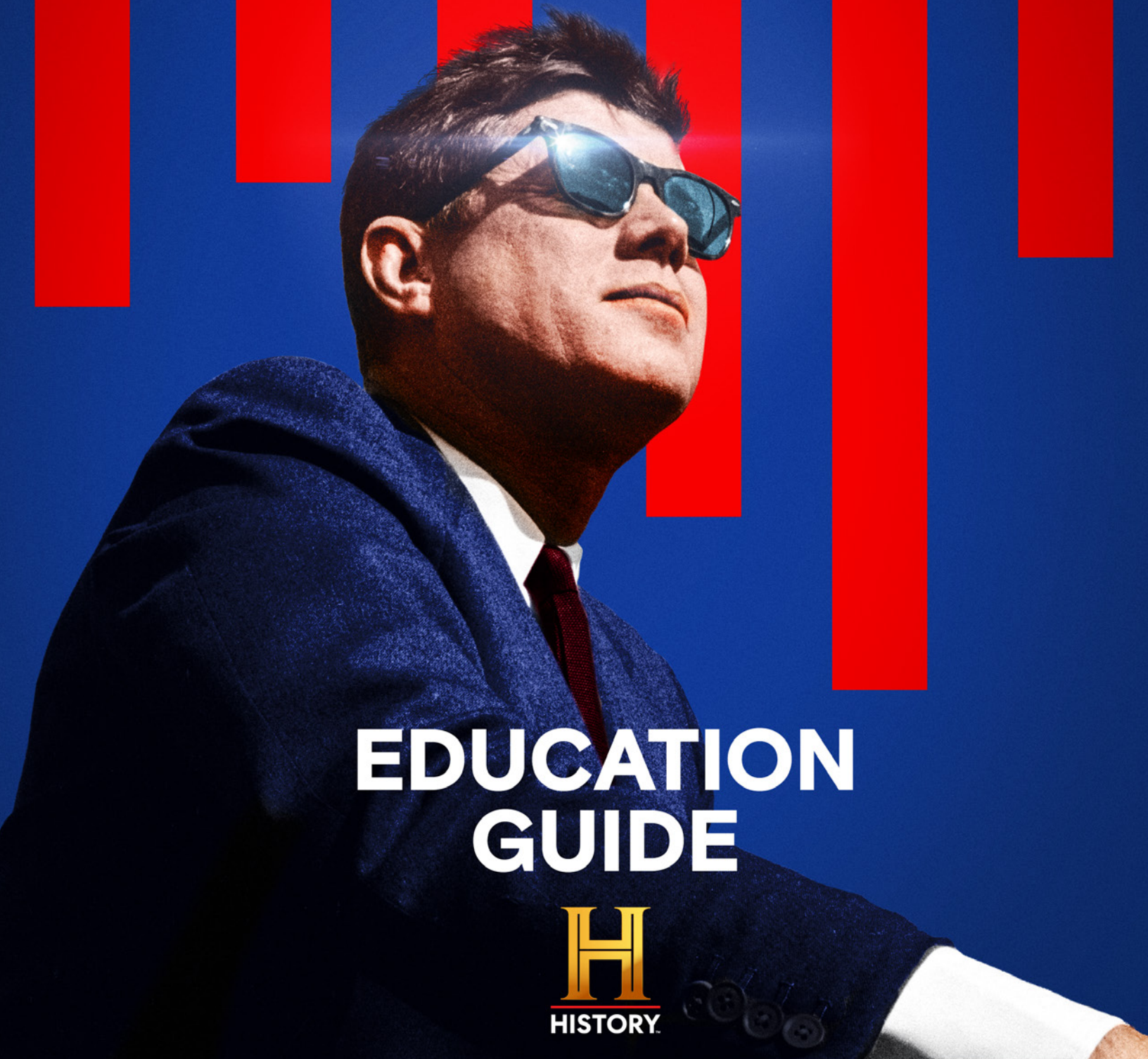


A HISTORY® CHANNEL ORIGINAL

# KENNEDY



EDUCATION  
GUIDE





## Introduction

*Kennedy* is 3-night documentary event that examines the life of John F. Kennedy, tracing his evolution from scion of a wealthy family to his formative years in World War II and his political rise to become America's 35th President. The series explores Kennedy's remarkable life, enduring legacy, and ambitious leadership, as America's youngest elected president faces challenges at home and abroad.

In director Ashton Gleckman's film, Kennedy's life unfolds through a cinematic library of archival materials and new interviews that provide insights from leading historians and experts.

## Curriculum Links

*Kennedy* is useful for History, American Culture, American Studies, Civics, and Government courses. It is appropriate for high school and college students. Students will be able to explore and discuss major themes and topics including political leadership, the Cold War, the Cuban Missile Crisis, civil rights in the early 1960s and the legacy of President John F. Kennedy.

## Viewing Resource: Watchalong Guide

Learn more about the series here:

<https://www.history.com/shows/kennedy>

## Key Terms to Define:

Students can define these terms before or after watching this series.

- Cold War
- Segregation
- Civil Rights
- New Frontier
- Containment
- Nuclear Test Ban Treaty
- Proxy War
- Space Race



## Discussion Questions

Students can answer these questions in group discussions or in essay format.

1. What was JFK's childhood like? What impact did his upbringing have on his later life?
2. Describe Kennedy's lifelong health struggles and challenges. How did this shape his life and how did he rise above these challenges?
3. Why was Kennedy's service in World War II important in his growth as a future leader?
4. How did the death of Kennedy's older brother change the course of JFK's life?
5. Describe the relationship between John and Robert Kennedy. How did their relationship evolve over time and why did RFK become an important advisor to his brother?
6. When Kennedy's Catholicism became an issue during the 1960 election, how did he confront questions regarding his faith?
7. Why did Kennedy's presidency represent change in America? How did Kennedy inspire younger Americans?
8. Why did Kennedy believe the Soviet Union and communism posed a threat to the United States?
9. Why did Kennedy champion America's space program and set it on the path to "go to the Moon?"
10. What role did Ted Sorensen play in Kennedy's political life, and what were his contributions to the Kennedy administration?
11. What lessons did Kennedy learn from the failure of the Bay of Pigs Invasion, and how did that influence his actions during the Cuban Missile Crisis?
12. Why did President Kennedy create the Peace Corps? What were his goals for the program?
13. How were Kennedy's contributions to civil rights for Black Americans?
14. Many of the historians in the series describe Kennedy as a cautious leader. How do you think this affected his decision making in key moments like the school integration battles in the South and the Cuban Missile Crisis?
15. What message was Kennedy trying to deliver to the people of Berlin in his 1963 speech?
16. How did Kennedy's views on America's role in the conflict in Vietnam evolve over the course of his presidency?
17. What do you think are three of President Kennedy's greatest legacies and contributions?



## Primary Source Activities

### Primary Source Activity #1

Book: Profiles in Courage, 1956

Source: John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum

[Read additional excerpts here.](#)

“Profiles in Courage”, Kennedy’s second book, was published three years after his election to the U.S. Senate. It was a series of short profiles of eight U.S. Senators who had, in Kennedy’s view, taken a stand on the contentious issues of their day, often ignoring political pressure to defend their beliefs. The book, written with the assistance of Kennedy aide Ted Sorenson, was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Biography in 1957 and proved a crucial next step in Kennedy’s political journey.

Excerpts from “Profiles in Courage”

To be courageous, these stories make clear, requires no exceptional qualifications, no magic formula, no special combination of time, place and circumstance. It is an opportunity that sooner or later is presented to us all. Politics merely furnishes one arena which imposes special tests of courage. In whatever arena of life one may meet the challenge of courage, whatever may be the sacrifices he faces if he follow his conscience – the loss of his friends, his fortune, his contentment, even the esteem of his fellow men – each man must decide for himself the course he will follow. The stories of past courage can define that ingredient – they can teach, they can offer hope, they provide inspiration. But they cannot supply courage itself. For this each man must look into his own soul.

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A man does what he must – in spite of personal consequences, in spite of obstacles and dangers and pressures – and that is the basis of all human morality.

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Today the challenge of political courage looms larger than ever before. For our everyday life is becoming so saturated with the tremendous power of mass communications that any unpopular or unorthodox course arouses a storm of protests such as John Quincy Adams – under attack in 1807 – could never have envisioned. Our political life is becoming so expensive, so mechanized and so dominated by professional politicians and public relations men that the idealist who dreams of independent statesmanship is rudely awakened by the necessities of election and accomplishment...

And thus, in the days ahead, only the very courageous will be able to take the hard and unpopular decisions necessary for our survival in the struggle with a powerful enemy – an enemy with leaders who need give little thought to the popularity of their course, who need pay little tribute to the public opinion they themselves manipulate, and who may force, without fear of retaliation at the polls, their citizens to sacrifice present laughter for future glory.

We shall need compromises in the days ahead, to be sure. But these will be, or should be, compromises of issues, not of principles. We can compromise our political positions, but not ourselves... Compromise does not mean cowardice. Indeed it is frequently the compromisers and conciliators who are faced with the severest tests of political courage as they oppose the extremist views of their constituents.

### **Discussion Questions**

1. How would you define political courage?
2. Why is compromise important in politics? What are some recent examples you can name of political compromise?
3. How has the power of media and mass communications Kennedy mentions affected our political system?
4. Do you believe that Kennedy's idea of political courage is still relevant today?

### **Related Activity**

Ask students to write a short essay, or their own "Profile in Courage." This could be someone they know personally, or someone from the worlds of politics, business or even entertainment. Have them use these questions as well as the answers to the discussion questions above to help guide their writing. What obstacles or pressures did this individual encounter? How were this individual's actions/decisions courageous?



## Primary Source Activity #2

Editorial Cartoon Analysis

Source: Picturing America, National Endowment for the Humanities



"Let's get a lock for this thing"  
Herblock, The Washington Post, October 1962

The relationship between President Kennedy and Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev got off to a rocky start with their first meeting in Vienna in 1961. The following year, years of simmering tensions between the Communist east and Democratic west over the fate of Berlin resulted in the building of the Berlin Wall. In October 1963, the Cold War reached its hottest moment yet, when U.S. intelligence discovered the Soviets were installing nuclear-armed missiles in Cuba, located just 90 miles away from the U.S. mainland.

Over the course of nearly two weeks, the two superpowers faced off, with many fearing the world was on the brink of nuclear war. Editorial cartoonists like Herbert Block (commonly known as Herblock) helped capture this volatile period in history.

### Discussion Questions

- Who is being depicted in this image?
- What is happening in this image?
- What message do you think the cartoonist is trying to make? List evidence from the image to support your conclusion.

### Primary Source Activity #3

Speech: Televised Address to the Nation on Civil Rights, June 11, 1963

Source: John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum

[Watch the full speech here.](#)

On June 11, 1963, following Kennedy's decision to send National Guard troops to assist in the integration of the University of Mississippi and University of Alabama, JFK addressed the nation on the fight for racial equality and called for new Congressional legislation to secure civil rights for all Americans. The bill, passed a year after his assassination, became the landmark Civil Rights Act of 1964.

*Excerpts from Kennedy's Civil Rights speech.*

Today we are committed to a worldwide struggle to promote and protect the rights of all who wish to be free...

It ought to be possible for American consumers of any color to receive equal service in places of public accommodation, such as hotels and restaurants and theaters and retail stores, without being forced to resort to demonstrations in the street, and it ought to be possible for American citizens of any color to register to vote in a free election without interference or fear of reprisal.

It ought to be possible, in short, for every American to enjoy the privileges of being American without regard to his race or his color. In short, every American ought to have the right to be treated as he would wish to be treated, as one would wish his children to be treated. But this is not the case.

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This is not a sectional issue. Difficulties over segregation and discrimination exist in every city, in every State of the Union, producing in many cities a rising tide of discontent that threatens the public safety. Nor is this a partisan issue. In a time of domestic crisis men of good will and generosity should be able to unite regardless of party or politics. This is not even a legal or legislative issue alone. It is better to settle these matters in the courts than on the streets, and new laws are needed at every level, but law alone cannot make men see right.

We are confronted primarily with a moral issue. It is as old as the scriptures and is as clear as the American Constitution.

The heart of the question is whether all Americans are to be afforded equal rights and equal opportunities, whether we are going to treat our fellow Americans as we want to be treated. If an American, because his skin is dark, cannot eat lunch in a restaurant open to the public, if he cannot send his children to the best public school available, if he cannot vote for the public officials who will represent him, if, in short, he cannot enjoy the full and free life which all of us want, then who among us would be content to have the color of his skin changed and stand in his place? Who among us would then be content with the counsels of patience and delay?

One hundred years of delay have passed since President Lincoln freed the slaves, yet their heirs, their grandsons, are not fully free. They are not yet freed from the bonds of injustice. They are not yet freed from social and economic oppression. And this Nation, for all its hopes and all its boasts, will not be fully free until all its citizens are free.

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Now the time has come for this Nation to fulfill its promise. The events in Birmingham and elsewhere have so increased the cries for equality that no city or State or legislative body can prudently choose to ignore them.

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Next week I shall ask the Congress of the United States to act, to make a commitment it has not fully made in this century to the proposition that race has no place in American life or law.

### **Discussion Questions**

1. Why did Kennedy feel compelled to call on the federal government to tackle the issue of racial inequality in America? What recent events prompted this action?
2. What did Kennedy believe was the “heart of the question” when it came to civil rights?
3. Do you believe that America has fulfilled the promise Kennedy spoke of in the decades since this speech, or has it failed to fulfill the promise? What are some historic examples that support your belief.





## Primary Source Activity #4

### Historical Photograph Analysis

Source: John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum



**Image 1**  
Kennedy children at Hyannis Port.



**Image 2**  
John F. Kennedy and crewmen of the PT-109.



**Image 3**  
Senator John F. Kennedy of Massachusetts in Nashua, New Hampshire.



**Image 4**  
President John F. Kennedy visits Cape Canaveral.



**Image 5**  
Meeting with civil rights leaders after March on Washington.

Have students select one of the photos to perform a deeper analysis of the images and its meaning. Students should study the photo briefly to get an overall impression, then examine it further for additional context and clues to answer questions about the photo. Students should then share their findings and results in a short descriptive report.

- Describe what you see in the photo.
- Who is being shown in the photo, and where was it taken?
- What can you tell me about the subjects in the photo?
- What is the historical time period of the photo?
- What is unusual or significant about the photo?
- What would be a good title for this photo?
- What thoughts or feelings do you have about what you see in the photo?
- What is a question you would like to ask the people shown in this photo, if they were still alive today?
- Do you have any questions about the photo? What are you left wondering after studying the photo?

## **SIDEBAR ACTIVITY**

### ***Interpreting a Speech***

Source: John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum

Speeches are a valuable primary source for students. Students should be able to analyze the text of a speech to determine historical context and data, and to also develop language skills, including understanding of rhetoric, composition, and interpretation.

Have students select a speech from the options below, which they will watch in full to answer the questions below:

#### ***Option 1***

Inaugural Address, January 20, 1961

[Watch full speech here.](#)

#### ***Option 2***

Address at Rice University on the Nation's Space Effort, September 12, 1962.

[Watch the full speech here.](#)

#### ***Option 3***

Remarks at the Rudolph Wilde Platz, Berlin, June 26, 1963.

[Watch the full speech here.](#)





### **Questions to consider:**

- What was the historical background for this speech?
- What was the purpose of the speech?
- Who was the target audience for the speech?
- What was the key message of the speech?
- What rhetorical styles did the speech use? How did it use language, tone and style to deliver its message?
- What impact did the speech have when it was delivered, and has its impact changed over time?
- Do you believe the speech was effective and successful? Present examples to support your conclusions.

### **Related Activity**

Students will write an essay or descriptive report on their chosen speech. This should not be a simple summary of the speech but should incorporate the answers to the questions listed above in their text.

## **More From History.com**

Article: John F. Kennedy

<https://www.history.com/topics/us-presidents/john-f-kennedy>

Article: 10 Things You May Not Know About John F. Kennedy

<https://www.history.com/news/10-things-you-may-not-know-about-john-f-kennedy>

Article: The Navy Disaster That Earned JFK Two Medals for Heroism

<https://www.history.com/news/jfk-wwii-purple-heart-torpedo-boat>

Article: Why the Bay of Pigs Invasion Went so Wrong

<https://www.history.com/news/bay-of-pigs-mistakes-cuba-jfk-castro>

Key Moments in the Cuban Missile Crisis

<https://www.history.com/news/cuban-missile-crisis-timeline-jfk-khrushchev>

Articles: JFK's Final 100 Days

<https://www.history.com/news/jfk-final-100-days>

## **More Related Content**

John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum

<https://www.jfklibrary.org/>

John F. Kennedy Resources, Miller Center

<https://millercenter.org/president/kennedy>

The American Presidency Project, UC Santa Barbara

<https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/people/president/john-f-kennedy>

John F. Kennedy National Historic Site

<https://www.nps.gov/jofi/index.htm>

The Sixth Floor Museum

<https://www.jfk.org/learn/>