

## DVD LESSON PLAN: *THIRTEEN DAYS*

**Title:** *Thirteen Days*

**Content:** Recently declassified documents contributed to the realism of this lightly fictionalized account of the Cuban Missile Crisis. Starring Kevin Costner as a special assistant to the president, the film focuses on the close circle of Kennedy advisors who dodged politics, untangled Khrushchev's contradicting messages, and crossed their fingers. The film carries the audience from the initial discovery of Soviet weapons in Cuba to the situation's denouement. Bruce Greenwood is effective as JFK: charming, forceful, and determined not to be pulled into initiating nuclear war.

**Special Features of this DVD:**

Two documentary films: *Roots of the Cuban Missile Crisis* and *Bringing History to the Silver Screen*.

Historical commentary from John F. Kennedy, Sergei Khrushchev, Ernest R. May, Philip D. Zelikov, and Pierre Salinger

Film commentary from producer/actor Kevin Costner, director Roger Donaldson, writer David Self, and producers Michael De Luca and Arny Bernstein

Biographical notes about historical figures.

Cast and crew filmographies

Deleted scenes with director commentary

Theatrical trailer.

Special effects deconstructions.

Dolby and Surround Sound.

**Suggested Grade Level:** 7 and up. **Note:** rated PG-13 for language

**Time:** Run time is 147 minutes. Chapter selected lesson can be completed in 1 to 2 periods.

**Outcomes:**

Students will:

-understand how a president reached a decision at a critical time in U.S. history

-understand some of the sources of tension during the Cold War

**Prior Knowledge Required:** Students should know the origins and nature of the Cold War.

**Lesson format/ strategies:**

1. Opening issue. Read the following quotation to the class (or put on overhead transparency) and discuss what they think it means. Follow with the question, “Is the quotation still valid today?”

*“Nuclear powers must avert those confrontations which bring an adversary to a choice of either a humiliating retreat or a nuclear war. To adopt that kind of course in the nuclear age would be evidence only of the bankruptcy of our policy—or of a collective death wish for the world.”*

—John F. Kennedy, *Speech at American University, 1963*

2. Using the DVD
  - A. Select 3:10:54 and play to 3:12:02, go to 4:13:24 and play to 5:17:30 (President is informed of the missiles, and cabinet meeting)
  - B. Select 7:20:17 and play to 7:41:30 (LeMay meeting)
  - C. Select 10:39:10 and play to 10:41:22
  - D. Select 14:50:52 and play to 15:52:36
  - E. Select 25:1:46 and play to end 30:2:18:50

**Culminating Activity:**

Have students write a paragraph in which they complete the following statement:

“The most significant result of the Cuban Missile crisis was...”

**Additional/ wrap-up:**

1. Students could research the event at the official National Security Archive:  
[http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/nsa/cuba\\_mis\\_cri/](http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/nsa/cuba_mis_cri/)

In particular, students can compare the movie version with the analysis by Philip Brenner, “Turning History on its Head”:

[http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/nsa/cuba\\_mis\\_cri/brenner.htm](http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/nsa/cuba_mis_cri/brenner.htm) .

FILM ANALYSIS SHEET—*Thirteen Days*

1. How was the President informed of the possibility of missiles in Cuba?
2. What are the estimates of the capabilities of the missiles? What is the tone of the cabinet discussion about what action to take? What options are presented? What is Kennedy's position on the matter?
3. What is the connection between Cuba and Berlin?
4. What are the three options presented at the EXCOMM meeting?
5. What is the position of General LeMay and the military?
6. What course of action does the cabinet choose?
7. What does the President say in his television address? How does it reflect a policy position? How might saying this create international tension?
8. The National Security Archive Web site contains the following statement:  
"If the Cuban Missile Crisis was the most dangerous passage of the Cold War, the most dangerous moment of the Cuban Missile Crisis was the evening of Saturday, 27 October 1962, when the resolution of the crisis—war or peace—appeared to hang in the balance."  
How effectively is this portrayed in the movie?