



Unit

Topic

Cold War

Fidel Castro & Che Guevara

**The texts used for the lesson contain graphic details. Use your best judgment on whether to use these texts with your students.*

Lesson Plan

Aim

To analyze the threat of communism by identifying the human rights violations in Cuba under Fidel Castro's regime to present day.

Rationale

The false depictions that romanticize Fidel Castro and Che Guevara as heroes are dangerous to our youth who have no way of knowing the extent of their cruelty if not covered by teachers. As Hollywood and some scholars have embraced Cuba's propaganda as truth and are spreading its falsities, the human rights violations of this brutal communist regime will remain unknown, and the people will continue to suffer. The legacy of Castro's Cuba is not one of healthcare, literacy, and equality like they want you to believe, but one of death, destruction, and fear. Genocide Watch has listed Cuba on its list of governments guilty of genocide and the Human Rights Watch has noted their continued repressions as of 2020. This lesson that focuses on Fidel Castro's Cuba is one that fits well into the Cold War unit, ideally being taught before the Cuban Missile Crisis, so that students can understand the threat of communism from Cuba. As students learn about the horrors of this bloody and brutal regime, they will begin to understand the importance of debunking the myths that surround the murderous Castro and Guevara.

Student Learning Objectives

Students will be able to identify human rights violations in Cuba since the Castro regime by analyzing text evidence.

Students will be able to evaluate the extent to which myths are difficult to debunk by making connections between the origin of the myth and the problem with retrieving information from rogue nations.

Civics Connection

- How have people in power affected political, social, and economic developments regarding the freedom and protection of their people?
- Why is this topic one of particular importance for participation in a democratic society?

**See the Civics Connection Through Questioning guide in Civics for more ideas.*



Vocabulary

Communism	Fidel Castro	Repression	Genocide	Myth
Socialism	Che Guevara	Human Rights Watch	Genocide Watch	

Materials and Resources

1. Text: *5 Myths of Fidel Castro, Che Guevara, and Communist Cuba*

2. Text: *The Real Fidel Castro and Cuba*

Sources: Emmick, Frank. "An American's 14 Years in Cuban Prisons." *The New York Times*, 1978.

<https://www.nytimes.com/1978/04/12/archives/an-americans-14-years-in-cuban-prisons.html>

Genocide Watch. <https://www.genocidewatch.com/ten-stages-genocide>

Human Rights Watch. <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2020/country-chapters/cuba#>

Nordlinger, Jay. "The Myth of Cuban Healthcare." *National Review*, 2007. <https://www.nationalreview.com/2007/07/myth-cuban-health-care/>

The Issue of Genocide and Cuba. <https://cubaverdad.net/genocide.htm>

3. Text: *The Real Che Guevara*

Sources: *Biography.com* <https://www.biography.com/political-figure/che-guevara>

History. <https://www.history.com/topics/south-america/che-guevara>

Jones, Nigel. "It is a sad reflection of our time that Che Guevara is seen as a hero." *The Telegraph*, 2009.

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/comment/personal-view/4077397/It-is-a-sad-reflection-of-our-time-that-Che-Guevara-is-seen-as-a-hero.html>

Llosa, Alvaro Vargas. "The Killing Machine: Che Guevara, from Communist Firebrand to Capitalist Brand." *Independent Institute*, 2005.

<https://www.independent.org/news/article.asp?id=1535>

Lott, Maxim. "5 inconvenient truths about Che Guevara." *Fox News*, 2019. <https://www.foxnews.com/politics/5-inconvenient-truths-about-che-guevara>

4. Text: *United Nations General Assembly: The Resistance to Che Guevara*

5. Handout: *Debunking the Myths of Castro, Guevara, and Cuba*

Procedure

Do Now:

Students will be asked to respond to the following questions:

A. In what ways does "Hollywood" change history to serve its purpose? How do you define Hollywood's purpose?

B. What do you know about Fidel Castro and Che Guevara? Where have you heard this information?

Lesson:

The teacher will explain how Hollywood and other influential figures have corrupted the images of Fidel Castro and Che Guevara while reading through the *5 Myths of Castro, Guevara, and Cuba* handout.

The teacher will read aloud and annotate both texts, *The Real Fidel Castro and Cuba* and *The Real Che Guevara* with students to allow for emphasis and discussion if needed. **The texts used for the lesson contain graphic details. Use your best judgment on whether to use these texts with your students.* The teacher will provide a model of completing one row of the handout, *Debunking the Myths of Castro, Guevara, and Cuba*.



Collaborative/Independent Work:

Students will work together in groups of 2-4 to complete the handout. This activity requires students to identify at the least three myths that have been proven false by citing text evidence. Students will then contemplate why this myth was created, and rate how difficult it may be for people to accept the truth and why. (If the column asking *why this myth was created* has similar answers, it is expected as students will find that communist countries have a trend of using propaganda and manipulating facts to hide reality.)

Share:

Students will share their findings with the class. The teacher will point out areas of agreement and stress the difficulties attaining information on the repression of human rights due to the manipulation of data, lack of archival access, and expulsion of a free press.

Close:

Students will respond to the following question:

Which myth do you think is the most dangerous to spread and not correct? Explain why.

Modifications

- The teacher may assign myths to debunk for students regarding level of difficulty.
- The teacher may modify texts, but must not change the meaning.

Extension

The teacher may add the text, *United Nations General Assembly: The Resistance to Che Guevara*, to extend the lesson into an analysis of Che Guevara's imperialistic goals and his failure to be regarded as a revolutionary hero by his neighboring nations.

Notes

**Use discretion for activities according to what is appropriate for your class.*

****The texts used for the lesson contain graphic details. Use your best judgment on whether to use these texts with your students.***

****Research for this topic is limited due to discrepancies in accurate details, including statistics, which have been left out due to this issue. As more reliable research is revealed, these documents will be updated. The manipulation of data, lack of archival access, and repression of a free press has limited information available from communist countries.***



5 Myths of Fidel Castro, Che Guevara, and Communist Cuba

Myth #1: Fidel Castro and Che Guevara fought for peace, equality, and justice.

Myth #2: Cuba is an exception to communist regimes who are known for their violence, repression of human rights, murderous campaigns, and economic disasters.

Myth #3: Fidel Castro cared for the sick and provided excellent healthcare for all. A low infant mortality rate is a result of this medical care.

Myth #4: Fidel Castro brought education to a new level in Cuba with an increased literacy rate for the general well-being of the Cuban people.

Myth #5: Che Guevara was a revolutionary hero who wanted to bring people out of poverty and help others do the same around the world.



The Real Fidel Castro and Cuba

Note: Many, including Hollywood, who have bought into his propaganda regard Fidel Castro as a heroic leader of Cuba; the truth is that he was a mass murderer, guilty of both genocide and the extreme repression of human rights.

After the success of his bloody revolution, Fidel Castro brought death, destruction, and fear to Cubans who suffered under his regime which he established in 1959. Thousands were killed and thousands died trying to flee the brutal dictatorship. Like all communist regimes, Castro used propaganda and manipulated records to cover up his crimes against humanity which were present in every sphere of society.

Genocide Watch has placed Castro's regime on its list of "governments guilty of genocide." According to international law (which was amended at the request of Josef Stalin to exclude the murder of political opponents so that his government, which was doing just that, would not be classified as being guilty of genocide), defines genocide as "... any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such: (a) Killing members of the group; (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; (d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; (e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group. Article III: The following acts shall be punishable: (a) Genocide; (b) Conspiracy to commit genocide; (c) Direct and public incitement to commit genocide; (d) Attempt to commit genocide; (e) Complicity in genocide."

Although the number of deaths has been widely disagreed upon, Genocide Watch estimates that 35,000 to over 140,000 people were killed between 1959 to 1987. (Statistics from communist countries are virtually non-existent as records are either manipulated or not kept in these rogue nations. The number of deaths in Cuba is likely in the hundreds of thousands as historical evidence suggests.)

Genocide Watch has classified Castro's Cuba at phase five (out of ten) of genocide which is "organization." At this stage, the state and militias carry out espionage, arrests, torture, and murder to eliminate anyone suspected of opposing the regime. Castro's loyal followers carried out these crimes, especially the murderous and ruthless Che Guevara.

Once Castro came to power, he established the infamous La Cabaña prison that was reserved for those who opposed the regime. The following descriptions are from Frank Emmick, an American who was sentenced to 30 years in a Cuban prison for suspected espionage. He served 14 of his 30-year sentence after he was released to U.S. representatives. Emmick reported that the conditions in this prison were horrific.



Hundreds of prisoners were packed in rooms that were too small, very dark, and lacked proper ventilation. Even the cement floor where they slept, on the tiny inches of space they had, was in poor condition. The sanitary conditions were non-existent as the prisoners shared a hole in the cement floor that was used for a toilet, and some occasionally received a bucket and can for a bath. If prisoners received food, they had a ration of water twice a day. If these political prisoners were not already killed, some were sent to Isle of Pines prison, a forced labor camp, which also meant certain death.

There are many misrepresentations about this dictator's leadership of Cuba. Myths that have engulfed Hollywood, and those who want communism to seem appealing, include but are not limited to Cuba's healthcare system and literacy rate. Like all other communist nations, the government uses dishonesty and deceit to manipulate the world into believing that they are doing good work; however, those who seek the truth are bound to discover it as they look behind the closed doors instead of just those that are opened to visitors by the government.

The real healthcare system in Cuba is a devastating mess in which the most basic needs are not and cannot be provided for. If one opts to go to a crumbling hospital, they must bring their own supplies including toilet paper, bed sheets, soap, food, and light bulbs. Basic medication is scarce and if one needs an antibiotic, the cost is outrageous as it has to be acquired illegally. Doctors have either old or no equipment; they are even forced to reuse gloves with no other choice. They barely make any money, about \$25 a month, and many are forced to find additional ways to make money. Healthcare is so bad in Cuba that old diseases have resurfaced including tuberculosis, leprosy, and typhoid fever. Although many credit Cuba with a favorable infant mortality rate, it is largely due to ending pregnancies if there are any reasons for concern, often without the mother's consent. Sadly, many people do not know the real conditions of the healthcare of ordinary Cubans. Foreigners and tourists in Cuba have separate healthcare in which they see state-of-the-art facilities that are clean and well-stocked, not the decrepit hospitals and ill-equipped doctors that deprive the people of proper care. If a doctor tries to create their own practice, they would be deemed an "enemy of the state," and their fate would likely find them in a political prison.

Cuba's image worldwide was important to Castro who wanted to make it *look* like a paradise to others, and, in many cases, he sadly has succeeded. Castro has sent Cuban doctors to places like Venezuela on "humanitarian medical missions," with state-of-the-art medical supplies. The equipment and medical supplies that Cuba has are reserved for these self-serving propagandist campaigns, not for their own ordinary people. Afraid that a Cuban doctor sent abroad will not return, the government usually sends married doctors so that their families are essentially held hostage making it likely that they will return, and the doctors are intensely watched. Still, many have defected, and when they have reached freedom, they tell the truth.



In addition to the misrepresentations of its healthcare system, Cuba has also used their literacy rate as a means of fooling the world into thinking that they are an exceptional nation. The purpose of teaching their population literacy was so that they would read the government's propaganda. Sadly, their intention was to corrupt the minds of their people to ingrain communist thought into their heads so that nothing would threaten their loyalty to the dictatorship. The more their people soak up the brainwashing of communist propaganda, the more likely they are to believe it and not question the injustices they face.

In 2006, Fidel Castro fell ill, and the country was in control of his brother, Raul, though not officially until 2008.

According to Human Rights Watch, as of 2020 Cuba is still repressing human rights by controlling all media outlets and punishing political dissenters, among many other violations. Their intolerance for civil rights has made Cuba a dangerous place to live for anyone who wishes to express their freedoms, especially for those who identify with groups that the Cuban government deems are unacceptable. Cuba does not allow any human rights organizations access to their prisons or other facilities, and punishes those who "attempt to document abuses."

Sources:

Emmick, Frank. "An American's 14 Years in Cuban Prisons." *The New York Times*, 1978.
<https://www.nytimes.com/1978/04/12/archives/an-americans-14-years-in-cuban-prisons.html>

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<https://www.nationalreview.com/2007/07/myth-cuban-health-care/>

The Issue of Genocide and Cuba. <https://cubaverdad.net/genocide.htm>



The Real Che Guevara

Note: Hollywood and pop culture have falsely romanticized and depicted Che Guevara as a hero, and many people boast his image not knowing why. The reality is that Che Guevara was far from a hero; his murderous "revolution" left thousands dead and his communist campaigns, like all others, left the Cuban people devastated.

Ernesto Che Guevara met Cuban Revolutionary Fidel Castro while in Mexico in 1955, and joined his campaign to overthrow Batista's government. Guevara's commitment to Castro and socialism led to a bloody revolution that mirrored all other socialist revolutions. Guevara became Castro's military advisor and led guerilla troops against Batista. In 1959, Guevara was in charge of the infamous La Cabaña prison, and brought torture and suffering to those he herded into concentration camps. He also became the president of the Cuban National Bank and guided Cuba's relations away from the United States towards his idol, the Soviet Union, which resulted in crumbling the economy. Through his socialist policies and violent actions, Guevara only managed to bring pain and suffering to the people of Cuba.

Guevara ordered hundreds of people to be executed, without trial, having no concern for guilt or innocence. According to the official Cuban newspaper, *Revolución*, Guevara said in 1962, "In times of excessive tension we cannot proceed weakly. At the Sierra Maestra, we executed many people by firing squad without knowing if they were fully guilty. At time, the Revolution cannot stop to conduct much investigation; it has the obligation to triumph." When speaking to the United Nations General Assembly in 1964, Guevara stated, "...executions? Yes, we have executed people; we are executing people and shall continue to execute people as long as it is necessary."

Guevara's bloodthirsty leadership and the toppling of the Cuban economy made no one safe. His incitement of violence is not only revealed in his actions, but in his words in which he wrote, "It is hatred that makes our soldiers into violent and cold-blooded killing machines." His instructions to execute without hesitation led to the death of numerous innocent people. He sent capitalists, members of the LGBTQ community, religious groups, and many others into concentration camps at gunpoint where they suffered under heinous conditions. The first concentration camp established there, Guanahacabibes, was a place of death and torture. The overcrowded concentration camps can be defined by their horrific conditions that included traumatizing experiences of abuse. Thousands died trying to escape this deadly regime and thousands more became refugees.

In early 1961, as Minister of Industry, Guevara brought his "social justice" ideas to the economy where he managed to nearly destroy sugar production, failed to industrialize, and introduced rationing to the people of Cuba. The land redistribution, a major characteristic of communism, was not given to peasants but to bureaucrats. Manpower cultivating land was reduced and transferred to other areas, which severely diminished the harvest. It has been reported that by 1997, Cubans were rationed to "five pounds of rice and one pound of beans per month; four ounces of meat



twice a year; four ounces of soybean paste per week; and four eggs per month." The goal to industrialize was never going to be successful as Cuba lacked the raw materials necessary for growing heavy industry. This left Cuba heavily dependent on trade with the Soviet Bloc, exchanging their sugar for oil to meet their needs and sell to other countries. While the people of Cuba suffered, Guevara enjoyed living in a mansion, among other luxuries, that he took over after the revolution.

In 1965, Guevara made the decision to leave his position as the Minister of Industry in Cuba to spread the ideas of Cuba's revolution and socialism around the world. He had many failed attempts at organizing guerilla troops and instigating rebellions throughout Latin America. When he tried to encourage the people of Bolivia to rebel against their government, he was turned over to the army who executed him in 1967.

Today, Guevara is viewed as a falsely romanticized revolutionary hero by those who oppose freedom and the rights and liberties of the United States; however, bringing death and destruction to thousands of people is what defines his legacy.

Sources:

Biography.com <https://www.biography.com/political-figure/che-guevara>

History. <https://www.history.com/topics/south-america/che-guevara>

Jones, Nigel. "It is a sad reflection of our time that Che Guevara is seen as a hero." *The Telegraph*, 2009. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/comment/personal-view/4077397/It-is-a-sad-reflection-of-our-time-that-Che-Guevara-is-seen-as-a-hero.html>

Llosa, Alvaro Vargas. "The Killing Machine: Che Guevara, from Communist Firebrand to Capitalist Brand." *Independent Institute*, 2005. <https://www.independent.org/news/article.asp?id=1535>

Lott, Maxim. "5 inconvenient truths about Che Guevara." *Fox News*, 2019. <https://www.foxnews.com/politics/5-inconvenient-truths-about-che-guevara>



Debunking the Myths of Castro, Guevara, and Cuba

Myth	Evidence that this is not true	Why do you think this myth was created?	On a scale of 1-10 (10 being the most difficult), how difficult will it be for people to accept the truth? Why?



United Nations General Assembly: The Resistance to Che Guevara (Primary Source)

Mr. VOLIO (Costa Rica) (translated from Spanish): In exercise of my right of reply, which I had asked for this morning, I should like to comment on two references to Costa Rica made by Mr. Guevara, the representative of Cuba, at the previous meeting. 6. Mr. Guevara referred to alleged military activities of Cuban exiles in my country and to the recent measures supported by my country taken by the Organization of American States against Cuba. As usual, the Cuban Government has attempted to confuse the United Nations by placing a fanciful interpretation upon the facts.

7. I must categorically deny the existence in Costa Rica of training camps for troops of Cuban or of any other nationality. When rumors of the existence of such camps appeared in our Press—a free and democratic Press and one that is certainly very different from that existing in Cuba—the journalists demanded that there should be a complete investigation. The Government complied and the journalists themselves participated constantly in the investigation. The rumors turned out to be completely unfounded.

8. The Government took the opportunity to state publicly that it would not permit such activities in the country. But this does not mean that Costa Rica will not remain on the alert, ready to defend its sovereignty and its territorial integrity in face of the subversion preached and practiced by the Cuban Government in its systematic plan to export the Marxist-Leninist revolution to Latin America.

9. Since the crisis of October 1962 and the aggression against Venezuela, in particular, we have had recourse to the inter-American legal system in order to defend ourselves against Cuban aggression and subversion. In the last twenty years our country has on two occasions requested the application of the inter-American legal system to help it to defend its sovereignty and its territory. But since Costa Rica belongs to that system not for selfish reasons but because of the strong ties of continental solidarity and responsibility, it has also requested the application of the procedures provided in the Charter of the OAS and of other regional pacts in order to defend the territorial integrity and the sovereignty of other Latin American countries.

10. Thus, I should like to mention the cases of aggression by Trujillo and Castro against the Republic of Venezuela. I do not stand here before you as an accused, replying to charges, but as an accuser; I am here to tell Mr. Guevara that my country will remain on the alert and will repulse the systematic attempts of the Cuban Government to intervene in the affairs of the Latin American countries as an agent of an extra-continental imperialism, and that my country is also prepared to defend and improve the inter-American system as a guarantee of our struggle against all forms of imperialism and as an instrument for the ordering of the relations of the Latin American countries on a legal basis.

Che Guevara: We must say here something that is a well-known truth and that we have always asserted before the whole world: executions? Yes, we have executed people; we are executing people and shall continue to execute people as long as it is necessary.

Source: <https://unwatch.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/Guevara-we-execute-people-english.pdf>

