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*Decision Making in U.S. History*

**The 1960s & the Vietnam War**

By Kevin O'Reilly

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# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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My appreciation goes out to the following for their help on this volume: Dave Boschetto for reviewing Lesson 2, and Sean O'Reilly for research and editing.

This book is dedicated to the memory of Dick Aieta.

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# HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

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Think of this book, and the other books in this series, not as a text, but as a menu. As a teacher, you select lessons from the menu. It was never intended that you would have everything on the menu—that would be overeating. [Take a look at the table of contents.] When choosing a lesson, look first at the problems on the student handout(s), and then at the student handout describing these problems' historical outcomes. If you like what you see, take a look at the lesson plan for ideas on using the handouts. You can teach all of the lessons by giving students a problem handout, having them discuss what they would do, and finally distributing the outcomes handout. You may also consult the “Quick Motivator” section of a lesson plan to use the handouts as a short introduction to class.

On the other hand, you can think of this book as a “how-to” guide for teaching specific decision-making skills while also covering significant events in United States history. The book posits a general guideline of ten distinct skills, organized under the acronym **P-A-G-E** to help students remember these skills. Take a look at the explanation of **P-A-G-E** in the introduction to this book, under the section titled “Guide to Thoughtful Decision Making.” This section explains each of the ten skills and includes examples.

Every lesson in this series analyzes the historical topic in terms of **P-A-G-E**. Each lesson targets specific skills, letting the content and the actual decision in history determine the skills emphasized in the lesson. Take a look at the skills grid for each lesson on page 1 of this book. Handouts are frequently used to focus students on using specific skills. For example, many lessons include a list of questions designed to provoke more questions from students, as well as to give them ideas of the types of questions to ask. Other lessons give students a list of assumptions and ask which they assumed in making their decisions. The other skills have similar handouts.

Whether you try the problem-discussion-outcome approach or concentrate more on specific decision-making skills, I hope these books will help make you a more effective teacher and help your students learn United States history in a way that will help prepare them to make more thoughtful decisions as citizens.

Kevin O'Reilly



# THE 1960S & THE VIETNAM WAR

## Introduction

### OVERVIEW

This volume has eight lessons on the 1960s: four on foreign policy and four on domestic issues. Two of the lessons focus on the Vietnam War: one focuses upon early U.S. involvement in Vietnam (mostly in the 1950s), the second on 1964–1965. These lessons appear consecutively, since many teachers organize all their lessons on Vietnam into one unit. Thus, the lesson on the march on Birmingham is chronologically out of order and comes after the second lesson on Vietnam, in order to keep the two Vietnam lessons together. As with the other volumes in the *Decision Making in U.S. History* series, this book does not cover all the major topics for this time period; instead, the lessons center on a few thought-provoking decision-making problems from the era.

### SKILLS GRID FOR THIS VOLUME

X = part of lesson

E = emphasized in the lesson

Skill	Lesson							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Underlying problem		X	X	X	X	X		
Point of view		X	X	X	X	E	X	
Assumptions/emotions			X			X		
Ask—context	X	E	X	X	X	E	X	X
Ask—sources		X	X			X		
Ask—analogies		X	E		E	X		
Goals? Realistic?	E	X	X		E	X		E
Options. Ethical?		X	X				E	
Unintended consequences		X	X	E	X	X		
Play out option		E	E				X	

# LESSON 1: ELECTION OF 1960

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## Teacher Pages

### OVERVIEW

The 1960 U.S. presidential election was important not only for the candidates who ran, but also for the expansion of television coverage of presidential campaigns. This election featured the first televised presidential debates.

### VOCABULARY

This lesson has no specialized vocabulary.

### DECISION-MAKING SKILLS EMPHASIZED

- Ask about context
- Reflect on goals

# LESSON PLAN

---

## A. IN-DEPTH LESSON (30 minutes)

### Procedure:

Give students the handout on the candidates and ask them to vote and predict who actually won the election. After the discussion, tell them who the candidates were and that John F. Kennedy (Candidate B) won, as noted in Handout 2. Ask students whether they think Kennedy will be a good or bad president for the country based on this description. Was there anything in the description of Kennedy that would indicate how he might handle the Cuban missile crisis?

After you give students Handout 2 (which lists the outcome), ask students why they think the televised presidential debates were important. If possible, show them the photograph of Vice President Nixon wiping his face during the debate. (You can find the photograph at The Museum of TV, available at <http://www.museum.tv/debateweb/html/history/1960/photo3.htm>.) How do students react to this photograph? Should this sort of visual make a difference in the outcome of a political race?

### Reflecting on Decision Making:

Ask students what they learned from this outcome. Next, ask students what decision-making skills they found especially important when deciding for whom they would vote. Which of the letters of **P-A-G-E** applied especially to this election? (See the “Decision-Making Analysis” section below for ideas.) You may want to ask students if they based their votes primarily on character, decision-making skills, or the candidate’s positions on important issues. Discuss their answers, or ask students to write their answers in their journals or in their decision-making logs.

### Placing the Actual Decisions Into Historical Context:

Ask students what the 1960 election showed about the U.S. at the time (possibilities: the effects of the Cold War, the influence of television, the ongoing civil rights movement). Why did they vote differently or the same as voters at the time?

### Connecting to Today:

On what should people generally base their votes in presidential elections: character, skills, or issues? What does the 1960 election show about how to choose candidates in general?

Troubleshooting:

Some students may need to review how the 1960 election fit into the context of the Cold War. You might want to use a map to explain the political and social situations in both Berlin and Formosa.

**B. QUICK MOTIVATOR (10 minutes)**

As homework, have students decide on a candidate from Handout 1. In class the next day, ask them to vote individually and to predict the overall results of the election. Next, tell students the results or give them Handout 2, which describes what happened. Keep the discussion short by focusing only on whether students based their votes more on personal characteristics or on issues.

# TEACHER NOTES FOR EXPANDING DISCUSSION

(For outcomes for students, see Handout 2.)

## WHAT ACTUALLY HAPPENED:

Handout 2 explains John F. Kennedy's victory in the 1960 election and also discusses the role of the televised debates.

## DECISION-MAKING ANALYSIS:

### P = Problem

- Identify any underlying problem
- Consider other points of view
- What are my assumptions? Emotions?

### A = Ask for information (about)

- \* - **Historical context (history of this issue; context in the world)**
- Reliability of sources
- Historical analogies

### G = Goals

- \* - **What are my main goals? Are they realistic?**
- Generate options to help achieve these goals. Are they ethical?

### E = Effects

- Predict unintended consequences
- Play out the options. What could go wrong?

\* Denotes topics emphasized in this lesson

- **Ask about context:** A key factor in the election was the number of people who owned or had access to televisions. By 1960, 88% of households had televisions, and about 65–70 million Americans watched the first televised presidential debates.
- **Reflect on your goals:** Is the primary goal to elect someone with strong character, strong decision-making skills, or the right positions on important issues? In this election, the candidates differed greatly in terms of both character and temperament, and they held very different positions on key issues.

Further Research:

The platforms of the Republican and Democratic Parties are available at The American Presidency Project: <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/platforms.php>. This site also includes the full transcripts of the four televised debates.

# SOURCES

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# LESSON 1: ELECTION OF 1960

## Student Handout 1



You are a voter in the 1960 U.S. presidential election. The nation has experienced a decade of peace and prosperity, and looks optimistically to the decade ahead. However, the U.S. is still involved in the Cold War with the Soviet Union.

Choose the candidate who will be best for the country.

Who do you predict will win the election?

### CANDIDATE A:

#### Positions on Important Issues:

This candidate is the current vice president of the U.S. The summary below of his views on the issues comes from his party's platform and from his speeches:

1. Foreign policy—He argues that his party has stopped the Soviets in Formosa (off the coast of China) and in Berlin. He believes that the U.S. must stand firm with the communists but must be careful not to overspend on the military. He argues that Candidate B is too young and inexperienced to lead the free world against the Soviets. In contrast, Candidate A has met and debated Nikita Khrushchev, the premier (leader) of the Soviet Union.
2. Taxes and spending—Wants to reform taxes to expand business; wants no deficit spending; wants to reduce the national debt
3. Economy—Favors a higher minimum wage as well as private initiatives instead of government programs to improve the economy. He wants to reduce the high cost of living.
4. Trade—Favors free trade, not tariffs
5. Farmers—Supports government aid (subsidies) for farmers in order to keep prices up
6. Labor—Supports the Taft-Hartley Act, which limits the power of unions
7. Medical care—Favors government medical insurance along with private insurance for the elderly. The elderly could choose the type of insurance they want.
8. Civil rights—When Martin Luther King was arrested during the campaign, this candidate did nothing

#### Personal Characteristics:

Candidate A grew up in a very poor Quaker family in California and had five brothers. He wanted to play football in high school but couldn't because he had to take the bus home each day before practice and his family was too poor to get him home another way.