

Lesson Plan

Title: Tracing the Tensions of the Cold War

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Magazine Issue: This lesson is inspired by the “Canada and the Cold War” issue of *Kayak: Canada’s History Magazine for Kids*.

Grade Level: 9, 10, 11, 12

Themes:

- Canada and the Global Community
- National Politics
- Peace and Conflict

Subject Area: Social studies/history

Lesson Overview: In this lesson, students will examine the context of the Cold War and the causes that led to the conflict. They will then determine the significance of each of these events for international relations and its impact on Canada.

Time Required: 2 or 3 periods of 75 minutes

Historical Thinking Concepts:

- Establish *historical significance*
- Utilize *evidence*
- Analyze *cause and consequence*

Learning Outcomes

Students will:

- Identify the causes that led to the Cold War.
- Explain what the Cold War was and its context.
- Show its importance for international relations and Canada.

Background Information:

The Cold War was a period of geopolitical tension with the United States and the Soviet Union and their respective allies. During the time, the world was divided by the capitalist “West” and the communist “East.”

As part of this lesson, there is a short summary of key political and economic events from the end of the Second World War and the early years of the Cold War.

You may also want to review some of the following articles in preparation for this lesson:

- "[Canada and the Cold War](#)," *The Canadian Encyclopedia*
- "[Canadian Forces in Europe During the Cold War](#)," *The Canadian Encyclopedia*
- "[Canada and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization - Historical sheet](#),"
Government of Canada

Lesson Activity:

Activating

- Present students with a [map of Germany](#) according to the London Protocol and lead a discussion where students will have to hypothesize what led to the partition of the country into occupation zones.
- Have students read the article "New World, New Fight" in the [February 2025 issue of Kayak: Canada's History Magazine for Kids](#) to learn more about the division of Germany at the end of the Second World War.

Acquiring

- Divide your students into groups of four and hand out the summary of key political and economic events that contributed to the Cold War. There are suggested links to primary source material or additional secondary source summaries for each event. You may want students to examine these additional resources or have your students do their own extended research to support them in their analysis.
- Task students with reflecting on the question, "What caused the Cold War?" Have them create a table where they can classify and arrange each of the events according to their degree of importance in causing the Cold War (e.g. very important, moderately important, not important). Students will have to explain the reasons for their choices to the rest of their group.
- To establish the historical significance of the Cold War, students will look at key events. Have them create a timeline and classify whether they contributed to the formation of the Eastern and Western Blocs.
 - » Beginnings of the Zhdanov Doctrine
 - » Truman Doctrine
 - » Marshall Plan
 - » Creation of the Cominform
 - » Czechoslovak coup d'état

- » Creation of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)
 - » Warsaw Pact
 - » Creation of the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (Comecon)
 - » Signing of the North Atlantic Treaty (NATO)
 - » Berlin Blockade
 - » USSR has the atomic bomb
 - » Creation of the German Democratic Republic (GDR)
 - » Creation of the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG)
- Using the article “Chilling Times” in the [February 2025 issue of Kayak](#), have students add events up to 1960 on their timeline. This will allow them to consider some of the domestic developments taking place in regards to the Cold War.
 - Ask students to consider the major consequences of the various alliances and international crises during the Cold War. Direct them to think about how Canada was involved or not in international relations during this time.

Applying

- At the end of the lesson, have students write a short text where they explain how the Cold War affected Canada. They will need to explain what the Cold War reveals about history and how it led to profound changes, justifying this with evidence. Once students have completed their writing, you can lead a discussion about it with the entire class.

Summary of Early Cold War Events

The London Protocol (September 12, 1944)

The London Protocol outlined the Allied powers' plan to divide Germany into occupation zones after the Second World War, marking an important step toward managing post-war Europe. **More details:**

- [English](#)
 - [Français](#)
-

Yalta Conference (February 11, 1945)

The Yalta Conference brought together Winston Churchill, Theodore Roosevelt, and Joseph Stalin to discuss the end of the Second World War and the future of Europe. Their agreements on borders and power-sharing also planted the seeds for Cold War tensions. **More details:**

- [English](#) | [Context](#)
 - [Français](#) | [Contexte](#)
-

Churchill's "Iron Curtain" Speech (March 5, 1946)

Speaking at Westminster College in Missouri, Winston Churchill delivered a speech warning of the growing divide between Western democracies and Soviet-controlled Eastern Europe. He described this divide as an "Iron Curtain." **More details:**

- [English](#)
 - [Français](#)
-

Truman Doctrine (March 12, 1947)

President Harry Truman promised that the United States would support countries resisting communism by providing economic and military aid. This marked the start of active U.S. involvement in the Cold War. **More details:**

- [English](#)
- [Français](#)

Marshall Plan (June 1947)

U.S. Secretary of State George Marshall proposed an economic aid program to rebuild Western Europe and stop the spread of communism. **More details:**

- [English](#) | [Context](#)
 - [Français](#)
-

Zhdanov Doctrine and the Cominform (September-October 1947)

Soviet leader Andrei Zhdanov articulated the Soviet view of a world divided into two camps: the “imperialist” West and the “democratic” communist East. The creation of the Cominform followed, establishing a network to coordinate communist parties under Soviet leadership. These developments were in response to the Truman Doctrine and Marshall Plan. **More details:**

- [English](#)
 - [Français](#) | [Contexte](#)
-

Czechoslovak Coup d'état (February 1948)

Communist forces, supported by the Soviet Union, seized power in Czechoslovakia, forcing the resignation of the democratic government. This event, known as the “Prague Coup,” eliminated one of Eastern Europe’s last democracies and intensified Western fears of communist expansion. **More details:**

- [English](#)
 - [Français](#)
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Berlin Blockade and Airlift (June 1948 - May 1949)

The Berlin Blockade was one of the first major crises of the Cold War. The Soviet Union blocked all ground access to West Berlin, attempting to force the Western allies out of the city. In response, the United States and Britain organized a massive airlift to supply the city with essential goods for 11 months. **More details:**

- [English](#)
- [Français](#)

Creation of the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA or COMECON) (January 1949)

Established by the Soviet Union as a response to the Marshall Plan, COMECON coordinated economic cooperation between Soviet-bloc countries. This organization aimed to integrate the economies of Eastern European nations under Soviet leadership and provide an alternative to Western economic cooperation. More details:

- [English](#)
 - [Français](#)
-

Signing of the NATO Treaty (April 4, 1949)

Twelve nations signed the North Atlantic Treaty, creating NATO as a collective defense organization against Soviet expansion. This military alliance formalized the Western bloc and established the principle that an attack on one member would be considered an attack on all. More details:

- [English](#)
 - [Français](#)
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Creation of the FRG (May 1949)

The Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) was established as a democratic state in the American, British, and French occupation zones of western Germany. With its capital in Bonn, the FRG adopted a democratic constitution, embraced parliamentary democracy, and aligned with Western powers. More details:

- [English](#)
 - [Français](#)
-

Creation of the GDR (October 1949)

The German Democratic Republic (GDR) was established in the Soviet-controlled zone as a response to the FRG's creation. Based in East Berlin, the GDR was formed as a socialist state and maintained close political, economic, and military ties with the Soviet Union. More details:

- [English](#)
- [Français](#)

USSR Tests the Atomic Bomb (August 29, 1949)

The Soviet Union successfully tested its first atomic bomb, breaking the U.S. monopoly on nuclear weapons and escalating the arms race. **More details:**

- [English](#)
- [Français](#)