“Duck and Cover” (Civil Defense)
Teacher Page

Overview:

In the years following World War II, the United States enjoyed a nuclear monopoly. However, in the late 1940s, the Soviet Union also developed nuclear weapons, and a long arms race ensued. As each side built more and deadlier weapons, the United States government found itself trying to assure citizens that a nuclear war was not only winnable, but survivable.

Thousands of Americans built fallout shelters, thinking that going underground would protect them, and schoolchildren were required to participate in drills to “sharpen” their skills in “ducking and covering” when the bombs fell.

Objectives:

Students will:
- view and analyze a Civil Defense video
- speculate on the impact such films would have had on American schoolchildren and American society
- make inferences about the role of Civil Defense in American society

Web Site Used in this Lesson:

Direct students to the “Gallery” page at the Propaganda Critic site (http://www.propagandacritic.com/gallery) and ask them to click on the “Duck and Cover” video. (Note: In order to access the video, Real Player must be installed on the computer and a sound card must be installed. Links for a “broadband” (network) connection as well as a “dial-up” connection are available. Test the site prior to starting the lesson to ensure that you can access the site and that the video is playable.)

Strategies:

Introduce the lesson by giving a quick overview of how Civil Defense worked. The Cold War Era Civil Defense Museum site (http://www.civildefensemuseum.com/) is a good resource for understanding the basic idea of the duties of Civil Defense.

Ask students if they are aware of any visible signs of Civil Defense today. Some students may note that they have seen Civil Defense mentioned in popular movies during their lives, as well as on television. Other students may be familiar with the Civil Defense emblem or may have seen signs declaring “Fallout Shelter” on older buildings.

Next, either prepare to play the “Duck and Cover” video, or ask students to access and play the video. (Note: the video is over nine minutes, and it may be necessary to play it more than once for the students to be able to answer the worksheet questions.)
the student worksheets. Due to the nature of the questions and the resource (a film), it is suggested that students read through the questions before starting the video, then take notes on the film as it plays. After that, have students go back and answer the questions based on their written notes.

Allow sufficient time for the students to complete the worksheets. Student answers for each question may vary, but should average 3–5 sentences.

Wrap-Up:

After students have completed the worksheets, have a discussion focused on the following issue:

Was the Cold War actually heightened because of Civil Defense films that made a nuclear conflict appear “winnable”?

Extension Activity:

Using sources such as the Cold War Civil Defense Museum site, ask students to make posters or multimedia presentations on the role of Civil Defense during the 1950s and 1960s.
“Duck and Cover” (Civil Defense)
Student Worksheet

Introduction:

Many Americans were lulled into a sense of false security during the 1950s and 1960s because of Civil Defense. Through various pamphlets and films, Civil Defense made people believe that a nuclear war was survivable. People were encouraged to stockpile supplies, as well as to build fallout shelters in case of an attack. Even small children were instructed how to survive a nuclear attack: various films and school drills were designed to teach elementary-age students to “duck and cover.”

Directions:

All Web links for this lesson can be found at: http://www.socialstudies.com/uslinks.html

Propaganda Critic: Video Gallery
http://www.propagandacritic.com/gallery/

Click on the link for “Duck and Cover” (be sure to follow the teacher’s instructions for which link to click). View the video and take notes while the film plays. After the film is over, answer the following questions.

1. What animals does the filmmaker use in the opening of the film to represent American schoolchildren and the enemy?

2. Who produced the film? Who consulted in the making of it?

3. In the film, the narrator says that the atomic bomb is “very dangerous,” and equates it with other dangers children face. What dangers are listed? Why do you think the producers of the film chose to do this?

4. How does the narrator describe what happens in an atomic explosion? How does the narrator describe what might happen to children in an explosion? How does the narrator describe “duck and cover”?
5. What two different types of nuclear attack does the narrator state might happen? Which one does the narrator claim probably will happen? Why do you think the producers of the film claimed this?

6. How does the narrator describe what children should do if there’s an attack without any warning?

7. How does “Tony the Cub Scout” do the “duck and cover” drill? Who assists Tony when the all clear sounds?

8. How does the family on a picnic protect themselves from atomic blasts?

9. What does the narrator of the film suggest students do if they have any questions about what to do if the bomb explodes? In case of a nuclear attack, what does the narrator suggest students should do (1) if there are adults around, and (2) if there aren’t adults around?

10. In your view, did Civil Defense and the producers of this film really believe the “facts” presented in this film, or did they believe the film would serve as propaganda to ease the minds of children or parents who were concerned that war between the U.S. and USSR was inevitable?