

OFFICIAL
TEACHER S GUIDE
DEVELOPED BY THE CHOICES PROGRAM



A FILM BY KOJI MASUTANI

VIRTUAL JFK

VIETNAM IF KENNEDY HAD LIVED

choices.edu/virtualjfk

virtualjfk.com

SYNOPSIS

Virtual JFK investigates one of the most debated “what if” scenarios in the history of U.S. foreign policy: What would President John F. Kennedy have done in Vietnam if he had not been assassinated in 1963, and had he been elected in 1964? The film employs what Harvard historian Niall Ferguson calls “virtual history,” assessing the plausibility of “what ifs” and the outcomes they might have produced.

The heart of the film deals with the questions: Can a president make a decisive difference in matters of war and peace? Can a president decisively lead his country into war, or keep his country out of war? Or are the forces that drive nations into conflict far more impersonal – out of the control of any single human being, even a president?



NOTE TO TEACHERS

This guide is designed to help students think about complex issues raised by *Virtual JFK*. The film revisits the Vietnam War, one of the most controversial wars in U.S. history, and considers what the role of John F. Kennedy might have been if he had not been assassinated. The story takes place in the midst of the Cold War and tempestuous partisan politics in the United States.



Exploring key historical events and considering the role of presidential decision making in matters of war and peace is a classroom challenge. Yet providing students with the opportunity to reflect on these issues and participate in an informed discussion is invaluable.

The activities provided in this guide can help students explore and develop their own views. Teachers may want to consult the Choices Program’s Guidelines for Deliberation <<http://www.choices.edu/deliberation>> as a means of promoting careful consideration of controversial issues.

Each lesson in this guide can be used independently or in combination. There is also a graphic organizer to help students organize information from the film. We hope that you and your students enjoy viewing this film and that you find the materials in this guide a provocative and new way to explore history and to consider the influence that leaders have on major events.

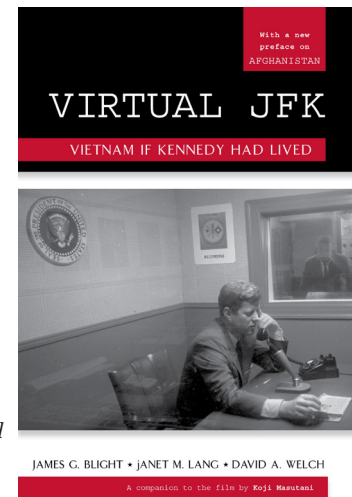
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The companion book to the film contains excerpts from recently declassified documents, oral testimony of White House officials from both the Kennedy and Johnson administrations, and the analysis of top historians.

THE CHOICES FOR THE 21ST CENTURY EDUCATION PROGRAM is a program of the Watson Institute for International Studies at Brown University. CHOICES was established to help citizens think constructively about foreign policy issues, to improve participatory citizenship skills, and to encourage public judgement on policy issues.



The Watson Institute for International Studies was established at Brown University in 1986 to serve as a forum for students, faculty, visiting scholars, and policy practitioners who are committed to analyzing contemporary global problems and developing initiatives to address them.

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HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Cold War—From the end of World War II until the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, world politics was dominated by the East-West Cold War: a tense and dangerous peace between the two superpowers. While East and West were caught in a nuclear stand-off, lethal “proxy” wars were fought all over the globe between allies of the United States and allies of the Soviet Union and/or the People’s Republic of China. At the time of Kennedy’s presidency, Nikita Khrushchev was the leader of the Soviet Union.

Nuclear Weapons—Two nuclear bombs dropped by the United States on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945 killed more than 150,000 people. By 1946, the atomic bomb was being called “the ultimate weapon,” a force of unprecedented destructiveness. In 1949, the Soviet Union detonated its first nuclear device. A nuclear arms race ensued between the Soviet Union and the United States, as each side threatened the other with thousands of nuclear weapons.

Bay of Pigs—In January 1961, after his inauguration as president, Kennedy learned that the Eisenhower administration had planned an operation to overthrow Cuban President Fidel Castro. The CIA had trained fourteen hundred Cuban exiles to invade Cuba, march toward Havana, and start a rebellion against Castro. Kennedy worried that an invasion might cause the Soviet Union to react militarily in Berlin or elsewhere. Nonetheless, Kennedy approved the invasion, with the provision that U.S. military forces not be used. The landing at the Bay of Pigs on April 17, 1961 was a complete failure.

Berlin—The United States, the Soviet Union, Great Britain, and France each occupied sectors of Berlin after defeating Germany in World War II. In 1958, the Soviet Union demanded a resolution to the divided status of Berlin. The Soviets argued that Berlin was in their occupation zone of eastern Germany and should fall completely under their control. This prompted hundreds of thousands

of East Germans to flee to the West through West Berlin. To stem the flow, the East Germans, with Soviet approval, built a wall in August 1961 to seal off West Berlin.

Cuban Missile Crisis—When the Soviet Union placed nuclear weapons on the island of Cuba in 1962, a thirteen-day superpower showdown ensued. The United States and the Soviet Union came to the brink of nuclear war. The crisis has come to be recognized as the most dangerous confrontation of the Cold War. Disaster was avoided only at the last moment when Soviet Premier Khrushchev agreed to remove the missiles, President Kennedy agreed not to attack Cuba, and Cuban President Castro agreed to permit the Soviets to remove the weapons.

During the missile crisis, many U.S. policy makers feared that Berlin again would become a point of conflict. They thought that the Soviets might demand that the United States leave Berlin in exchange for removing their missiles from Cuba. Another possibility was that the Soviets would counter a U.S. attack on Cuba with an attack on West Berlin.

Vietnam War—In the mid-1950s, the United States intervened militarily in Vietnam, beginning what has been called a “crisis in slow motion.” Many people in the United States were convinced that the fall of South Vietnam to communism would result in the fall of all of Southeast Asia. The U.S. government got involved in the war to prevent North Vietnam from unifying North and South Vietnam under Communist leadership. To the combined Communist forces of the North Vietnamese and the National Liberation Front the war was a sign of U.S. imperial ambitions in the South. The war stretched across several generations and killed more than three million Vietnamese and 58,000 U.S. troops. There was intense international opposition to the war and widespread protest at home. The U.S. loss in Vietnam dealt a profound psychological blow to U.S. society.



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BEFORE VIEWING THE FILM

1 The following key terms are used during the movie. You may want write them on the board and ask students to suggest definitions. Revisit them after the movie to add more detail to the definitions.

national interest

Cold War

conventional war

communist

appeasement

Kremlin

unilaterally

insurgency

virtual history

nuclear weapons

nuclear war

Cold War pawn

guerilla

nuclear strike capability

full retaliatory response

limited war

fallout shelter

moratorium

impeachment

Berlin Wall

domino theory

quarantine

memo

2 The film contains references to key players in history whom students may not be familiar with. You may want to write them on the board and review them briefly with students.

Richard M. Nixon

Fidel Castro

Maxwell Taylor

Lucius Clay

McGeorge Bundy

Hubert Humphrey

Nikita Khrushchev

Adlai Stevenson

Andrei Gromyko

Dean Rusk

Curtis Lemay

Robert McNamara

Henry Cabot Lodge, Jr.

Barry Goldwater

Pierre Salinger

Lyndon Johnson

3 Ask students to read the film's synopsis and the "Historical Background" to familiarize themselves with the content of the film.

4 Ask students to recall anything they have learned about John F. Kennedy either from assignments in their history classes or from relatives who might have lived during the time he was president. What adjectives do people use to characterize him? How is his tenure remembered? For homework prior to viewing, ask students to research John F. Kennedy. Suggest that they conduct an interview with someone who lived during his presidency.

VIEWING THE FILM

1. Distribute the graphic organizer to the class.
2. Instruct students to select a point in the film that they find particularly interesting and be prepared to share this with the class.

AFTER VIEWING THE FILM

1. Ask students to recall the most striking moments of the film. Why do students remember those parts especially?
2. What is virtual history? Encourage students to come up with their own examples. Why does Professor James Blight say this kind of history is controversial? Why does he say it is useful?
3. What argument does the film make? How does it make its argument? For example, what evidence does it use? What kinds of primary sources does it use? What other sources does it use? Do students find the film convincing? Why or why not?
4. What did students learn about the events discussed in the film? What did they learn about John F. Kennedy? What impressions do they have of him, now that they have seen the film?
5. Have students consider the statement “It really matters who is president during times of war and peace.” Do students think that Kennedy would have followed a different course than President Johnson did in Vietnam after 1963? Why or why not? Do students think that Johnson chose to send combat troops to Vietnam or that he was forced to send those troops? Why? Do students think that Johnson could have chosen to not send troops to Vietnam? Why? Or why not? Why might Kennedy have chosen differently?



GRAPHIC ORGANIZER

Instructions: Use this chart to keep track of any information you learn from the film about the crises during Kennedy's presidency. Record as much information as you can, including dates, the names of important figures, and the outcome of each crisis.

Crisis Name	Description of Crisis	What Kennedy's Advisors Recommended	Kennedy's Decision	Outcome of Crisis
I. The Bay of Pigs				
II. Laos				
III. Berlin				
IV. Showdown over Vietnam				
V. Cuban Missile Crisis				
VI. The Withdrawal				



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VIETNAM IF KENNEDY HAD LIVED

ACTIVITY 1: SEEING IS BELIEVING

Objectives:

- Assess the value of visual and written sources.
- Compare a transcript with the actual visual record.

1. Break the class into small groups. Distribute “Seeing is Believing” to the groups and have them read and answer the questions. When the groups have completed the first two questions, play the actual footage of the reporter’s questions and Kennedy’s response. (Chapter 8 of the DVD at 34 minutes and 30 seconds.) You may want to play this more than once.

2. Have the students answer the final three questions. Call on groups to share their answers with the class.

3. Did students notice Kennedy shaking his head during the reporter’s question? Does that change how we understand Kennedy’s answer to the question? Most of the time, documents are assumed to be reliable sources of information. Is that the case this time?

When analyzing history, should we rely on what we read in documents? Or should we look for other evidence as well? Ask students first to make the case that it is only what is actually said that should be considered. Then have them suggest reasons that the visual record helps understand Kennedy’s true thinking on the matter.

Why do students think the filmmakers put this clip in the film?

HANDOUT: SEEING IS BELIEVING

Instructions: You are going to compare a transcript of a news conference to video footage. You are going to be asked to consider whether any important information is revealed in the video footage that is not in the transcript. Read the transcript below and answer the first two questions. Then your teacher will play the video footage of the news conference.

REPORTER: [The] decision to send General Taylor to Vietnam...there may be some interpretation of that decision as implying confirmation of reports that you intend to send American forces to Vietnam or to Thailand or to Laos. Can you give us your appraisal of the conditions under which you might find it necessary to send troops?

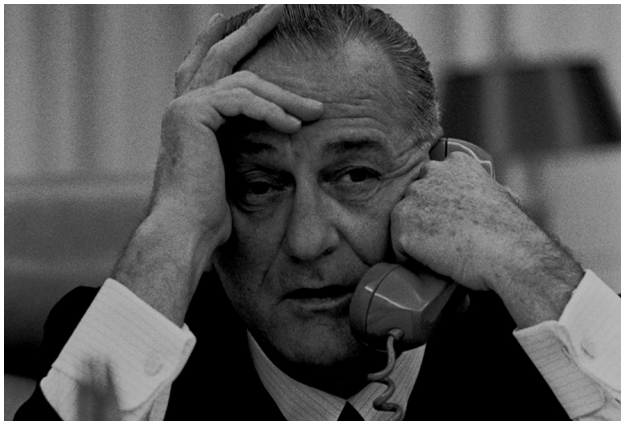
JFK: Well, we're going to, uh, wait until General Taylor comes back and brings an up-to-date description of the situation, particularly in Vietnam. General Taylor will, uh, give me and, uh, the Joint Chiefs of Staff an educated military guess as to what the situation of the government there faces. Then we can come to conclusion as to what is best to do.

1. Summarize the reporter's question.
2. Read Kennedy's response. Summarize his answer.
3. Now watch the actual answer to the question. Does the answer match the transcript?
4. Describe Kennedy's body language and mannerisms during the answer. Do you have a different impression after watching his answer than after reading it? Why might Kennedy's physical response have been different from his verbal response? Did Kennedy intend this or is there another reason?
5. In general, why might different impressions of verbal statements be interesting to those investigating historical questions? How might they be problematic?

ACTIVITY 2: TO FIGHT OR NOT TO FIGHT

Objectives:

- Consider the role of the president in matters of war and peace.
- Examine the rationales for and against going to war in the film.



1. Put the questions “Why should a country go to war?” and “When should a country stay out of war?” on the board. Record students’ answers on the board.

Challenge students to think further. For example, are presidents always able to have a choice about going to war? Are there events that necessitate action, no matter what the values or opinions of a leader? For example, did the United States have to respond to the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941, regardless of what President Roosevelt might have believed? What about after the attacks of September 11? Could a president choose not to respond to a nuclear strike on the United States? Challenge students to think of other examples. Distribute the handout “To Fight or Not to Fight”

2. Play chapter 9 of the DVD (Cuban Missile Crisis 1). Ask students to fill out their chart. Have students consider General LeMay’s statement to President Kennedy that Kennedy doesn’t have a choice but to go to war. Why does LeMay say this? How do students react to LeMay’s statement?

3. Play chapter 15 (Enter Hubert Humphrey) and chapter 17 (Framing Vietnam). Have students record their answers in the chart as they watch. Have students discuss their charts. What sorts of reasons were given for going to war? What sorts of reasons were given for staying out of war? Which reasons do students find most compelling?

4. Play Chapter 18 (Epilogue and Credits) Professor James Blight states that Johnson hated the war and that it deeply affected him. What reasons can students give about why Johnson chose to escalate the war in Vietnam?

Do students believe Johnson’s decision was based on his personal beliefs, on events outside of his control, or both? Does the film give information to answer this question satisfactorily?

In the film Johnson argues that Kennedy would not have withdrawn from Vietnam if he had lived. This is a different interpretation from the filmmaker’s argument about what Kennedy would have done. What arguments can students make that support Johnson’s assertion? What arguments can students make that refute it?

Professor Blight says that Kennedy was a different kind of president and that it matters a great deal who is president concerning matters of war and peace. Is this true? What were the qualities that made Kennedy different? Based on what they have seen in the film, have students list as many as possible.

Have students consider what it would be like if history were different. How would we understand Kennedy today if the Soviet Union had launched a nuclear attack on the United States from Cuba? How would we understand Johnson if the United States had won the war in Vietnam? Have students reconsider the reasons for and against war listed in their charts. Would they interpret these reasons more or less favorably if events had ended differently?

HANDOUT: TO FIGHT OR NOT TO FIGHT

Instructions: Your teacher will replay selections from the movie. Fill in the chart below as you watch the excerpts.

	CUBAN MISSILE CRISIS	VIETNAM UNDER PRESIDENT JOHNSON
REASON(S) FOR WAR		
REASON(S) AGAINST WAR		
PRESIDENT'S ULTIMATE DECISION		
WHAT FACTORS INFLUENCED THE PRESIDENT'S DECISION?		

EXTRA CHALLENGES & DISCUSSIONS

1. One historian has called the Bay of Pigs invasion “The Perfect Failure.” Failure is usually thought of as a bad thing. But was the failure at the Bay of Pigs a good thing or a useful thing? What arguments support the idea that failure at the Bay of Pigs paved the way for future success? What are the arguments against that idea?

After the Bay of Pigs, Kennedy famously said, “... victory has a hundred fathers and defeat is an orphan.” Kennedy took responsibility for this failure. Was he right to do so? Can students think of other historical examples of leaders taking responsibility for the failure of government policies? Do they think that admitting failure weakens or strengthens a politician? What are the risks of admitting failure? Ask students to consider a time when they admitted failure. Why did they choose to do so? What were the consequences?

2. The way a film tells its story can have an important influence on how we understand the film’s message. Watch chapter 13 (The Vietnam War). Ask students to notice how the filmmakers tell the story. For example, consider the contrast between the home movies of a young Kennedy with the Zapruder film of the assassination or the watch ticking backwards. What do students think the filmmakers are trying to communicate using these techniques?



EXTRA CHALLENGES & DISCUSSIONS

3. Some observers note that all policy makers choose from a limited range of options when addressing foreign policy issues. What are the ways that presidents can grapple with foreign policy problems? What are the ways that President Kennedy tried to approach foreign policy questions? At the beginning of the film, Professor Blight asks viewers to look for “habits” Kennedy had that would be useful in predicting what he would do. What did he mean by habits? Did students notice any habits of Kennedy during the film? What are the habits that students think presidents should have when dealing with foreign policy questions?

4. The final scene of the movie presents an anonymous saying: “Every time history repeats itself, the price of the lesson goes up.” Ask students to rephrase this in their own words. What do they think are the lessons that the filmmakers want viewers to take from this film? What lessons do students take from the film? Challenge students to apply the lessons they take from the film to international issues today.



BEHIND THE SCENES

THE DIRECTOR

Koji Masutani is the director of *Virtual JFK: Vietnam If Kennedy Had Lived*, a film produced by Professor James Blight, Professor Janet Lang, Professor David A. Welch, and Peter O. Almond, producer of the film *Thirteen Days*.

Masutani also produced, wrote, and directed *The Japanese Textbook Controversy: Through the Eyes of the Next Generation*, shown at the 2005 Cannes Film Festival, among other film festivals; *Ward No. 6*, shown at the 2004 Cannes Film Festival; and *Bobby Goodfella*, selected for the 2003 Ivy League Film Festival.

Masutani received a BA from Brown University in 2005 in international relations. He also studied Japanese, film, and literature at the Stanford University Kyoto Center for Japanese Studies and attended the New York University Tisch School of Drama/Atlantic Theater Company.

CRITICAL ORAL HISTORY

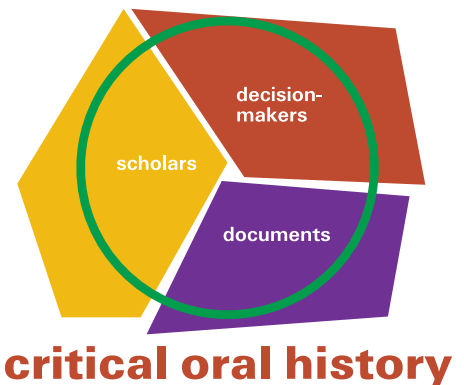
Professors James G. Blight and Janet M. Lang pioneered the method of critical oral history in the study of recent U.S. foreign policy.

The method involves the simultaneous interaction, in a conference setting, of

- declassified documents on the events under scrutiny,
- key officials who participated in the events, and
- top scholars familiar with the documents and events.

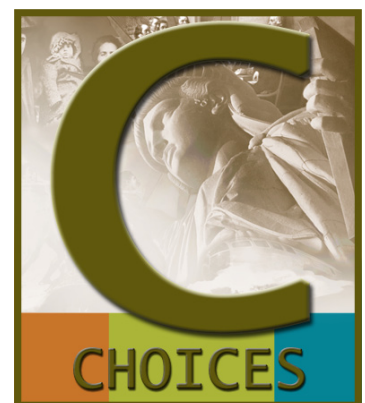
Over the years, Blight and Lang have applied this method most notably to the Cuban missile crisis and the escalation of the U.S. war in Vietnam. More recently, they have turned to U.S.-Iran policy.

The method of critical oral history has been featured in several documentary films with which the two have been involved, including the Oscar-winning *Fog of War* and the 2008 *Virtual JFK: Vietnam If Kennedy Had Lived*. Blight and Lang have also been conducting screenings and training sessions internationally to instruct a new generation of scholars in this technique.



THE CHOICES PROGRAM

The Choices for the 21st Century Education Program is a national education initiative based at Brown University. The Choices Program develops teaching resources on historical and current international issues, provides professional development for classroom teachers, and sponsors programs that engage students beyond the classroom. Choices teaching resources incorporate the latest scholarship to make connections between historical events and contemporary international issues. Choices materials are used in a range of courses including U.S. history, world history, global studies, and government and are in use in eight thousand schools in the United States. Professional development programs for secondary-level teachers take a variety of forms, including introductory workshops, in-service programs, teaching seminars, and summer teaching institutes.



VIRTUAL JFK

VIETNAM IF KENNEDY HAD LIVED

A FILM BY KOJI MASUTANI

SVEN KAHN FILMS presents **A GLOBAL MEDIA PROJECT** production in association with **THE WATSON INSTITUTE FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDIES** a film by **KOJI MASUTANI** “**VIRTUAL JFK: VIETNAM IF KENNEDY HAD LIVED**” original score **JOSHUA KERN** cinematography **EDWARD HUFF KOJI MASUTANI** **CURT WORDEN** post production supervisor **MICHAEL A. DAWSON** production design **ELLEN V. DARLING** **KATHERINE FARRELL ELLEN CARNEY WHITE** graphic design **EMILY FRIEND ROBERTS** special advisors **BENJAMIN C. COLLIER KOSEI MASUTANI GREGORY MAZUREK KAYLEIGH SCALZO** co-producer **MICHAEL PASZT** consulting producer **PAMELA HOGAN** written by **JAMES G. BLIGHT JANET M. LANG KOJI MASUTANI DAVID A. WELCH** producers **PETER O. ALMOND JAMES G. BLIGHT JANET M. LANG KOJI MASUTANI DAVID A. WELCH** produced and directed by **KOJI MASUTANI**

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WWW.VIRTUALJFK.COM

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The Official Teacher's Guide to the Film **VIRTUAL JFK**

This guide is designed to help students think about complex issues raised by *Virtual JFK*. The film investigates one of the most debated “what if” scenarios in the history of U.S. foreign policy: What would President John F. Kennedy have done in Vietnam if he had not been assassinated in 1963, and had he been elected in 1964? The story takes place in the midst of the Cold War and tempestuous partisan politics in the United States.

