

OxfordAQA

International GCSE

History (9245)

Scheme of work

Crises of the Cold War, 1960-1975

For teaching from September 2026 onwards
For International GCSE exams in June 2028 onwards

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Introduction

This scheme of work is intended to help teachers plan and implement the teaching of the Crises of the Cold War, 1960-1975 option of the Oxford AQA International GCSE History (9245) specification. The purpose is to provide advice and guidance to teachers, not to prescribe and restrict their approach to the specification. There are obviously many other ways of organising the work, and there is absolutely no requirement to use this scheme. We hope the suggested activities will support your teaching of this topic.

This study enables students to understand the complex and diverse interests of different states, ideologies and the individuals who represented them. It considers revolutionary movements during this time and their impact on East-West rivalry. It focuses on the global crises of the Cold War and seeks to show how and why conflict occurred and why it proved difficult to resolve the tensions which arose. It considers the role of key individuals and groups in shaping change.

Assumed coverage and teaching hours

This scheme of work assumes that the OxfordAQA International GCSE History (9245) is taught as a two-year linear course, with a total of approximately 120–140 guided learning hours in total, in line with specification guidance. This equates to two hours of teaching per week over two academic years, although this may vary according to local timetabling arrangements and students' prior experience. As this optional topic equates to one quarter of the qualification, this scheme of work is designed to be taught in around 30-35 hours.

Work will also need to be completed outside of lessons. The amount of independent study required will depend on curriculum time, the pace of delivery and the extent to which assessment practice and consolidation activities are incorporated into timetabled lessons.

Assessment

Assessment points in the learning activity column indicate possible assessment opportunities. These could be short tests of about ten minutes (exam-style questions, short factual tests, source evaluation) or longer assessments (exam-style questions).

The assessment in Section A is based on a series of short and extended questions in response to a group of primary and secondary sources (AO3). Different types of visual and written primary and secondary sources will be used in the assessment. A booklet containing three sources will be pre-released before the examination. Two unseen sources, which will not be included in the pre-release booklet, will also be assessed.

It is not permitted to bring any notes or annotations into the exam. A clean-copy source insert containing all five sources will be provided. The booklet of pre-release sources for Section A will be made available on 1 February for the summer series and 1 July for the Autumn series.

- Question 1 tests AO3 and is worth 4 marks. It is based on an unseen source. It requires students to use the source's content and/or provenance and their contextual knowledge to support a given claim. The question will target Part 1 or Part 2 of the specification content.

- Question 2 tests AO3 and is worth 6 marks. It is based on one unseen source and one source from the pre-release booklet. It requires students to explain a difference between the sources using the content of each and their own knowledge. The question will target Part 1 or Part 2 of the specification content.
- Question 3 tests AO3 and is worth 8 marks. It is based on an unseen source. It requires students to use the content, provenance and their own contextual knowledge to evaluate how a source is useful to a historian studying a given issue. The evaluation of the source's limitations (ie how it is not useful) is not required. The question will target Part 1 or Part 2 of the specification content.
- Question 4 tests AO3 and is worth 12 marks. It requires students to analyse and evaluate a given issue or development using evidence drawn from the content of any of the sources and their own knowledge. Students should aim to use a range of the sources and link them together to support their reasoning. The question will target Part 1 or Part 2 of the specification content.

Resources

Research exercises assume students have access to a textbook(s) and / or the internet. You can supplement textbook(s) by other sources.

OUP support this option with 'International Relations: Conflict and Peace in the 20th Century' published in 2026 as part of the OxfordAQA International series and available in various formats.

A parallel product written for a similar AQA UK examination option contains supplementary material.

Part 1: Threats to peace in the 1960s

Causes of tension

Suggested timing

7 hours

Specification content

Causes of tension: The U2 Crisis, 1960; the responses of the USA and the USSR to the crisis and the effect on the Paris Summit; the situation in Berlin, including the Berlin Wall; Kennedy's response; the space and arms races; nuclear deterrent; the development of ICBMs; Polaris; interplanetary and human spaceflight, including Yuri Gagarin and the Apollo space programme.

Teaching guidance

- The enquiry is based on describing and explaining the causes of tension between the superpowers at the start of a troubled decade.
- Initially develop an understanding of the U2 Crisis and the impact the crisis had on the Paris Peace Summit and relations between the superpowers.
- The focus should then move to the Berlin Wall - what motivated the Soviet government to build the wall and the way in which the USA and Soviet Union used it for propaganda purposes.
- This section concludes with coverage of the space race and the ways in which nuclear weapons were becoming more powerful; why were both space and arms races significant for the Cold War?
- Here is an early opportunity to practice writing in response to sources/interpretations style questions on Paper 1, Section A. One method or approach is to develop a critical routine or programme, which reconstructs the elements of source evaluation through a series of questions:
 - What does the source or interpretation tell us?
 - What can be inferred or suggested?
 - What differences can be identified between different sources or interpretations?
 - Explain the purpose or motive behind the work of the person who created the source or interpretation, ie provenance?
 - Refer to the historical context, ie use knowledge to test the validity of the source or interpretation.
- Though this is by no means the only permissible approach to AO3 questions, there are chances for further practice throughout the Scheme of Work.

Possible teaching and learning activities

- Enquiry question 1: Why was the U2 Crisis important?
- Students research and write a first-person account of the U2 crisis and Paris Peace Summit from the perspective of either President Eisenhower or Soviet leader Khrushchev. They share their accounts by being in role in a 'hot seat' and take questions from the rest of the class.
- Enquiry question 2: how great was the risk of another world war during the Berlin Wall crisis?
- Research key profiles of Kennedy and Khrushchev – how experienced were they? What were their attitudes to each other? Why was the Vienna summit between them important?
- Students generate reasons for building the wall.
- Students look at a range of sources and interpretations which relate to the building of the Berlin Wall and use them to assess how both superpowers were affected. How useful were they for understanding American or Russian attitudes towards the wall.
- Students compose a diary entry for two German citizens that live on opposing sides of the wall.
- Enquiry 3: how did the arms and space race contribute to the Cold War?
- In groups, students analyse a range of contemporary written and visual sources related to the arms and space race. What do they reveal about the key developments? Using the sources, students produce an illustrated timeline of the key points in the arms and space race. Use your research to discuss peoples' attitudes/fears at the time.
- Class discussion: 'The US now sleeps under a Soviet moon' – what did Khrushchev mean by this? Students debate whether anyone won the arms and space race.
- Reviewing this series of lessons, consider why there were likely to be tensions and arguments between the Superpowers at the start of the 1960s – why it was becoming more difficult for them to co-operate together. Feedback with a prediction of how this will affect international relations and the prospects for global peace.

The Cuban Missile Crisis, 1962

Suggested timing

5 hours

Specification content

The Cuban Missile Crisis, 1962: the effect of Castro's seizure of power in Cuba, 1959; Kennedy and the Bay of Pigs; Khrushchev and the missile crisis of 1962; Kennedy's response; the danger to the world; the results of the crisis; the effect on Kennedy and Khrushchev.

Teaching guidance

- The focus should be on why a crisis emerged, how it developed and the implications for the Cold War and world peace.

Possible teaching and learning activities

- As knowledge is acquired through this section, think about the background of relations between Kennedy and Khrushchev, especially in view of the Vienna summit of 1961 and the building of the Berlin Wall.
- Provide an overview of the political situation in Cuba. Use maps and photographs of key individuals to report on the background to the crisis.
Students may produce a timeline of the key events and developments of the Cuban Missile Crisis.
- Students look at a range of contemporary sources about Castro. What do they reveal about American and Soviet attitudes towards him? Comment on the provenance of the sources, and how convincing they are.
- Students research the Bay of Pigs and write a report, from either the US or Soviet point of view, about the event and its consequences.
- Students look at a range of sources and interpretations relating to the Crisis – what do they reveal about American and Soviet attitudes and fears? Comment on the usefulness of the sources/interpretations – which proved most useful when studying the Crisis and why?
- Present a spider diagram which shows the results and potential dangers of the crisis.
- Class debate: consider how the crisis affected relations between the superpowers – which leader emerged from the crisis with the better reputation? Why? Students present from both Kennedy and Khrushchev's perspective. Include consideration of the idea that it was Castro who played the crucial role during and after the missile crisis. Do students agree?

Czechoslovakia, 1968: Dubček and the Prague Spring

Suggested timing

2 hours

Specification content

Czechoslovakia, 1968: Dubček and the Prague Spring; why it concerned the USSR and the Warsaw Pact and their response to it; the effects on East-West relations; the Brezhnev Doctrine.

Teaching guidance

- This part of the study provides opportunities for students to develop an understanding of the key events and developments of the Prague Spring and the USSR's response.
- Students should understand the impact the Prague Spring had on relations between the superpowers and why the Brezhnev Doctrine was a cause for international concern.

Possible teaching and learning activities

- Students produce a timeline of the events and developments of the Prague Spring. They can use either their timeline or research on the effects in order to write a news broadcast.
- Using a range of sources and interpretations, different groups could consider if the arguments about reform in Czechoslovakia could have been avoided. Comment on the inferences gained from the sources and which made the most convincing case. Group the sources for and against Dubček.
- Students compare the sources for their utility based on content, purpose and knowledge.
- In groups, students discuss and analyse the Soviet reaction to the Prague Spring – how could the Soviet reaction and subsequent suppression of reform be justified? Present a report to the whole class. Using the question from the group discussion, students consider the qualities required when constructing conclusions and judgements when evaluating sources and interpretations.
- Examples of responses to AO3 questions could be modelled and peer assessed. Enquiry question: how did the Prague Spring affect relations between the superpowers? Students study the Brezhnev Doctrine. What does it suggest about Soviet attitudes to the eastern bloc? Why was it a cause for international concern?

Review

Suggested timing

1 hour

Specification content

Review and assessment of Part 1

Assessment guidance

- This is the opportunity to develop your students' exam technique and to test their learning so far.
- You can use exam-style questions based on the content of Part 1.
- Students could be presented with contrasting sources and asked to compare their usefulness in helping us to understand the impact of the Berlin Wall, Cuban Missile Crisis or Prague Spring.
- Students could swap answers and identify ways of answering utility questions from model answers.

Resources

Specimen papers and Activities sections of the OUP textbook.

Part 2: Conflict in Vietnam

The US escalation of conflict in Vietnam

Suggested timing

7 hours

Specification content

The US escalation of conflict in Vietnam: the Domino Theory; intervention under Kennedy; the North Vietnamese - support, leadership and guerrilla tactics and the US response; Strategic Hamlets programme; Johnson's war; the Gulf of Tonkin incident, 1964; the bombing campaign; My Lai; the protest movement in the US; Search and Destroy tactics; the Tet Offensive, 1968.

Teaching guidance

- While considering increasing involvement in Vietnam, students will find it helpful to acquire some knowledge of the background to American involvement, beginning with the policy of containment in the 1940s with President Truman. Then how the different presidents became involved in the conflict.
- For example, in terms of Johnson's War, the next lessons will focus should be on the different tactics used by the US and their relative effectiveness, for example, 'hearts and minds', Operation Rolling Thunder.
- As the narrative progresses, consider using the My Lai Massacre as a case study of search and destroy tactics. Start to develop students' understanding of the reasons why some Americans wanted peace. Opposition to war will be developed in the next section of the course.
- The Tet Offensive, 1968. Students should consider its military impact and its impact on morale in the USA. Why is it important to understand who claimed victory?
- In response to sources/interpretations style questions on Paper 1, Section A. One method or approach is to develop a critical routine or programme which reconstructs the elements of source evaluation through a series of questions:
 - What does the source or interpretation tell us?
 - What can be inferred or suggested?
 - What differences can be identified between different sources or interpretations?
 - Explain the purpose or motive behind the work of the person who created the source or interpretation, ie provenance?
 - Refer to the historical context, ie use knowledge to test the validity of the source or interpretation.

Though this is by no means the only permissible approach to AO3 questions there are chances for further practice throughout the Scheme of Work.

Possible teaching and learning activities

- Enquiry question: how and why did the US become increasingly involved in Vietnam?
- Students research the Domino Theory.
- Ask some of your students take on the role of a US government official at the time and write a report outlining what they think the prospects for success are in the war. Students need to convince other members of the class that war was the correct decision.
- Class debate: could the US have avoided escalating involvement? What were the arguments for and against?
- Students research a timeline of US involvement.
- Students look at a range of sources and interpretations which relate to the decisions taken to increase US actions against the Communist forces, eg how did the US react to the Gulf of Tonkin incident? Discuss whether Congress should have given Johnson the power to 'take all necessary measures to prevent further aggression and achieve peace and security?'
- Military tactics: did the USA or the Vietcong have the advantage?
- Students produce a diagram showing each tactic used by the US in response to the guerrilla tactics and "rate" their effectiveness.
- Class discussion: 'Mixed results'. Is this a fair summary of the effectiveness of bombing in the Vietnam War?
- Enquiry: why was the My Lai Massacre so shocking to the American public?
- Discuss the details of the My Lai search and destroy mission.
- Students look at a range of sources and interpretations about reactions to My Lai and the impact on US and world attitudes to the Vietnam War. Which sources proved most useful when studying My Lai? Explain your choice.
- Investigation: was the sentence for Lieutenant Calley justified?
- Students study evidence from his trial and write a report analyzing whether or not the sentence was justified.
- Students model a response to the following question: how effective were guerrilla tactics during the Vietnam War? What sources proved most convincing when answering this question? Why – what makes a source 'convincing'?
- The Tet Offensive: a victory for North Vietnam or USA?
- Source evaluation: students collate a range of images of the Tet Offensive. For each image they should decide how far it supports the view of an NVA victory or defeat.
- Ask your students to provide a written evaluation of the impact of Tet Offensive and also ask them to consider why the Tet Offensive might be considered a turning point in the war.

The ending of the conflict in Vietnam

Suggested timing

7 hours

Specification content

The ending of the conflict in Vietnam: Nixon's War including Vietnamisation; chemical warfare and bombing; relations with China; widening the war into Laos and Cambodia, 1970-1972; protests and opposition to the war, including Kent State University, the impact of the media; the end of the war; Paris peace talks; US withdrawal and the fall of Saigon, 1975.

Teaching guidance

- Continuing the previous learning, with the emphasis now on the reasons for the end of the conflict in Vietnam and the consequences of US withdrawal. Why did the US lose the war?
- The first part of the narrative looks at the concept of Vietnamisation and Nixon's motivation for introducing the policy. The focus moves on to look at the purpose and initial impact of the US attacks on Laos and Cambodia and the reasoning behind the continued war there between the years 1970–1972.
- Also, analyse the purpose and impact of the bombing of the North between the years 1970–1972.
- Opposition to the war: how did the media and protest movement contribute to ending the war? Students might also look at the context of the Watergate Affair and how it had an impact on Nixon's war.
- Finally, the study ends with the negotiations at the Paris Peace Conference and reasons behind the US decision to withdraw. Look at the final defeat for the South with the Fall of Saigon in 1975.

Possible teaching and learning activities

- Students build a timeline of Nixon's war – to include a fact file or spider diagram about the reasons for the US withdrawal from Vietnam.
- Students research the concept of Vietnamization. Why do they think it was introduced? What were the consequences/impact of Vietnamization and consider to what extent the policy worked for the US, the people of South Vietnam? Was it a complete disaster?
- Students analyse the reasons for the invasion of Cambodia and assess its military and political impact. It would be helpful to annotate a map of Vietnam and its neighbours, plotting the military campaigns to develop their understanding of how conflict developed.
- How were the US tactics unpopular in the US and other parts of the world (Blanket bombing, napalm, Agent Orange, search and destroy).
- Students look at a range of sources and interpretations which explore the media coverage of the war and its impact. Include references to inference and provenance in the media search. For example, in groups, students search for a range of visual images of the Vietnam War. They should divide them into different categories including pro and anti-war images; images

that are negative towards the NVA/Vietcong as well as the US troops, and images that show the long-term impact of the war itself.

- How did the peace movement use the media to support their cause? Students might consider the following aspects:
 - protests
 - anti-war propaganda, such as posters and placards
 - support by ex-soldiers and serving soldiers in Vietnam
 - the use of celebrities such as Mohammad Ali and Jane Fonda.
- Students study the role of John Kerry and Vietnam Veterans against War (VVAW) in the Fulbright Hearing, 1971. What can they learn from this study?
- Card sort/sequencing exercise to categorise the usefulness of different sources and interpretations related to the withdrawal of US forces from Vietnam. Select three sources and/or interpretations - explain what they tell us about the media coverage of the Vietnam War in the USA and how it led to demands for peace?
- Class discussion: what was the impact of the Watergate Affair on Americans and the war in Vietnam?
- Enquiry question: what were the consequences of the war for both sides?
- Students analyse images of the evacuation of Saigon and consider how the images affected attitudes in the USA towards the war.
- Students study sources relating to the main terms of the Paris Peace agreement. They should decide who had the greater success at the negotiating table: Kissinger of the USA or Le Duc Tho from North Vietnam and justify their conclusion.
- Students research and present their findings about the fall of Saigon and the final defeat for the South.

Review

Suggested timing

1 hour

Specification content

Review and assessment of Part 2

Assessment guidance

- This is the opportunity to develop your students' exam technique and to test their learning so far.
- You can use exam-style questions based on the content of Part 2.
- Assessment: students could be presented with contrasting sources and interpretations and are asked to compare their usefulness in helping us to understand US involvement in Vietnam.
- Model an example of a student response. Ask students to explain the characteristics of a good answer.

Resources

Specimen papers and Activities sections of the OUP textbook.