

OxfordAQA

International GCSE

History (9245)

Scheme of work

The origins and development of the Cold War, 1945 -1960

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 origins and development of the Cold War, 1945–1960 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 the clash between capitalist and communist states during this time and their impact on East-West rivalry. It focuses on the causes and development 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 B is based on a series of short and extended response questions.

- Question 1 tests AO1 and is worth 3 marks. It requires students to show their knowledge of a given issue.
- Question 2 tests AO1 and AO2 and is worth 6 marks. It requires students to explain one way in which a given issue developed, supporting their explanation with knowledge and understanding. It will focus on the 2nd order concept of cause/consequence or change.
- Question 3 tests AO1 and AO2 and is worth 9 marks. It requires students to explain two changes or two ways/ reasons why a given issue developed, supporting their explanation with knowledge and understanding. It will focus on the 2nd order concept of cause/consequence or change.
- Question 4 tests AO1 and AO2 and is worth 12 marks. It requires students to construct an extended response with a line of reasoning. It requires students to explain a given

cause/ consequence/ change and at least cause/ consequence/ change in the context of a broader development leading to a judgement that evaluates their relative importance. It will focus on the 2nd order concept of cause/consequence or change.

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 One: Rivalry between the USA and USSR, 1945–1949

The end of the Second World War

Suggested timing

4 hours

Specification content

The end of the Second World War: changes in leadership, ideological differences and their effects; the Yalta and Potsdam Conferences; the use of atomic weapons on Hiroshima and Nagasaki and its effects; the division of Germany and Berlin; zones of occupation.

Teaching guidance

- The enquiry is focused on post-war superpower relations, how tension increased and why rivalry emerged. Teaching objectives would:
- explore how ideological and personal differences threatened relations between the Allies - explain why they grew hostile in 1945 after they had co-operated to win the Second World War.
- Analyse and compare the Yalta and Potsdam Conferences and their impact on the development of the Cold War.
- Explain why the US used atomic weapons were dropped and consider the significance of these events for East-West relations at the time.
- Here is an early opportunity to practice writing in response to 'explain' style questions: questions 2, 3 and 4. A common method to approach this is using the structure Point, Evidence, Explain, though this is by no means the only permissible approach. This approach to 'explain' questions is replicated throughout the assessment of the option – so there are chances for further practice throughout the Scheme of Work.

Possible teaching and learning activities

- Centres could organize their teaching around the enquiry: 'why did the allies become enemies?'
- In groups, students research the differences between the political, economic and social policies of USSR and USA. Students produce a poster of images/symbols to illustrate the ideologies. What were the attitudes of the 'Big Three'? For each leader, report on why tensions were increasing and why it was becoming more difficult to co-operate together in 1945. Feedback with a prediction of how this will affect post war relations between the superpowers.
- Students complete a table detailing the decisions made at Yalta and Potsdam. Debate in class which conference was more of a success, and for which country.

- Role play: in groups students write a news broadcast from Potsdam which explains the hostile atmosphere between the Allies at the conference.
- Sources exercise: give your students a range of contrasting sources and interpretations that give different views on the decision to use the atomic bombs. What were the consequences for the development of the Cold War?
- Students annotate a map of Germany and Berlin to show the areas of division post war.
- Research the Nuremberg trials – why were they significant?

The Iron Curtain and the evolution of East-West rivalry and tensions

Suggested timing

5 hours

Specification content

The Iron Curtain and the evolution of East-West rivalry and tensions: Soviet expansion in the East and the development of the Iron Curtain; Czechoslovakia, 1948; the Truman Doctrine: the situation in Greece and Turkey; containment and the purpose of the Truman Doctrine; the Marshall Plan: effect of Marshall Aid and the Soviet response. Cominform and Comecon; Yugoslavia and the split between Tito and Stalin.

Teaching guidance

- The focus should be on the Iron Curtain and the countries that became communist and way in which this was achieved. This would include analyzing the differences between the Soviet and Western views of the Iron Curtain.
- Students would develop an understanding the reasons for a new priority in US foreign policy, for example, containment; and consider the USSR's (Stalin's reaction) to the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan. The specification includes Cominform, Comecon, and the experience of Yugoslavia, as examples of Stalin's reaction.
- Teaching could be organized around the enquiry, 'Was there any justification for the US and Soviet policies towards each other?'

Possible teaching and learning activities

- As knowledge is acquired through this section, there is an opportunity to consider the view put forward by some historians that the Cold War really began in 1947.
- Students write opposing interpretations of the Truman Doctrine and Marshall Plan. One should be from a US perspective and should present the policies in a positive light.
- The other should be from Stalin's perspective and critical of US 'dollar imperialism'.
- List the key steps in the development of the Iron Curtain and East-West rivalry. Students produce a flow diagram to show the 'cause and effect' relationship between agreements made at Potsdam, the nature of Soviet Expansion in Europe and US policies. Draw links between different events and factors.
- Students research Cominform, Comecon, and what happened in Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia. Present a fact file of the findings.
- They could then produce propaganda press releases on behalf of the US or USSR government justifying its actions.

The significance of the division of Germany

Suggested timing

5 hours

Specification content

The significance of the division of Germany: the Berlin Blockade and Airlift; the formation of the Federal Republic and GDR; the formation of NATO, and its membership and purpose; atomic weapons and the beginnings of the nuclear arms race.

Teaching guidance

- This study provides opportunities for students to develop an understanding of the causes and events of the Berlin Blockade, the events and outcomes of the Berlin Airlift, the reasons why NATO was formed and Germany permanently divided. Against this background, nuclear weapons were becoming more powerful, and this arms race had a significant impact on the Cold War.
- This part of the narrative lends itself to interpretations of the origins of the Cold War - who was to blame and which factors were the most important in causing it?

Possible teaching and learning activities

- Centres could organise their teaching around several lines of enquiry – Was it too late to prevent the Cold War developing any further? How dangerous was the conflict over Berlin? Why were the creation of NATO and the division of Germany significant for the future peace of Europe?
- Students produce a storyboard/cartoon strip of events in the Berlin Airlift.
- Class debate: how did events in Berlin in 1949 affect the Cold War?
- Using a range of sources and interpretations, different groups could consider if the clash over Berlin could have been avoided; what the USSR and US were seeking to achieve and why; how dangerous was the Blockade and Airlift? Findings might be reported back to the whole class.
- Construct a table to compare features of the Federal Republic and GDR.
- Give your students an outline of the purpose of NATO. Students annotate a world map to show NATO. Enquiry question: how did the arms race contribute to the Cold War?
- Students begin an illustrated timeline of the key points in the arms race – for completion when the next part of the course has been covered.
- A card sort or diamond nine exercise could help students categorise statements about the relative importance of different factors which had contributed to the development of the Cold War to 1949.

Review

Suggested timing

1 hour

Specification content

Review and assessment of Part 1: Origins of the Cold War

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.
- For second order concept questions, analyse students' effectiveness when writing Point/Evidence/Explanation paragraphs in answer to an 'explain' style question.
- Students could swap answers and identify ways of answering these types of questions, including those which require a conclusion and judgement.

Resources

Specimen papers and Activities sections of the OUP textbook.

Part 2: The development of the Cold War, 1949 -1960

The development of the nuclear arms and space races

Suggested timing

3 hours

Specification content

The development of the nuclear arms and space races: the hydrogen bomb; the formation of the Warsaw Pact, membership and purpose; early ICBMs; Sputnik 1.

Teaching guidance

- The focus should be on the ways in which the arms race changed in the 1950s and the impact of the new space race. This could be explored by considering:
 - peoples' attitudes to the arms race.
 - the nature of the arms race in the 1950s and why it escalated.
 - the significance of the arms race and the new space race increased superpower rivalry.
 - changes in the alliance system are a background to these developments - what was the Warsaw Pact and why was it signed in 1955?
- Part 2 provides further opportunities to practice writing in response to 'explain' style questions: questions 2, 3 and 4. A common method to approach this is using the structure Point, Evidence, Explain, bearing in mind that this is by no means the only permissible approach.

Possible teaching and learning activities

- Draw a table which compares NATO with the Warsaw Pact – include membership, aims, terms and purposes.
- 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 and attitudes and fears which people shared at the time? Students continue the illustrated timeline of the key points in the arms and space race.
- 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. Analyse its significance for superpower relations in the 1950s.

The significance of events in Asia for superpower relations

Suggested timing

7 hours

Specification content

The significance of events in Asia for superpower relations: USSR's support for Mao Zedong and the Communist revolution in China; Vietnam and the Geneva Agreement, 1954; the military campaign waged by the North Vietnamese against France and the USA; the Korean War, 1950–1953: reasons for involvement of UN and USA; the role of MacArthur; the part played by USSR and China; the escalation of the war and stalemate; armistice, peace talks and the impact of the war.

Teaching guidance

- Develop students' understanding of events in Asia and their significance for the superpowers. Did the Cold War become 'colder'? This includes several lines of enquiry - how communism spread in Asia, analysing how this affected relations between the superpowers. This would include studying the impact of changing relations between the USSR and China, the causes, events and results of the Korean War, concluding with an analysis of how the conflict in Vietnam and Asia played its part in the Cold War.

Possible teaching and learning activities

- Give your students an overview of the geopolitical situation in Asia. Use maps of East Asia to underpin their understanding.
- In groups, suggest the production of a narrative of events/timeline for Sino-Soviet relations, Korea, or Vietnam (up to 1960). Each group reports to the whole class.
- Use a sequencing exercise to present a secure chronology of what happened.
- Profile Mao Zedong from a range of sources – draw inferences about his attitudes towards Stalin and the USA.
- Study a range of American and/or Soviet and/or Communist Chinese sources and interpretations relating to Korea and Vietnam. What do they reveal about superpower attitudes to events in the East and, for the US, the fear of Communism? Compare how each conflict was seen to pose a different threat to global peace.
- Produce a spider diagram of the problems left behind by the French when they withdrew from Vietnam in 1954.
- Students write reports for President Eisenhower about what lessons could be learnt from the Korean war and how to deal with the Vietminh in Vietnam.
- Ask students to take on the role of a US government official at the time and write a report outlining what they think were the prospects for success if the US decided to increase its intervention in Vietnam. How convincing are the arguments for intervention?
- Case study: complete an investigation about the life and work of Ho Chi Minh. Include analysis of Vietminh military tactics.

- Class debate: students discuss how events in China, Korea and Vietnam affected relations between the superpowers. Did the Cold War get 'colder'?

The nature of the ‘Thaw’

Suggested timing

4 hours

Specification content

The nature of the ‘Thaw’: the death of Stalin; Austria’s declaration of neutrality, 1955; Khrushchev’s policy of peaceful co-existence; Hungary, 1956 including the causes of the rising, why it was a threat to the USSR and how the Soviets dealt with it; the effects on East West relations by 1960.

Teaching guidance

- This study relates to the concept of the ‘Thaw’ and ‘peaceful co-existence’ following Stalin’s death. Did relations between the superpowers improve?
- Students should understand the key developments and events in Hungary and how they showed the limits of ‘peaceful co-existence’.
- Lessons might lend themselves to consider an enquiry question such as: how far was ‘peaceful co-existence’ peaceful?

Possible teaching and learning activities

- Complete a profile of Khrushchev – what was his background and how might his character and qualities as a politician prove useful as the leader of the Soviet Union?
- How might an American adviser to the President justify both optimistic and pessimistic views of de-Stalinization?
- Students research the key developments and events in Hungary and use their research to produce a timeline.
- Use a range of sources and interpretations to produce a spider diagram which identifies the consequences of events in Hungary. They should consider the impact Hungary had on superpower relations. What does the Hungarian crisis suggest about Soviet fears? How did the Russians react? How did the US react?
- Produce a fact file about Austria’s declaration of neutrality.
- What was the state of the Cold War by 1960? Create an annotated map to show the major areas of Cold War conflict around the world. Debate as a class about which areas were significant threats to global peace.

Review for Part 2

Suggested timing

1 hour

Specification content

Review and assessment of Part 2: The development of the Cold War, 1949 - 1960

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.
- For second order concept questions, analyse students' effectiveness when writing Point/Evidence/Explanation paragraphs in answer to an 'explain' style question.

Resources

Specimen papers and Activities sections of the OUP textbook.