

“The Battle of Ideas” Castro’s Legacy and the Future of Cuba

Objectives:

Students will: Explore the reaction to Fidel Castro’s decision to resign as Cuba’s president.

Identify and categorize competing perspectives on Castro and the future of Cuba.

Consider the international response to Castro’s resignation and assess possible consequences.

Note:

Teachers might find it useful to have students explore various online resources about Castro and Cuba prior to doing this exercise. A brief annotated list is included with “Reactions to the Resignation of Fidel Castro.”

Handouts:

“Reactions to the Resignation of Fidel Castro”

“Categorizing World Reactions about Castro and Cuba”

In the Classroom:

1. Focus Question—Put the question “What standards should history use to judge leaders?” on the board. You might use a well-known U.S. president to help the students think about this. Have the class brainstorm; record their ideas.

2. Thinking about Cuba—Use a Know/Want to Know/Learned (K-W-L) worksheet to record on the board what students already know about Cuba and Castro and what they want to know. As the class activities progress, fill out the “learned” section on the board.

3. Working in Groups—Break students into groups of 3-4. Distribute the handouts.

Remind students that comments on these blogs are not the work of historians or scholars and may not be factually accurate. They do reflect strongly held opinions.

Have one member of each group record their group’s responses on the worksheet.

4. Sharing Conclusions and Discussion—After the groups have completed the worksheet, invite groups to share their findings.

Ask students to consider this concept of the battle of ideas. Is it about the past or future? Or both? Ask students to cite specific examples from the reactions.

Why do students believe that Castro provokes such strong (both positive and negative) reactions? Challenge students to make a strong positive argument about Castro and then a strong negative argument.

Ask students to consider what standards history should use to judge leaders. Have students apply the standards they came up with at the beginning of the class to what they know of Castro. Help students identify what additional knowledge they would want or need to address this question.

How might Castro’s legacy affect the future of Cuba? What role will the “battle of ideas” play in Cuba’s future? Which voices in this debate should be most important?

5. Extra Challenge—Have students draw a political cartoon representing one of the points of view expressed in the reactions, or a cartoon which tackles one of the issues in the “battle of ideas,” e.g., human rights, civil liberties, social welfare; the effectiveness of the U.S. embargo; or imperialism and globalization.