

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Thirteen Days, Day 1



Key Passage, p. 14

“Having stared down the nuclear abyss together, the two leaders were determined that the world would never again suffer such a crisis” (p. 14).

Writing Prompt

President Kennedy and the Soviet leader, Khrushchev, were both very close to starting a nuclear war between the United States and the Soviet Union. Both leaders were trying to defend and protect their countries in the way that they thought best, but with their actions, they both came very close to devastating war. After the crisis ended, both leaders were determined to never take steps toward nuclear war ever again. Why did President Kennedy try to stop the Soviets from placing missiles in Cuba? Why did Khrushchev lie about placing missiles in Cuba? How could this crisis have been avoided?

Write three explanatory paragraphs. First, explain why having nuclear weapons, as a leader, is good for the common good. Second, explain why having nuclear weapons, as a leader, is bad for the common good. Third, in an informative paragraph, give your opinion on whether or not you think nuclear weapons are necessary for promoting the common good. As a leader, would you need them?

- If the leaders use their weapons, everyone involved would suffer greatly. How is this promoting common good? If the leader doesn't have them, they are in danger of the country that does. How can the two countries be sure that the weapons won't be used? How can the leaders know that their actions are good?
1. Describe a time when you were in charge of making an important decision.
 2. Describe the process you took in order to make your choice.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Thirteen Days, Day 2



Key Passage, p. 22

“Now, as the representative of the CIA explained the U-2 photographs that morning, Tuesday, October 16, we realized that it had all been lies, one gigantic fabric of lies. The Russians were putting missiles in Cuba, and they had been shipping them there. They were beginning the construction of the sites at the same time that those various private and public assurances were being forwarded by Chairman Khrushchev to President Kennedy” (p. 22).

Writing Prompt

President Kennedy was confident in his growing relationship with the Soviets and their leader, Khrushchev, but was caught off guard when he found out that the Khrushchev was lying about placing nuclear missiles in Cuba. How should President Kennedy respond to Khrushchev about the U-2 photos? Should he trust Khrushchev? Why was Khrushchev lying?

Write a 3 step informative plan of action that details how would you react, as the President of the United States, immediately after you found out that Khrushchev was lying to you about building offensive weapons in Cuba.

- In the informative report, explain if you would have announced war? Would you have told Khrushchev that you knew the truth? Would you have kept your knowledge as secret and prepared for war?

1. Describe a time when someone lied to you.
2. Do you think it is possible to regain their trust? Why or why not?

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Thirteen Days, Day 3



Key Passage, p. 30

“Whatever military reason he and others could marshal, they were nevertheless, in the last analysis, advocating a surprise attack by a very large nation against a small one. This, I said, could not be undertaken by the U.S. if we were to maintain our moral position at home and around the globe. Our struggle against Communism throughout the work was far more than physical survival—it had as its essence our heritage and our ideals, and these we must not destroy” (p. 30).

Writing Prompt

Cuba is a very small nation and does not have much power on its own. Cuba was being supported by the Soviet Union, but was still less powerful than the United States. The United States prided itself on being a moral country that only fought when they were forced to fight. If the U.S. had surprise-attacked Cuba, that action would have affected the moral position of the U.S. How can the U.S. protect itself from nuclear weapons that could destroy the whole nation, if doing so would reflect negatively upon them? What if the President doesn’t order a sneak attack and the Soviets act first and the U.S. never has a chance to protect itself?

Write an informative report to the President. Choose a side: launch a sneak attack on Cuba or preserve U.S. morality. Write an informative paragraph explaining why your position is the best solution. Include three examples to support your position. Consider the following question for your informative report:

- What is more important: morality or survival?
 - How do you decide between when to protect yourself and when to protect your image?
 - How do leaders know when to act and when to wait?
1. If you were in the President’s committee, what would you advise him to do? Why?
 2. Predict the outcome of the blockade.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Thirteen Days, Day 4



Key Passage, p. 35

“Each one of us was being asked to make a recommendation which would affect the future of all mankind, a recommendation which, if wrong and if accepted, could mean the destruction of the human race” (p. 35).

Writing Prompt

A committee was formed and relied upon by the President to gather information. Analyze it and decide what the best action is to take against the Soviets. The committee had the fate of the U.S., Cuba and the Soviet Union in its hands. How can a committee of people complicate matters? How can you be sure you have the right committee? Without the opinions of the Soviets, can you really have an unbiased committee?

Pretend you are a committee member. Write an explanatory paragraph describing your opinion. In a second paragraph, explain how you would get your points across to the other leaders.

Consider the following questions:

- Would you explain your opinion to the group?
 - Would you engage people individually to help them understand your view? Would you yell?
 - Would you sit back and wait for a chance to talk?
 - Would you show your approach step by step?
1. Do you agree or disagree with the criticisms the President faced? Explain.
 2. How do you think you would have reacted to the President’s explanation of the crisis if you were a teenager during 1962?

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Thirteen Days, Day 5



Key Passage, p. 55

“If the ships have orders to turn around, we want to give them every opportunity to do so” (p. 55).

Writing Prompt

President Kennedy was doing everything he could to give Khrushchev the opportunity to change his mind and stop the crisis. He took the least aggressive approach with the quarantine and hoped that the Soviets would back down voluntarily. Why did President Kennedy give the Soviets this opportunity? Why did Kennedy still trust the Soviets?

Write an explanatory letter to President Kennedy describing why you are pleased or disappointed with his decision. Include three reasons to support your position.

- If you disagree, include what you would have done, why, and how.
- If you support him, please describe why you think his steps were the best and what the negative results would have been if he had chosen another route.

1. What would you have done if you were President Kennedy?
2. What do you think will happen next?

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Thirteen Days, Day 6



Key Passage, p. 60

“The President ultimately decided that the risk of life was so great—with so many people aboard the ship, and so high a possibility of something going seriously wrong—that he would let the vessel through” (p. 60).

Writing Prompt

President Kennedy was very serious about not letting anymore Soviet ships through to Cuba without inspection; however, he was not willing to sacrifice innocent people’s lives. He acted morally and justly in an effort to promote the common good. Why was President Kennedy willing to trust the Soviets and not inspect the ship? What was more important, the risk of life or the safety of the U.S.?

Write an informative letter to the people of the United States of America explaining why you, from the position of President Kennedy, let the ship through without inspection when the United State was in great danger?

- Why would the President be willing to risk the chance not intercepting missiles? Would you have done the same? What if there had been missiles on the ship? What could have happened because of the President’s actions?
1. What do President Kennedy’s actions show about his character?
 2. What do you think he would be like if you met him in person?

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Thirteen Days, Day 7



Key Passage, p. 68

“The reason he had sent these weapons to Cuba was because the U.S. was interested in overthrowing the Cuban government, as the U.S. had actively attempted to overthrow the Communist government in the Soviet Union after their revolution. Khrushchev and the Soviet people wished to help Cuba protect herself” (p. 68).

Writing Prompt

The U.S. and the Soviet Union were attempting to negotiate about steps that needed to be taken to end the crisis. Khrushchev tried to explain that the weapons were only placed in Cuba to protect it from being invaded and overthrown by the U.S. Why wouldn't the U.S. allow Cuba to protect itself? Why could the U.S. have nuclear weapons but Cuba couldn't? Why did the U.S. think they had the right to decide who had missiles?

We have now read why Khrushchev placed missiles in Cuba. Write two informative paragraphs: the first, explaining Khrushchev's position with Cuba; the second, explaining the U.S.'s position.

- Show how both leaders are compelled to act for the common good, but how each common good is conflicting.
1. Who do you think is in a harder position Khrushchev or President Kennedy, why?
 2. What do you think will be the next step both sides will make?

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Thirteen Days, Day 8



Key Passage, p. 81

“The thought that disturbed him the most, and that made the prospect of was much more fearful than it would otherwise have been, was the specter of the death of the children of this country and all the world—the you people who had no role, who had no say, who knew nothing even of the confrontation, but whose lives would be snuffed out like everyone else’s” (p. 81).

Writing Prompt

President Kennedy and Khrushchev were negotiating back and forth through letters about the crisis. President Kennedy held his ground to protect the U.S. In the end, Khrushchev agreed to remove the missiles from Cuba. Throughout the negotiating, President Kennedy was very concerned about the future of the children. Why was he so concerned about them? What do the children represent?

President Kennedy was very worried that his actions were going to lead the U.S. and the Soviet Union to nuclear war. If they did, this was going to change the world as he knew it. **Write an explanatory journal entry, from the perspective of President Kennedy, describing the impact this war would have on the world and future children.**

- What could he have done differently? What would life be like? How did his leadership contribute to this crisis, and how could he have fixed it?
1. Do you think the Russians are going to follow through on their actions, or is this another lie?
 2. Predict what will happen next.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Thirteen Days, Day 9



Key Passage, p. 86-87

“Thirty years ago, the world was a far, far different place. The Secretary of State and his department could handle all international problems. Perhaps they were not always handled correctly, but at least this handling by one department was manageable. Our commitments were few—we were not as widely involved as we are today—but we were nevertheless a very powerful nation. We could and did, in places we felt our national interests were involved (such as Latin America). Impose our will by force if we believed it necessary. The Secretary of State dealt with all the responsibilities without great difficulty, giving foreign-policy advice to the President, administering the department, directing out relationships with that handful of countries which were considered significant, and protecting the financial interest of our citizens around the world.

But that position has very little relationship with that of the Secretary of State today. The title is the same; it still deals with foreign affairs; but there the similarity virtually disappears. Today, the Secretary of State’s position is at least five jobs, five different areas of responsibility, and all of which could properly require his full time” (p. 86-87).

Writing Prompt

The crisis has ended and many years have passed with an ever-changing structure of government. The Secretary of State, who used to be heavily involved in both domestic and foreign affairs, is now spread across many jobs where he/she cannot spend much energy on any one issue. How does this change things? What does that mean for our country? How do serious matters get handled now that there are so many more issues without an increase in people handling these issues?

Write three informative paragraphs:

First: Write an informative paragraph, describing three ways in which the responsibility of the Secretary of State has changed in a positive way.

Second: Write an informative paragraph, describing three ways in which you see the change in responsibilities for the Secretary of State as a negative thing.

Third: Write a short explanatory paragraph describing what you think the Secretary of State’s job should be.

- Should they only be involved in serious matters? Is there a way to prioritize what needs immediate attention, or should he/she handle every issue?
Should there be more than one person in each position?

1. Why was it important to put pressure on the Soviets without causing them public humiliation?
2. Describe an example of a poor decision that was made to avoid embarrassment.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt
Thirteen Days, Day 10



Key Passage, p. 106

“Perhaps the most obvious scenario by which nuclear war might have emerged from the sequence follows the actual course of events through step seven, but proceeds:

(8) Khrushchev reiterates that any attack on the Soviet missiles and personnel in Cuba will be met with a full Soviet retaliatory response (October 28).

(9) U.S. “surgical” air strike against Soviet missiles (destroying all ballistic missiles and killing a limited number of Soviet personnel) (October 31).

(10) Soviet medium-range ballistic missiles attack U.S. missiles in Turkey (destroying all ballistic missiles and killing a small number of Americans) (October 31).

(11) In accord with obligations under the NATO treaty, U.S. medium-range missiles in Europe attack bases in the Soviet Union from which missiles that attacked the Turkish bases were launched (October 31)

(12) Soviet Union, fearing additional U.S. attacks on its limited number of ICBMs, attacks the U.S. (November 1).

(13) U.S. ICBMs attacks the Soviet Union (November 1)” (p. 106).

Writing Prompt

The crisis did not lead to war, but with all of the quickly escalating factors, this reality is hard to believe. The U.S. and Soviet Union were so close to nuclear war that with one different choice, the two nations could have been completely destroyed. How did the crisis end? Who is responsible for the end? What wrong step could have caused a war?

Write explanatory two paragraphs describing what would have happened if the crisis didn’t end at step 7. Do you think there is a step between 8-13 where the crisis could have ended?

- What is it, and what would have happened? After step 7, would both sides have gone too far to stop? Could there be peace after this war? What would the consequences have been?

1. What did you like and dislike about this book?
2. Would you recommend this book to a friend?