

## The Spanish Civil War: U.S. Foreign Policy and individual Conscience Between the World Wars

### Lesson Plan

To prepare the students for this unit of study, it is advisable to assign for homework the night before the materials that appear on the following pages: the [Background](#), the [Glossary](#), and the [Time Line](#). Ask students to read these materials and take notes in the form of a learning log of ideas, themes, or issues that most impressed them.

On the day of the lesson, to initially and effectively engage students, we begin by giving them the opportunity to become policy makers in the context of current events. We then provide students with information from a documentary film that will help them to better understand the historical issues of the inter-war period, especially the Spanish Civil War. We close this section by giving the students a chance to voice their own views on the U.S. government's position during the Spanish Civil War.

#### Step-by-step plan: One-hour unit

Begin by asking students to write their responses to the "quick write" topic (see below).

Hand out note-taking strategy (see page 13) or study guide questions (see page 14) for Eric Sevareid's "Between the Wars" documentary film on the Spanish Civil War.

Show the class the half-hour Sevareid program (available here). This is a fast-moving documentary; you may need to pause the film at various points for review. You may want to adapt, modify, or combine both the note-taking strategy and study guide questions mentioned above.

If you wish to extend this unit into a second hour, see below for more options. If you wish to limit this unit to a one-class session, you could end it here, asking students to write for homework brief essay answers to the questions below. Students should use the notes they took during the film or their answers to the study guide questions to help them answer these questions:

- Why did some American men and women volunteer to serve in the Abraham Lincoln Brigade during the Spanish Civil War?
- How did General Franco manage to win the Spanish Civil War?
- Should the U.S. government have supported the Spanish Republic? Why or why not?

#### Step-by-step Plan: Second hour

Pass out copies of excerpts of personal testimony by some of the volunteers who went to Spain. These are in the form of excerpts from letters written by [Canute Oliver Frankson](#), [Hyman Katz](#), excerpts from an interview with [Evelyn Hutchins](#), and some sections of Congressional testimony made by [Crawford Morgan](#) before the Subversive Activities Control Board in 1954.

Read these excerpts aloud with the students, discussing the kinds of political and personal issues that are raised. This is an excellent opportunity to lead a discussion on what motivated men and women to defy U.S. law and foreign policy by leaving the U.S. to take military action against the fascists in a foreign country. Allow a half-hour to 40 minutes for this part.

Pass out copies of excerpts from President Roosevelt's "[Quarantine Speech](#)" of October 5, 1937 and read aloud in class.

Pass out copies of excerpts from "[Nationwide Press Comments](#)" that appeared in the New York Times of October 6, 1937 and read aloud in class.

For homework assignment, ask students to write their own editorial response to Roosevelt's speech.

#### Quick-Write

Pretend that you are in charge of U.S. foreign policy, and you have just learned about a severe state of emergency in another country where hundreds of thousands of people are being slaughtered by soldiers fighting against one another in a civil war.

Both sides have sought military assistance and supplies from you. Knowing that you have the power to authorize the sending of American troops, military equipment, and supplies to this country, you also realize that American intervention into the affairs of other countries is bound to be criticized severely by the public, especially if there are any American casualties.

Remembering the horrors of World War I, you are concerned that intervention might contribute to yet another destructive world war. Keep in mind, too, that this is an election year and your public standing is already in jeopardy from a series of economic problems at home.

Which policy would you choose: intervene in this country in an effort to end the bloodshed? Issue a humanitarian plea for restraint to both sides in the civil war, but pledge to remain neutral?"

In a quick-write, respond to the question above and support your position. Be prepared to discuss.