Science Fiction of the Fifties: Reflections of Cold War Themes

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Abstract:

In an inquiry-based curriculum unit designed for 11th grade US History and AP US History, students will explore themes, feelings, and motivations that lie beneath the events of the Cold War. Science fiction films and novels of the era will serve as a gateway to the themes and mindset of the era. By exploring American and Soviet sides of the conflict and paying close attention to early Cold War American cultural, political, and technological developments, students will root out misconceptions about the era and synthesize research into a deeper understanding of the culture that dug backyard bomb shelters and held Senate hearings to avert communist mind controllers in Hollywood. Students will analyze and evaluate themes of alienation, fear, control, conformity, and destruction through the lens of science fiction to better understand just how different or similar our current era is to early Cold War times.

In a five-week submersion student groups will research and teach their peers about four different themes, science fiction novels, and science fiction movies.