The Cold War

The Cold War was a time of political and military tension between the United States and the Soviet Union following World War II. In this informational text, Jessica McBirney details the various events of the Cold War and the effects they had both domestically and internationally. As you read, identify how the events of the Cold War affected the United States.

[paragraph 1] The Cold War is a part of world history that stretched over a period of more than 50 years. It embodied many military, political, cultural, and scientific tensions that had been building between nations for decades. Although it primarily involved the United States and the Soviet Union, the conflict affected dozens of other countries on almost every continent in the world. The Cold War was a complex web of conflicts, so it is easiest to understand it by asking some big-picture questions.

**WHAT IS A COLD WAR?**

[p. 2] When we normally think of war, we think of what scholars call "hot war." A hot war is a military conflict between two countries who go directly into combat with each other. On the other hand, a "cold war" happens when two countries are openly hostile towards each other without using violence. They might promote negative opinions about the enemy, threaten each other without actually following through, or do anything else (short of military action) to tear down the enemy.

**WHO FOUGHT THE COLD WAR?**
The two main actors were the United States and the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union stretched across modern-day Russia, into eastern Europe, and down near the Middle East. Both countries wanted to be the dominant world power.

**WHERE DID THE COLD WAR HAPPEN?**

Because it was a cold war, the two countries never directly fought with each other. Instead, they supported opposite sides of other wars they believed could promote their own beliefs. So really, the Cold War happened all over the world. It stretched to countries on almost every continent, including Cuba, Korea, Hungary, Guatemala, Congo, and more.

**WHEN DID IT HAPPEN?**

The Cold War started shortly after World War II ended, in 1947. In the aftermath of the war, Germany was defeated, but both the U.S. and the USSR were world superpowers who wanted control. They decided to split control of the old German territory in half. Soon, a wall went up separating the two territories; this Berlin Wall became the most famous physical icon of the Cold War. The destruction of the Berlin Wall, and the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, ended the War.

**WHY?**

Arguably, the central reason for the Cold War was the conflict between capitalism and communism. Both the U.S. (the capitalists) and the Soviet Union (the communists) believed their economic and governmental systems were superior, and both believed the other side’s way would seriously harm the world.

As a result, the U.S. devised a policy of “containment,” which said the U.S. would not try to fight existing communist countries, but they would do anything they could to stop new countries from becoming communist. Since this policy went directly against the USSR’s goal to expand communism globally, the two superpowers often found themselves fighting on behalf of smaller countries.

Nuclear weapons complicated this ideological tension. The U.S. first showed the world the power of nuclear missiles in 1945; it wasn’t long before the Soviet Union developed its own nuclear weapons. Now, either country could wipe the other one out with the push of a button.

**HOW WAS IT FOUGHT?**

The Cold War was made up of many smaller incidents across the world. Each incident was unique, but a few are more famous than the rest. One example of the indirect warfare between the U.S. and the USSR was the Vietnam War, from 1957 to 1975. In 1957 the communist-led North Vietnamese army began attacking South Vietnam. They hoped to gain control of the whole country. The U.S. saw this as a communist threat and, because of the containment policy, began sending troops to support South Vietnam in 1964. The Soviet Union, in turn, provided significant monetary support to North Vietnam. Unfortunately, the war essentially turned into a stalemate; U.S. troops pulled out in 1973, and South Vietnam fell to the Northern communist forces two years later.

Tensions were always high between the U.S. and the USSR. The best example is the Cuban Missile Crisis, which occurred in 1962 and was one of the tensest moments in the Cold War. U.S. spies discovered that the Soviet Union had placed nuclear missiles on the coast of Cuba, only a few hundred miles away from Florida. For several days, as President John F. Kennedy and his advisors debated what to do, it looked as if the incident might escalate into a nuclear world war.
However, President Kennedy and Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev both made some courageous decisions to hold back and rely on diplomacy instead of war. They agreed not to attack each other.

The Cold War was not just military; in fact, the famous space race of the 1960s was largely a scientific competition between the U.S. and the Soviets. In 1961 President Kennedy declared the U.S. would reach the moon by the end of the decade. The competition that followed led to some incredible scientific discoveries in both countries. In the end, the Soviets were first to launch a man into space (Yuri Gagarin in 1961), but the U.S. did accomplish its goal and was first to land on the moon, in July of 1969.

THE COLD WAR AND THE U.S.

The Cold War clearly influenced many international events, but it also influenced daily life in the United States. One very real fear was nuclear war. Regular citizens in the U.S. were aware that a nuclear bomb could potentially fall at any moment. Some families constructed underground bomb shelters and kept them stocked with food just in case of nuclear fallout. Public schools conducted nuclear fallout drills, much as we have fire drills today, in which students would practice hiding under their desks if they saw a bomb go off.

The fear of communism also had tangible effects on the home front. Particularly during the 1950s as the policy of containment became more well-known, people began to see communism as a threat in their own communities as well. Anyone with possibly communist-leaning ideas was suspicious. Congress got involved when Senator Joseph McCarthy started seeking out people who had been affiliated with communism in any way; he even worked with the FBI to obtain information on people’s backgrounds and whereabouts. “McCarthyism” swept the nation, and many people, especially actors in Hollywood, were put on watch-lists without much evidence.

The Cold War slowly declined as the U.S. and the Soviet Union formed better relationships and agreed to get rid of some of their nuclear weapons. It officially ended in 1991, when the Soviet Union collapsed and its communist government dissolved. The tense relationship between the two countries defined much of world history for almost half a century; even today the U.S. and Russia have a complicated relationship. The Cold War also showed how much ideas can influence countries and their actions.

Assignment 1- Text Dependent Questions

Directions: For the following questions, choose the best answer. When you locate the answer for the multiple choice questions, please highlight the correct response using the highlight feature on the toolbar above (the highlight feature looks like a little marker).

1. Which statement expresses the claim of the text?
   a. The atmosphere of the Cold War led to some of the most important technological and scientific discoveries to date.
   b. While tension was high between many nations during the Cold War, leaders were able to keep life relatively normal for citizens in their countries.
   c. While the Cold War lasted several decades, it had less severe effects because there was no actual violence.
   d. The Cold War was a time of conflict and fear between nations that affected America’s
relationship with many other countries.

2. Which two pieces of evidence best support the answer to question 1?

   a. “They might promote negative opinions about the enemy, threaten each other without actually following through, or do anything else (short of military action)” (Paragraph 2)
   b. “They decided to split control of the old German territory in half. Soon, a wall went up separating the two territories” (Paragraph 5)
   c. “The U.S. first showed the world the power of nuclear missiles in 1945; it wasn’t long before the Soviet Union developed its own nuclear weapons.” (Paragraph 8)
   d. “U.S. spies discovered that the Soviet Union had placed nuclear missiles on the coast of Cuba, only a few hundred miles away from Florida.” (Paragraph 10)
   e. “the famous space race of the 1960s was largely a scientific competition between the U.S. and the Soviets.” (Paragraph 11)
   f. “people began to see communism as a threat in their own communities as well. Anyone with possibly communist-leaning ideas was suspicious.” (Paragraph 13)

3. How does the author primarily structure “How Was It Fought?” (Paragraphs 9-11)?

   a. The author describes the events of the Cold War in the order that they took place.
   b. The author breaks down the complex event by defining key terms for readers.
   c. The author gives three examples of major historical events from the Cold War period.
   d. The author groups the events of the Cold War together based on location to minimize confusion.

4. How do paragraphs 6-8 contribute to the development of ideas in the text?

   a. They compare cold wars to typical military conflicts.
   b. They dissect the various types of military strategies used in war.
   c. They illustrate how the United States and Soviet Union fought the Cold War.
   d. They detail why the Cold War is a time period as much as it was a war.

Assignment 2- Brief Response

Directions: Using the text, please respond in at least a paragraph to the question below.

1. Explain the relationship between the Cold War and Americans’ everyday lives. Cite evidence from the text in your response. Please type/write your response below. Type/write your response below.
Assignment 3 - Discussion Questions

Directions: Write your answers to the following questions in the space provided. Imagine you had to share your original ideas in a class discussion.

1. In the context of this text, how does fear drive action? Cite evidence from this text, your own experience, and other literature, art, or history in your answer.

2. The Cold War changed the lives of Americans in many ways, even though the war was very different from previous wars America had fought in. How did awareness of the conflict change life in America? How can war affect citizens who are not fighting the war itself?

3. Consider a time when the United States was involved in a conflict abroad during your lifetime. Even though it was not fought in America, did it impact your day-to-day life? Why or why not?