

Blair House Memo lesson for English Language Learners (ELLs)

Introduction:

This lesson was prepared for 10th and 11th grade English Language Learners (ELLs), most of whom arrived in the U.S. approximately two years ago and struggle with academic vocabulary. This lesson has both content and English language objectives. In addition to learning about the beginning of the Korean War, the purpose of this lesson is to strengthen Cold War vocabulary (specifically communism, containment and domino theory), and to explore historical thinking and reading skills such as sourcing, corroboration, contextualization, and close reading.

While the overall reading level of this document may be difficult for many ELLs, through an appropriately guided lesson, students can extrapolate key information and strengthen their skills and understanding of this time period.

Ohio's Learning Standards (Social Studies 2018)

American History

TOPIC: HISTORICAL THINKING AND SKILLS Students apply skills by utilizing a variety of resources to construct theses and support or refute contentions made by others. Alternative explanations of historical events are analyzed and questions of historical inevitability are explored.

CONTENT STATEMENT 1: The use of primary and secondary sources of information includes an examination of the credibility of each source.

TOPIC: THE COLD WAR (1945-1991) The United States and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (U.S.S.R.) emerged as the two strongest powers in international affairs. Ideologically opposed, they challenged one another in a series of confrontations known as the Cold War. The costs of this prolonged contest weakened the U.S.S.R. so that it collapsed due to internal upheavals as well as American pressure. The Cold War had social and political implications in the United States.

CONTENT STATEMENT 25: The Cold War and conflicts in Korea and Vietnam influenced domestic and international politics.

World History

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explanations of historical events are analyzed and questions of historical inevitability are explored.

CONTENT STATEMENT 1. The use of primary and secondary sources of information includes an examination of the credibility of each source.

TOPIC: THE COLD WAR (1945-1991) Conflicting political and economic ideologies after World War II resulted in the Cold War. The Cold War overlapped with the era of decolonization and national liberation.

CONTENT STATEMENTS: 17. The United States and the Soviet Union became superpowers and competed for global influence. 18. Treaties and agreements at the end of World War II changed national boundaries and created multinational organizations.

Lesson Plan

1. Distribute 3 vocab sheets (Frayer models of communism, containment and domino theory), and assist where needed to complete them, leaving the “examples” and “non-examples” sections blank. It may help students to work in pairs. Set these aside for completion after reading the memo.
2. Discuss some background information of the beginning of the Korean War, showing a map of North and South Korea as divided after WWII. Explain how on June 25, 1950, the U.S. learned that the North Korea crossed the line and invaded South Korea. Also explain that China had just become a Communist country (and Taiwan/Formosa did not) following a civil war.
3. Distribute the Blair House Memo, which is actually a summary of the longer 8 page transcript. As a class, read and annotate together. The following may be helpful definitions for students to highlight and write in the margins along the way.

apparent (easy to see)

capable (able to do something)

imminent collapse (to fall down suddenly)

Formosa (another name for Taiwan)

committed (decided to use)

substantial mobilization (many resources to get ready for war)

appropriate (right, proper)

4. Distribute the Historical Thinking for Blair House Memo questions. Read and discuss, either individually or as a class discussion.

5. Return to the 3 frayer vocab sheets and complete the “examples” and “non-examples” sections based on reading the Blair House memo. The memo doesn’t specifically mention communism, containment, or the domino theory, but all are implied.

Possible discussion questions:

The memo doesn’t mention Communists, but who do you think are the Communists in this situation? Who are the U.S. going to fight against?

The memo talks about “containment” of communism, without saying that word. How does the U.S. government intend to “contain” North Korea?

Which countries does the U.S. want to protect from communism? In other words, if South Korea falls to communism, which nearby countries are the U.S. trying to protect/strengthen? (a map would be helpful here!) This is an example of “domino theory.”

Lesson Extensions:

Many of these telegrams could be interesting for more practice with historical thinking and reading, and/or to apply the vocab lessons here.

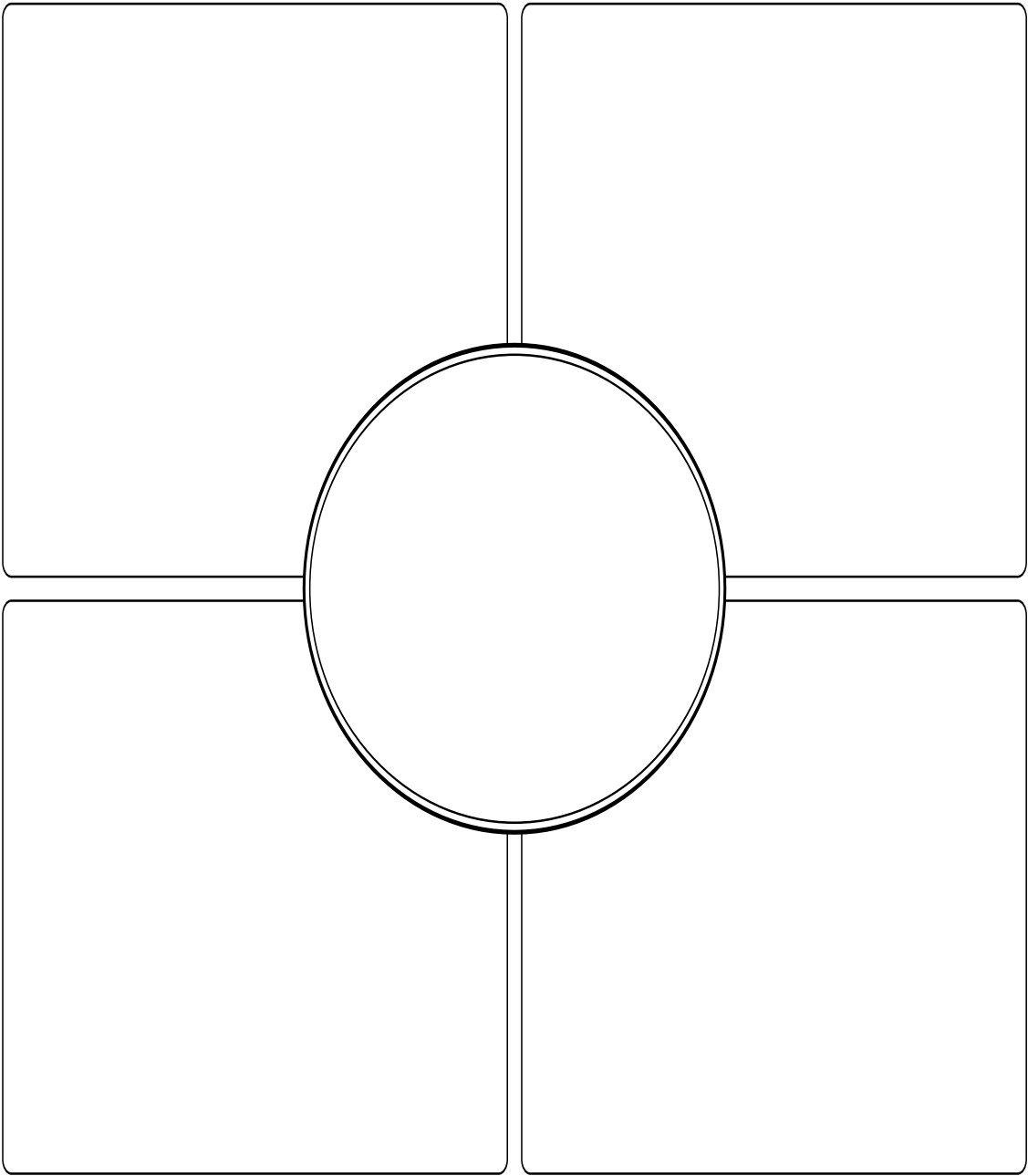
<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1950v07/comp1> -- telegrams from pre-post Korean war

The Korean War and Why There are 2 Koreas from Newsela – good introduction to the war, and reading level can be adjusted by lexile level.

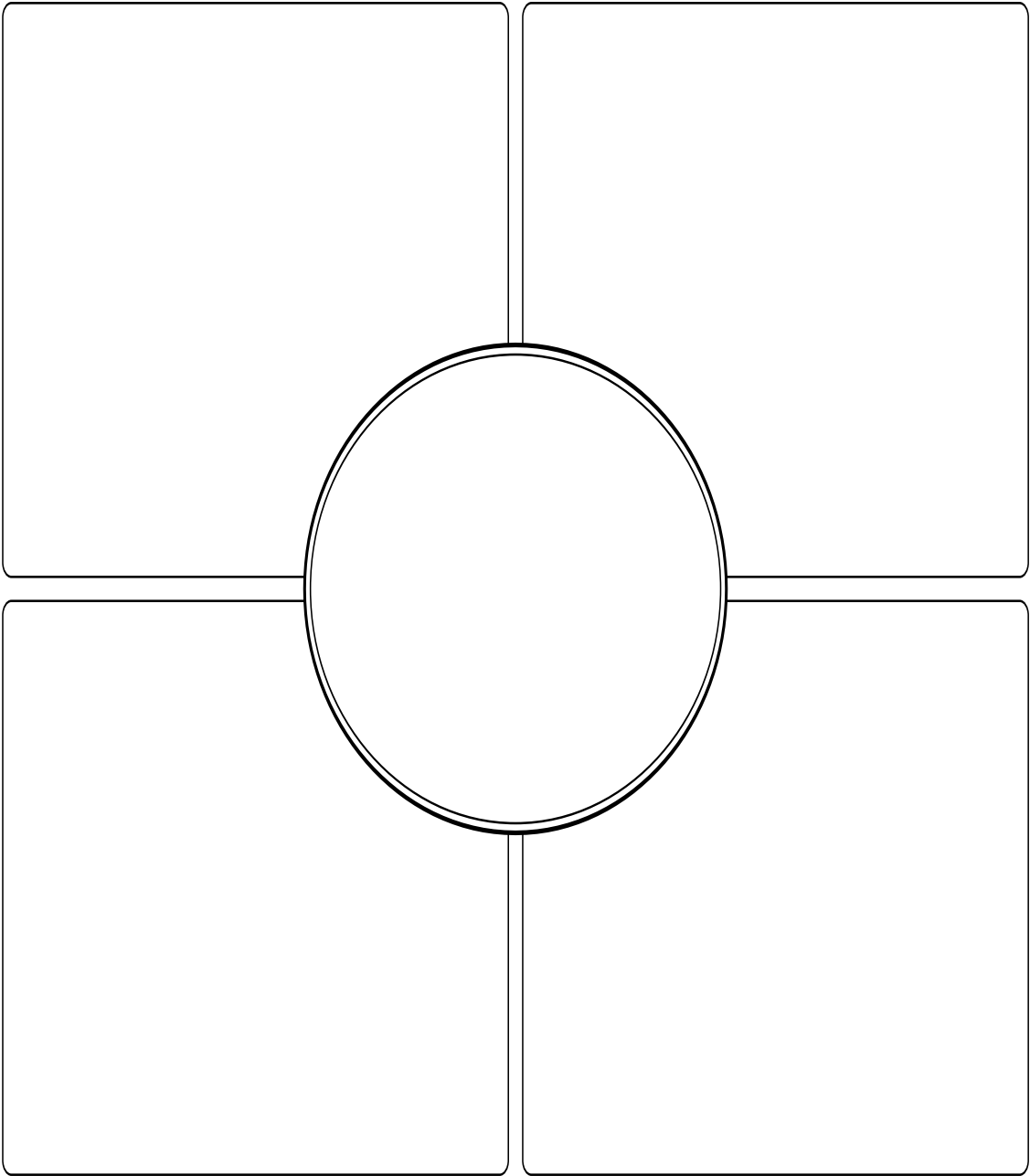
<https://newsela.com/read/lib-history-korean-war/id/39331/>

Veterans History Project – library of Congress <https://www.loc.gov/vets/> -- watch/listen to interviews of Korean War vets, specifically Walter Dowdy, Jr., beginning with the clip that starts “in April 1950,” as he was among those immediately dispatched to Korea and was injured the same day as the Blair House memo.

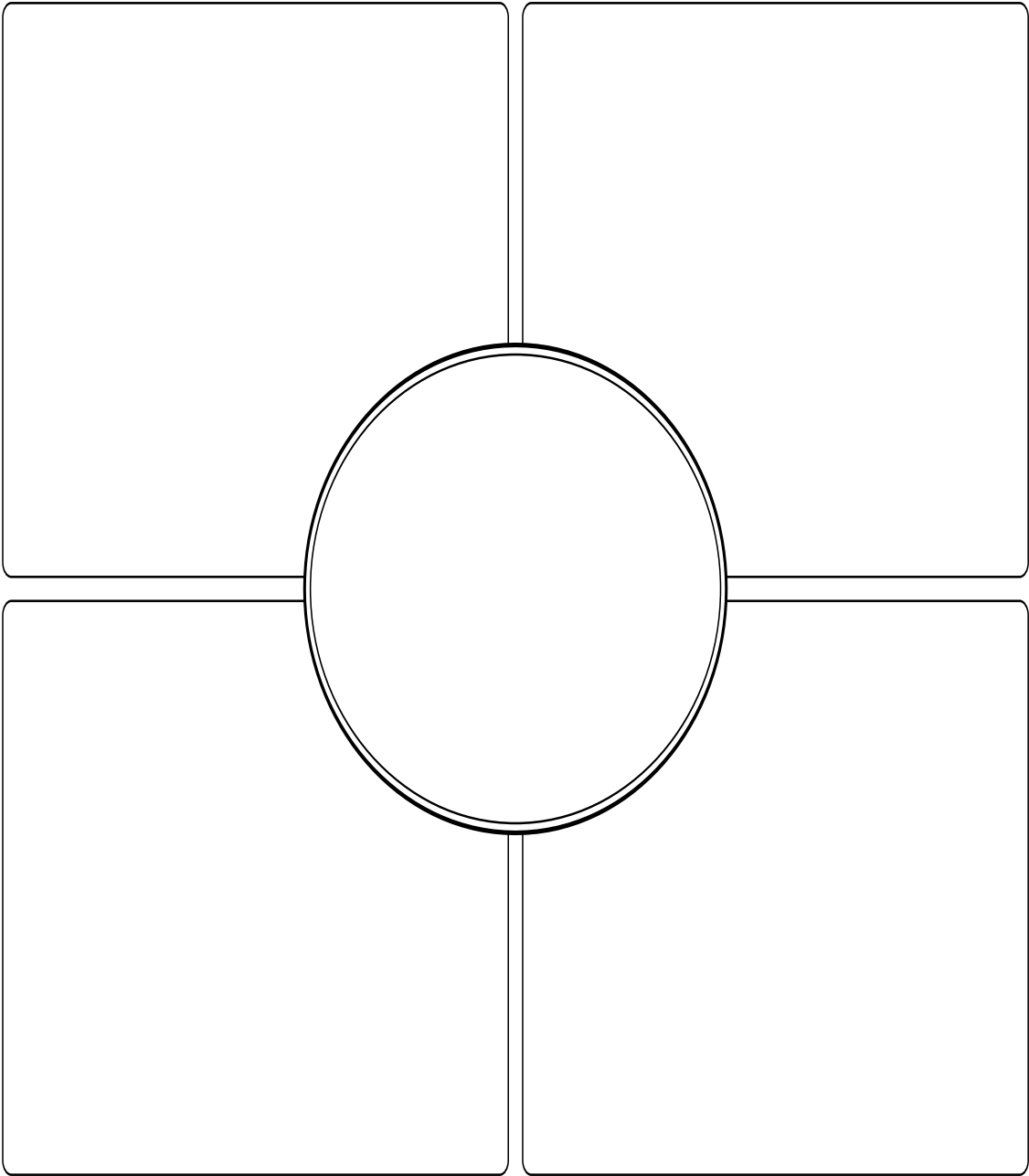
Cold War Vocabulary



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June 26, 1950 - Monday

Subject: Blair House Meetings



During the course of the day on June 26, it became apparent that the forces of the Republic of Korea were not capable of holding Seoul, and there were some reports that they were in danger of imminent collapse. At 9 o'clock in the evening of June 26, a meeting was held, attended by the President, the Secretary of State with Messrs. Matthews, Rusk, Hickerson, and Jessup, the Secretary of Defense, Secretary Pace, Secretary Finletter, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff. At this meeting it was agreed that:

- a. The Navy and Air Force be instructed to offer the fullest possible support to the South Korean forces south of the 38th Parallel;
- b. orders be issued to the Seventh Fleet to prevent an attack on Formosa, the National Government of China be told to desist from operations against the mainland, and the Seventh Fleet be ordered to effect this;
- c. U. S. military forces in the Philippines be increased, and aid to the Philippines accelerated;
- d. aid to Indochina be stepped up and a strong military mission sent there.

During the course of the meeting the problem of whether or not ground forces might be committed was considered, and it was agreed that this would require substantial mobilization.

Appropriate orders were issued that evening and a public announcement made the next day.

Source: Secretary Acheson's Briefing Book,
borrowed by G.M.E. from Averell Harriman.

Name _____

Historical Thinking Questions for Blair House Meetings Memo

Sourcing

1. When was this document written? _____

2. What type of document is this? (circle one)

Diary entry photograph memo newspaper article

Contextualization

3. What is the purpose of this document? _____

4. Why was the meeting at Blair House called? _____

Corroboration

5. How can we tell if this memo is real? _____

Close Reading

6. When were the orders detailed in the document to be put into place? _____

