1960

John F. Kennedy vs Richard Nixon

A 20-minute lesson on the 1960 U.S. presidential election. Includes lesson plan, student worksheet, answer key, and discussion prompts.

ERA New Deal Coalition	ELECTORAL VOTES 537 total
WINNER John F. Kennedy (Democratic) · 303 EV	RUNNER-UP Richard Nixon (Republican) · 219 EV
KEY ISSUE Cold War; Cuba; civil rights; Kennedy's Catholicism; economic growth	TURNOUT 63.8%

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1960

In 1960, two men wanted to be the next president of the United States. One was John F. Kennedy, a senator from Massachusetts. The other was Richard Nixon, the vice president at the time.

John Kennedy was different from most presidents. He was Catholic, and there had never been a Catholic president before. Some people worried about that. He was also very young. He was only 43 years old. Other presidents had usually been much older.

But Kennedy was good at talking to people. He gave speeches that made people excited about America. He also did something brand new: he debated Richard Nixon on television. About 70 million people watched the first debate. People who listened on the radio thought Nixon won. People who watched on television thought Kennedy won. Kennedy looked young and confident; Nixon looked tired and sweaty.

When the votes were counted, Kennedy won. But he won by a tiny number of votes - one of the closest elections in American history. He became the youngest person ever elected president and the first Catholic president.

Look at the picture. President Kennedy started big projects. He



John F. Kennedy in 1961, the year he became the 35th U.S. president. He was the youngest person ever elected to the office.

WHITE HOUSE PRESS OFFICE, VIA WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

Let's talk about the story

1.

Who became the 35th president of the United States after the 1960 election?

2.

What was different about the 1960 election compared to earlier elections?

3.

Name one thing John F. Kennedy did as president.

Warm-up (5 min)

Look at the man in the picture. His name is John F. Kennedy. People often called him JFK. In 1960 he ran for president. He was very young - only 43 years old.

Answer key

1.

John F. Kennedy became the 35th president. He started his job in January 1961.

Kennedy defeated Richard Nixon in a very close election. He was 43 years old when he took office, the youngest person ever elected.

2.

Accept any of: (1) It was the first time presidential candidates debated on TV. (2) The first Catholic was elected president. (3) The youngest person ever elected president won. (4) It was one of the closest elections in U.S. history. Award credit for any specific difference.

The 1960 election's firsts include the TV debate, the first Catholic, the youngest winner, and the razor-thin margin. Any one shows comprehension.

3.

Accept any: He started the Peace Corps. He said America would send a person to the Moon by the end of the 1960s. He worked on civil rights. He handled the Cuban Missile Crisis. Award credit for any specific Kennedy-era achievement or event.

Kennedy's thousand days as president included many famous events. Any specific one shows the child understood the reading.