

AROUND THE WORLD

Cuba: Tito's Trouble with Communism | Lesson Plan

What does Tito's story reveal about the costs of communism, and why does human dignity require liberty?

Students will understand how Tito's experience reveals communism's failure to produce a free society, a stable economy, and a secure future for individuals and families.

Learning Objectives:

- Locate and describe Cuba's geography and its strategic position near the United States, understanding how location shapes both history and geopolitical importance.
- Examine the richness of Cuban culture—its language, music, family bonds, love of classic cars—and consider how these enduring aspects of humanity persist.
- Evaluate how censorship, rationing, and forced economic control suppress human dignity, limit freedom, and prevent individuals from flourishing.
- Compare and contrast life under communist rule with life in a free republic, particularly in regard to freedom of speech, economic liberty, and the ability to pursue one's vocation.
- Compare and contrast how Tito and Carolina respond to injustice, and explain how each character chooses to fight for their family, each in their own way.

Key Vocabulary:

- **Communism:** A political and economic system in which all property and resources are owned and controlled by the government. The result of this system is often dictatorship and government control of every aspect of people's lives.
- **Fidel Castro:** A political revolutionary who took control of Cuba and led the country from 1959 to 2008. Castro turned Cuba into the first communist state in the Western Hemisphere.
- **Cuban Revolution:** The political and military revolt led by Fidel Castro to overthrow Fulgencio Batista's dictatorship.
- **Nationalize:** To take private property and give it to the national government.
- **Black Market:** A type of parallel economy where people buy and sell outside of the government's control. In Cuba, it sells basic goods like food and medicine that people cannot get in the regular market.
- **Free Market:** An economic system based on free competition between privately owned businesses, with little to no interference from the government.

Educational Standards: CCRA.L.1, CCRA.L.2, CCRA.L.4, CCRA.L.5, CCRA.SL.1, CCRA.SL.2, CCRA.R.4, CCRA.R.6

Academic Subject Areas: Civics, U.S. History, Western Civilization, Social Studies, Geography, Culture, Global Awareness

Scan to watch episode



What You'll Need

- Video: *Around the World: Tito's Trouble with Communism* (Watch [Here](#))
- Worksheet: *Around the World: Tito's Trouble with Communism* (Click [Here](#))
- Optional: construction paper, glue, magazines, colored pencils or markers

Lesson Plan (Two 45-minute Class Periods)

Part 1: Reading the Book (25-30 min)

Note to Teachers:

- We recommend beginning this lesson with a sustained, uninterrupted read-aloud of *Around the World: Tito's Trouble with Communism* while students follow along on their devices or printed copies. This will take around 25–30 minutes, depending on pace.
- This method is intentional—it rebuilds attention spans, immerses students in meaningful narrative, and restores a lost tradition: attentive listening. If possible, resist the temptation to break up the reading into smaller sessions.
- Encourage students to follow along with a pencil in hand and mark moments they find surprising, confusing, or important. After reading, allow a few moments for quiet reflection or discussion before beginning Part 2 of the lesson plan.

Part 2: Geography Focus (10-15 min)

- Activity: Use the **Geography Focus** section of the worksheets—*North America & the Caribbean* and *Map of the Island of Cuba*—to guide students through a hands-on mapping activity. Students will locate and label Cuba and surrounding regions, measure distances using a scale, and identify key geographic features in the Caribbean and Central America.
- Discuss the following questions:
 - How does Cuba's island location impact the daily lives of Tito and his family, especially when it comes to trade, travel, and access to resources?
 - Why is Cuba's closeness to the United States important in the story, and how has that relationship shaped Cuba's history and government decisions?
 - How might living in a place both rich in culture and full of hardship affect how someone sees their future, like Tito or Carolina, or how someone like Grandma Maribel sees her past?

Part 3: Vocabulary Focus and Sentence Writing (5-10 min)

- Vocabulary Focus: Introduce and define the key vocabulary terms listed in the worksheet (*communism, Fidel Castro, Cuban Revolution, nationalize, black market, free market*). Discuss how these terms show up in the story and shape Tito's experiences living under a communist government. You may choose to pre-teach these words or explore them after reading using the worksheet section.

Part 4: Systems, Struggles, and Solutions (20-25 min)

- Activity: Use the **Cause & Effect Chart** in the worksheet to help students connect events in the story to the broader political systems and ideologies that shape Tito's life in Cuba. Below are three major themes that reveal how communism negatively impacts individuals and families in Cuba. Each example connects directly to scenes in the story.
 - **Broken Promises of Equality and Provision**
The government promised a better life for all, but delivered hardship instead.
 - Castro promised prosperity but kept wealth for himself and party elites.
 - The government seized homes and businesses, but never truly "redistributed" them.
 - Decades later, families like Tito's still live in poverty.
 - Food rations are unreliable—Sonia's quinceañera had almost no celebration.
 - Vital resources like electricity, medicine, and clean water are inconsistent.
 - Cuba sends doctors and goods abroad while its own people go without.
 - **Government Control of Daily Life**
Everyday choices—like school, work, or healthcare—are controlled by the state.
 - Tito's boxing path depends on government approval, not personal goals.
 - Grandma Maribel's dance career served the regime's interests.
 - Tito and Carolina attend school through political connections, not merit.
 - Families rely on black market jobs to survive because formal jobs pay too little.
 - The government controls the school curriculum and punishes dissent.
 - Sonia's illness is made worse by state-run healthcare failures.
 - **Censorship, Surveillance, and Fear**
Speaking the truth—or even asking questions—can lead to punishment.
 - Rafa disappears after attending a protest against the regime.
 - Carolina is nearly expelled for criticizing Cuba's broken healthcare system.
 - Tito keeps quiet to protect himself and his family.
 - A classmate says Carolina's father "should've known his place."
 - Tito fears Carolina will vanish like their father if she joins the protest.
 - Even at home, Grandma Maribel speaks carefully about the past.
- Small Group or Partner Work: Students identify 2–3 problems Tito and his family face and connect them to a system or policy described in the story. Then, explain how that system affected Tito's life or that of his family.
- Whole-Class Debrief: Guide a discussion using these questions:
 - What aspect of communism caused the biggest challenge in Tito's story?
 - What values or actions helped him push through?
- Teacher Note: This activity encourages students to recognize how flawed policies shape educational outcomes—but also how personal values like perseverance, truth, and discipline offer a better path forward, even within broken systems.

Part 5: Personal Reflection / Writing Activity (20-25 min)

- Activity: Have students complete the **Reading Comprehension and Personal Reflection** section of the worksheet. This portion reinforces key plot points and encourages students to think critically about the cost of government policy.
- Teacher Guidance:
 - Review the comprehension questions aloud or in small groups to check understanding before students begin writing.
 - Encourage students to refer to specific moments from the story in their answers.
 - For the reflection prompt, give students quiet time to think before writing. Emphasize honesty and effort over length.
 - Optional: Invite volunteers to share their reflections with the class to build connection and discussion.

Don't have time for the full lesson? Quick Activity (25 minutes)

Step 1: Watch the *Around the World: Tito's Trouble with Communism* video together as a class.

Step 2: Lead a focused discussion using the following guiding questions:

- What are some of the biggest challenges Tito and his family face living in Cuba?
- What promises did Fidel Castro make about communism that were not kept?
- How does Tito respond to these challenges—and how does his response differ from Carolina's?

Optional Extension: Distribute the worksheet and invite students to complete one or two sections independently—such as the Vocabulary Focus & Sentence Writing or the Cause & Effect Chart—as a follow-up or homework assignment.