

Over the summer, I read a book called “Countdown” by Deborah Wiles. It was the story of a middle school girl who lived during the Cuban Missile Crisis. I found that the historical backdrop fascinated me just as much as the characters and their conflicts. When I heard that the topic for History Day was Debate and Diplomacy, I immediately thought of the Cuban Missile Crisis. I knew that it would be a good topic- I was confident there would be many available sources- and, of course, the topic interested me. It was a perfect fit.

When I was researching, I originally stuck to Proquest and other online databases. However, many of my sources were from the online archives of the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library. I also went to the Wilson Library at the University of Minnesota and found some good sources there. I got them, though, through the Elk River Public Library. Lastly, I acquired a very good book source from my school library. I found my previous knowledge to be fairly useless because President Kennedy was portrayed as a hero and Premier Khrushchev as a villain but that wasn’t really the case. Both men were somewhere in the middle.

I chose a performance as my category because I decided to work on a skill that I needed to improve on rather than use the ones I’m already confident in. I know that I get stage fright and I would like to try to work through that. I also chose a performance because there was a lot of emotion involved with the crisis. To me, the best way to capture and show that would be through a performance.

It took a lot of trial and error to create my script. In the beginning, I thought that I could go about my performance as if I were President Kennedy’s ghost. However, I could tell writing from his perspective wasn’t working for me. After that, I tried to be an ex- CIA agent, but when I wrote from that perspective I was not able to put the right kind of emotion into the dialogue. I talked to my history teacher about it, and he suggested that I try to write it from the perspective of someone who was married to one of the Executive Committee members. He used the head of the CIA as an example, and I took that idea and ran with it. After that it was a simple matter of writing everything out.

The Cuban Missile Crisis is related to debate and diplomacy because it took several days of debate to decide how to act towards the missiles in Cuba. However, I didn’t focus on that aspect of the crisis so much. I did, though, focus on the diplomacy between the Soviet Union and the United States. If Premier Khrushchev and President Kennedy hadn’t begun their secret correspondence, then the telegraph machine that connected the two superpower leaders together would never have been installed.