

## Lumumba Assassination Lesson Plan

**Central Historical Question:**  
*Why was Patrice Lumumba assassinated?*

### Materials:

- Assassination of Lumumba PowerPoint
- Copies of Documents A-E
- Copies of Guiding Questions and Graphic Organizer

**Common Core State Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies:** #1 (Gr. 6-12), #3 (Gr. 11-12), #6 (Gr. 6-12), #8 (Gr. 11-12), #9 (Gr. 6-12)

**Note:** This lesson will likely take multiple class periods. You might consider assigning the opening textbook passage and Guiding Questions as homework in order to limit the amount of text students work through in class.

Prior to this lesson, students should be familiar with the history of Belgian colonization of the Congo.

### Plan of Instruction:

1. Warm Up: *What are some reasons why politicians are assassinated?*  
Once students have a chance to brainstorm answers to this question, encourage them to share out.
2. Introduction: Use the PowerPoint presentation to establish background information on the assassination of Patrice Lumumba and to introduce the day's Central Historical Question.
  - a. Slide 2: Belgian Control of the Congo: 1884-1960. *Remind students that Belgium colonized the Congo starting in 1884. Before the Belgians arrived, the Congo was home to the Kongo, Luba, Lunda, and Yeke kingdoms, as well as the Kuba Federation and numerous other smaller states. King Leopold first controlled the Congo personally through a private organization named the Congo Free State. After public outcry over the mistreatment of people in the Congo, the government of Belgium took over control of the Congo in 1908.*
  - b. Slide 3: Decolonization in Africa. *After World War II, African countries began negotiating, demanding, and winning their independence from their European colonizers.*
  - c. Slide 4: Pressure for Independence. *Although Belgium hadn't really considered giving the Congo independence, in the late 1950s, Congolese began founding political parties. One of those political parties, the National Congolese Movement (MNC), was co-founded by Patrice Lumumba.*

*Lumumba had been a postal clerk and beer salesman. He became very active in his trade union and increasingly interested in politics. He co-founded the MNC as a national, pro-independence party that united Congolese from a variety of political backgrounds for the goal of independence. The MNC was the only political party in the Congo that was not based on regional or ethnic identities.*

*When the Belgian king visited the Congo in 1955, Lumumba was one of the people selected to meet with him. Lumumba was 30 years old at the time. In 1959, protests for independence started in the country. Lumumba was arrested during one protest and put in jail for 6 months.*

- d. Slide 5: An Independent Congolese Government. *As protests grew and some turned violent, the Belgian government realized they needed to put together a plan for independence. In January 1960, the Belgian government hosted a “round table” of Congolese leaders to discuss independence for the Congo. Lumumba was freed from jail in order to travel to Brussels for the meeting, which he attended as the representative of the MNC. At the round table, the leaders agreed that June 30, 1960, would be the day that Congo gained its independence.*

*Before independence in June, elections were held to determine who would lead the Congo. Lumumba’s political party, the MNC, won the highest number of votes in the election, and he was named prime minister. Alliance des Bakongo, one of the regional/ethnic parties, earned the second most votes, and its leader, Joseph Kasavubu, was named president. A government with multiple political parties in the highest positions of its executive branch is known as a “coalition” government.*

- e. Slide 6: Troubles for Lumumba. *Trouble for Lumumba and the Congo started quickly after Independence Day. The army mutinied because of their continued mistreatment by Belgian officers, who stayed in the Congo even after June 30 as part of the transition to independence. The state of Katanga tried to secede, or break away from the country, because their political leader, Moise Tshombe, hadn’t been made part of the Congo’s government. A very large portion of Congo’s exports and public revenue came from resource-rich Katanga. In addition to the political conflict of secession, losing Katanga would be a huge loss to Congo’s economy. Less than 10 weeks after he became prime minister, Lumumba was dismissed from power by Kasavubu on September 5, 1960.*
- f. Slide 7: Removed from Power. *Colonel Joseph Mobutu (who later became president) staged a military coup on September 14<sup>th</sup>. Lumumba was put under house arrest by the military. We now know that Belgium, Britain, and U.S. were all plotting Lumumba’s assassination around this time.*

- g. Slide 8: Assassination in Katanga. *Lumumba realized how much danger he was in and decided to try to escape with his family. When the army eventually found Lumumba, he was arrested, beaten, and put on a plane to Katanga province. He was jailed in Katanga for a few days and then taken into the forest and killed by a firing squad of Katangese police or military forces.*

*In 2001 [see Document E], the Belgian government admitted to being “morally responsible for the circumstances leading to the death of Lumumba.” Others have speculated about U.S and British involvement. In 1975, the Church Committee in the U.S. found that the CIA was actively involved in attempts to assassinate Lumumba. In 2013, a member of the British parliament claimed that MI6, the British intelligence agency, was also complicit in the assassination, although this claim has been disputed. [See <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-22006446> for more details.]*

- h. Slide 9: Central Historical Question. *Although we know the groups involved in killing Lumumba, we still need to determine why so many different actors and countries wanted him dead. In this lesson, your main task will be to answer the lesson’s Central Historical Question: Why was Patrice Lumumba assassinated?*

3. Introduce/Review skills of sourcing and contextualization.

- a. If necessary, use Historical Thinking posters [[sheg.stanford.edu/intro-materials](http://sheg.stanford.edu/intro-materials)] to review the skills of sourcing and contextualization.
- b. Point out that historians make claims based upon evidence in historical sources. In order to gather credible evidence, historians evaluate the reliability, or trustworthiness, of different historical sources. They often do this by considering the point of view and motivations of different historical actors and by comparing how different sources portray historical events.
- c. Explain to students that they will work on sourcing and contextualizing five documents on the assassination of Patrice Lumumba. They will then develop a claim addressing the lesson's Central Historical Question.

4. Hand out Document A.

- a. Explain that first the class will read a textbook account of the assassination of Lumumba.
- b. Have students review the Guiding Questions.
- c. In pairs, students read Document A and answer the Guiding Questions.

- d. As students read through the documents in this lesson, they should complete the Graphic Organizer. It will help them to construct a written response to the Central Historical Question at the end of the lesson.
  - e. As a whole class, share out and discuss responses.
    - Students should notice that little information is given about Lumumba other than that he was a postal clerk. After Lumumba came to power, the textbook recounts only negative things happening—Belgians leaving the country, the economy struggling, and Katanga seceding. Ask students what the textbook might be implying.
    - Further, students should notice that the textbook does not specify who assassinated Lumumba or give any reasons why he might have been assassinated. Discuss why students think this might be the case. Possible answers include that it is a complicated or controversial topic and the textbook authors chose to oversimplify it in order to avoid the controversy.
5. Hand out Documents B and C.
- a. Explain to students that they will now read two documents that will help them explore possible reasons for Lumumba’s assassination.
  - b. Have students read Document B and answer the Guiding Questions.
  - c. As a whole class, share out and discuss responses. Focus on Questions 2 and 3:
    - Students should notice that Lumumba is hopeful about the future of the Congo but fairly frank about the experience of Belgian colonialism in his country. Make sure students consider how different audiences, including Belgians and Congolese, might have received this speech.
    - Building off students’ responses about how Belgians might have received Lumumba’s speech, discuss whether any clues are emerging about why Lumumba was assassinated. Students have no hard evidence about rationale yet, but they can begin to speculate how Lumumba might have angered people or made enemies. If students struggle to answer this question, ask them why Belgians might have cared about how Lumumba talked about Belgians and colonialism. For example, there were still many Belgians living in the Congo, many Belgian companies operating there, and members of the Belgian military still working there. Would these people want Lumumba to be the leader of the

country? Would the Belgian government be responsive to the feelings and opinions of these Belgians living in the Congo?

- d. Before students read Document C, source the document together. Quickly discuss when it was published (1960) and what was going on with the U.S. at the time: the Cold War. If necessary, quickly review what the Cold War was and who the U.S. saw as its enemies.
  - e. Have students read Document C and answer the Guiding Questions.
  - f. As a whole class, share out and discuss responses. Focus on Questions 2 and 3.
    - Lumumba is described, at different points in this brief, as having a “leftist tinge,” appointing “Communist inclined” people to government positions, having “Communist contacts,” and willing to accept money from “Communist sources.” Lumumba is portrayed as powerful—the brief emphasizes his control over the army—and dangerous to U.S. interests because of his connections with the USSR.
    - Push students to continue to speculate about reasons why Lumumba had enemies who might want him out of power. Specifically, students should think about whether, in the context of the Cold War, the U.S. would have approved of a new leader who was willing to accept support from the USSR.
6. Hand out Documents D and E.
- a. Explain to students that they will now read two final documents.
  - b. Have students read Document D and answer the Guiding Questions.
  - c. As a whole class, share out and discuss responses. Focus on Questions 2, 3, and 4:
    - According to the article, Lumumba claimed that Belgium was directing and supporting Katanga’s efforts to secede from the Congo. If students struggle to answer Question 3, ask them what Belgium might have gained from supporting Katanga (especially since Belgian relations with Lumumba and the Congo were already strained). Help students realize that Belgium was interested in Katanga’s vast resources and in protecting Belgian companies located there for the resources.
    - Students should realize that, even before Katanga seceded, Belgian relationships with Lumumba were already strained (based on Lumumba’s Independence Day speech as well as other events). Katanga’s secession and Lumumba’s accusations about

Belgian support for Katanga made the situation even worse. Belgium was highly motivated to either help Katanga secede or to have Congolese leadership that was more sympathetic to Belgian interests in the Congo.

- d. Have students read Document E and answer the Guiding Questions.
- e. As a whole class, share out and discuss responses. Focus on Questions 3 and 4:
  - This document should help corroborate what students may have speculated as part of their answer to Question 4 about Document D—Belgium admits that it was primarily concerned with protecting its “financial and economic” interests and that the government was under pressure by Belgian citizens living in the Congo to act to bring down Lumumba.
  - Students should recognize that this source is significantly different than others they read as part of the inquiry: it was written about 40 years after Lumumba’s assassination and as part of an effort by Belgium to understand the role they played in the assassination. There is no correct answer to this question, but push students to defend their reasoning.

## 7. Final Discussion

- a. *Why, based on all of these documents, was Lumumba assassinated?*
- b. *Based on what we know now, why do you think the textbook might oversimplify the circumstances surrounding Lumumba’s death?*
- c. *What other perspectives would we want to consider in order to learn even more about why Lumumba was assassinated? Whose perspectives are we still missing?* Students might point out, for example, that there is no source from the perspective of Moïse Tshombe or other Katangese leaders. We also might want to hear from Joseph Kasavubu or Lumumba himself once he was in power or after he was put under house arrest.

8. Final Claim. Using arguments and evidence from Documents A-E, write a final claim to answer the question: Why was Patrice Lumumba assassinated?

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### Citations:

Document A

Source: *World History: Continuity and Change*. Austin, Texas: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1999, pp. 776-777.

Document B

Lumumba's Independence Day Speech, June 30, 1960. Retrieved from <https://www.marxists.org/subject/africa/lumumba/1960/06/independence.htm>.

Document C

*CIA Daily Brief*. June 27, 1960. Retrieved from [http://www.foia.cia.gov/sites/default/files/document\\_conversions/5829/CIA-RDP79T00975A005100490001-1.pdf](http://www.foia.cia.gov/sites/default/files/document_conversions/5829/CIA-RDP79T00975A005100490001-1.pdf)

Document D

Thomas F. Brady. "Congolese Premier Threatens to 'Revise Position' Unless U.N. Sends Troops Now." *The New York Times*, August 6, 1960

Document E

"The Conclusions of the Enquiry Committee," 2001. Retrieved from [http://www.lachambre.be/kvvcr/pdf\\_sections/comm/lmb/conclusions.pdf](http://www.lachambre.be/kvvcr/pdf_sections/comm/lmb/conclusions.pdf)