

The Cold War in the classroom, 1952

Introduction

As the Cold War pervaded domestic as well as international spheres, *Duck and Cover*, an educational film produced by the Federal Civil Defense Administration and Archer Productions Inc., showed children how to react in case of a nuclear attack. The Soviet Union had tested its



Bert the Turtle encounters danger in Duck and Cover. (National Archives)

first nuclear bomb in 1949 and fear of an attack in the United States was high. As a result, Congress created the Federal Civil Defense Administration in 1950 to prepare America for emergencies. Two of the organization's more visible contributions were public fallout shelters and the Emergency Broadcast System.

Educational films such as this one were popular in the 1950s. They were used to teach life skills to students across the country in a uniform way. *Duck and Cover* taught children to hide under a desk or against a wall and cover their neck and face for safety during a

nuclear attack. It was first screened on January 7, 1952, as part of the Alert America civil defense exhibit convoy in Washington DC. Two weeks later, it was shown to school officials in New York City, and it debuted in the classroom on March 6, 1952.

To view the film, go to The Cold War in the classroom, 1952, www.gilderlehrman.org/history-by-era/fifties/resources/cold-war-classroom-1952.

Questions for Discussion

Read the introduction and view the video *Duck and Cover*. Then apply your knowledge of American history to answer the following questions:

1. What events led to the production of this film?
2. Who was the intended audience?
3. Why do you think those responsible for its production chose a cartoon format for the introduction with Bert the Turtle as the main character?
4. Viewers today consider the film naïve and misleading and without any scientific foundation. At one point there is a comparison of radiation burns from a nuclear blast to bad sunburn. Why was the information considered accurate and appropriate in the early 1950s?