Trials
Ms. Shen

The Cold War at Home

Point Value: 40 points

The 1950s were a time of great fear – fear of communism and fear of the nuclear bomb. At the urging of state and local government officials, thousands of Americans built bomb shelters in their homes to protect themselves from possible nuclear attack. While these shelters may seem ineffective and even insane to us now, at the time, they were all that people could do to prepare themselves physically and psychologically for a potential nuclear attack.

Instructions:

Step 1: Read the attached reading entitled “Fallout Can Be Fun.” Take note of the purpose and design of bomb shelters because you are next going to use this information to design a bomb shelter for you and your family to use during a nuclear attack in the 1950s.

Step 2: You should first make an aerial drawing of your shelter on which you label the contents of your bomb shelter. Please remember to include all the amenities of home, including furniture and other decorations, as well as anything you think you might need in the event of nuclear fallout. Use color and be thoughtful. An 8 ½ by 11 inch piece of paper will suffice, but if you want to use a bigger piece of paper, feel free. You will be graded on your creativity, the attention to detail, and overall presentation. (10 points)

Step 3: Finally, build a model of your bomb shelter. You may use whatever materials you would like (shoe box, Legos, clay, sticks, etc.) – all I ask is that you put some time into this assignment. Have fun! (20 points)

This is not designed to be a 10 minute assignment – please put time and effort in to both your drawing and model.

Fallout Can Be Fun: How the Cold War civil-defense programs became farce.
By David Greenberg

...It takes a leap of historical imagination to conceive how the Cold War's nuclear attack drills, dog tags for school kids, and backyard bomb shelters could ever have been taken seriously...

The dropping of the atom bomb in 1945—and the Soviet Union's attainment of nuclear capability in 1949—transformed the meaning of civil defense. During World War II, the government drafted citizens to make tangible contributions to the war effort: scrimping on scarce supplies such as meat and nylons; growing Victory Gardens; joining scrap metal drives. Although officials urged these gestures mainly to foster a feeling of patriotic engagement, their secondary purpose—materially aiding America's military goals—was also legitimate.
During the Cold War, however, there was little for citizens to do. Preparedness became the watchword… In January 1951, President Truman created the Federal Civil Defense Administration, the Homeland Security Department of its day… FCDA developed curricula for public schools and distributed brochures, films, and radio segments. Home-economics classes taught girls how to furnish bomb shelters. Advertising firms lent their experts to the mission, newspapers offered free placement of FCDA ads, and celebrities from Orson Welles to Ozzie and Harriet signed up to help pitch the cause.

Most famously, the FCDA popularized the cartoon figure Bert the Turtle, star of comic-book pamphlets and short classroom films such as *Duck and Cover*. The amiable Bert demonstrated to kids how, in the event of an attack, "you DUCK to avoid the things flying through the air ..." (here the panel shows a frightened Bert, with a Richie Rich-like human sidekick, diving to the ground) "... and COVER to keep from getting cut or even badly burned." (In the next panel, Bert withdraws his head into his shell while his friend throws on the hood of his jacket.) In the movie version, sing-songy music accompanied the instruction.

Even before the advent of the FCDA, New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, and other major cities were undertaking biweekly or monthly atomic air raid drills. Teachers, at a random moment, would order their students to "Drop!" and the children would crouch and bury their faces. New York City also spent $159,000 on 2.5 million identification bracelets, or dog tags, for students to wear at all times—with the unspoken purpose being that they would help distinguish children who were lost or killed in a nuclear explosion. Other cities followed.

Then there was the bomb shelter craze—or crazes, since the epidemic of "bombshelteritis" that the *New York Times* reported in 1951 subsided after roughly eight months but returned during moments of heightened peril. Off and on until the early '60s, Americans built underground rooms that promised to protect them from a nuclear attack. Playing on traditional imagery of women as domestic caretakers, the FCDA pitched housewives advertisements for "Grandma's Pantry," a home shelter that women should stock with canned goods, first-aid kits, and flashlights. Commercial firms marketed a range of safehouses, that ranged from a "$13.50 foxhole shelter" to a $5,000 "deluxe" model that included a phone, beds, toilets, and even a Geiger counter. *Life* magazine even ran a story on a young newlywed couple who spent their honeymoon in a steel-and-concrete room 12 feet underground. "Fallout can be fun," the article said.

It's hard today to do anything but laugh at these Cold War inanities, but at the time Americans mostly reacted with enthusiasm or, rarely, with cautionary efforts to ratchet down the hysteria. A handful of educators, for example, questioned the schools' approach to nuclear preparedness, suggesting that fear-struck grade-schoolers gazing out classroom windows for Soviet jets hardly constituted an ideal learning environment. Some proposed channeling efforts into the academic study of the USSR and other Communist countries, to little avail.

Into the early '60s, *U.S. News & World Report* and *Life* were still running cover stories with headlines such as "If Bombs Do Fall—What Happens to Your Investments," and "How You Can Survive Fallout." …In 1959, 64 percent of Americans surveyed by Gallup listed nuclear war as the most dire problem facing the country; by 1965 the number dropped to 16 percent…

### Supplies In Fallout Shelters

During the Fallout Shelter program the Office of Civil Defense provided supplies to be stocked in marked community shelters. These supplies were very minimal survival supplies which would have provide shelterees with food, water and sanitation needs for an allotted 2 week shelter stay. The plan was to provide each shelteree with 1 quart of water per day, 700 calories of food per day, sanitation supplies and radiation detection instruments.

Water supplies were stored in metal 17.5 gallon water barrels. Food stocks came packaged in several different forms such as ration crackers, wafers and carbohydrate supplement (hard candy). Sanitation Kits contained various supplies such as toilet paper, cups etc. Of course in a
nuclear war you just might need some Medical Kits which were also supplied. And finally, the most interesting of all of the supplies, the Radiation Detection Kits, were provided for shelters with over 50 spaces.

…Fallout shelter food supplies came in the form of crackers, biscuits, bulgar wafers and carbohydrate supplement (hard candy). The shelter program goal was to stock 10,000 calories total per shelteree for the designated 2 week shelter stay. That amounted to a 700 calorie per day food supply to each shelteree. It is pretty obvious that you wouldn’t gain any weight at 700 calories a day during your shelter stay. With the minimal stocks that were provided it would have been just enough to stay alive…

In the ’50s and ’60s, fears of nuclear war spurred a boom in building fallout shelters -- right in your own basement or under the back yard.

A fallout shelter built in the corner of a basement was the least expensive type, and it supposedly offered "substantial protection." In many plans, concrete blocks provided the walls. An open doorway and vents near the floor provided ventilation. The shelter’s entrance was constructed with a sharp turn to reduce radiation intensity. Several publications recommended stocking foods that would last for several months without refrigeration and that required little or no cooking. There were devices to help people know when radio-activity had reached safe levels. The pocket dosimeter was a radiation detection device that included a pen-like tube that could be worn on clothing. The tube captured radioactivity in the air, and could then be read by a separate base unit to determine the level of exposure of radioactive fallout. There were even radiation detectors, known as Geiger counters available for sale.

Other plans called for construction of a separate fallout shelter several feet underground. Even four feet of earth or a couple of feet of concrete would reduce the level of gamma ray radiation that would reach the family in an underground shelter. One plan suggested the "The roof of the shelter can be used as an attractive patio." Ventilation in the shelter was provided by a hand-cranked blower attached through a pipe to a filter mechanism on the surface. By turning the crank, the shelter would be ventilated with fresh air filtered to keep out radioactive particles. Some more elaborate plans suggested installing an electrical generator to provide all the comforts of home.

…Sometimes, cots, sanitation kits, and tins of candy were provided by the state Civil Defense Agency for family shelters. More often, families had to buy similar products commercially.

It was recommended that people stay in the shelter full time for at least 14 days after a nuclear blast. Families with children were advised to stock their shelter with recreational materials to break the monotony. Monopoly games were popular. Other suggested items included playing cards and diaries to keep a record of one's stay.

According to civil defense authorities, a concrete block basement shelter could be built as a do-it-yourself project for $150 to $200. Exactly how much protection they actually afforded was an open question.

Fallout comes when a fireball from a nuclear weapon touches the earth’s surface and great clouds of pulverized debris are sucked miles up into the atmosphere. These tiny particles are mixed with the particles from the weapon itself and are very radioactive. They may rise to a height of more than 16 miles above the earth. Eventually wind and gravity will bring snow-like radiation-bearing debris back to earth. The debris is known as fallout. It may be so fine that you can’t see it, but fallout can be deadly.

The best all-around protection officials said, was an underground shelter with at least three feet of earth or sand covering it. Two feet of concrete would give the same protection. Adding an adequate door plus an air filter cut the danger from fallout "almost down to zero." Radiation measuring devices could be added to the shelter. They sold for about $20 and had been tested and approved by the civil defense authorities.