STANISLAV PETROV LESSON PLAN

LIEUTENANT COLONEL OF THE SOVIET AIR DEFENCE FORCES

BORN 1939 - DIED 2017

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"WHEN WE DEAL WITH SPACE, WHEN WE PLAY GOD, WHO KNOWS WHAT WILL BE THE NET SURPRISE."

Stanislav Yevgrafovich Petrov was a lieutenant colonel of the Soviet Air Defence Forces who played a key role in the 1983 Soviet nuclear false alarm incident. On 26 September 1983, three weeks after the Soviet military had shot down Korean Air Lines Flight 007, Petrov was the duty officer at the command center for the Oko nuclear early-warning system when the system reported that a missile had been launched from the United States, followed by up to five more. Petrov judged the reports to be a false alarm, and his decision to disobey orders, against Soviet military protocol, is credited with having prevented an erroneous retaliatory nuclear attack on the United States and its NATO allies that could have resulted in a large-scale nuclear war. Investigation later confirmed that the Soviet satellite warning system had indeed malfunctioned.

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AWARDS

World Citizen Award from Association of World Citizens
Dresden Peace Award from Dresden Germany
Future of Life Award (posthumously)

CURRICULUM VOCABULARY

Software – the programs and other operating information used by a computer.

Software Engineer - is a person who applies the principles of software engineering to the design, development, maintenance, testing, and evaluation of computer software.

NASA - Formed July 29, 1958, National Aeronautics and Space Administration. Its the federal agency that institutes and administers the civilian programs of the U.S. government that deal with aeronautical research and the development of launch vehicles and spacecraft.

MIT - Massachusetts Institute of Technology, a private research university in Cambridge Massachusetts.

Astronaut - a person who is trained to travel in a spacecraft.

Apollo Missions - Apollo was the NASA program that resulted in American astronauts' making a total of 11 spaceflights and walking on the moon. Learn more here: https://www.nasa.gov/audience/forstudents/5-8/features/nasa-knows/what-was-apollo-program-58.html

THEATRE/STORY VOCABULARY

Monologue – When one person is speaking.
Context – the circumstances that form the setting for an event, statement, or idea, and in terms of which it can be fully understood and assessed.

MATERIALS

Written Monologue
Video Monologue

TO UNDERSTAND A STORY, YOU MUST HAVE CONTEXT.

Context is - the circumstances that form the setting for an event, statement, or idea, and in terms of which it can be fully understood and assessed. In acting, we call this the When/Where/Who. When I am speaking? Where am I speaking? And Who am I speaking to?

UNDERSTANDING THE STORY

WHEN/WHERE/WHO?

When is Stanislav Petrov talking in the monologue?

a.   Before the missile crisis
b.   During missile crisis
c.   After the missile crisis

How did you get your answer?

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Who is he speaking with?

a.   A journalist
b.   A family member
c.   Himself

How did you get your answer?

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Where is he when he is talking?

a.   In his home
b.   In the missile launch room
c.   In a spacecraft

How did you get your answer?

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Why do you think Stanislav is telling this story?

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EXAMINING THE MONOLOGUE

Examining and understanding the details and the emotions of a story helps a person to get the picture and the perspective of the speaker.

DETAILS, DETAILS, DETAILS

What was Stanislav Petrov's job?

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What country did he serve?

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How is he different than other officers in the Soviet Union Army?

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What was he supposed to do when the alarm went off?

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What date did this happen? What time of day was it?

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What would have happened if he had called his superiors?

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Why didn't he call his superiors?

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How much time did it take for him to realize he made the right call? How do you think he felt during that time?

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How did the Soviet Army respond to his actions?

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Why do you think he didn't tell anybody about what happened?

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Do you think he believes he saved the world? Explain your answer.

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THE MOMENT AFTER

Based on the monologue, how do you think this event affected Stanislav's life after the event? Be sure to explain your answer.

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Follow this link, and explain the lesson that Stanislav wants people to take away from his experience. https://time. com/4947879/stanislav-petrov-russia-nuclear-war-obituary/

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Do you think you would be able to do what he did in that moment?

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Having learned something about Stanislav Petrov, what do you admire most about him?

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What is a quality that he has that you might want to emulate?

Emulate definition: matching or surpassing a person's achievement.

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MONOLOGUE

OLDER, SIXTIES, he sits. Defeated. Tired. This is a man who lived a very hard life. He's a smoker. He says it as it is. And he's quick to anger.

And they forced me out. Early retirement. Feels like being fired.

SIGH. BEAT.

Another whole life sliced off.

But I had my wife. And I couldn't even tell her. For 10 years I stayed silent. For so long, no one knew my story.

BEAT

And now everyone wants to know. One mention in a book in 1998, in Colonel General Votinstev's book. 15 years after that night, and everyone wants to know.

Lousy journalists.

Lousy people.

Lousy.

I'll tell the story. But not about my family. I won't talk about my mother or my father.

The Soviet Army.

The Soviet Army. (disgust). Soldiers only know how to obey orders. They don't know how to think. I was civilian educated. The only civilian educated man in my unit. My colleagues were all professional soldiers, taught to give and obey orders.

A GRUNT/SIGH/A VOCALIZED DISCONTENT.

Disgusting. (could be saying that about the army or his job)

My job.

If the United States launched their nuclear missiles, I called my superiors, and then launch nuclear missiles towards the United States.

My job was to help annihilate the United States of America, but only if they tried to annihilate us first.

Then what? Everyone is dead. Millions of people dead.

That was my job.

I didn't even want to join. No, my parents pushed me. So they didn't have to take care of me. Cut me out. Get out, they said.

But this isn't about them.

That night. September 25, 1983. I wasn't even supposed to work that night. Someone got sick. Lucky it was me. Lucky it was me. *[chuckles to himself]*

BEAT. Remembering. He composes himself. Talks matter of factly. Like he is being interviewed.

It was shortly after midnight. September 26. And bold red letters come up, LAUNCH.

I remember staring at them for a few seconds.

Protocol was that decisions had to be based on computer readouts. Not support service. And here the computer was telling me a missile had been launched.

All I had to do was reach for the phone, to raise the direct line to our top commanders. But I couldn't move. I felt like I was sitting on a hot frying pan.

If the United States were to strike, wouldn't they launch more than just one missile?

A minute later the siren went off again. The second missile was launched. Then the third. Then the fourth. Then the fifth.

Computers changed from launch to missile strike.

In the Soviet Army, there are no rules to how long we were allowed to think before we reported the strike. Especially in that time. The tensions between us and the United States were high. At the slightest provocation we would strike.

[this whole section from 'it was shortly. . .we would strike" are all of his words]

[chuckles] But that's not what they're saying now is it? Of course not.

[back to interview posture] But I kept sitting there. Thinking. The launch didn't make sense. That's all I could think. It doesn't make sense.

And I knew, perfectly well, if I called my superior and said the US had launch missiles that we would launch our missiles. And no one would be able to correct my mistake. [actual quote]

Millions would die. That would be it. My mistake would kill people. Lots of them.

So, I picked up the telephone handset, spoke to my superior and reported the alarm was false. A system malfunction.

And I waited. The odds were 50/50. *[actual quote]*

And if I were wrong, the first nuclear explosion would've happened on Soviet soil in minutes.

Twenty-Three minutes later, I realized that nothing had happened. If there had been a real strike, then I would already know about it. It was such a relief. *[actual quote]*

BEAT

A few days later, I received an official reprimand for what happened. I was punished. Not for what I did, but I had made some mistakes in the logbook. Because I had a phone in one hand and the intercom in the other, and I don't have a third hand! *[actual quote]*

SPITS

They assigned me to less sensitive post, and then the army slowly forced me out.

And I didn't say anything. To anyone. Not even my wife. When I got home from work that morning and she asked me what I did. I told her, "nothing. I did nothing." *[actual quote]*

I thought it was shameful for the Soviet Army that our system failed in this way. A satellite had picked up the sun's reflection off of the cloud tops, and it interpreted that as a missile launch.

A GRUNT/SIGH/A VOCALIZED DISCONTENT.

They say I saved millions of people. They say I saved the United States and the Soviet Union from all out nuclear war. They say I saved the world. I say, I was simply doing my job.

I've been asked if I think there is any more chance of accidental nuclear launch, since our computers are so much better now. I wish I could say no. But when we deal with space, when we play God, who knows what will be the net surprise. *[actual quote]*