

I Caught the Fever of '57- The Sputnik Story and found it perfect for you and your students

By Andrée Duggan

I got a call from award-winning filmmaker David Hoffman for whom I worked on various PBS documentaries years ago. Knowing my interest in kids and in the power of media to affect them, he asked me to take a look at his latest feature documentary, **The Fever of '57**, a look at what happened after the launch of Sputnik 50 years ago and how it provoked America and brought us shockingly close to nuclear annihilation. The Soviets had beaten us into space and shifted the balance of power overnight. People were afraid the rocket that had launched Sputnik could deliver a nuclear bomb to our shores. Hoffman said that the film was receiving rave reviews and that it was especially gratifying to see the reactions of young people who were walking out of screenings making parallels to the world today. That peaked my interest.

After viewing **The Fever of '57** with my 17-year old, I was amazed to see that we too were immediately discussing the parallels to now — to war, crisis, fear about the future, and worries that the U.S. could be out-paced once again overnight. My son called his grandparents to find out what they thought, because "they had lived through it." He also called a few friends who get a kick out of anything "retro" and told them about the rocket boys scene in the film — kids his age who launched home-made rockets in an effort to help America win the space race. It was easy for him to relate to the film, which he perceived as "cool", not old.

The movie is filled with pundits, press, politicians, and military people, telling Americans to be scared. It is amazing that the emotions people were feeling back then are so similar to the mood of America today. **The Fever of '57** is a must-see for every young person. Incredibly dramatic and fast-paced, it examines this tumultuous time from a safe distance of fifty years. From the blazing red hot nuclear bomb tests that brought us to the brink of World War III, to the Congressional movement to have the American Military control space, you see how bad things can get and how quickly tensions can escalate. The film clearly shows the reasons America was knocked to her knees in panic, and most importantly, the way Eisenhower and Khrushchev averted disaster.

I am so excited about **The Fever of '57** for High School and College classrooms, and here's why:

1.) **David Hoffman's PBS track record.** David Hoffman and his writer Paul Dickson (45 books to his credit including Sputnik: The Shock of the Century) are both award-winning professionals in their fields. Hoffman has produced over 100 PBS primetime television specials and series including the six-part prime-time PBS series "Making Sense of the Sixties," and the four-part best-selling Turner entertainment series, "Moon Shot." **The Fever of '57** is the kind of "you are there" film for which Hoffman is famous. It keeps kids riveted. They'll see dramatic declassified test-bomb footage, America's most famous failed rocket launch, the first living thing in space (Laika the space dog, who never came home), bomb shelter families, everyday 50's footage of teens, Rocket Boys and rare, never before seen home movies from the Khrushchev family archives!

2.) **Big names are in the film and tell their stories.** They include:

Dr. Sergei Khrushchev - Son of Soviet Premier Khrushchev

Susan Eisenhower - Granddaughter of President Eisenhower

Daniel Schorr - Former CBS journalist and now NPR senior news analyst

Dr. Eileen Galloway - Aide to Lyndon B. Johnson

Dr. Scott Hubbard - Director, NASA Ames Research Center

Homer Hickam - Rocket boy and author of "October Sky"

Richard Rhodes - Author, Atomic Bomb Expert

3.) **It's the 50th Anniversary of the Space Age.** There were many "firsts" during the calendar year October 1957 – October 1958: Sputnik 1, Sputnik 2 with live dog on board, the failed Vanguard, the successful Explorer 1, and the birth of NASA. So students will be hearing a lot about space this year in the news, from NASA to the Smithsonian. This film will help bring your students into the discussions.

4.) **There's an Educational Version and Package.** David Hoffman has created **The Fever of '57 Educational DVDs** – (3) 30 minute segments appropriate for classroom viewing, plus the full-length 92-minute film for non-theatrical school showings. I've worked with top

educators to develop a **Teacher's Guide with Student Activity** sheets to help you integrate the film into US History, World History, Social Studies, and Science for upper grades. Plus we've compiled the very best online resources for original student inquiry and a list of 50th Anniversary of Space Age events. These will all be available in mid-September at www.thefeverof57.com/education

5.) **Reviewers love this Film.** Michael Moore (Sicko) picked **The Fever of '57** from more than 600 films reviewed for his Traverse City Film Festival. He called it the "sleeper" – one of his favorite films that he felt viewers would love. Read what other reviewers are saying below.

In the end, Sputnik provoked so many important changes in America and in the world. That year gave rise to: global satellite communication, minituarization, cell phones, a *global* view of ourselves, the birth of our civilian space agency – NASA, the modern environmental movement, and perhaps most importantly, it gave rise to a new standard of education for America's young people that fueled our trips to the moon and everything technological that has happened since then! Visit www.thefeverof57.com/education.html for more information.

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Reviews of 'The Fever of '57'

"The launch of Russia's Sputnik satellite is exhumed and made exciting in this important slice of you-are-there documaking. If distribs can see the timely value of this snapshot of a crucial moment in U.S. and world history, "The Fever of '57" has a shot at reaching auds who will find it useful material a half-century later, at the start of a new, potentially more dangerous era." - **VARIETY**

.... "The Fever of '57," an amazing, light-speed ride through one of mankind's more dramatic run-ins with the cosmos. Outer space fans willing to put history before Klingons, and give reality priority over sci-fi fantasy, should embrace David Hoffman's fascinating documentary." – **FILM THREAT**

"Focused and Dramatic" - three stars, **SEATTLE TIMES**

"Entertaining....."This little known slice of American history..may never be completely told, but "Fever of 57" takes a giant step in reopening the case" - **SEATTLE POST-INTELLIGENCER**

"Must see film"....combines great footage with a great story" - **THE HERALD**

"The Fever of '57' is a documentary I was surprised by. This October is the 50th anniversary of the launch of the Sputnik satellite by the Soviet Union. I always thought that people were scared by this event, but it turns out a lot of Americans watched the satellite from their front lawns and felt it was a step forward for man. It was only on the fourth day after launching that Lyndon B. Johnson went on TV and radio and said that the satellite could have bombs and missiles on it. Within days people were terrified of it, and, ironically, it was Johnson and the Democrats who were responsible for this fear and paranoia." – **MICHAEL MOORE**

"Remarkable.intriguing...thought provoking...I can't get the darn thing out of my head." - **MOVIEFREAK.COM**

"Enthralling, well-researched and wonderfully produced" - **#1ENTERTAINMENT BLOG**

"We see with new eyes Ike and LBJ and Krushchev pondering the cold war" –

SEATTLE WEEKLY

"A great film that deserves a great audience"....there is not a single dull moment in this film. . . "I wasn't prepared for just how fascinating it was and just how well the director David Hoffman told this complex story in such an accessible way" – **SEATTLE INT'L FILM FESTIVAL BLOG**