

A view of JFK's death

By Maida Odom
Inquirer Staff Writer

The high school boys tittered and snickered as they sat in the dark auditorium and watched slides of John F. Kennedy being shot.

"It's not funny. This is the murder of the President of the United States," admonished guest lecturer Robert Groden, a critic of government investigations into Kennedy's death who served as consultant to the House Assassinations Committee.

The audience of about 200 at St. Joseph's Preparatory School had been cordial and attentive through most of Groden's slide presentation of evidence advancing the theory that Kennedy was the victim of a highly placed, well-connected conspiracy and that the truth of it was deftly covered up.

But some of the students laughed at the grim pictures as Groden repeatedly clicked the slide projector's control switch back and forth: first, a House Assassinations Committee's diagram of the fatal bullet's rear entry and frontal exit; then a view of the shooting that appeared to show the President being fatally shot from the front.

Perhaps it was watching the shooting scene (an enhanced frame taken from a film) several times in rapid succession, suggested librarian Joe DeMarco. "Maybe it's so gruesome they can't dwell on it," he said.

"Maybe there's too much apathy," countered religion teacher Tom Bowe, during a post-lecture round-table discussion among a handful of teachers, a few students and Groden.

Perhaps time — 26 years since the Nov. 22, 1963, assassination — made the characters on the screen less human to students who were not even born when Kennedy died, suggested William E. Scott, the award-winning teacher who arranged Groden's speech.

"They see so much violence on

television and on films that when they looked at the screen it was like make-believe — an extension of the movies, almost Hollywood."

Bob Sola, 17, a senior from Northeast Philadelphia, said: "Kennedy was like a fairy-tale personality — perfect wife, perfect kids, perfect life, and then seeing him get shot, you find it hard to believe.

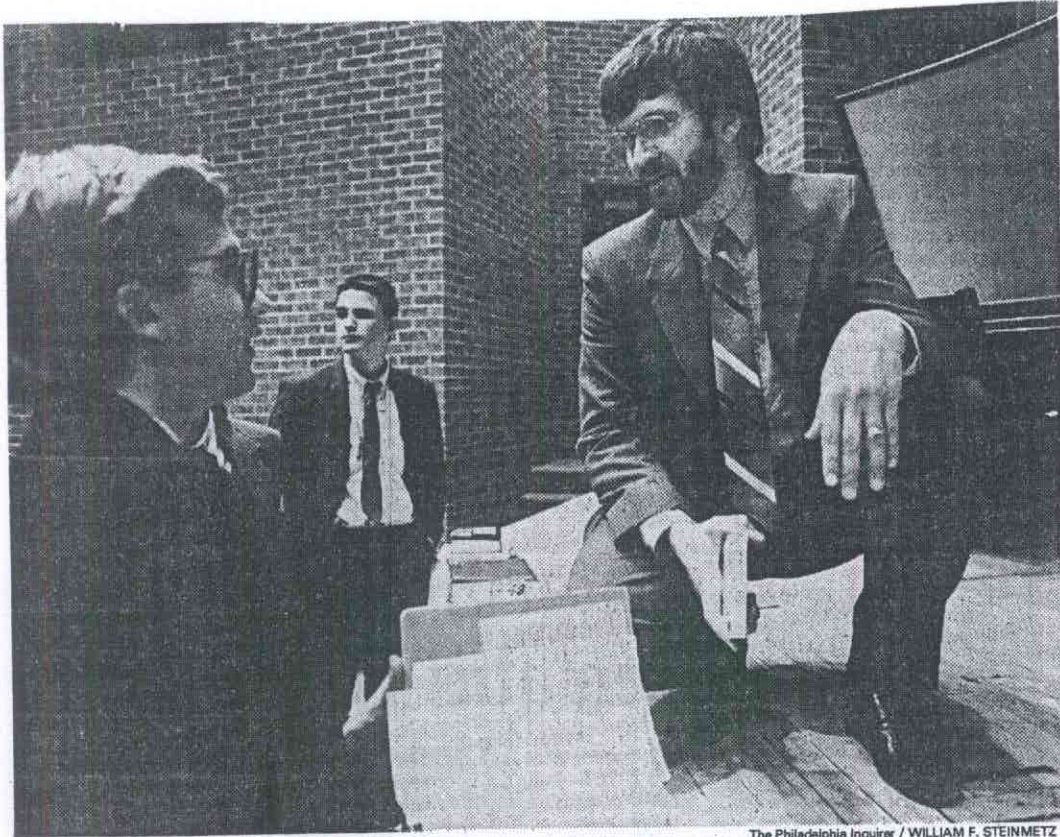
"He's the most powerful man in the world, and just like that" Sola snapped his fingers, "he's nothing."

Matthew Kehner, 16, a junior from the Fairmount area, said the presentation made him "curious why the Warren Commission would find the belief that Oswald did the shooting to be true.

"There's something going on. It might be able to happen again. It happened once."

"It made me *really* think about what happened," said Steve Ranjo, 17, a senior from Fishtown.

Scott could not have hoped for bet-



The Philadelphia Inquirer / WILLIAM F. STEINMETZ

Groden talks to boys at St. Joseph's Prep about the Kennedy assassination and his points of dissent.

ter responses. Although he has lectured on the Kennedy assassination to his advanced-placement history students, bringing in Groden, a photography expert who has spent 25 years studying the assassination, gave the questions he had raised credibility, Scott said.

"Some people consider history a pack of lies," said Scott, one of five teachers in the nation who received the 1989 Teachers Award sponsored by NBC and the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. "But there are different interpretations of history, and that's what we want them to see."

Scott, 33, won the award for his innovative approach to teaching and was specially honored for a lesson plan that involved students' role-playing key positions in a simulation of the Cuban missile crisis.

In addition to Groden, Scott has had David Eisenhower visit the

school to talk about the role of his grandfather, former general and President Dwight D. Eisenhower, in World War II.

That was a very different presentation from the one Groden delivered yesterday, Scott noted.

Students laughed as Groden poked fun at the Warren Commission's finding that a bullet, fired by Lee Harvey Oswald from the sixth floor of a Dallas book-depository building, went in the back of Kennedy's neck and out of his throat; entered the back of Texas Gov. John Connally and went out through his chest, and shattered Connally's wrist.

"Sure it's laughable. It's ridiculous. And by the way, the man who invented this theory is your senator, Arlen Specter," Groden, 44, said, referring to the role of Specter (R., Pa.) when he served as counsel to the Warren Commission.

After attacking the Warren Com-

mission report, Groden told students that the House Assassinations Committee, with which he worked, had continued the coverup by sticking with the notion that Kennedy was killed by a shot in the back of his head, and by not pursuing the question of who might have been involved in a conspiracy, although admitting the possibility that one existed.

"Lee Harvey Oswald never fired a shot," said Groden, who asserted that photographs of the slain president were altered to make it appear he was shot in the back of the head. He cited interviews with doctors who had treated Kennedy and photographs as proof of his allegations.

Groden told students that he believed Kennedy was assassinated because he was unwilling to engage Cuban leader Fidel Castro militarily and because he was preparing to end the war in Vietnam.