

Watergate: Teacher's Guide

Grade Level: 8-12

Curriculum Focus: U.S. History

Lesson Duration: One or two class periods

Program Description

A burglary investigation of the Democratic National Headquarters in Washington, D.C., leads to the resignation of President Richard M. Nixon. Thirty years later, the Watergate scandal fascinates investigators, students, and others in search of the identity of the informant known as Deep Throat, as well as the missing 18-1/2 minutes of Nixon's secret tapes. Learn the details and consequences of one of the greatest political blunders in our country's history.

Onscreen Questions

Part I— Before watching the video

- As you watch the program, think about why the Watergate scandal took place. How does it compare to other scandals in recent history?
- What attitudes and beliefs of the president and his staff led to the Watergate break-in and subsequent cover-up?
- What revelations led to President Nixon's resignation?

Part I— After watching the video

- Analyze the role of the press during political scandals such as Watergate.
- How did Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein uncover the Watergate story and keep it alive?
- Debate how reporters should balance respect for the role of the government with the public's right to know.

Part II— Before watching the video

- What do you know about the effects and consequences of Watergate?
- How did it affect President Nixon's place in history?
- How did it change the way Americans feel about their government?
- Think about why Watergate is still important to Americans.

Part II— After watching the video

- The identity of "Deep Throat" remains a big mystery. Discuss the responsibility of journalists to protect their sources.
 - Which techniques being used to identify Deep Throat seem most likely to reveal his identity?
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Lesson Plan

Student Objectives

- Discuss the primary events of the Watergate crisis.
- Conduct an interview with a Watergate-era adult.
- Present a summary of their interview.

Materials

- *Watergate* video and VCR
- Computer with Internet access
- Print resources about Watergate
- Audio or video recorder
- Paper, pens

Procedures

1. Review the information about Watergate featured in the video by asking students these questions:
 - What was Watergate?
 - Why was the scandal called Watergate?
 - What precipitated the scandal? How did it end?
 - Who were the primary people involved in the event?
 - Who broke the story to the American public?
 - Who was "Deep Throat"?
 - What evidence existed that Nixon was guilty?
 - What was the most incriminating aspect of the White House tapes?
2. Explain that the students' assignment is to interview someone who was an adult at the time of the Watergate scandal (1972-1974). Students should try to get a personal look at how the events of Watergate changed the way the public viewed the U.S. government.
3. Tell students that their interviews may be brief (about 30 minutes). Their questions must allow an interviewee to give opinions and share memories and feelings. They must avoid questions that elicit a one-word answer. Also, students should find out about their interviewee by asking the following questions:
 - How old were you at the time of the Watergate scandal?
 - Where did you live?



- What were you doing? (examples: college student, owned a business, took care of children)
 - Had you voted for Nixon? Did your opinion of Nixon change when the scandal broke?
 - Describe your feelings toward the government and politics before and after the Watergate scandal.
4. Have students work individually to write their own lists of questions. If they would like additional information, direct them to the following Web sites:
- **Washingtonpost.com: Watergate**
<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/national/longterm/watergate/front.htm>
 - **Encyclopedia Americana: Watergate**
<http://gi.grolier.com/presidents/ea/side/watergte.html>
 - **Watergate Info**
<http://watergate.info/>
5. Have students work in pairs to interview their partners, who will critique the questions. Are the questions clear? Are they asked in a logical order? Do they provoke thoughtful answers? Did the interview take longer than 30 minutes?
6. Review techniques for conducting an interview:
- Identify an appropriate person to interview. Ask your relatives, neighbors, or other members of your community.
 - Introduce yourself, if necessary, and explain the purpose of your interview.
 - Schedule the interview at a convenient time for the interviewee. Explain that it will take about 30 minutes.
 - Get permission to use an audio or video recorder during the interview.
 - Arrive on time for the interview.
 - Be familiar with your questions, but it is OK to read from your list.
 - Take notes during the interview, even if you are using an audio or video recorder.
 - Be patient and polite. Do not argue.
 - Refer to your question list, but be prepared to ask follow-up questions in response to the subject's answers.
 - Review your notes right after the interview. Then write a short summary. Contact your subject quickly if you have additional questions.
 - Very soon after the interview, thank your subject by phone or mail for taking time to talk with you. Offer a copy of your interview.

7. Once students have completed their interviews, they should review their notes to find the highlights to create a brief presentation. They will summarize the interview and include at least two direct quotes from their subject.
8. Discuss the results of the interviews. What surprised students most? What were similarities and differences among the interviewees? What do students see as the most significant outcome of Watergate? What did they learn that they might not have learned from a book or news article?

Assessment

Use the following three-point rubric to evaluate students' work during this lesson.

- **3 points:** Students were highly engaged in class discussions; created clear and detailed interview questions, reflecting an exceptional understanding of the events of Watergate; presented a well-organized summary supported with details and two direct quotes.
- **2 points:** Students participated in class discussions; created adequate interview questions, reflecting an understanding of the events of Watergate; presented a summary with a few details and one direct quote.
- **1 point:** Students participated minimally in class discussions; created an incomplete list of interview questions, reflecting little or no understanding of the events of Watergate; presented a disorganized summary without adequate details and included no direct quotes.

Vocabulary

Deep Throat

Definition: The mysterious White House informant who provided crucial facts to Washington Post reporters Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein

Context: The three men who know the identity of Deep Throat have vowed not to reveal his name until he is deceased.

resign

Definition: To give up an office or position

Context: Due to the results of the Watergate scandal, President Richard Nixon resigned on August 8, 1974.

scandal

Definition: A crime or act that offends accepted moral standards; an act that disgraces those associated with it

Context: The Watergate scandal changed the way the public viewed the United States government.

Watergate

Definition: A political scandal that occurred between 1972 and 1974 and ended with the resignation of the U.S. President Richard Nixon

Context: The Watergate scandal began when burglars broke into the Democratic Party's National Committee offices at the Watergate Hotel in Washington, D.C..

Academic Standards

Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL)

McREL's Content Knowledge: A Compendium of Standards and Benchmarks for K-12 Education addresses 14 content areas. To view the standards and benchmarks, visit link:

<http://www.mcrel.org/compendium/browse.asp>

This lesson plan addresses the following national standards:

- History – U.S. History: Understands developments in foreign policy and domestic politics between the Nixon and Clinton presidencies
- Language Arts – Viewing: Uses viewing skills and strategies to understand and interpret visual media; Listening and Speaking: Uses listening and speaking strategies for different purposes

The National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS)

NCSS has developed national guidelines for teaching social studies. To become a member of NCSS, or to view the standards online, go to <http://www.socialstudies.org>

This lesson plan addresses the following thematic standards:

- Time, Continuity, and Change
 - Individuals, Groups, and Institutions
 - Power, Authority, and Governance
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Support Materials

Develop custom worksheets, educational puzzles, online quizzes, and more with the free teaching tools offered on the Discoveryschool.com Web site. Create and print support materials, or save them to a Custom Classroom account for future use. To learn more, visit

- <http://school.discovery.com/teachingtools/teachingtools.html>

