

# **The 1950s**

## *Backwards Planning Curriculum Units*

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# Table of Contents

<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>IV</b>
<b>Lecture Notes</b> .....	<b>S1</b>
<b>Student Handouts</b> .....	<b>H1</b>
<b>Backwards Planning Curriculum:</b>	
The 1950s: Backwards Planning Activities .....	<b>1</b>
Project #1: The 1950s in My Hometown.....	<b>3</b>
Project #2: 1950s Television Hall of Fame.....	<b>8</b>
Project #3: “Teenage Rebellion” Editorial .....	<b>16</b>
The 1950s: Multiple-Choice Quiz .....	<b>21</b>
The 1950s: Multiple-Choice Quiz Answer Key .....	<b>25</b>

# How to Use This Unit

Backwards planning offers an innovative yet simple approach to meeting curriculum goals; it also provides a way to keep students engaged and focused throughout the learning process. Many teachers approach history instruction in the following manner: they identify a topic required by state and/or national standards, they find materials on that topic, they use those materials with their students, and then they administer some sort of standard test at the end of the unit. Backwards planning, rather than just starting with a required instructional topic, goes a step further by identifying exactly what students need to know by the end of the unit—the so-called “enduring understandings.” The next step involves assessment: devising ways to determine whether students have learned what they need to know. The final step involves planning the teaching/learning process so that students can acquire the knowledge needed.

This product uses backwards planning to combine a PowerPoint presentation, activities that involve authentic assessment, and traditional tests (multiple-choice and essay) into a complete curriculum unit. Although the materials have enough built-in flexibility that you can use them in a number of ways, we suggest the following procedure:

1. Start with the “essential questions” listed on slide 2 of the PowerPoint presentation (these also appear in the teacher support materials). Briefly go over them with students before getting into the topic material. These questions will help students focus their learning and note taking during the course of the unit. You can also choose to use the essential questions as essay questions at the end of the unit; one way to do this is to let students know at the outset that one of the essential questions will be on the test—they just won’t know which one.
2. Next, discuss the activities students will complete during the unit. This will also help focus their learning and note taking, and it will lead them to view the PowerPoint presentation in a different light, considering it a source of ideas for authentic-assessment projects.
3. Present the PowerPoint to the class. Most slides have an image and bullet points summarizing the slide’s topic. The Notes page for each slide contains a paragraph or two of information that you can use as a presentation script, or just as background information for your own reference. You don’t need to present the entire PowerPoint at once: it’s broken up into several sections, each of which concludes with some discussion questions that echo parts of the essential questions and also help students to get closer to the “enduring understandings.” Spend some time with the class going over and debating these questions—this will not only help students think critically about the material, but it will also allow you to incorporate different modes of instruction during a single class period, offering a better chance to engage students.
4. Have students complete one or more of the authentic-assessment activities. These activities are flexible: most can be completed either individually or in groups, and either as homework or as in-class assignments. Each activity includes a rubric; many also have graphic organizers. You can choose to have students complete the activities after you have shown them the entire PowerPoint presentation, or you can show them one section of the PowerPoint, go over the discussion questions, and then have students complete an activity.

**5.** End the unit with traditional assessment. The support materials include a 20-question multiple-choice quiz; you can combine this with an essay question (you can use one of the essential questions or come up with one of your own) to create a full-period test.

**6.** If desired, debrief with students by going over the essential questions with them again and remind them what the enduring understandings are.

We are dedicated to continually improving our products and working with teachers to develop exciting and effective tools for the classroom. We can offer advice on how to maximize the use of the product and share others' experiences. We would also be happy to work with you on ideas for customizing the presentation.

We value your feedback, so please let us know more about the ways in which you use this product to supplement your lessons; we're also eager to hear any recommendations you might have for ways in which we can expand the functionality of this product in future editions. You can e-mail us at [access@socialstudies.com](mailto:access@socialstudies.com). We look forward to hearing from you.

Dr. Aaron Willis  
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# The 1950s: Backwards Planning Activities

## Enduring understandings:

- The 1950s were a decade in which relations between the United States and Soviet Union worsened
- The 1950s saw great technological advancements, especially in the areas of chemical production, consumer electronics, and computers
- The 1950s demonstrated significant cultural differences between generations, as well as social changes such as the civil rights movement
- Television emerged as a major influence in shaping American culture, economics, and politics
- The 1950s seemed an era of tight social conformity, but in a real sense demonstrated tensions among various groups
- Many of the issues and concerns of the 1950s affected American society into the next decade and beyond

## Essential questions:

- What aspects of post–World War II America shaped the issues that arose in the 1950s?
- How did the Cold War affect American foreign policy during the decade?
- How did changing aspects of culture affect the upbringing of children and adolescents?
- Why did rock ‘n’ roll engender wildly different reactions from various segments of society?
- How did the modern civil rights movement evolve in the mid- and late 1950s?
- What impact did television have on society, economics, and politics during the 1950s?
- How did events and issues in the 1950s help lead to the cultural and social revolutions of the 1960s?

# Learning Experiences and Instruction

Students will need to know...	Students will need to be able to...
<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Major figures from the 1950s, including cultural, political, and civil rights leaders</li><li>2. How the Cold War evolved from the late 1940s through the 1950s</li><li>3. Social changes that affected gender roles during the decade</li><li>4. How African American leaders managed to make significant gains during the 1950s</li><li>5. Social and cultural issues that led to the rise of the Beat movement</li><li>6. How new technology and consumer demand affected economic trends</li></ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Read and interpret primary source documents from the 1950s</li><li>2. Make conclusions about various events and themes</li><li>3. Identify key persons associated with economic, political, and social movements</li><li>4. Recognize how American life and culture changed throughout the decade</li><li>5. Determine how innovation and invention affected everyday life</li><li>6. Theorize how events that occurred in the 1950s affected U.S. politics and culture in the 1960s</li></ol>

## Teaching and learning activities that equip students to demonstrate targeted understandings:

- An overview of essential questions and basic understandings
- Class discussion of questions posed in the PowerPoint presentation
- Introduction of common terms and ideas in the essential questions and related projects
- Providing students with primary source materials from which they will complete the unit's related projects
- Students conduct research in groups to be used later in individual and cooperative projects
- Informal observation and coaching of students as they work in groups
- Delivering feedback and evaluations on projects and research reports
- Student creation and presentation of their projects
- A posttest on the presentation, made up of multiple-choice questions and one or more essential questions as essay questions

# Project #1: The 1950s in My Hometown

## Overview:

In this lesson, students look for evidence as to what the 1950s might have been like in their community. Using 21st-century technology (the Internet, including an appropriate social-networking site), student groups construct Web pages comparing school and daily life in the 1950s with those of the present day.

## Objectives:

After completing the lesson, students will:

- understand how life in the 1950s affected their school and local communities
- develop research skills targeted at gathering information on local history
- synthesize this information and make conclusions regarding life in the 1950s
- develop an understanding of typical American life in the 1950s and how it compares with modern culture
- compare and contrast local communities in the 1950s and the present day

## Time:

Five to seven class periods, depending on the time allotted for research

## Materials:

Computer(s) with Internet access; sources of local historical information; scanner and digital camera (if desired)

## Methodology:

Begin the lesson by discussing various changes that affected ordinary Americans during the '50s. The PowerPoint presentation touches on several of these themes, including rock 'n' roll, teenage rebellion, the impact of the Cold War, and others. Explain that high school students in the 1950s went through various stresses and changes that affected society as a whole.

At the end of the discussion, explain to the students that they will work in groups to research and collect information about life in the 1950s specifically regarding their school (or a school in the immediate vicinity, if their school didn't exist at the time) and their hometown, and compare that information to life in their community and school today.