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Recent U.S. History

Backwards Planning Curriculum Units

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Table of Contents

Introduction	v
Backwards Planning Curriculum	
Project #1: Mock Nixon Impeachment Trial	3
Project #2: Presidential Posters	11
Project #3: Recent History Podcast Project.....	19
Recent U.S. History Multiple-Choice Quiz.....	28
Recent U.S. History Multiple-Choice Quiz Answer Key	34
Lecture Notes	37
Student Handouts	139

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. We look forward to hearing from you.

Dr. Aaron Willis
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Recent U.S. History

Backwards Planning Activities

Enduring understandings:

- The United States underwent significant political and social change in the decades after the 1960s
- Events in the Middle East have frequently dominated foreign policy since 1970
- Scandals such as Watergate, Clinton's impeachment, and the collapse of Enron had a major impact on domestic policy and the American people
- Events such as the energy crisis and changes in U.S. policy after the 9/11 terrorist attacks led to significant changes to the everyday lives of Americans
- The political climate was frequently dominated by conflict between different social groups
- The rise of the Internet redefined communication and commerce in the last years of the 20th century and into the 21st century
- Various political groups such as the Tea Party Movement became more active and vocal during the period

Essential questions:

- What issues and factors have dominated U.S. foreign policy since the 1970s?
- What impact did political and economic scandals have on U.S. policy and the American people?
- How did terrorism and events in the Middle East affect the nation psychologically?
- What U.S. policies contributed to the eventual end of the Cold War?
- How did the rise of the Internet change the U.S. economy and people's everyday lives?
- What factors contributed to the emergence and rising influence of various social and political groups during the period?
- Why did the U.S. government restrict civil liberties in the period following the 9/11 terrorist attacks?

Learning Experiences and Instruction

Students will need to know...	Students will need to be able to...
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What factors helped shape U.S. foreign and domestic policies during the Nixon Administration 2. Fundamental causes of the 1970s OPEC oil embargo and resulting energy crisis 3. The causes and effects of the Watergate scandal 4. The impact of the presidential administrations of Nixon, Ford, Carter, Reagan, George H.W. Bush, Clinton, George W. Bush, and Obama 5. How policies of the period from 1970 to the present day shaped the American economy 6. What events led to the terrorist attacks of September 11th, 2001 7. How presidents from the 1990s to present day dealt with increased terrorist activities 8. Why various groups such as the Tea Party movement formed and gained influence 9. How the 2008 recession affected American life and the economy 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Read and interpret primary source materials from the period of U.S. history from 1970- to the present day 2. Identify key people involved in various political and social activities during the period 3. Recognize economic, political, and social trends of the period including Watergate, the Christian Conservative movement, and the Tea Party movement 4. Understand the causes and effects of U.S. involvement in the 1991 Persian Gulf War 5. Understand the causes of the 2003 invasion of Iraq 6. Geographically identify various locations of events (Iraq, Pakistan, Afghanistan, etc.) during the period 7. Understand the economic conditions that led to the 2008 recession and related government policies 8. Determine the overall impact of the period of 1970 to the present day on American society and politics

Teaching and learning activities that will 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: Mock Nixon Impeachment Trial

Overview:

In this lesson, students use online research to find the causes and effects of the Watergate Scandal (1972–1974). They then use that information to conduct a mock impeachment trial of President Richard Nixon had he remained in office, not resigned, and never received the pardon from President Gerald Ford.

Objectives:

As a result of completing this lesson, students will:

- Understand the events surrounding the Watergate scandal, including the break-in, subsequent cover-up, and subsequent investigation and judicial action during the scandal
- Speculate as to why the Nixon Administration might have felt it necessary to take the actions that caused the scandal
- Develop conclusions about the impact of the scandal on the U.S. government and on the American public
- Synthesize information regarding the scandal and analyze its impact on the three branches of government, as well as the Constitutional system

Time required:

Three to four class periods, although it may be necessary to assign some of the research tasks as homework.

Materials needed:

Computers with Internet access. Depending on how the class conducts the trial, you may also wish to provide microphones to participants in the trial as well as video equipment for recording the trial for viewing at a later date.

Lesson procedure:

Before beginning the lesson, students should have a basic understanding of the events surrounding the Watergate scandal, as well as the later cover-up, Congressional hearings, the Watergate tapes, and the eventual resignation of President Nixon. You may wish to review related slides from the PowerPoint with the class prior to beginning the lesson.

After reviewing the events surrounding Watergate, discuss them with the class in more detail. The related Web resources for the lesson offer further background on what happened during the scandal, the U.S. v. Nixon decision, and Nixon's subsequent resignation from office. Next, assign roles for the impeachment trial, either as principals in the case, witnesses, or attorneys. (Note: in an impeachment trial, the Senate would act as a jury to convict or acquit the president, and House managers would act as the prosecutors. The Chief Justice of the United States Supreme Court would act as the presiding judge.) Depending on the size of the class, you may wish to revise the number of principals, witnesses, House managers, and defense attorneys.

Evaluation:

Allow sufficient time for the students to synthesize their information into position papers. After the activity has concluded, evaluate student work using a suitable rubric that mirrors the objectives of the lesson. You may wish to construct a rubric of your own, or may wish to use a rubric created by your school or school district. (A sample rubric follows this lesson.)

Witnesses:

- President Richard M. Nixon
- James W. McCord (former CIA agent who worked as a security consultant for the Committee to Re-Elect the President [CREEP])
- G. Gordon Liddy (CREEP official who participated in the break-in and subsequent cover-up)
- Howard Hunt (CREEP official who participated in the break-in and subsequent cover-up)
- John Dean (White House counsel)
- H.R. Haldeman (Nixon White House Chief of Staff who resigned as the depth of the scandal grew)
- John Ehrlichman (Nixon White House Chief Domestic Advisor, who resigned at the same time Haldeman did)
- Bob Woodward (*Washington Post* reporter)
- Carl Bernstein (*Washington Post* reporter)
- Mark Felt (Assistant FBI Director who was “Deep Throat,” the source cited in many *Washington Post* stories about Watergate)
- Alexander Butterfield (presidential assistant in the Nixon Administration whose testimony included information about a comprehensive tape recording system in the Oval Office through which many Watergate-related conversations were archived)
- Archibald Cox (Watergate special prosecutor fired in the “Saturday Night Massacre”)
- Leon Jaworski (Appointed special prosecutor after Cox's dismissal)

House managers:

You should appoint a reasonable number of House managers to act as prosecutors. While Nixon never actually faced an impeachment trial, 13 members of the House Judiciary Committee served as managers during the impeachment trial of President Bill Clinton. You may wish to appoint a smaller number of managers, but make sure you have enough students to fulfill the requirements of the trial as listed below.

Defense Attorneys:

You should appoint two to five defense attorneys to represent Nixon in the trial and cover various aspects of the trial as listed below.

Chief Justice:

The Chief Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court acts as the judge in an impeachment trial. In 1974, the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court was Warren Burger.

Other roles:

Remaining students may assume the roles of research assistants helping the attorneys develop arguments, the bailiff, or members of the Senate “jury” that decides the verdict in the case. (Note: in an impeachment trial, a two-thirds majority of the Senate would be needed for conviction.)

Once roles have been assigned, students should begin their research using the “Impeachment Trial Information Sheet” and suggested Web resources included with this lesson.

Suggested Web resources:

(Note: Several Web sites provide information on the Watergate scandal. You may wish to have students conduct further Internet searches for other sources to use in completing the project. Also, encourage students to use traditional resources such as encyclopedias, books, and archival newspaper and magazine copies to complete their research.)

Watergate Resources:

Washington Post “Watergate Story” page:

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/politics/special/watergate/>

Washington Post “Watergate Story” timeline page:

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/politics/special/watergate/timeline.html>

“Watergate Info” site: <http://watergate.info/>

Gerald R. Ford Library and Museum “Watergate Files” page:

http://www.ford.utexas.edu/museum/exhibits/watergate_files/index.html

CNN Watergate 25th Anniversary page:

<http://www.cnn.com/ALLPOLITICS/1997/gen/resources/watergate/>

Musarium “Illusion and Delusion”—The Watergate Decade page:

<http://www.musarium.com/watergate.html>

The Woodward and Bernstein Watergate Papers Exhibit (University of Texas at Austin):

<http://www.hrc.utexas.edu/exhibitions/web/woodstein/>

Mary Ferrell Foundation Watergate page: <http://www.maryferrell.org/wiki/index.php/Watergate>