

Student Handout
Oakland Museum of California
What's Going On? California and the Vietnam Era
Lesson Plan #2

1968: Year of Social Change and Turning Point in Vietnam and the U.S.

1968 Timeline—Year of Dissent

Introduction

“The end result is that this nation’s people are almost totally frustrated. The promises made in the name of The Great Society have turned into a virtual nightmare of racial tensions, dispirited youth, rising crime and a mushrooming federal bureaucracy.”

--Jessie Unruh, Democratic Assembly leader,
Speech in Santa Cruz, October 7, 1968

“When I left California it was in a state of confusion. The Tet Offensive began on the 31st of January 1968. I left about a month later. And everybody was sitting in their living rooms wondering why was this happening now?”

--Frank McAdams, Vietnam Veteran, First Marine Division

As social unrest rocked the nation, one pivotal year shifted the majority of public opinion against the war for the first time. In January 1968, a massive surprise attack by North Vietnamese troops convinced many Americans that the war was not going to end soon, and cast its outcome into question. All at once, large-scale opposition flared against the administration and its policies. Federal troops put down race riots across the country, while other bitter protests erupted on campuses, at both national political conventions, and at public events from beauty pageants to the Olympics. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Robert Kennedy were assassinated. The growing discord, combined with the highest casualties to date in the war, unnerved the country. And in the midst of the chaos, President Johnson announced that he would not seek reelection.



Timeline

January:

- **Prince Sihanouk of Cambodia** tells U.S. representative that he will not stop American forces from pursuing Vietcong across the Cambodian border.
- **Siege of Khe Sanh**; U.S. Marine base under siege for 77 days from North Vietnamese/Vietcong mortar attacks.
- **North Koreans seize the USS *Pueblo***, a Naval intelligence ship, off the coast of Korea.
- **Tet Offensive begins**; North Vietnamese and Vietcong simultaneously attack all major South Vietnamese cities and briefly occupy the American embassy in Saigon.
- **Battle of Hue begins**; house by house fighting destroys thousands of homes, inflicting heavy civilian casualties.

February:

- **Additional 206,000 U.S. troops** requested by General Westmoreland; his request is denied.
- **Republic of Vietnam announces call-up** of 65,000 additional men for its armed forces; for the first time 18 year-olds in the South will be subject to the draft.
- **Richard Nixon declares his candidacy** for the Republican presidential nomination.
- **Cesar Chavez**, the United Farm Workers Union leader, begins his first fast for nonviolence.
- **U.S. Gallup poll** shows 50% of Americans disapprove of the President's management of the war.
- **Troops of the Republic of Vietnam retake the Citadel** of the Imperial Palace at Hue.



March:

- **Remains of 2000 Hue residents** executed by Communists discovered by South Vietnamese authorities.
- **Senator Eugene McCarthy**, a peace candidate, is narrowly defeated by President Johnson in the New Hampshire Democratic presidential primary.
- **General William Westmoreland replaced by General Creighton Abrams** as commander of U.S. Forces in Vietnam.
- **President Lyndon Johnson announces he will not seek re-election;** he also initiates a partial bombing halt over North Vietnam.
- **Robert Kennedy** declares his candidacy for the Democratic presidential nomination on an anti-war platform.
- **President Johnson increases bombing of Laos.**
- **In the hamlet of My Lai**, north of Da Nang, over 300 unarmed Vietnamese civilians killed by members of Charlie Company, Americal Division.
- **Cesar Chavez ends his fast** during meeting with Robert Kennedy.

April:

- **Martin Luther King Jr. assassinated in Memphis, Tennessee;** riots break out across the country.
- **Oakland Police and Black Panther shootout** results in the death of 18 year-old Bobby Hutton, an early party member.
- **Civil Rights Act of 1968** prohibiting racial discrimination in the sale, rental, and financing of housing signed into law.
- **24,500 U.S. military reservists** called to action for two-year commitment.
- **Student Mobilization Committee** holds largest student strike against the war; thousands of protesters march in San Francisco and New York.



May:

- **U.S. and North Vietnam** agree to preliminary peace talks in Paris.
- **Bloody Monday in France** marks days of violent protest by Parisian students in reaction to a variety of issues including the war in Vietnam.
- **Vietcong launch Mini-Tet**; rocket and mortar attacks against Saigon and other towns across South Vietnam; U.S. responds with air strikes on North Vietnam.

June:

- **Robert Kennedy** fatally shot at the Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles after winning the California Democratic primary.
- **Protests erupt in Berkeley** in sympathy with French students and for ethnic studies programs.

July:

- **Black Panthers sponsor “Free Huey” Rally** in front of the Alameda County Courthouse for release of Party Defense Minister, Huey P. Newton.
- **GIs serving time in the stockade at Fort Bragg, North Carolina** take control of the prison from military police.
- **Three American POWs** released by Hanoi.

August:

- **Ronald Reagan** announces his candidacy for the Republican presidential nomination.
- **Richard M. Nixon wins Republican Presidential nomination** as anti-war protests erupt at Republican Convention in Miami, Florida.
- **Democratic National Convention in Chicago** disrupted by major protest against the war while Hubert H. Humphrey wins Democratic presidential nomination.



September:

- **Women's liberation** groups protest the Miss America Beauty Pageant in Atlantic City.
- **Student riots in Mexico City** subdued by Mexican security forces.
- **Huey P. Newton**, Black Panther Party Minister of Defense, convicted of manslaughter and sentenced to 2–15 years in federal prison.

October:

- **Anti-war protest** organized and led by Vietnam veterans held in San Francisco.
- **Violence erupts in Ireland** between Catholics and Protestants.
- **Summer Olympic games in Mexico City**; San Jose State athletes Tommie Smith and John Carlos raise their fists in the black power salute during their medal ceremony to protest the treatment of African Americans.
- **Presidio Mutiny in San Francisco**; 27 soldiers serving brig time attempt to stage a sit-in protesting prison conditions; all are tried as mutineers.

November:

- **Richard Nixon** wins the presidential election by 500,000 votes.
- **Peace talks** begin between the U.S. and North Vietnam in Paris.
- **Student riots** explode in Berlin and Prague.
- **Student strike at San Francisco State begins**; students protest against the war and in support of an ethnic studies program.

December:

- **Apollo 8** launch begins the first U.S. mission to land on the Moon.
- **U.S. troops** in Vietnam number 536,000 at the end of the year.
- **South Vietnamese forces** number approximately 800,000.
- **More than 16,000 total U.S. deaths** in Vietnam for the year.
- **Estimated 28,000 deaths of South Vietnamese troops** for the year.



Pop Culture

The Year's Top Movies

- *2001: A Space Odyssey*
- *The Producers*
- *The Graduate*
- *Barbarella*,
- *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*
- *Funny Girl*
- *The Odd Couple*
- *Planet of the Apes*
- *Rosemary's Baby*

Ratings of G, PG, R, and X instituted in movies

The Year's Top Books

- Aleksandr Solzhenitsyen: *The Cancer Ward*
- Tom Wolfe: *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*
- Kurt Vonnegut: *Welcome to the Monkey House*
- Dr. Martin Hoffman: *The Gay World: Male Homosexuality and the Social Creation of Evil*
- Arthur Hailey: *Airport*

The Year's Music

- Beatles record: "Hey Jude"
- Grammy for Record of the Year: Simon & Garfunkel, "Mrs. Robinson"
- Grammy for Album of the Year: Glen Campbell, "By the Time I Get to Phoenix"
- Grammy for Best Female Vocalist: Dionne Warwick, "Do You Know the Way to San Jose"
- Grammy for Best Male Vocalist: José Feliciano, "Light My Fire"

New Television Shows

- *Adam 12*
- *The Doris Day Show*
- *Hawaii Five-O*
- *Julia*
- *Mayberry R.F.D*
- *The Mod Squad*
- *Rowan & Martin's Laugh-In*
- *60 Minutes*
- *Wild Kingdom*



Sports

- Detroit Tigers beat the St. Louis Cardinals in the World Series.
- New York Jets beat the Baltimore Colts in Super Bowl III.
- Heisman Trophy winner was O.J. Simpson.
- Boston Celtics beat the LA Lakers in the NBA championship.

Miscellaneous

- The price of a Hershey bar doubles... to 10 cents.
- Kerner Commission reports that America is moving towards two cultures, one black and one white.
- The musical *Hair* is produced on Broadway.
- Zap Comics is printed for the first time.

