THE HISTORY CHANNEL® PRESENTS

1968 with Tom Brokaw

An original documentary

“The year 1968 is considered one of the most turbulent, and pivotal, twelve month periods in American history. This single year was a flashpoint for many of the social, political, and cultural transformations for which the overall decade of the 1960s is known. During these years, the United States became entrenched in an unpopular war in Vietnam abroad, while unrest, experimentation, violence, and outspokenness raged throughout the nation. The Civil Rights Movement gained momentum, sit-ins and riots became commonplace, leaders were assassinated on a seemingly regular basis, and social experimentation and psychedelic music became the rage in San Francisco and elsewhere.

Many consider these years divisive, others shameful, yet some believe they were necessary to galvanize change in America. The slowly building upheaval of the 1960s reached an apex in 1968. The tension that had been increasingly brewing over the previous years finally came to a head, exploding across 365 days of violence, uprising, and mourning. Robert Kennedy and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. were assassinated, riots broke out at the Democratic National Convention, and the media coverage of the Tet Offensive exposed the gruesome underbelly of the Vietnam War. Together, these events signaled the powerful cultural, economic, and social changes that still reverberate today.

The History Channel documentary 1968 with Tom Brokaw is a two-hour special presentation featuring extensive video footage and mesmerizing new interviews. Brokaw, a young journalist in 1968, takes us through the year’s most important events, aided by testimonies from those closest to the action. Brokaw speaks to key leaders and participants in these events including Andrew Young-- the former Mayor of Atlanta who was standing next to Martin Luther King when he was assassinated, Rafer Johnson—a close friend of Robert Kennedy who tackled the senator’s assassin in the kitchen of the Ambassador Hotel, and musicians Bruce Springsteen, Arlo Guthrie, and James Taylor. Together, their insights help capture this dynamic and fascinating year in history, bringing viewers a fresh and incisive view of 1968, and what it all means today. Covering the political and personal, the cultural and scientific, 1968 with Tom Brokaw explores and deciphers this critical year in American History. Educators and their students will find this documentary to be a riveting retrospective of this era and its consequences for our lives today.” (History)

Curricular context: “This documentary fulfills the following standards as outlined by the National Council for History Education: (1) Civilization, cultural diffusion and innovation, (2) Human interaction with the environment, (3) Values, beliefs, political ideas and institutions, (4) Patterns of social and political interaction, and (5) Conflict and cooperation.” (History)

Assignment: Watch the documentary *1968*, and answer at least three of the following questions (posted on Blackboard) and comment on the answer of one classmate. There is no minimum word count but I expect your to answer each question thoroughly, thoughtfully, and using academic grammar.

1. What were some of the major cultural and political events that directly preceded 1968? How did they influence the events, which occurred in 1968?

2. What was the Tet Offensive? What did it reveal about the conflict in Vietnam and why was it particularly shocking for Americans?

3. How was Arlo Guthrie’s song “Alice’s Restaurant” a commentary on the draft? What message was Guthrie trying to convey, and why? Is there still a draft today?

4. What was at stake for those who dodged the draft? By going to Canada to escape the draft and military service, were people breaking the law? Do you think some draft dodgers were justified, or not? Discuss.

5. Why do you think the Haight-Ashbury district of San Francisco was the destination and home for so many in the counter-culture movement? How would you characterize this movement, and what is the actual definition of a “hippie”?

6. Why do you think the Smothers Brothers were so popular? By the same token, why do you think they were considered so controversial? Is there a need for personalities like John Stewart and the Smothers Brothers to “take off the veil” for society?

7. Why was George Wallace such a polarizing figure in politics? Why do you think he garnered such support, and how did his viewpoints compare with those of the other presidential candidates in 1968?

8. What was the Orangeburg Massacre? What were the repercussions of this violent event, and how do you think it influenced and affected the Civil Rights, and even the anti-war Movements?

9. What incited the various sit-ins and protests at Columbia University? How would you describe the make up of these protestors and what ultimately happened to them? Do you think that anything of this size and nature could happen today? Why or why not?

10. What were the various reactions to the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King jr.?

11. Why do you think Robert Kennedy was such an influential and widely liked candidate, especially among minority groups such as migrant farm workers? What set him apart from Eugene McCarthy? Finally, why was the Senator assassinated?

12. What were the repercussions of the riots at the 1968 Democratic Convention? Can you think of any recent event that was covered and exposed so extensively on television?

13. What was the “silent majority” and why were they significant? How did this contingency ultimately affect the results of the 1968 Presidential Election?

14. Apart from the political, what were some of the other major events that took place in 1968?

15. Former Nixon speechwriter Pat Buchanan considers 1968 one of the most divisive years in American History. Why? Do you agree? If so, would you characterize this divisiveness as detrimental, beneficial, or somewhere in between?

16. What was the legacy of the 1960s, or specifically 1968? What did we gain from this decade?