

HISTORY™ CLASSROOM PRESENTS

THE CENTURY: APPROACHING THE APOCALYPSE

Reporter Peter Jennings hosts this important series that chronicles the events and experiences of America in the twentieth century, the century that Henry Luce dubbed “The American Century.” Using archival footage and interviews with historians, veterans, activists and every-day people, this documentary explores the social, political, cultural, and economic changes that have transformed this nation from a burgeoning, isolationist economic power to one of the world’s leaders. *The Century: America’s Time* would be useful for classes on American History, American Culture, Women’s History, Political Science, Civics, Science and Technology, Military History and Ethics. It is appropriate for middle school, high school and college.

APPROACHING THE APOCALYPSE

The turbulence of the 1960s paved the way for the election of Richard Nixon. Distraught at the violence and unrest of the nation, Nixon’s “Silent Majority” voted loudly. But the turmoil of the decade continued with riots and generational conflicts, and, despite the success of Apollo 11 and Nixon’s historic trip to China, the era ended in the disgrace of Watergate and the fall of Saigon.

OBJECTIVES

Students will analyze the effects of the twentieth century on American life, political institutions, economics, foreign policy and culture. They will also investigate how events in the twentieth century influenced America’s position as a world leader, and how global and domestic events created change, and sometimes turmoil, in America itself.

NATIONAL HISTORY STANDARDS

Approaching the Apocalypse fulfills the following National Standards for History for grades 5-12: Chronological thinking, historical comprehension, historical analysis and interpretation, historical research capabilities, historical issues-analysis and decision-making for Eras 9 and 10.

VOCABULARY

desolation	escalation	placards	unmitigated
obdurate	desecration	vociferous	masochism
adversary	bellicose	effete	impudent
metaphor	elusive	apex	sanctuary
vengeance	rhetoric	coup	extortion

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Richard Nixon became president in 1969. Why was Nixon such a poor choice for the divided nation?
2. Who were the “silent majority?” How was the image of the silent majority used as a political weapon?
3. In 1970, National Guardsmen killed four students at Kent State University. How did the killings at Kent State epitomize the destructive divide in America?
4. What are identity politics? Are they empowering or are they divisive?
5. American soldiers were better equipped, better fed and in better health than the Vietnamese soldiers. Yet, the American soldiers were not able to defeat the Vietnamese. Why were the Vietnamese soldiers so resilient?
6. Nixon’s crowning achievement as president was his trip to China. Why was his trip to China so monumental?
7. Discuss some of the problems Vietnam veterans had adjusting to American society when they came home. Why did they have so many problems?
8. Why was Watergate such a scandal? How did it bring down the president of the United States?
9. Discuss the impact of the Watergate scandal on the American public, American confidence and American history.
10. How did the inability of the United States to defeat North Vietnam reveal cracks in the seemingly impenetrable military might of the country?
11. How did the fall of Saigon end an era?

EXTENDED ACTIVITIES

1. Design a commemorative medal for the 1969 moonwalk.
2. Design a movie poster for *Easy Rider*.
3. Design a memorial for American POWs and MIAs of the Vietnam War.