

Lesson Plan: The Watergate Scandal

Grade Level: High School (Grades 9-12)

Subject: U.S. History

Duration: 50-60 minutes

Learning Objectives:

- Students will understand the key events leading up to, during, and after the Watergate scandal.
 - Students will analyze the impact of the scandal on U.S. politics, government, and public trust.
 - Students will examine the role of the media and the legal system in uncovering the scandal.
-

Materials Needed:

- Whiteboard and markers
 - Projector or computer for video clips (optional)
 - Handouts with timeline of Watergate events (provided by teacher)
 - Articles or summaries of the Watergate hearings and investigation (optional)
-

Standards Addressed:

- **Civics and Government:** Understanding the checks and balances of the U.S. government and the role of the president.
 - **Historical Thinking:** Analyzing historical events and understanding their causes, effects, and significance.
 - **Media Literacy:** Understanding the role of the media in shaping public perception and holding government accountable.
-

Lesson Outline:

1. Introduction to the Watergate Scandal (15 minutes)

Objective: Set the context for the Watergate scandal and introduce key terms and figures.

- **Bell Ringer:** Ask students, “What do you know about the Watergate scandal?” Write student responses on the board.
- **Lecture/Discussion:** Introduce the Watergate scandal:
 - The break-in at the Democratic National Committee headquarters at the Watergate Complex in Washington, D.C. (June 17, 1972).
 - The involvement of members of President Richard Nixon’s re-election campaign, known as the “Committee to Re-elect the President” (CREEP).
 - Nixon’s subsequent efforts to cover up the crime and obstruct investigations.
 - Key figures: Richard Nixon, Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein, John Dean, G. Gordon Liddy, and the role of the media and investigative journalists.

Visual Aid: Use a simple timeline on the board or projector to outline the key events leading up to and following the break-in.

2. Understanding the Timeline of Events (15 minutes)

Objective: Provide students with a clear understanding of the sequence of events.

- **Activity:** Hand out a timeline of the major events in the Watergate scandal, including:
 - The break-in (1972)
 - The Washington Post's investigation (Woodward and Bernstein)
 - The Senate Watergate hearings (1973)
 - The resignation of President Nixon (1974)
 - **Discussion:** Break down the timeline and ask students to identify the most significant turning points.
 - Why did the cover-up efforts fail?
 - How did the media contribute to uncovering the scandal?
 - What was the significance of the Senate hearings?
-

3. The Role of the Media and Investigative Journalism (10 minutes)

Objective: Analyze the role of the press in investigating and exposing the Watergate scandal.

- **Video Clip (Optional):** Show a short segment from the movie *All the President's Men*, which dramatizes the investigative reporting of Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein.
 - **Discussion:** Discuss the following questions:
 - What challenges did Woodward and Bernstein face while investigating the scandal?
 - How did their reporting impact public perception of Nixon and the government?
 - Why is the role of the media in this case so significant?
-

4. The Aftermath of Watergate and Its Impact on U.S. Politics (10 minutes)

Objective: Examine the consequences of Watergate on public trust in the government and political culture.

- **Lecture/Discussion:** Discuss the broader implications of Watergate:
 - Nixon's resignation on August 9, 1974.
 - The lasting impact on the public's trust in the presidency and the U.S. government.
 - The passage of new laws and reforms aimed at limiting executive power (e.g., the War Powers Act, Freedom of Information Act, campaign finance reforms).
 - The legacy of Watergate in terms of the relationship between the executive branch and the media.

Critical Thinking: Ask students to reflect on the following: - Do you think the U.S. government became more transparent after Watergate? Why or why not? - How do scandals like Watergate affect public trust in political leaders today?

5. Conclusion and Reflection (5 minutes)

Objective: Reinforce key takeaways and connect the Watergate scandal to modern-day politics.

- **Discussion:** Ask students to consider how Watergate might relate to current political issues or scandals.
 - Do modern-day scandals involve similar themes of abuse of power, media involvement, and public accountability?
 - **Exit Ticket:** Have students write a brief response to the question: “What lessons can be learned from the Watergate scandal in relation to democracy and government transparency?”
-

Assessment:

- **Participation** in class discussion and activities.
 - **Exit Ticket** response to demonstrate understanding of the lesson.
 - Optional: Homework assignment to read a summary article on the Watergate hearings or watch a short documentary and write a reflection.
-

Extensions:

- **Debate:** Hold a class debate on the question: “Was Nixon’s resignation necessary, or was his impeachment sufficient to address the Watergate scandal?”
 - **Research Project:** Have students research the key figures involved in Watergate (e.g., Bob Woodward, Carl Bernstein, John Dean) and present a report on their contributions to the investigation.
-

Differentiation:

- Provide additional resources for students who need more support (e.g., summarized timelines, article summaries).
 - Offer extension activities for students who finish early, such as researching other political scandals or analyzing Watergate’s impact on modern politics.
-

This lesson plan provides a comprehensive overview of the Watergate scandal, fostering understanding of its historical significance and the roles played by various actors, including the media, in bringing about accountability in the U.S. government.