

WATERGATE LESSON PLAN

SUBJECT

Social Studies, U.S. History

GRADES

8-12

ESTIMATED TIME

80 minutes

OBJECTIVE

To gain an understanding of the events of the Watergate scandal and its significance on American Politics.

OPENING DISCUSSION

1. What do you already know about President Nixon or the historical context of his Presidency?
2. In your opinion, what is President Nixon most well known for?

PROCEDURE

1. Show students June 23rd, 1972 White House tapes. Use resources attached.
2. Discuss what they heard, and what they think the most significant part of those tapes were.
3. Give context to tapes by explaining Watergate using the condensed timeline below.
4. Split students into groups and assign one part of the timeline to each. The group must research the event, present it, and explain how it affects the next event.
5. Introduce the idea of political reform (modification of policies and change in laws).
 - Explain why/when these laws were modified.
 - Watergate was so significant to politics, law and democracy's that due to it there is now an extensive list of post scandal reforms.
6. Introduce the following acts that were modified due to Watergate: *The 1974 Amendments to the Freedom of Information Act, Federal Advisory Committee Act of*

1972, Government in the Sunshine Act of 1976 and the Presidential Records Act of 1978.

7. Explain their effects on government transparency and ethics.
 - Discuss how the White House has changed since then (essentially more information is available to the public now).
 - Question: Would you trust the government after Watergate? Why or why not? Does political reform change your opinion?
8. Explain how they affected the 2019 impeachment trials using the marked up version of the Zelenskyy-Trump phone conversation. Attached to lesson plan.
 - The Court's curb on executive power remains crucial today, they proved that not even the president is above the law. This has affected today's impeachment trials.
 - Lawyers and Attorneys for the first time were viewed in a negative way. Most law schools after the scandal implemented an ethics course, and the bar rewrote its responsibility code.
 - Carl Bernstein and Bob Woodward (journalists at Washington Post covering scandal), created what became known as the culture of celebrity journalists.

GRAPHIC SUMMARY: Watergate Time Line



June 23rd, 1972 White House "Smoking Gun" Tape:

<https://watergate.info/1972/06/23/the-smoking-gun-tape.html>

EXTENSION ACTIVITY

After students gain a grasp on the effects of Watergate on modern day American politics they can begin this assignment. The objective is to get the students to understand the significance of these policy changes, no matter how small or big. Through this assignment they will begin to understand the significance of Watergate.

1. Each student will research a policy that was modified or created due to Watergate. Some examples are: *The 1974 Amendments to the Freedom of Information Act* or *the Federal Advisory Committee Act of 1972*.
2. With this policy they will find a court case that uses that policy in some way (similar to the Transcripts I marked up).
3. They will then present why and how their policy was significant to the case they chose.