



Richard Nixon | Lesson Plan

How should we evaluate a leader’s legacy—by their successes, their failures, or both?

Students will understand that Richard Nixon’s presidency was marked by both major accomplishments and significant controversy, demonstrating how a leader’s legacy is shaped by their successes, challenges, and public perception over time.

Learning Objectives:

- **Identify** the key life events of Richard Nixon and their influence on his rise to the presidency.
- **Explain** how Richard Nixon shaped U.S. foreign policy and ended American involvement in the Vietnam War.
- **Compare** the key hardships and achievements of Richard Nixon that defined his leadership and presidency.
- **Evaluate** Richard Nixon’s leadership skills and decisions, considering both his major accomplishments and the controversy surrounding his resignation.

Key Vocabulary:

- **Vietnam War:** A conflict in which the United States was involved, and Nixon worked to end.
- **Communism:** A system of government where the government controls everything; Nixon opposed communism during the Cold War.
- **Détente:** Nixon’s policy of easing tensions with communist countries like the Soviet Union and China.
- **Watergate:** A scandal that led to Nixon resigning from the presidency.
- **Resignation:** When a leader or worker decides to leave their job; Nixon resigned from office instead of being removed.

Educational Standards: CCRA.R.1, CCRA.R.2, CCRA.R.7, CCRA.W.2, CCRA.W.4, CCRA.W.9, CCRA.L.1, CCRA.L.2, CCRA.L.4, CCRA.SL.1, CCRA.SL.2

Academic Subject Areas: Biography, U.S. Presidents, U.S. History

What You’ll Need

- Video: *Guess or Mess: Richard Nixon* (Watch [Here](#))
- Worksheet: *Guess or Mess: Richard Nixon* (Click [Here](#))
- PragerU Kids biographical book: *Richard M. Nixon* (Download [Here](#))
- Large paper or poster board for each group, along with markers



Lesson Plan: Read and Discuss (60 minutes)

Introduction to Nixon: (5 minutes)

1. Begin with a brief discussion about U.S. presidents and the qualities that make a great leader. Ask students:
 - What do you think makes a president a strong leader?
 - Can you name any presidents who led during difficult times?
2. Guide the discussion toward presidents who faced major challenges, such as:
 - George Washington leading a new nation.
 - Abraham Lincoln guiding the country through the Civil War.
 - Franklin D. Roosevelt leading during the Great Depression and World War II.
3. Introduce Richard Nixon as a president who faced both great challenges and great successes. Explain the focus of the lesson:
 - Today, we will learn about Richard Nixon, the 37th President of the United States.
 - By the end of this lesson, we will consider: *How should we evaluate a leader's legacy—by their successes, their failures, or both?*
4. Display the *Richard M. Nixon* digital book using an electronic device. Briefly highlight his significance as the 37th president, his role in ending U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War, and the controversy that led to his resignation. Show images from the digital book to provide a visual overview of his life and key achievements.

Nixon History Huddle: (25 minutes)

1. Read the "Meet Richard M. Nixon" section on page 2 together as a class, with the teacher leading this page to model fluent reading and set the tone for the lesson.
2. After completing the teacher-led reading, explain that students will now explore other key aspects of Nixon's life in small groups.
3. Split the class into small groups and assign each group a different section of the digital book to explore. The following are recommendations:
 - Group 1: *Young Richard, Early Career, Anti-Communist Leader* (pages 3-4)
 - Group 2: *Vice President, Devastating Defeats* (pages 5-6)
 - Group 3: *Epic Comeback, President* (pages 7-8)
 - Group 4: *Tragic Downfall, Retirement* (pages 9-10)
 - Group 5: *Legacy* (page 11)
4. Allow time for each group to read their assigned section, taking turns reading aloud. As students read, they should discuss the main ideas.
5. Provide each group with a large piece of paper or a poster board and markers to write down key points and any interesting facts or quotes they find.
6. Allow each group one to two minutes to present their findings to the class. After each presentation, provide time for classmates to ask questions and discuss the content.

Worksheet Workshop: (15 minutes)

1. Hand out individual copies of the worksheet to each student. Explain how to fill out each section of the worksheet with these instructions:

Timeline: Students should select key dates and events mentioned throughout the digital book. The following are recommendations, but the teacher and students can use many other dates mentioned in the book:

- 1913 - Birth of Richard Nixon
- 1968 - Elected 37th President of the United States
- 1969 - Begins to reduce involvement in the Vietnam War
- 1972 - Detente policy with China and Soviet Union
- 1974 - Resigns due to Watergate scandal

Interesting Quote: Have students choose a meaningful quote from the book to fill in the quote section on their worksheet.

Interesting Fact: Ask students to select an interesting fact about Richard Nixon that stood out to them and write it in the space provided.

Vocabulary Builder: Instruct students to choose a word from the Glossary on page 12 that they find interesting and use it in a sentence that conveys its meaning.

2. **Multiple Choice:** Explain that students should complete the multiple-choice section of the worksheet individually. (Note: The multiple-choice section corresponds to the *Guess or Mess* episode about Richard Nixon and can also be used to play along while watching. See “Extension Activity” below.)

Reflection Round-Up: (10 minutes)

1. Briefly summarize the key points covered about Richard Nixon, focusing on his life, presidency, and legacy.
2. **Think-Pair-Share:** Ask students to recall one fact about Richard Nixon and share it with a partner. Encourage them to discuss why that fact was significant.
3. Tie back to the enduring question by asking students to consider the big question: *How should we evaluate a leader’s legacy—by their successes, their failures, or both?*
 - Invite a few students to share their thoughts.
4. As the teacher, take this opportunity to explain that history is made up of real people who make great decisions or terrible mistakes, just like all of us. Explain that no one is defined by just one moment—good or bad. When we look at history, we have to ask what was done right, what was done wrong, and what we can learn from how these choices shape history.
5. **Bonus Activities:** If time allows, allow students to complete the puzzle on page 2 by finding hidden letters throughout the book. They can also explore and engage with the other interactive activities included in the book.

Extension Activity: (20 minutes)

Guess or Mess Trivia Show: After the lesson, students can participate in the *Guess or Mess* trivia show for Richard Nixon—direct students to the multiple-choice section of the worksheet. Students can play along with the contestants to see if they can answer the trivia questions correctly.

PragerU 5-Minute Videos:

Did you know that PragerU has a comprehensive video catalog of U.S. Presidents in an easy-to-watch 5-minute format? Enhance this lesson plan with one of our insightful, engaging, and educational videos that provide students with a deep dive into the lives and legacies of America's leaders. To view *Understanding Nixon*, click [here](#).

Don't have time for a full lesson? Quick Activity (30 minutes)

Read the *Richard Nixon* book together as a class, with students taking turns reading aloud. Then, watch the *Guess or Mess* video and play along with the trivia questions.