



# The 1960s a decade of change

Christopher Hemming

# World Study after 1900: The 1960s a decade of change

This is an ambitious programme of study that introduces and explores with pupils the cultural and political changes of the 1960s and their impact on Great Britain. The cross-curricular programme is particularly suited to schools with either a strong foundation in the performing or visual arts or those with arts status and focuses on film, drama and popular music. The units suggest strong opportunities for links to **all** of the objectives in the Citizenship key stage 3 programme of study.

Interpretations of the 1960s vary according to attitudes. One view suggests that traditional values were overturned deferring to pop music and a laxity of morality. Another stance suggests that it was a highly progressive decade with the legalization of abortion, abolition of capital punishment and outlawing of racial discrimination. Was the 1960s a defining moment in postwar Britain when working class solidarity was overturned by generational revolution? Or perhaps as Kenneth O Morgan suggests it was a decade of economic failure and political disappointment for Britain whilst at the same time 'an era of psychic liberation.'

This Scheme of Work (SoW) is constructed in four parts. Each module could be used as a stand-alone programme allowing for a 'pick-and-mix' approach to the study of the decade depending upon the relative strengths of the cross curricular links within the respective schools.

## *Expectations*

---

### **At the end of this unit**

**Most pupils will:** demonstrate knowledge of the changes that occurred in British society in the 1960s; describe the Cold War and the key groupings demonstrating an understanding about nuclear weapons; describe the main focal points of global protest; account for the growth of youth culture; analyse an interpretation of change on the lives of most young people; select, organise and use relevant information in a piece of structured writing.

**Some pupils will not have made so much progress and will:** demonstrate some knowledge of key events that occurred in Britain during the 1960s; identify the importance of the Cold War and nuclear weapons; suggest reasons for protest; identify cultural changes and its affect on young people; select and combine information in piece of structured writing.

**Some pupils will have progressed further and will:** demonstrate detailed knowledge of political and social changes in the 1960s; analyse and make links between the key events of the Cold War and social protest; assess and evaluate the impact of social and cultural factors; evaluate an interpretation of the 1960s as a decade of change; reach substantiated conclusions in a piece of structured writing.

## *Unit 1: The Cold War - how real was the nuclear threat?*

---

Takes an overview of the principle political global events of the decade. The unit should include the Cold War and in particular the Cuban Missile Crisis, the Vietnam War, the race to place a man on the moon and the changes in the People's Republic of China from Cultural Revolution to the 'opening' of China following the Nixon/Mao rapprochement. Key individuals will include John F. Kennedy, Richard Nixon, Mao Tse Tung.

The cultural focus will be on the Stanley Kubric film of 1963, "Dr Strangelove; or, How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb," and the protest songs of Bob Dylan particularly "Blowin' in the Wind." The contextual influence on the 'protest' song could be explored including pupils creation of their own song in the genre of the time.

Pupils should have the opportunity to study the wide variety of documentary source material relating to the Cuban Missile Crisis now available on the internet and develop an understanding of how decisions are made thus directly linking to Citizenship.

China is now a growing power and its future influence in global affairs is likely to be very influential. Pupils will therefore have the opportunity to study the early emergence of China onto the world stage in the 1960s. Cross curricular arts subjects could be addressed by an examination and/or production of John Adams' opera 'Nixon in China'.

## *Unit 2: Did Britain experience a cultural revolution?*

---

An examination of Britain in the 'swinging sixties' from a social perspective plus a political and economic overview of the decade. The overview to include the 1964-70 Wilson government, the 'white heat of technology' — the Concorde project, Rhodesia and end of Empire, Commonwealth immigration, the explosion of Higher Education and the introduction of comprehensive schools.

The 'swinging sixties' of the Beatles and Carnaby Street can be contrasted with two contemporary films, 'Saturday Night and Sunday Morning' (1960) and 'A Hard Day's Night' (1964). Were the Beatles just an 'enchanted and intoxicating hybrid of Negro rock-and-roll with their own adolescent romanticism' as described by Philip Larkin or did they herald a fundamental change in youth culture?

This unit particularly features and seeks to explore the ethnic diversity of the United Kingdom. The impact of Caribbean immigration and culture could be traced through the affect of reggae and ska on popular music and the creation of events such as the Notting Hill Carnival founded in 1964. Was the first Carnival an important moment in the history of Black Britons? The work of the black poets Linton Kwesi Johnson and Benjamin Zephaniah could feature to illustrate and investigate racism.

As an extension exercise the most able pupils could examine the 1960s Labour government through the plays of Dennis Potter; 'Vote, Vote, Vote for Nigel Barton' and 'Standup, Nigel Barton' both published in 1968.

### *Unit 3: Was the 1960s a decade of protest?*

---

What was the global impact of youth protest primarily over the Vietnam War? What was the affect on other events including the Paris riots of 1968, the quest for freedom in the Prague Spring and the Cultural Revolution in China led by young 'Red Guards?'

The growth of feminism is explored including the publication of the influential 'Female Eunuch' by Germaine Greer. Was the 'Women's Movement' influenced by other factors such as the American civil rights movement? What was the influence which sparked demands for equal pay? Did Women protest against their domestic role in society? How far did the development of the birth-control pill allow women to control their own lives?

Did young people develop a counter-culture? The aspiration for an 'alternative society' can be considered with an exploration of the underground poetry – folksong of Michael Horovitz, 'Children of Albion: Poetry of the 'Underground' in Britain' and the culmination of the hippy idyll with the three day festival at Woodstock in 1970 attended by ½ million young people.

Tasks could include writing a protest poem, examining the 1969 cult cinema-verité 'Easy Rider' and outlining a screenplay or exploring the popularity of black music, particularly 'Motown' and the impact of the civil rights movement in the United States. Key figure of Martin Luther King could be compared with Marvin Gaye.

### *Unit 4: Did anything change?*

---

This unit explores the lives of young people in the 1960s. Did Britain see a huge social change brought about by an explosion in the creative arts? Did full employment lead to a generation of young consumers who supported the growth of the UK music industry? How far did the generational change influence the growing medium of television?

The unit assesses the degree of change relative to the majority of young people. The unit examines specific entertainment and new drama that addressed issues of concern. The unit focus will be the two BBC television dramas. The first, 'Up the Junction' an examination of life in the working class area of Battersea that addressed the social problem of abortion that was illegal until the 1967 legislation.<sup>a</sup> The second, 'Cathy Come Home' first shown in 1966 that highlighted the public power of the new medium and which led to a new political awareness about the

---

<sup>a</sup> An alternative text that could be used is Lynne Reid Banks, 'The L-Shaped Room,' (1962).

problem of homelessness and was directly linked to the formation of the charity 'Shelter.'

The unit may offer as either an extension exercise or one aimed at underachieving boys the impact of the 1966 football World Cup. Did football fever grip the 'English' nation; did it establish or define differences between the respective nations of Great Britain? Did the increased popularity of football lead to it taking on a more prominent role in the national psyche and contribute to increasing levels of violence?

## Teaching activities

---

The following is a lesson plan for the unit 2: Did Britain experience a cultural revolution?

Lesson 1: Was the 1960s a pivotal period in British life?

### Overview of the decade

Teacher led overview of Britain in the 1960s. Include government fragility from the decay of the Macmillan government and early years of Wilson government. The 1966 Election and hopes for bright future following on from 'English' euphoria following World Cup victory.

### Personal experiences

Invite two/three parents or grandparents of pupils to address the class and answer questions on their personal experiences of the period.

### Group investigation

Pupils divided into groups to explore and investigate one given aspect of the period. Topics range from 'White heat of technology' and Concorde, Commonwealth Immigration, Rhodesia and UDI, Changes to education,<sup>b</sup> for classes in urban areas the impact of housing development and environmental change may be included. Transport revolution, Beeching to motorways.

Examination of one feature from the period either via contemporary account using either a newspaper or a news report. Focus; What happened? What was the cause?

## RESOURCES

**BBC 'On this day'** background information on an event and a video or audio stream of a contemporary news report.

- <http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday>

**Film Library** 3,500 hours of material covers news, sport, social history and entertainment from 1896 to 1970. The archive has been digitised, material can now be searched online and downloaded.

- [British Pathe News](#)

**Guardian** This website contains hundreds of important articles that have appeared in the Guardian during the 20th Century.

- [Guardian Century](#)

---

<sup>b</sup> The school may have been constructed in the 1960s thus providing a focus for research.

## Lesson 2: How were young peoples lives affected?

Prior to the lesson (as homework task) pupils asked to interview adult relative about life in the 1960s. What were the most important changes on their lives?

### Changing times

Pupils present feedback on oral history investigation about changes to the lives of an adult relative in the 1960s. Focus on cultural and environmental factors.

Pupils could be asked to bring one object associated with the 1960s to the lesson to assist in whole class discussion on issues raised. e.g. Record or newspaper or item of clothing.

### Changing lives

Focus on one object/picture/music.  
Identification and interpretation.

? Cover of Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band.

? Song 'Getting Better'.

Does the Sgt. Pepper album suggest optimism among young people at the time or were young people much more concerned about the Cold War and the threat from nuclear annihilation?  
(Comparison with work in unit 1)



### Swinging sixties – only for a minority?

Understanding the decade by contrasting the differences in class expectations by examining excerpts from two contemporary films. 'Saturday Night and Sunday Morning' (1960) and 'A Hard Day's Night' (1964).

### RESOURCES

Beatles, Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band.

Objects brought in by pupils

Video

'Saturday Night and Sunday Morning' and 'A Hard Day's Night'

## Lesson 3: What is the legacy of the 1960s?

### How many black faces in the photomontage on the cover for the Sgt. Pepper album?

Commonwealth immigration became a major issue in the 1960s. Pupils will examine political events like the Smethwick by-election in 1964 and figures like Enough Powell. Pupils will chart the influence of Caribbean immigration and culture on the cultural diversity of the United Kingdom from the commencement of the Notting Hill carnival in 1964. Pupils will trace this development using the 'Pop Charts' from the period as chronological source material.

Some pupils could go on to trace the influence on literature of black poets such as Linton Kwesi Johnson and Benjamin Zephaniah and the impact of the anti-racism movement.

### Were young people more political?

Evidence at the time suggested that young people were influential in supporting the Labour government of Harold Wilson in 1964 and 1966 and as a consequence the franchise was widened to reduce the voting age to 18.

Pupils will gain an increasing factual knowledge of the social legislation of the 1960s. The politics of the period that led to the abolition of capital punishment and legalisation of abortion and homosexuality. Pupils will also gain some insight into the cash between the Labour government and the trade union movement in respect of legislation to reform labour relations. Pupils will learn about key individuals including Harold Wilson and Barbara Castle.

As an extension exercise the most able pupils could examine the 1960s Labour government through the plays of Dennis Potter; 'Vote, Vote, Vote for Nigel Barton' and 'Standup, Nigel Barton' both published in 1968.

### RESOURCES

Pop Music Charts

Compilation of 1960s popular music associated with Caribbean or Black America.

Video or text of;

Dennis Potter 'Vote, Vote, Vote for Nigel Barton' and 'Standup, Nigel Barton'.

## *Learning objectives*

---

Pupils will learn about the lives of young people and recognise that much of the diversity and popular culture of modern Britain is strongly identified with the 1960s. By getting pupils to ask and answer questions they will therefore learn about the events that have influenced the lives of their own parents or grandparents. They will learn how to collect and select evidence to prepare for either a debate or group presentation reflecting the learning objectives.

Pupils will also learn about the development and understand the cultural and diverse nature of British society tracing many common features of modern society to developments that occurred in the 1960s. Through a range of enquiries pupils will recognise and trace media developments in many manifestations that became an influential force for the transmission of culture and politics on a national and global scale.

## Links to other subjects in National Curriculum

---

### Art and Design

- 4c? continuity and change in the purposes and audiences of artists, craftspeople and designers from Western Europe and the wider world [for example, differences in the roles and functions of art in contemporary life...].
- 5d? investigating art, craft and design in the locality, in a variety of genres, styles and traditions, and from a range of historical, social and cultural contexts [for example, in original and reproduction form, during visits to museums, galleries and sites, on the internet].

### Citizenship

This scheme of work relates to all of the requirements for building knowledge, skills and understanding at key stage 3.

### English

This scheme of work relates to much of the National Curriculum for English. Specifically it relates to the following for writing skills;

#### EN3

- 1i? develop logical arguments and cite evidence
- 1j? use persuasive techniques and rhetorical devices
- 1k? anticipate reader reaction, counter opposing views and use language to gain attention and sustain interest
- 1l? reflect on the nature and significance of the subject matter
- 1m? form their own view, taking into account a range of evidence and opinions
- 1n? organise their ideas and information, distinguishing between analysis and comment
- 1o? take account of how well the reader knows the topic.

and in respect of drama;

#### EN1

- 4d? evaluate critically performances of dramas that they have watched or in which they have taken part.

#### EN2

- 8b? recent and contemporary drama, fiction and poetry written for young people and adults
- 8c? drama, fiction and poetry by major writers from different cultures and traditions.

## Music

4d? identify the contextual influences that affect the way music is created, performed and heard [for example, intention, use, venue, occasion, development of resources, impact of ICT, the cultural environment and the contribution of individuals].

5b? responding to a range of musical and non-musical starting points.

5e? a range of live and recorded music from different times and cultures including music from the British Isles, the 'Western classical' tradition, folk, jazz and popular genres, and by well-known composers and performers.

## Assessment

---

Pupils will build on a portfolio of evidence including assessment during the final lesson.