

Frost/Nixon

by Peter Morgan

Directed by Michael Grandage

March 11 – 29, 2009

Ahmanson Theatre

DiscoveryGuide





L.A.'s Theatre Company

Ahmanson Theatre
Mark Taper Forum
Kirk Douglas Theatre

601 West Temple Street
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Frost/Nixon is a play that goes behind the scenes of real events –

the taped and televised interviews that David Frost conducted with former U.S. President Richard M. Nixon in 1977. Playwright Peter Morgan interweaves actual conversations with dialogue that he imagined took place.

It may be difficult to see the importance of the interviews from today's perspective. But for those who were angered by Nixon's central role in the Watergate scandal, David Frost's probing interviews achieved what congressional committees and a U.S. District Court judge never did. Mr. Frost came the closest to eliciting an admission of guilt and an apology from a U.S. president whose participation in criminal acts so deeply disappointed his fellow citizens.

Frost/Nixon dramatizes the confrontation between two men, who by outward appearances were polar opposites but who resembled each other at the core. David Frost is a British talk-show host and entertainer. Among many other credits, he hosted a T.V. show in the U.S. called *That Was the Week That Was* (1964-65), a satire of the week's news similar to *The Daily Show*, *Chocolate News* or "Weekend Update" on *Saturday Night Live*. In the 1970s, he was a celebrity with a reputation as a "player." Nixon, despite his prominence on the world stage, was notoriously ill-at-ease and awkward in public. Yet the two men shared a desire that motivated their common self-interest in agreeing to the interviews: In 1977, both men were desperate for a career come-back. *Frost/Nixon* tells that story.

DiscoveryGuide

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COVER
The cast of the National
Tour of *Frost/Nixon*.
PHOTO BY CAROL ROSEGG.

OBJECTIVES OF THIS DISCOVERY GUIDE

Provide background information that will clarify the action and meaning of the play

Connect the play with today's political and cultural landscape

Illuminate the play's themes

Vocabulary words are in **bold** type.
Definitions are within each section.

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PHOTO COURTESY OF CAMP BROADWAY.

Filling in the Background

Frost/Nixon is based on real events that took place between 1974 and 1977. The playwright assumes the audience knows the people and topics he references, such as the Watergate scandal and the presidency of Richard M. Nixon. Here's a brief guide to the 1970s, to help you understand the play's historical context. As you work through the guide, see if you can find similarities between the Nixon era and today's political and social climate.

The Vietnam War

America's involvement in the Vietnamese civil war began in the early 1960s when the United States decided to offer military support to the South Vietnamese who fought the Communist North for control of the country. Here at home, opposition to the war created a bitter division between its supporters and opponents. A "generation gap" grew between "Baby Boomers" who opposed the war, and their parents' age group (who had lived through and fought World War II) who supported it — though age was not the only determining factor in one's attitude toward the war. The "war at home" was fueled by the draft — a mandatory induction of young men into the U.S. Army. The draft sent thousands to a war they did not want to fight. Over 50,000 American soldiers died in the conflict.

Opposition to the war and the draft was driven by college students who staged demonstrations and campus sit-ins. In May of 1970, four students were killed by national guardsmen during an anti-war demonstration at Kent State University in Ohio. Ten days later, two more students were killed by state law enforcement officers at Jackson State College in Mississippi.

When Richard M. Nixon was first elected to the presidency in 1968, he promised to end the war.

It wasn't until Nixon's second term in 1972, however, that he secured a peace treaty with the North Vietnamese and brought the last of our troops home. Early in Nixon's presidency many Americans became angry about the war, pessimistic about the future, cynical about government and distrustful of politicians.

Race Relations

Americans made great strides in racial equality in the 1960s, but by the early 1970s, there was still much work to be done. Many young African Americans were still attending segregated, sub-standard schools. In 1971, school segregation, which had long been deemed illegal, was addressed through court-mandated busing. School districts all over the country bussed black kids to white schools and vice versa. Forced integration encountered fierce opposition and caused a "white flight" to the suburbs.

Women's Liberation

In the Seventies, women began to question their traditional roles in society. Women held "consciousness raising" groups that discussed everything from sex to paychecks. The ERA, or Equal Rights Amendment, was a proposal to amend the Constitution to enforce equal rights for women. The push for its passage gained a lot of publicity but not enough support to become law. Nevertheless, incremental changes in women's lives, such as the ability to open a line of credit without a male co-signer, continued to occur. In 1975, for example, women were admitted to the formerly all-male West Point, Air Force and Navy academies. That year was also recognized globally as International Woman's Year.

Sometimes people dismiss "Women's Libbers" as angry "bra-burners," but many basic rights that women enjoy today (funding for school sports, access to higher education, employment opportunities, etc.) stem from the efforts of women whose dissatisfaction with the **status quo** spurred them to activism.



Somewhere in South Vietnam, trucks of the U.S. Army First Cavalry Division, loaded with equipment and sprawling soldiers, move in convoy along a dusty road through a U.S. base. UPI.

“In the summer of 1972, Richard Nixon had brought the war in Vietnam to an end, achieved a diplomatic breakthrough with the Russians, had been the first Western leader to visit the People’s Republic of China and presided over a period of economic stability at home. His approval ratings matched Kennedy’s, none of his political opponents could lay a finger on him, he was about to be re-elected with the largest landslide in recent political history and then...he decided to cover up a third-rate burglary.”

—Jim Reston



Norma Enrique Basilo, a twenty-year-old member of the 1968 Mexican Olympic team, became the first woman in the 2744-year history of the Olympic Games to light the sacred Olympic flame. UPI.

The Environment

In the 1960s, the country was choking on pollution. The air in Los Angeles was thick and un-breathable. In 1969, the Cuyahoga River in Ohio was so polluted it caught fire. The 1970s brought in a wave of legislation to address the problems, such as The Clean Air Act and the creation of the Environmental Protection Agency. April 22, 1970 was the first Earth Day and the start of an environmental movement.

Energy

In 1973, Egypt attacked Israel on the Jewish High Holy Day of Yom Kippur. Israel quickly defeated its enemies in the Arab world. The Arab countries that controlled the world oil supply retaliated against Israel and its Western allies by raising the price of a barrel of oil from \$3.00 to \$11.65 (today’s oil prices are extremely volatile, and have spiked as high as \$144 per barrel). The price hike caused a world-wide economic recession and a lot of hardship here at home. Schools and businesses had to close for lack of heating oil. Commuters could not afford to drive to work. Drivers who could afford to fill their tanks encountered long lines at gas stations, and tempers flared.

Vocabulary

Recession: *n.* in economics, the condition in which the output of goods and services shrinks

Status quo: *n.* the existing state of affairs

Watershed: *n.* a crucial dividing point

Economy

The economy was in an inflationary spiral all through the 1970s. Inflation means that a dollar’s purchasing power decreases. Consumers felt the pinch. President Nixon’s successor, Gerald Ford, proposed a plan for combating inflation – W.I.N. (Whip Inflation Now) – which was generally regarded as a laughable failure. The next president, Jimmy Carter, inherited the bad economic situation, and was equally unsuccessful in solving it. The economy, under the guidance of Federal Reserve Chairman Paul Volcker, eventually sorted itself out by the mid-1980s (Volcker has since been tapped by President Obama to help remedy the current economic downturn).

If It Feels Good...

The Seventies, dubbed “The Me Decade” by writer Tom Wolfe, were the years between the invention of the birth control pill, legalization of abortion via the Supreme Court decision Roe v. Wade, and the advent of the AIDS epidemic in the 1980s. It was a time of free-wheeling experimentation. The consequences of casual sex — unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted disease — were not big concerns during the 1970s. “If it feels good, do it,” was a catchphrase of the era.

Exercise

Then and Now

Divide into groups. Research an aspect of the 1970s and compare it to today. What has changed and what has remained the same? Present your findings to the class.

Use a category from the previous article, the list below or think up one of your own.

Music

Movies

Fashion

Hair styles

Catch phrases

Popular TV shows

Art

Sports

Social issues

Military

World news

Scandals

Start by searching the Internet. Look through old photo albums, and bring examples of '70s culture and style to class. Maybe someone you know has a pair of platform shoes in the back of a closet. If you can find the clothes, come to class in your best '70s gear.

That Seventies Show

The 1970s was, as we used to say, a mixed bag — platform shoes and polyester, roller disco, CB radio, pet rocks, Three Mile Island and Love Canal. Divorce rates were up and birth rates were down. Square-jawed, handsome movie stars were out and quirky actors like Al Pacino and Dustin Hoffman were in. Can you dig it? Far out, man!

For many who were coming up back then, a look at their photo albums makes them both laugh and cringe. “Afro” and “shag” hair-dos, mood rings and bell-bottom pants, oh my! The Seventies was a decade of shifting attitudes and values in American life. Watergate was a **watershed**. The American public, weary of the Vietnam War, wanted President Nixon to succeed, but the Watergate scandal exacerbated a loss of faith in government that has never been fully restored.

People think of the Sixties as a decade of upheaval, which it certainly was, but many of the changes that started then actually manifested in the early years of the 1970s. Google “the Seventies” and learn more.

What's a Watergate?

Watergate refers to a series of crimes and attempts to conceal those crimes that were planned and committed with the full knowledge and participation of the President of the United States, Richard M. Nixon. “Watergate” is the name of the Washington, D.C. hotel and office complex that housed the headquarters of the Democratic National Committee (DNC) in 1972. Ever since the Watergate scandal broke, the suffix “gate” has been attached to any shameful political episode.

In the summer of 1972, a group of men broke into the DNC offices at the Watergate to readjust wiretapping (bugging) devices. Their purpose was to spy on the Democrats and learn their strategy for the upcoming presidential election. The men were caught in the act, and under the probing eyes of two Washington Post reporters, Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein (and others), the burglars were traced directly to the White House. The burning questions at the time were, “What does the President know and when did he know it?”

The Watergate scandal was a pivotal moment in American history. A good way to understand the scandal is to review its key events. Here is a timeline of Watergate and its immediate aftermath.* Please consult the reference list at the end of this guide to see suggestions for further reading.

November 5, 1968 Republican Nixon narrowly defeats Democrat Hubert Humphrey for the presidency.

Spring 1969 Nixon operatives begin bugging homes and offices of journalists and others on Nixon’s “enemies list.” Wiretapping without a warrant is illegal.

February 1971 – July 1973 Nixon secretly tapes all conversations in the Oval Office and at Camp David.

June 1971 A “plumbers” unit is formed and housed in White House basement. So-called because they are supposed to stop all “leaking” of Nixon Administration secrets.

Fall 1971 Nixon operative Donald Segretti begins a campaign of dirty tricks against Democratic presidential candidates. Some tricks are simply nasty; others are illegal.

June 1972 George McGovern wins the Democratic Party nomination for president.



“I let the American people down. And I have to live with that burden for the rest of my life.”

—Richard M. Nixon, 37th President of the United States

June 17, 1972 The “plumbers” break into the DNC headquarters at the Watergate Hotel. They are arrested. Working on a hunch that there’s more to the story, reporters Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein of *The Washington Post* begin an investigation.

June 20, 1972 Watergate cover-up begins. Nixon discusses the cover-up with his Chief of Staff, Bob Haldeman. The conversation is taped and later erased.

June 23, 1972 The first of the famous “smoking gun” conversations is recorded in the Oval Office. The tape is irrefutable evidence that links the president to the Watergate break-in and cover-up.

September 15, 1972 Five plumbers and two high-ranking members of Nixon’s staff are indicted for the Watergate burglary. Nixon and Haldeman discuss the indictments and how to contain the scandal. This conversation, also recorded, later comes to be known as “the second smoking gun.”

November 7, 1972 Nixon defeats McGovern.

March 1973 Facing prison, James McCord, one of the Watergate burglars, writes to federal district judge John Sirica telling him he knows much more but has been ordered to keep quiet. McCord testifies again.

March 21, 1973 John Dean, Nixon’s White House attorney, tells the President that there is a “cancer on the presidency.” He is referring to the growing number of people who are threatening to talk about break-ins, secret tapings, **suborning** perjury and other crimes approved by Nixon.

April 30, 1973 Nixon’s most trusted advisors, John Haldeman, John Erlichman, Richard Kleindeinst and John Dean resign.

May 1973 Testimony begins before the Senate Watergate Committee.

June 25, 1973 Dean tells the committee about the cover-up and the “cancer” conversation.

July 13, 1973 A relatively low-level White House aide, Alexander Butterfield, tells investigators about the existence of the Oval Office tapes.

August 29, 1973 Judge Sirica rules that the tapes must be surrendered to the court.

October 10, 1973 Vice President Spiro Agnew pleads **nolo contendere** to tax evasion and resigns.

November 15, 1973 Nixon turns over a few of the tapes. An 18-minute gap is discovered on a June 20, 1972, tape (the date of the first cover-up conversation), leading to suspicion of evidence tampering and obstruction of justice.

December 6, 1973 Congressman Gerald Ford is confirmed by the House of Representatives as Vice President, replacing Spiro Agnew.

February 21, 1974 The House of Representatives prepares articles of impeachment against President Nixon.

July 24, 1974 The Supreme Court rules that Nixon must release all tapes.

July 27-29, 1974 Three impeachment articles are passed and sent to the full House.

August 5, 1974 Nixon releases tapes, including the “smoking gun” tape of June 23, 1972, in which he directs the cover-up.

August 8, 1974 Realizing that his support has crumbled, Nixon announces that he will resign the next day at noon.



August 9, 1974 Nixon resigns, returns to his home in San Clemente, California. Gerald Ford is sworn in as president.

September 8, 1974 Ford issues a “full and free pardon” to Nixon, making the former president immune to criminal prosecution.

1973-1975 Twenty-five members of Nixon’s administration, including five “plumbers” are sent to jail.

* Timeline is abridged from *Richard Nixon, Watergate, and the Press* by Louis W. Liebovich (Appendix B).

PHOTOS COURTESY OF CAMP BROADWAY.

“Æschylus and his Greek contemporaries believed that the gods begrudged human success, and would send a curse of ‘hubris’ on a person at the height of their powers; a loss of sanity that would eventually bring about their downfall. Nowadays, we give the gods less credit. We prefer to call it self-destruction.”
—Jim Reston

There were some fundamental principles of American democracy at work in the Watergate scandal and its aftermath. First, we are a country of laws, not men. We have no king or absolute ruler who may do as he or she pleases. Under our system, no one is above the law, including the president. Second, American citizens should be secure in the knowledge that our government does not spy on us or try to rig elections. Third, our constitutional system of succession, in which an orderly transfer of power takes place upon the death or resignation of a president, works. In many countries, a scandal like Watergate might have precipitated a military **coup d'état** or all-out chaos. However dispirited we may have been by the scandal, our democracy continued to function. And finally, if Nixon had admitted his involvement in Watergate and apologized, the public might have forgiven him and moved on. But he lied repeatedly, and that the American public could not forgive. “It’s not the crime, it’s the cover-up,” became the code that has governed every scandal since.

Vocabulary

Coup d'état: *n.* a sudden overturn or upset

Hubris: *n.* an excess of pride

Nolo contendere: *Latin,* “I do not contest it;” no contest: the same legal effect as a guilty plea

Smoking gun: *n.* something that serves as indisputable proof of a crime

Suborn: *v.* to induce secretly to do an unlawful thing

A Brief History of Campaign Dirty Tricks

Richard Nixon was undoubtedly guilty of using dirty tricks to get re-elected, but he was hardly the first politician to do so and he certainly wasn't the last. Underhanded campaign tactics have been part of elections ever since elections were invented! “Vote early and often” is an old campaign joke that isn't very funny to someone on the losing end of an election. Here's a very brief sampling:

Don't believe everything you read Thomas Jefferson hired a pamphleteer to write and distribute obscene remarks about his rival, Alexander Hamilton.

Disinformation The Internet is a good way to disseminate information, but whether the information is true or false is another story. In the 2008 presidential campaign, erroneous emails about Barack Obama's religion circulated widely. Fake campaign Web sites such as RudyGiulianiForum.com and FredThompsonForum.com posted false information from writers posing as well-known political commentators.

Four-legged polling Richard Daley, in Chicago's 1954 mayoral primary, had loyal precinct captains who walked voters into the polling booth and made sure they voted the “right” way – sometimes over and over. They also registered flophouse residents without their knowledge and voted for them.

Phone pranks In 2006, in upstate New York, Republicans accused Democrats of phoning voters and directing them to incorrect polling locations. Democrats accused Republicans of making repeated “robocalls” to annoy people and discourage turn-out on election day.

Intimidation Some 14,000 Latino voters in Orange County, California received letters shortly before the 2006 election informing them (falsely) that it's illegal for immigrants to vote.



UPI

Synopsis

Author's Note, from the printed script

“Whilst I’m satisfied, having met most of the participants and interviewed them at length, that what follows is an accurate representation of what actually happened, in the end, as an author, I feel most comfortable thinking of this as a fiction — a creation. Finally, it is a play, not a historical document and I have on occasion, perhaps inevitably, been unable to resist using my imagination.”

—Peter Morgan,
Frost/Nixon playwright

F*Frost/Nixon* begins in 1974 when the title characters are at a low point in their careers. President Nixon gives his resignation speech and David Frost hosts an Australian talk-show — a far cry from his glory days on U.S. television. The actor playing Jim Reston, a producer of the Nixon interviews, addresses the audience to explain what’s taking place. In the theatre, speaking directly to the audience is called “breaking the **fourth wall**.” In the course of the play, we see Frost develop his idea for a series of interviews with Nixon. We see Nixon working out how to use the interviews to his advantage. Nixon wants to restore his good reputation. Frost wants a confession and an apology for Watergate. These opposing goals provide dramatic conflict, which is central to any good play. The action of the play shows how Frost overcomes obstacles such as obtaining financing and how Nixon expertly maneuvers during the contract negotiations. We see a portion of the interview, taken from actual transcripts and a final, personal scene between the two men. The play is less about the interview program and more about the inner lives and outward struggles of the two participants. In that sense, the play is a **character study** in 22 short scenes.



1 Alan Cox as David Frost and Roxanna Hope as Caroline Cushing in the National Tour of *Frost/Nixon*. 2 Alan Cox as David Frost in the National Tour of *Frost/Nixon*. 3 Anthony Hagopian as John Birt and Alan Cox as David Frost in the National Tour of *Frost/Nixon*. 4 Stephen Rowe as Swifty Lazar, Stacy Keach as Richard Nixon and Noel Velez as Manolo Sanchez in the National Tour of *Frost/Nixon*. PHOTOS BY CAROL ROSEGG.

Vocabulary

Character study: *n.* a story that’s more about personalities than actions

Fourth wall: *n.* the imaginary barrier between the actors and the audience

The cast of characters (in order of appearance):

Richard Nixon

Jim Reston, Nixon scholar and a producer on the interview shows

David Frost

Jack Brennan, Nixon’s chief of staff

Evonne Goolagong, Wimbledon champion, aboriginal Australian

John Birt, producer on the interview shows

Manolo Sanchez, Nixon’s valet

Swifty Lazar, well-known Hollywood agent and Nixon’s representative

Caroline Cushing, Frost’s girlfriend at the time

Bob Zelnick, interview producer

Exercises

Conducting an Interview

When David Frost interviewed Richard Nixon, he hoped to elicit certain responses, which is not how journalists usually work. It's far more common to ask questions and accept whatever response is forthcoming. In either case, interviewing is harder than it looks.

Is there someone in your life with an interesting story or point of view? If you were to interview them, how would you get them to open up? Choose someone to interview. Make a list of questions before you begin, but be prepared to "go with the flow" if the conversation takes an unexpected but productive turn (redirect them to the topic if the conversation rambles). Think about the best location for conducting your interview (you'll want your subject to be comfortable). Frame your questions using "how, why, what, if," and other words that will prompt a story (yes or no questions will get you just that and tend to shut down spontaneity).

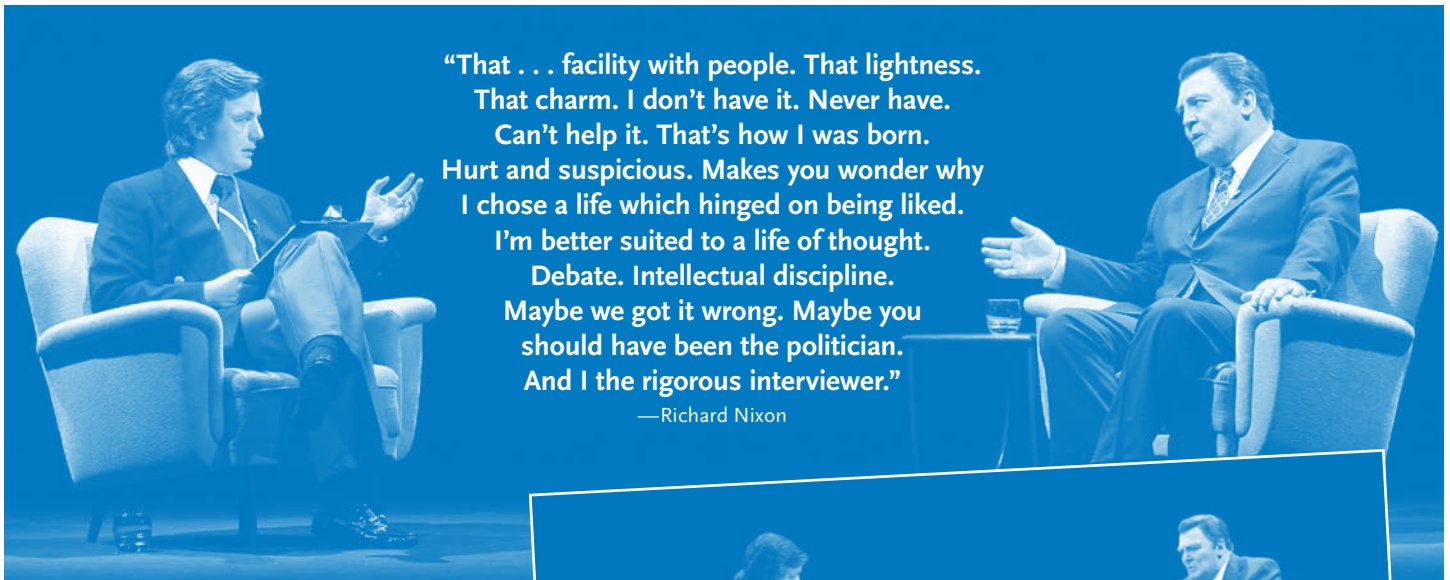
Who: _____

Questions:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Write additional questions and take notes on a separate sheet. Remember, in a good interview, you are listening far more than you are talking!

Present your interview to the class as a written article, a TV profile or an edited, video conversation.



"That . . . facility with people. That lightness.
That charm. I don't have it. Never have.
Can't help it. That's how I was born.
Hurt and suspicious. Makes you wonder why
I chose a life which hinged on being liked.
I'm better suited to a life of thought.
Debate. Intellectual discipline.
Maybe we got it wrong. Maybe you
should have been the politician.
And I the rigorous interviewer."

—Richard Nixon

Alan Cox as David Frost and Stacy Keach as Richard Nixon in the National Tour of *Frost/Nixon*. PHOTOS BY CAROL ROSEGG.



Meet the Press

“Honesty, vigor, compassion, intelligence – the presence or lack of these and other qualities make up what is called the candidate’s ‘image.’ While some intellectuals and politicians may scoff at these ‘images’ – and while they may in fact be based only on a candidate’s TV impression, ignoring his record, views and other appearances – my own conviction is that these images or impressions are likely to be uncannily correct.”

—Sen. John F. Kennedy,
TV Guide, Nov. 14, 1959



Back in Nixon’s day, there was a bright dividing line between news and opinion. The former was supposed to be an objective recitation of facts, while the latter was set aside with a banner, usually reading “Editorial,” indicating that the remarks were the views of the writer or speaker only. Not so anymore. Today’s news business is fragmented and competitive. Newspapers are dying, while Internet sites and cable news thrive. Hard news, gossip, opinion, speculation and even commercial messages are mixed up in one big information stew. Separating good reporting from bad, opinion from fact, and facts from sales pitches requires careful analysis. Does the story contain enough information up front for you to understand it readily? Does it make sense? What’s the tone of the writing? Is the writer trying to inform or persuade? Is the story one-sided or does it present multiple perspectives? As National Public Radio’s Brooke Gladstone says, “The responsibility is now on the news consumer. This is a **caveat emptor** world.”

DOES THE STORY CONTAIN ENOUGH
INFORMATION UP FRONT FOR YOU
TO UNDERSTAND IT READILY?

DOES IT MAKE SENSE?

WHAT’S THE TONE OF THE WRITING?

IS THE WRITER TRYING TO
INFORM OR PERSUADE?

IS THE STORY ONE-SIDED OR DOES
IT PRESENT MULTIPLE PERSPECTIVES?

Vocabulary

Blogosphere: *n.* the collective writings of those who post their views on the Web

Caveat emptor: *Latin*, “let the buyer beware”



Politics in a Celebrity Culture

“Walking through the crowds of air-kissing politicians, actors and high fliers, it was tough to tell where the politics stopped and the showbiz started. Maybe that was the point. Maybe, in the end, there is no difference. And David understood that better than all of us.”
—Jim Reston in *Frost/Nixon*



“The first and greatest sin of television is that it simplifies. Diminishes. Great, complex ideas, tranches of time, whole careers, become reduced to a single snapshot.”
—Jim Reston

In 1960, political rivals Richard Nixon and John Kennedy participated in the first televised presidential debate. Black and white images of the two candidates flickered across sets in millions of American households. Nixon, who had the flu that day and tended to perspire under TV lights, looked pale, haggard and in need of a shave. His appearance was in stark contrast to John Kennedy, who looked cool and vigorous on-camera. Those who listened to the debate on the radio thought Nixon was the winner. Television viewers gave the win to Kennedy. Nixon was the first political casualty of television: The content of his message could not overcome his unappealing image. And thus began the tension between image and content that persists to this day.

“The world is waiting to know. Boxers or briefs?”

—Laetitia Thompson, teenage questioner, MTV interview with presidential candidate Bill Clinton in 1992

When Bill Clinton answered the question with, “Briefs, usually,” the moment may have marked his transition from mere politician to celebrity. Rather than dismiss the question as inappropriate, he indulged his questioner’s trivial pursuit and opened up his personal life to an even greater level of scrutiny. He also won the election.

Today, popular culture and politics are fused as never before. We want to see the President’s family profiled in *People Weekly*. We want to know what he has on his iPod. (Obama listens to the Sugar Hill Gang, Jay-Z, Bob Dylan, Sheryl Crow and Miles Davis among others.) Senator John McCain tried to use Barack Obama’s celebrity status against him in the presidential campaign, but the strategy failed because generally speaking, we like celebrities. After all, the word celebrity means a person we celebrate. Media coverage makes us feel close to people in the public sphere. But do we really know celebrities, or do we merely consume a persona that’s manufactured and fed to us by professional image makers?



TOP PHOTO In a precedent-setting nationwide telecast, the 1960 Republican Presidential candidate, Richard M. Nixon (standing), debates campaign issues with his Democratic rival, John F. Kennedy. Weighing the outcome of the election, Nixon later believed that apparently looks, not issues, contributed to his defeat. **BOTTOM PHOTO** Singer Eartha Kitt (right) appears with Lady Bird Johnson at the White House luncheon held on Jan. 18, 1968. Minutes later, Miss Kitt shocked the First Lady and stunned other guests by angrily denouncing the war in Vietnam. UPI.

Concluding Remarks

Exercises

Class Discussion

How does a focus on celebrity affect the electorate? Do celebrities (including popular politicians) divert us from important issues or do they focus our attention in a useful way?

Are you influenced by the opinions of famous people? Which types of public figures are important to you and why?

The All-Spin, All-the-Time Zone or the Fine Art of Evading a Question

Presidents occasionally hold press conferences, where they stand at a podium and answer reporters' questions about the issues of the day. More often, they have a press secretary who answers questions for them. The press secretary's job is to represent the views of the President and his administration. During the Watergate scandal, Ron Ziegler, Nixon's press secretary, was in a very tough spot. There were things he didn't want to say, and many things he simply didn't know.

Talking without revealing anything, to bias the listener toward your viewpoint or with the purpose of making the boss look good is called "spin." The reporters' job is to elicit information in spite of the press secretary's reluctance or inability to furnish it. Here are some links to YouTube clips of Dana Perino and Scott McClellan, press secretaries to President George W. Bush, as they respond to questions from the Washington press corps. What's your assessment? Are the answers forthcoming or non-responsive? What techniques do they use to avoid answering?

www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tro96XlpP6M

www.youtube.com/watch?v=6R-owOc6a_g

What I Really Want to Know Is...

Using the Watergate timeline as a list of known facts, pretend that it's August 9, 1974, the day of Nixon's resignation. Develop some questions based on what you know and what you'd like to know. (Can you put yourself in David Frost's shoes?) Hold a press conference about the scandal. Choose a press secretary and a pool of reporters.

Here are some questions for starters: Why did the president discuss Watergate in the Oval Office when he knew the conversations were being taped? Why resign? If he's innocent of the charges, wouldn't it be better to have an impeachment or a criminal trial to settle the matter once and for all? What is the president's current relationship with John Dean and Bob Haldeman?

We hope this guide has given you insight into *Frost/Nixon* and has stimulated your interest in the Nixon years, the role of journalism in American life, and politics in general. A truly free society is made of involved and informed citizens. We hope you'll stay interested, informed and active in the workings of your government. After all, it belongs to you.



Books:

There are dozens of books about Nixon and Watergate, many written by people directly involved, such as special prosecutor Leon Jaworski and defendants Jeb Magruder, Charles Colson and H.R. (Bob) Haldeman. The following list is a good start and many contain comprehensive Watergate bibliographies.

All the President's Men by Carl Bernstein and Bob Woodward (Simon and Schuster, 1974) The Washington Post reporters who broke the Watergate story tell the story behind "the story."

Blind Ambition by John Dean (Simon & Schuster, 1976) A tell-all by the Nixon administration lawyer who "spilled his guts" to the Senate Watergate Committee

"I Gave Them a Sword" – Behind the Scenes of the Nixon Interviews by David Frost (William Morrow & Company, 1978) The title "character" of *Frost/Nixon* tells his version of the story of the interviews.

Watergate by Fred Emery (Times Books, 1994) One of the most well-respected accounts of the Watergate scandal

Richard Nixon, Watergate, and the Press by Louis B. Liebovich (Praeger Publishers, 2003) An account of Nixon's combative and often paranoid relationship with the press

To Set the Record Straight by John J. Sirica (George J. McLeod Limited, 1979) The Watergate trial judge tells the story from his perspective

Websites:

kclibrary.lonestar.edu/decade70.html
A good summary of the culture of the 1970s with links to other sites

www.libent.com/vidwall/frostonvidwall.html
Clips of the *Frost/Nixon* interviews

www.watergate.info/tapes/72-06-23-smoking-gun.shtml Transcript of the "smoking gun" conversation

www.nixonlibraryfoundation.org

Official site of the Richard Nixon presidential museum in Yorba Linda, California

www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=98082715

An interview with Jim Reston on NPR's Fresh Air

Film:

All the President's Men directed by Alan J. Pakula (Warner Bros., 1976) A dramatization of how Woodward and Bernstein got the story

Nixon directed by Oliver Stone (Cinergi Pictures Entertainment, 1995) The life and career of Richard Nixon as interpreted by Stone

For 38 years, Center Theatre Group's P.L.A.Y. (Performing for Los Angeles Youth)

has served 25,000 – 35,000 young people, teachers and families annually through a variety of performances, residencies, discount ticket programs and innovative educational experiences. P.L.A.Y. offers programs that allow young people, teachers and families to attend productions at the Mark Taper Forum, Ahmanson and Kirk Douglas Theatres for low or no cost. P.L.A.Y. is dedicated to the development of young people's skills and creativity through the exploration of theatre, its literature, art and imagination.

Performing for Los Angeles Youth

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