

"1950's - Post War America: Consumerism and Conformity"

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According to Wikipedia applied history is “history taught in a way to incorporate historical events in a hands on environment encouraging historical analysis, investigation, museum studies, archival work, historic preservation, documentaries and firsthand experience.” This course will be taught using this approach, as well as a technique known as artifact analysis - a way of exploring history and culture by exploring artifacts (primary and secondary sources, physical artifacts, guest speakers, etc) and making history more hands on, and hopefully more fun!

Requirements:

1. Students must attend class - This course is designed as a college class - we will meet Monday, Wednesday and Friday. Tuesday and Thursday will be spent completing assignments and digging deeper. Students can sign into the library or work independently in my classroom, they **are not** permitted to leave the building.
2. All books, movies and documents must be read or viewed prior to class. Readings will be discussed, and understandings assessed - they will not be taught.
3. Students will be required to maintain a journal that will be shared with the teacher for a number of reasons. Students will be asked to reflect on the material they are uncovering and to encourage free exchange of ideas. Journals will be graded - what you write, not how you write it - but this is a college level course, and your writing should reflect this. Journals will need to have at least two entries per week - done prior to class. At the end of each unit, after your presentation, please connect the pieces - discuss what you have learned, and your take on the subject. Journals will need to be typed - please remember that I am half blind - and emailed to the teacher.
4. Student presentations - working in small groups you will present group presentations to the rest of the class, digging deeper into topics presented. This presentations will need to be done as professionally as possible and include a written bibliography of material used.
5. Class participation - I am only a facilitator, you control your education and learning. Participation is crucial for your grade. Final - Format to be determined as required by administration.

Readings:

Salinger: *Nine Stories*

Allen Ginsberg: *Howl*

Betty Friedan: *The Feminine Mystique*

Terry Ryan: *The Prizewinner of Defiance Ohio*

Bill Bryson: *The Life and Times of the Thunderbolt Kid*

Jack Kerouac: *On The Road*

Pearson - Prentice Hall: *Making A Nation: The United States and It's People*

Goosetree - *Youth In Revolt. How Suburban Youth of the 1950s Rejected the Contradictions of an Affluent Society in Favor of Apocalyptic Zombies and Chicken Runs*

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Summary:

First Quarter

I. Living the Good Life

The 1950s was a time that saw a change in America - after years of wars and a great depression Americans were ready for some peace, prosperity and fun. While on the surface the American family and society seemed idealistic, but underneath this world of perceived perfection was the rumblings of discontent and unhappiness. This lesson will allow students to explore the “good life” - flashy cars, televisions, drive-ins, modern homes and modern sexuality.

II. A Homogeneous Society?

Although mass marketing and consumerism brought about a sense of conformity, and social situations (religion and gender roles) reinforced this concept, America was made up of many “dissimilar” people. While the ideals were often portrayed in the media and on TV, this was not always the norm. American society was still segregated, and although the dream of a single culture was presented, America was very much a multicultural society. The American Dream did not apply to all Americans and many were living in poverty and decaying inner cities. In addition, racism continued to rear its ugly head and people began to fight back, the Civil Rights Movement began in full swing.

Second Quarter

III. The Eisenhower Era

The 1950s was a time of changing political views. With the end of WWII, the United States faced a period of uncertainty with the rising threat of Communism. The Red Scare and McCarthyism dominated the political front and seeped into media and people’s private lives. The war in Korea brought the issue to a head and tested the strength of our government leaders and societies willingness to go to war.

IV. Challenges to the Consumer Society

In this unit, students will discover that not all of the 1950s was the wonderful Utopia that has been portrayed in the media and books. They will look into the Emmitt Till Murder and the segregation issues of the 1950s. In addition, the music and literature of the 1950s reflected a growing unhappiness with the youth of the generation. Music began to change, youths began to rebel and they followed authors such as Ginsberg and Kerouac and other Beat writers, screaming against the establishment - against conformity.