Baby Boom and the Culture of the 1950's

Summary

Enduring Understandings:
- Students will understand the ripple effect of the baby boom generation on history and on their lives today.
- By sequencing events students will understand how the rules and conformity of the 1950's set the stage for the rebellious, anti-establishment sixties.

Use your own expertise and knowledge of the era to help students synthesize the changes from the fifties to the sixties, as a result of the economic, political and social transitions.

Time Frame

2 class periods of 90 minutes each

Group Size

Large Groups

Life Skills

Thinking & Reasoning

Materials

Handout - timeline for sequencing events
Possible Videos: I Love Lucy, Happy Days, Leave It to Beaver, The Century - Peter Jennings
Textbook

Background for Teachers

Excellent resource materials:
- David Haberstam: The Fifties
- America: A Narrative History by Tindall and Shi

Student Prior Knowledge

Textbook information 1950-1960
Students interviews of people that were teens during this era.

Instructional Procedures

- Students will study the textbook on the 1950-1960 and place important events on time-line.
- The Teacher will lecture and model the cause effect of events in the 1950's and their outcome in the 1960's.
- Students will create a brochure or T-chart comparison of 1950-1960's.

The following topics can be covered to show the ripple effect of the baby boom generation.

GI Bill
- Education
- Housing
- Small Business loans
Redistribution of people
- White-flight - to the suburbs
development of economical housing - Levittown
Sunbelt and black migration north
Fewer farmers--> Agribusiness
Megalopolis
Interstate freeways

Families
Dr. Spock
Conformity
- Following rules v. anti- establishment
- Jobs: IBM - "Man in the Gray Flannel Suit"
Economic needs - Appliances, autos "keeping up with the Jones"
Religion - Billy Graham, Norman Vincent Peale
- Fear of communism and godlessness
Teenagers as a cultural group- spending power and rise to rock and roll music

Roles of Middle Class Women
Support husband and cater to family
Betty Friedan's Feminine Mystique
Birth Control

Television
Television sets the standards and values for homes - movie attendance drops
TV shows that portrayed the perfect family v. reality of "real" homes
- Leave it to Beaver, American Bandstand, Mickey Mouse Club,
- I Love Lucy, etc.

Music
- Rise of Rock and Roll (Afro-American rhythm and blues crossing over to the white teenager consumer)
- American Bandstand
- Elvis Presley and other music leaders

Consumerism and Advertising
Credit Cards - Diner's Club
- Buying on Credit (Keeping up with the Jones)
Franchise - Ray Kroc - McDonald's
- The rise of nationwide business chains with standardization products and services (again conformity)
- Eating out more often
John Galbraith's The Affluent Society

Youth Rebellion
Beatniks - Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg
"Rebel Without A Cause" and Catcher in the Rye - creates a youth culture
Hippies - Middle Class White Teenagers actually live off the system they protested against

Education and Technology
Sputnik --> National Education Act
RAND Corp. Think tanks, Calculators, transistors, air conditioning

Assessment Plan
Have students turn in time-lines for a quick visual check of accuracy.
Writing Assignment: Explain how the Baby Boom and its demands on society brought about the cultural and lifestyles changes from the 1950's to the 1960's.
Have students put together a brochure or newsletter describing the 1950's as an era of
Have students search the Internet for photographs and illustrations to include in their presentation. Have students work in small groups to present a slide presentation on the computer on one area of the 1950’s. (For example, architecture, music, sports, TV, etc.) Have students interview their parents or grandparents on their experiences in High School. Have students work on survey questions as a class. Then use the interviews for class discussion about the era.

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