

HISTORY™ CLASSROOM PRESENTS

THE CENTURY: AMERICA'S TIME HAPPY DAZE

Reporter Peter Jennings hosts this important series that chronicles the events and experiences of America in the twentieth century, the century that Henry Luce dubbed “The American Century.” Using archival footage and interviews with historians, veterans, activists and every-day people, this documentary explores the social, political, cultural, and economic changes that have transformed this nation from a burgeoning, isolationist economic power to one of the world’s leaders. *The Century: America’s Time* would be useful for classes on American History, American Culture, Women’s History, Political Science, Civics, Science and Technology, Military History and Ethics. It is appropriate for middle school, high school and college.

HAPPY DAZE

The election of Dwight Eisenhower in 1952 ushered in one of the most prosperous eras in American history. The shortages of the war were a distant memory as consumers rushed to spend their wartime savings on the new homes, cars and appliances that were now abundant. The nuclear family as the haven from political and atomic anxiety depended on rigid gender roles and consumption, and television provided the images of themselves that Americans wanted to see. But beneath the complacency of the era lurked the indicators of a society waiting to rebel, and the realities of a nation divided by racial and class conflicts. This episode examines the “Happy Days” of the 1950s and the major events of those years such as the Baby Boom, suburbanization, the advent of television, Civil Rights, *Brown v. Board of Education*, youth rebellions and the fears of a society enmeshed in a cold war.

OBJECTIVES

Students will analyze the effects of the twentieth century on American life, political institutions, economics, foreign policy and culture. They will also investigate how events in the twentieth century influenced America’s position as a world leader, and how global and domestic events created change, and sometimes turmoil, in America itself.

NATIONAL HISTORY STANDARDS

Happy Daze fulfills the following National Standards for History for grades 5-12: Chronological thinking, historical comprehension, historical analysis and interpretation, historical research capabilities, historical issues-analysis and decision-making for Era 9.

VOCABULARY

rhetoric

deviate

conformity

integral

infectious
charismatic

risqué
extremists

icon
desegregate

complacent
heady

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Dwight David Eisenhower enjoyed immense popularity when he was president between 1953 and 1961. What was Ike's appeal? Why was he so popular?
2. The 1950s witnessed the most prosperous economy in American history. How did this prosperity transform the country?
3. Discuss gender roles in the 1950s. Why were these roles so rigid? How have these roles changed? How have they remained similar?
4. Television became part of almost every American home in the 1950s. What was the impact of television on 1950s culture?
5. Why was television so popular? How has the role of television in American society changed? How has it remained the same?
6. Rock-n-roll debuted in the 1950s and caused consternation among some of the older generation. Why were traditionalists so concerned about the effects of rock-n-roll?
7. Discuss the impact of Elvis Presley on American culture and American music.
8. Discuss the impact of the Baby Boom. How did this boom fuel rock-n-roll and the youth culture of the 1950s?
9. What is an icon? Discuss the impact of some of the icons of the 1950s.
10. African-Americans chose the 1950s as the decade to change the system of segregation. How did Martin Luther King, Jr. become the leader of this Civil Rights Movement?
11. Discuss the events that happened at Central High School in Arkansas. What was the impact for the rest of the nation?

EXTENDED ACTIVITIES

1. The 1950s ushered in the era of television advertising. Create a storyboard for a 1950s commercial.
2. Create a poster urging people to join the Montgomery Bus Boycott.