1964

Lyndon B. Johnson vs Barry Goldwater

A 50-minute lesson on the 1964 U.S. presidential election. Includes lesson plan, background reading with primary source, student worksheet, answer key, and discussion prompts.

ERA New Deal Coalition	ELECTORAL VOTES 538 total
WINNER Lyndon B. Johnson (Democratic) · 486 EV	RUNNER-UP Barry Goldwater (Republican) · 52 EV
KEY ISSUE Civil rights; Great Society programs; nuclear war fears; Kennedy legacy	TURNOUT 62.8%

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1964: Lyndon B. Johnson vs Barry Goldwater

Standards alignment

NCSS · D2.His.4.6-8 (chronological reasoning) · D2.His.14.6-8 (causation). CCSS · CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.2 (central ideas in primary sources).

Timing

5 min	**Warm-up**	List two structural conditions in 1963-64 America that would produce an LBJ landslide. For each identify the specific 1963-64 development most responsible.
15 min	**Reading + vocab**	1964 election was 45th U.S. presidential election. Produced LBJ's 486-52 EV victory over Republican Barry Goldwater - biggest popular vote margin in U.S. history (LBJ 61.1% vs Goldwater 38.5% = 22.6 percentage points). Election structurally shaped by JFK assassination (November 22, 1963), Civil Rights Act 1964 (July 2), Gulf of Tonkin Resolution (August 7), Republican conservative-moderate split, and Daisy Girl attack-ad campaign. JFK assassinated November 22, 1963 in Dallas. Lee Harvey Oswald killed by Jack Ruby November 24. LBJ sworn in aboard Air Force One 2:38 PM CST November 22 by Judge Sarah T. Hughes - first president sworn in by a woman; first to take oath on an airplane. LBJ 55, Texas senator (1949-61), Senate Majority Leader (1955-61), JFK's VP (1961-63). "Johnson treatment" intense personal lobbying. First speech to Congress November 27, 1963: "Let us continue" - explicit commitment to JFK's agenda. 1964 pre-election achievements: (1) July 2, 1964 Civil Rights Act - banned racial discrimination in public accommodations, employment, federally funded programs. Title VII created EEOC. LBJ signed with 75 ceremonial pens. Told aide Bill Moyers: "We have lost the South for a generation." (2) August 7, 1964 Gulf of Tonkin Resolution - Congress authorized U.S. military action in Vietnam. House 416-0; Senate 88-2 (Sens Morse + Gruening dissented). (3) August 20, 1964 Economic Opportunity Act - "War on Poverty." Created OEO, Job Corps, VISTA, Head Start, Community Action Program. (4) Economic prosperity - GDP 5%/year; unemployment 5%. Democratic National Convention Atlantic City August 24-27, 1964 renominated LBJ by acclamation. Sen Hubert Humphrey (MN, 1948 Convention civil rights speech) VP. Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP) challenged regular Mississippi delegation - one of structural civil rights tests of convention. LBJ negotiated compromise: 2 at-large MFDP seats + recognition of MFDP at future conventions. Fannie

Lou Hamer's August 22 televised testimony described racial violence and voter suppression in Mississippi.

Republican National Convention San Francisco July 13-16, 1964. Conservative-moderate split. Conservative wing: Sen Barry Goldwater of Arizona (55, "Mr. Conservative," 1960 "The Conscience of a Conservative" structurally important). Moderate wing: NY Gov Nelson Rockefeller + PA Gov William Scranton. Conservative wing won. Goldwater nominated first ballot. Rep William Miller (NY, House Republican Conference chair) VP.

Goldwater acceptance speech July 16, 1964: "I would remind you that extremism in the defense of liberty is no vice. And let me remind you also that moderation in the pursuit of justice is no virtue." Speechwriter Karl Hess. Alienated moderate Republicans. Democrats immediately used quote against him.

Goldwater conservative positions: (1) Voted against July 2, 1964 Civil Rights Act on states' rights grounds (one of only 6 Republican senators against). (2) Proposed making Social Security voluntary. (3) Considered using tactical nuclear weapons in Vietnam. October 1963 comments about "lobbing one into the men's room at the Kremlin" had been politically toxic. (4) Wanted to sell TVA. (5) Opposed federal civil rights enforcement. (6) Proposed reducing federal welfare programs.

LBJ campaign exploited Goldwater's extremism. September 7, 1964 Daisy Girl ad: 60-second TV ad with young girl picking petals off daisy counting to ten; cut to countdown to nuclear explosion. LBJ voice-over: "These are the stakes! To make a world in which all of God's children can live, or to go into the dark. We must either love each other, or we must die." Aired ONCE on NBC Monday Movie September 7, 1964 - but generated massive media coverage. First major political attack ad. Implied Goldwater would start nuclear war. Subsequent ads: "Confessions of a Republican"; "Ice Cream" (girl eating ice cream cone with warning about strontium-90 fallout if Goldwater started nuclear testing).

LBJ slogan "All the way with LBJ." Republican slogan "In your heart, you know he's right." Democratic counter: "In your guts, you know he's nuts."

LBJ won 486 EV; Goldwater 52. LBJ carried 44 states; Goldwater 6 states. Popular vote: LBJ 43,127,041 (61.1%); Goldwater 27,175,754 (38.5%); minor candidates ~330K. Margin 15,951,287.

Goldwater's 6 states: Arizona (home state) + Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina (5 Deep South states). The 1964 was first Republican carrying of Mississippi since 1872; first carrying of Georgia since 1872; first carrying of South Carolina since 1876; first carrying of Alabama since 1872. The 5 Deep South states would become structurally Republican in subsequent decades - the realignment LBJ had predicted.

LBJ used 1964 mandate for Great Society legislation 1965: (1) August 6, 1965 Voting Rights Act - banned literacy tests + other voter-suppression devices; established federal supervision of voter registration in states with histories of discrimination. (2) July 30, 1965 Medicare + Medicaid - federal health insurance for elderly + poor. Signed at Truman Library with Truman attending. (3) October 3, 1965 Hart-Celler Immigration Act - ended 1924 national-origin quotas. (4) April 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act - first major federal aid to public schools. (5) November 1965 Higher Education Act - federal student loans and grants. (6) September 1965 Department of Housing and Urban Development. (7) October 1966 Department of Transportation. (8) November 1967 Public Broadcasting Act (PBS, NPR). Great Society legislative program most extensive federal social-policy expansion since New Deal.

Vietnam War destroyed LBJ presidency. March 8, 1965 Marines landed at Da Nang. By 1968 543,000 troops in Vietnam. ~58,220 American military deaths in Vietnam war 1955-75. January 1968 Tet Offensive demonstrated war not being won. LBJ approval fell from 79% (January 1965) to 36% (March 1968). March 31, 1968 LBJ announced: "I shall not seek, and I will not accept, the nomination of my party for another term as your President."

1964 election structural significance fourfold: (1) LBJ's 61.1% biggest in U.S. history. (2) Goldwater 5 Deep South states inaugurated Republican Southern realignment. (3) Goldwater's 1964 candidacy structural beginning of modern American conservatism that would produce Reagan 1980. (4) Daisy Girl inaugurated televised attack advertising.

Goldwater 1964 defeat politically catastrophic but structurally transformative. Goldwater's conservative philosophy became foundation of post-1964 American conservatism. Reagan's October 27, 1964 "A Time for Choosing" televised speech for Goldwater widely cited as launch of his political career. Reagan elected California Governor 1966 (defeated incumbent Pat Brown by 1M votes); U.S. president 1980 (defeated Carter 489-49 EV). Goldwater's coalition + ideology + movement infrastructure operationalized through Reagan.

10 min	**Primary source**	Read aloud once. Annotate individually. Quick pair-share on the source-analysis question.
10 min	**Discussion**	Small groups (3–4). Pick one prompt; report back two sentences.
10 min	**Worksheet**	Six questions: 2 multiple-choice, 3 short-answer, 1 map-read.

Background

Before the worksheet, review the key terms below and then read the primary source carefully. The two source-analysis questions on the worksheet (questions 6 and 7) ask you to quote from the excerpt.

Key terms

Lyndon B. Johnson (LBJ)

36th U.S. president (1963-69). Texas senator (1949-61) and Senate Majority Leader (1955-61). JFK's VP. Sworn in aboard Air Force One November 22, 1963 after JFK assassination. Won 1964 with 486-52 EV and 61.1% popular vote.

Barry Goldwater

Arizona Senator and 1964 Republican presidential nominee. Conservative wing leader. Voted against Civil Rights Act 1964. Acceptance speech: "Extremism in the defense of liberty is no vice." Lost 486-52 EV.

Daisy Girl ad

LBJ's September 7, 1964 60-second television attack ad. Aired ONCE on NBC Monday Movie. First major political attack ad. Implied Goldwater would start nuclear war.

Civil Rights Act of 1964

July 2, 1964 federal law banning racial discrimination in public accommodations, employment, federally funded programs.

Gulf of Tonkin Resolution

August 7, 1964 congressional resolution authorizing U.S. military action in Vietnam. Passed House 416-0; Senate 88-2.

Great Society

LBJ's 1964-68 federal social-policy expansion. Major laws: Civil Rights Act 1964, Voting Rights Act 1965, Medicare/Medicaid 1965, Hart-Celler Immigration Act 1965, ESEA 1965, Higher Education Act 1965, HUD 1965, DOT 1966, PBS/NPR 1967.

"A Time for Choosing" speech

Ronald Reagan's October 27, 1964 televised speech for Goldwater. 30 minutes. Raised ~$1M for Goldwater in final week - more than any political speech to that point. Widely cited as launch of Reagan's political career. Reagan elected CA Governor 1966; U.S. president 1980.

Acceptance Speech for Republican Presidential Nomination

BARRY GOLDWATER, JULY 16, 1964

Goldwater delivered this acceptance speech at the Republican National Convention in San Francisco on July 16, 1964. Speechwriter Karl Hess crafted the "extremism" passage from Cicero (Pro Sestio): "In rebus eo gravior probabitur, ne quid nimis... extremism in the defense of liberty is no vice; moderation in the pursuit of justice is no virtue." The passage was politically devastating: it appeared to endorse extremism rather than condemn it. Democrats immediately used the quote against Goldwater. Moderate Republicans (Rockefeller, Scranton) refused to endorse Goldwater. The speech is widely cited as one of the most politically damaging acceptance speeches in U.S. presidential history.

> *"I would remind you that extremism in the defense of liberty is no vice. And let me remind you also that moderation in the pursuit of justice is no virtue. The beauty of the very system we Republicans are pledged to restore and revitalize, the beauty of this Federal system of ours is in its reconciliation of diversity with unity. We must not see malice in honest differences of opinion, no matter how great, so long as they are not inconsistent with the pledges we have given to each other in and through our Constitution. Our Republican cause is not to level out the world or make its people conform in computer-regimented sameness. Our Republican cause is to free our people and light the way for liberty throughout the world."*

Goldwater, "Acceptance Speech for Republican Presidential Nomination" (San Francisco, July 16, 1964). Fair use under 17 USC §107 — educational excerpt of public political speech, ≈150 words.

The 1964 Election

Read the background page, then answer the six questions below.

QUESTION 1 · MULTIPLE-CHOICE

How many electoral votes did LBJ win in 1964?

( ) A. 447
( ) B. 472
( ) C. 486
( ) D. 509

QUESTION 2 · MULTIPLE-CHOICE

Which 5 Deep South states did Goldwater carry in 1964?

( ) A. AL, FL, GA, MS, NC
( ) B. AL, GA, LA, MS, SC
( ) C. AR, GA, LA, MS, TX
( ) D. AL, AR, GA, SC, VA

QUESTION 3 · SHORT-ANSWER

What was the Daisy Girl ad and why is it historically significant?

QUESTION 4 · SHORT-ANSWER

Goldwater says "extremism in the defense of liberty is no vice." What is the rhetorical strategy, and why was it politically damaging?

QUESTION 5 · SHORT-ANSWER

Why is Goldwater's 1964 defeat widely cited as the structural beginning of modern American conservatism?

QUESTION 6 · MAP-READ

On the 1964 election map, identify LBJ's 44 states and Goldwater's 6 states (AZ + AL, GA, LA, MS, SC). What does Goldwater's 5 Deep South victories reveal about the structural realignment?

Answer key

QUESTION 1

486. LBJ 486; Goldwater 52.

AP students should know the 486-52 split.

QUESTION 2

AL, GA, LA, MS, SC. Goldwater's 5 Deep South states + Arizona = 6 total.

AP students should know the 5 Deep South states.

QUESTION 3

The Daisy Girl ad was LBJ's September 7, 1964 60-second television attack ad against Goldwater. The ad opened with a young girl picking petals off a daisy counting to 10; cut to countdown to nuclear explosion. LBJ voice-over: "These are the stakes! To make a world in which all of God's children can live, or to go into the dark." The ad aired ONCE on NBC Monday Movie September 7, 1964 - but generated massive media coverage. Historical significance: (1) First major political attack ad - inaugurated era of televised negative advertising. (2) Pioneered emotional rather than logical political persuasion. (3) Demonstrated single televised ad could reshape political narrative through media coverage. (4) Weaponized fear of nuclear war as political tool. (5) Created template for subsequent attack ads (Willie Horton 1988; Swift Boat 2004; modern attack advertising).

AP students should be able to articulate the historical significance.

QUESTION 4

Goldwater's "extremism in the defense of liberty is no vice" passage uses three rhetorical strategies: (1) Conservative philosophical defense - drew on classical philosophical tradition (Cicero) to justify uncompromising commitment to principle. (2) Rejection of moderation - explicitly attacked "moderation" as not a virtue, signaling rejection of moderate Republican alternatives (Rockefeller, Scranton). (3) Conservative-movement identity - identified Goldwater's coalition as ideologically distinct from establishment Republicans. The passage was politically damaging for five reasons: (1) It appeared to endorse extremism rather than condemn it. (2) Democrats immediately framed Goldwater as "extremist" - the framing fit pre-existing characterizations of Goldwater. (3) Moderate Republicans (Rockefeller, Scranton, Sen Jacob Javits) refused to endorse Goldwater. (4) The passage made Goldwater appear unstable - confirming the framing that LBJ's Daisy Girl ad would exploit. (5) The passage made it politically impossible for Goldwater to walk back his more controversial positions (against Civil Rights Act, against TVA, possible tactical nuclear weapons in Vietnam). The structural lesson: a single passage can structurally define a candidate's identity in ways that constrain subsequent campaign options.

AP students should be able to articulate the strategy.

QUESTION 5

Goldwater 1964 defeat is widely cited as structural beginning of modern American conservatism for five reasons: (1) Coalition building - Goldwater's 27.2M votes (38.5%) assembled distinct conservative coalition that would persist and grow. (2) Ideological clarity - "Conscience of a Conservative" (1960) articulated coherent conservative philosophy that would shape Republican philosophy for 60 years. (3) Movement infrastructure - 1964 campaign produced Young Americans for Freedom, American Conservative Union, Heritage Foundation (1973+), Federalist Society (1982+). (4) Reagan emergence - October 27, 1964 "A Time for Choosing" televised speech for Goldwater launched Reagan's political career. Reagan elected CA Governor 1966; U.S. president 1980 (489-49 EV vs Carter). (5) Structural ideological transformation - subsequent Republican nominees increasingly adopted Goldwater positions: Nixon 1968-72 partial; Reagan 1980+ full; Bush 1988-92 partial; Trump 2016-24 nationalist conservative. Goldwater's 1964 defeat was the foundation of modern American conservatism that would eventually win the presidency.

AP students should be able to articulate the structural significance.

QUESTION 6

LBJ states (44): everything except 6 Goldwater states. Goldwater's 6 states: Arizona (his home state) + Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina (5 Deep South states). Goldwater's 5 Deep South victories reveal: (1) The 1964 was the first Republican carrying of Mississippi since 1872; first carrying of Georgia since 1872; first carrying of South Carolina since 1876; first carrying of Alabama since 1872. The 92-year-old Solid South had cracked. (2) Goldwater's 5 Deep South victories operationalized LBJ's "we have lost the South for a generation" prediction within months of his July 2, 1964 Civil Rights Act signing. (3) The 5 Deep South states would become structurally Republican in subsequent decades - the realignment that would dominate U.S. politics for the next 60 years. (4) Goldwater's Civil Rights Act opposition was the structural mechanism: it sent Southern white voters a coded signal that Republican Party would be sympathetic to states' rights / segregation. (5) The trajectory: 1964 Goldwater 5 Deep South ’ 1968 Wallace 5 Deep South (different states - Wallace took Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi) ’ 1972 Nixon all 11 Southern states ’ 1980+ Republican Southern dominance.

AP students should be able to articulate the structural significance.