1964

Lyndon B. Johnson vs Barry Goldwater

A 75-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%

CONTENTS

1. Cover + overview
2. Lesson plan (instructor, 75 min)
3. Background: key terms + primary source
4. Student worksheet (7 questions)
5. Answer key + discussion prompts

1964: Lyndon B. Johnson vs Barry Goldwater

Standards alignment

NCSS · D2.His.4.9-12 (chronological reasoning) · D2.His.14.9-12 (causation in U.S. history). CCSS · CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.2 (key ideas/details in primary sources).

Materials

One copy of the student worksheet per student. Optional: the 1964 map at theamericanvote.com/elections/-1964 projected, or printed as a handout.

Timing

5 min	**Warm-up**	Identify 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 Goldwater - biggest popular vote margin in U.S. history (LBJ 61.1% vs Goldwater 38.5%). JFK assassinated November 22, 1963 Dallas. Oswald killed by 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 on airplane. LBJ 55. Texas senator (1949-61), Senate Majority Leader (1955-61), JFK's VP (1961-63). "Let us continue" November 27 speech committed to JFK's agenda. 1964 pre-election achievements: July 2, 1964 Civil Rights Act; August 7, 1964 Gulf of Tonkin Resolution; August 20, 1964 Economic Opportunity Act ("War on Poverty"); economic prosperity (GDP 5%/year; unemployment 5%). Democratic National Convention Atlantic City August 24-27, 1964 renominated LBJ. Humphrey VP. MFDP challenge to regular Mississippi delegation. Compromise: 2 at-large MFDP seats. Fannie Lou Hamer August 22 televised testimony. Republican National Convention San Francisco July 13-16, 1964 nominated Goldwater on first ballot over Rockefeller and Scranton. Rep William Miller (NY) VP. Goldwater acceptance speech July 16: "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. Politically devastating. Goldwater positions: voted against Civil Rights Act 1964; proposed making Social Security voluntary; considered tactical nuclear weapons in Vietnam; wanted to sell

TVA; opposed federal civil rights enforcement; proposed reducing welfare programs.

LBJ campaign exploited Goldwater's extremism. September 7, 1964 Daisy Girl ad: 60-second TV ad aired ONCE on NBC Monday Movie - massive media coverage. First major political attack ad. LBJ slogan "All the way with LBJ"; Republican "In your heart, you know he's right"; Democratic counter "In your guts, you know he's nuts."

LBJ 486 EV; Goldwater 52. LBJ 44 states; Goldwater 6 (Arizona + Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina). Popular vote: LBJ 43,127,041 (61.1%); Goldwater 27,175,754 (38.5%); margin 15,951,287.

Goldwater's 5 Deep South states would become structurally Republican - realignment LBJ had predicted with "we have lost the South for a generation."

LBJ used 1964 mandate for Great Society legislation 1965: Voting Rights Act August 6, 1965; Medicare + Medicaid July 30, 1965 (signed at Truman Library); Hart-Celler Immigration Act October 3, 1965; ESEA April 1965; Higher Education Act November 1965; HUD September 1965; DOT October 1966; Public Broadcasting Act November 1967.

But 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 1955-75. January 1968 Tet Offensive. 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: (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. (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 launched his political career. Reagan elected CA Governor 1966; U.S. president 1980.

The 1964 election can be analyzed retrospectively as the structural inflection point between New Deal Democratic dominance (1932-68) and the Republican-conservative ascendance that would dominate U.S. politics 1968-2008. LBJ's 61.1% appeared to confirm Democratic dominance but in fact the 1964 election produced two structurally consequential realignments: (1) Southern Democratic-to-Republican realignment that would deliver the South to Republicans by 1972. (2) Conservative movement infrastructure that would produce Reagan 1980 and subsequent Republican presidential victories. The 1964 LBJ landslide was thus the apparent peak of

		New Deal Democratic dominance and the actual structural beginning of its collapse. The Great Society's 1964-65 legislative achievements - Civil Rights Act, Voting Rights Act, Medicare/Medicaid, Hart-Celler Immigration Act, ESEA, HEA, HUD, DOT, PBS/NPR - represented the most extensive federal social-policy expansion since the New Deal. The cumulative effect: federal government took on structural responsibilities for civil rights, healthcare, education, housing, and transportation that would persist through subsequent presidencies. Many Great Society programs would survive Reagan-era conservative challenges and remain structural features of U.S. federal government in the 21st century. The Vietnam War's 1965-73 escalation and conclusion was the structural counter-point to Great Society achievements. The war's political-economic costs (~58,220 American military deaths; ~1.5M Vietnamese deaths; ~$1 trillion in 2024 dollars) damaged the structural Democratic coalition. The 1968 election (Nixon 301-191-46 over Humphrey + Wallace) would inaugurate the post-LBJ political era. Then review the Key Terms on the background page so students share vocabulary before the primary-source work.
15 min	**Primary source**	Read the excerpt aloud once. Students annotate individually (3 min), then pair-share on worksheet questions 6 and 7 (5 min).
15 min	**Discussion**	Small groups (3–4). Pick one of the three prompts at the back of this packet (or assign one). Each group reports back two sentences.
20 min	**Assessment**	Student worksheet. Seven questions, mixed format (5 about the reading, 2 about the primary source). Answer key in the instructor section at the back.
5 min	**Closure**	One-sentence exit ticket — see Closure section below.

Closure

One-sentence exit ticket: "What is one thing the 1964 election tells you about the New Deal Coalition era that the textbook didn't?"

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). Sworn in 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. Lost 486-52 EV.

Daisy Girl ad
LBJ's September 7, 1964 60-second television attack ad. First major political attack ad.

Civil Rights Act of 1964
July 2, 1964 federal law banning racial discrimination.

Gulf of Tonkin Resolution
August 7, 1964 congressional resolution authorizing U.S. military action in Vietnam.

Great Society
LBJ's 1964-68 federal social-policy expansion.

"A Time for Choosing" speech
Reagan's October 27, 1964 televised speech for Goldwater. Launched Reagan's political career.

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. The "extremism" passage was politically devastating.

> *"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 (key terms and primary source), then answer the seven questions below. Questions 6 and 7 ask you to quote from the primary source.

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?

SOURCE ANALYSIS — QUESTIONS 6 AND 7 REFERENCE THE PRIMARY SOURCE ON THE BACKGROUND PAGE.

QUESTION 6 · SHORT-ANSWER

Explain how LBJ's 1964 mandate produced the Great Society legislative achievements of 1965.

QUESTION 7 · MAP-READ

On the 1964 election map, identify LBJ's 44 states and Goldwater's 6 states. What does Goldwater's 5 Deep South victories reveal?

Answer key

QUESTION 1

486. LBJ 486; Goldwater 52.

AP students should know the 486-52 split.

QUESTION 2

AL, GA, LA, MS, SC.

AP students should know the 5 Deep South states.

QUESTION 3

Daisy Girl ad was LBJ's September 7, 1964 60-second television attack ad. Aired ONCE on NBC Monday Movie. First major political attack ad. Historical significance: (1) Inaugurated era of televised negative advertising. (2) Pioneered emotional rather than logical political persuasion. (3) Demonstrated single ad could reshape political narrative through media coverage. (4) Weaponized fear of nuclear war as political tool. (5) Created template for subsequent attack ads.

AP students should be able to articulate.

QUESTION 4

Goldwater's "extremism in the defense of liberty is no vice" uses rhetorical strategies: (1) Conservative philosophical defense (Cicero). (2) Rejection of moderation. (3) Conservative-movement identity. Politically damaging because: (1) Appeared to endorse extremism. (2) Democrats framed Goldwater as "extremist." (3) Moderate Republicans refused to endorse Goldwater. (4) Confirmed Daisy Girl framing. (5) Constrained walking back controversial positions.

AP students should be able to articulate.

QUESTION 5

Goldwater 1964 defeat = structural beginning of modern American conservatism for five reasons: (1) Coalition building - 27.2M votes assembled distinct conservative coalition. (2) Ideological clarity - "Conscience of a Conservative" shaped Republican philosophy 60 years. (3) Movement infrastructure - Young Americans for Freedom, American Conservative Union, Heritage Foundation, Federalist Society. (4) Reagan emergence - "A Time for Choosing" launched career; CA Governor 1966; U.S. president 1980. (5) Structural ideological transformation - subsequent Republican nominees adopted Goldwater positions.

AP students should be able to articulate.

QUESTION 6

LBJ's 1964 mandate produced Great Society legislative achievements 1965 through five structural mechanisms: (1) Massive Democratic congressional majorities - 1964 election produced 295-140 Democratic House majority and 68-32 Democratic Senate majority. The Senate had filibuster-proof Democratic majority needed to pass Voting Rights Act. (2) JFK assassination produced political momentum - "complete what JFK began" framing made Great Society legislation a tribute to the slain president. (3) Civil rights movement momentum - August 1963 March on Washington, 1964 Freedom Summer, 1965 Selma marches created public pressure. (4) LBJ's legislative skills - "Johnson treatment" personal lobbying. He had been Senate Majority Leader 1955-61. He knew every senator and how to persuade. (5) Economic prosperity - GDP 5%/year, unemployment 5%, federal revenues growing. Could fund new programs without raising taxes. Major Great Society 1965 legislation: Voting Rights Act August 6 (federal supervision of voter registration); Medicare + Medicaid July 30 (federal health insurance for elderly + poor); Hart-Celler Immigration Act October 3 (ended 1924 national-origin quotas); ESEA April (first major federal aid to public schools); Higher Education Act November (federal student loans and grants); HUD September (cabinet department); DOT October 1966 (cabinet department); Public Broadcasting Act November 1967 (PBS, NPR). Cumulative effect: federal government took on structural responsibilities that would persist through subsequent presidencies. Many Great Society programs survived Reagan-era conservative challenges and remain structural features of U.S. federal government today.

AP students should be able to articulate the mechanism.

QUESTION 7

LBJ states (44): everything except 6 Goldwater states. Goldwater's 6 states: Arizona (home state) + Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina. Goldwater's 5 Deep South victories reveal: (1) First Republican carrying of MS since 1872; GA since 1872; SC since 1876; AL since 1872. The 92-year-old Solid South had cracked. (2) Operationalized LBJ's "we have lost the South for a generation" prediction within months. (3) The 5 Deep South states became structurally Republican over the next 60 years. (4) Goldwater's Civil Rights Act opposition was the mechanism. (5) Trajectory: 1964 Goldwater 5 Deep South ’ 1968 Wallace 5 different Deep South ’ 1972 Nixon all 11 Southern states ’ 1980+ Republican Southern dominance.

AP students should be able to articulate.

Discussion prompts

1. Goldwater 1964 candidacy is widely cited as the structural beginning of modern American conservatism. Identify three structural reasons the 1964 defeat could produce a winning conservative movement within 16 years (Reagan 1980).

2. LBJ's "we have lost the South for a generation" prediction was operationalized within months. Identify three structural mechanisms by which the Civil Rights Act 1964 produced Republican Southern realignment.