ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
Designed for typical grade 9–12 classrooms, this lesson includes three variations for different amounts of class time available to dedicate to 1968 and/or the use of oral history. These lessons can be used as an introduction to the events of the era or as a culminating activity in the study of 1968 or the 1960s.

VARIATION #1: 1 CLASS PERIOD

Lesson Goals:
- To give students a background on oral history and its importance in the study of key events
- To show students the significance of the year 1968 to American history, politics and society
- To use primary sources
- To give students access to the perspective of a different generation through first person accounts
- To provide students with access to people who witnessed 1968 and to see how regular Americans reacted to the pivotal events of that year

Lesson Objectives:
- Students will be able to identify key events of 1968 and how these events had an impact on various American communities
- Using first person accounts of the era collected by the Minnesota Historical Society (MHS), students will identify at least two similarities and two differences between their lives today and life in 1968

Minnesota State Educational Standards (9–12)
- USH (I:N) Students will understand the key domestic political issues and debates in the postwar era to 1972.
- USH (I:N) Students will demonstrate knowledge of the “rights revolution” including the civil rights movement, women's rights movements, expansion of civil liberties, and environmental and consumer protection.
- LA (III:A-5) Students will understand the effects of media on society and culture.
- LA(III:B-5) Students will make informed evaluations about television, radio, film productions, newspapers and magazine with regard to quality of production, accuracy of information, bias, purpose, message and audience.
Rationale: This is a one-lesson introduction the events of 1968 and the use of oral history. Although this lesson is intended to begin and end in one class period, it would be beneficial to assign students one of the following: a background reading of your choosing, the background included with this lesson, or a section highlighting 1968 (or the 1960s) in the students’ textbook. These documents can be posted online so students can access both the background reading and the oral history excerpts from the “1968: Reflections.”

Time Frame: Twenty minutes to one class period

Materials:
- Copies of MHS “1968: Reflections” oral histories
- Copies of “1968: A Brief Background”
- PDFs of the above available at www.the1968exhibit.org/node/3269
- 1968 images, video clips, (these can be projected from the 1968 website or used in a Power Point), and/or relevant text excerpts from books such as Tom Brokaw’s “Boom!”

Set up/organization:
- This activity is designed to have students work in small groups of 4–5.
- Each student has a different “Reflections” excerpt from someone who lived in 1968
- This lesson allows for individual work, small group discussion and large group analysis
- Additional extension activities for homework or next day discussion are also provided

A Note on Sources

Reflections: The oral history excerpts included for this lesson came from the Minnesota Historical Society’s 1968 Project’s “Reflections” website, which collects individuals’ memories from 1968. The 40 reflections selected are diverse: some individuals were in elementary school, others were facing the draft, while still others were involved in protests on either side of the political spectrum. The reflections highlight the variety of individual experiences in 1968 and underscore that oral history is a powerful tool to represent values, thoughts and opinions on various historical, political and social events. http://the1968exhibit.org/reflections

“Covering 1968” Blog:
The Minnesota Historical Society’s “Covering 1968” Project Blog is another excellent source of commentary on the events of 1968. Created by the project’s exhibit developer, it outlines specific events and key ideas that help narrate the story of 1968. This is a great resource for further research in extended student activities. http://the1968exhibit.org/covering-1968
INTRODUCTION
Ideally, this activity would come after an introduction to the 1960s. A brief background reading is provided. You could also use a slideshow or Power Point of 1968 images before handing out the reflections.

Have students think and discuss the ways in which they gather and share information.
• Where do we get most of our information from today?
• What is the impact of “live” vs. “recorded” TV?
• Contemplate the role of the newspaper.
• How many news stations do we have today? There were 3 in 1968.

Review primary vs. secondary sources; have students think about how they traditionally learn about history and social trends of the past.
• Textbooks
• School/teachers
• Internet

Discuss what is powerful about people recording or telling their stories—how does this help historians and students?
• Do the stories of people who were there help lend credibility to events?
• What do we need to consider when we use oral history? What about bias? Prejudice? Perspective?
• How do we gather oral histories?
  ~ Interviews
  ~ Memoirs
  ~ Autobiographies
  ~ Blogs

FOCUS ACTIVITY
Introduce the “Reflections” sources. Explain to the students that these “Reflections” are excerpts from stories written by people around the United States about their experiences in 1968.

Write the following questions on the board. Students can write out their responses for a class discussion as they finish reading.
• What is the tone of your reflection?
• What background information can you gather about the individual who wrote this? Is their age given? Is there any other background information available?
• What are some key events or concepts they discuss?
• What is your sense of 1968 from this reflection? Why?

Hand out the “1968: Reflections” to students. Each student should have their own reflection, different from those in their immediate vicinity.

Give students 5–10 minutes to read their excerpt.

Have students discuss their excerpt with people around them, either in partners or in small groups.
• Are there similarities among their reflections? Differences?
• What are some key events or people that your reflection mentions or alludes to?
• Are there pop culture references?

Have students brainstorm the different topics of their reflections. List these on the board.

Have students brainstorm some possible topics from their own lives that would give someone a “reflection” of life or events today.

WRAP UP / CLOSURE:
Emphasize with students the importance of gathering oral history. Collecting oral histories can be done in a variety of ways; it helps to personalize key events and to create shared historical memories.

Possible extension activities:
• Have students generate their own reflection on any of the key events from their lives brainstormed in class. They should write a paragraph reaction to or reflection on one of the events
• Have students choose one topic, person, place, etc. that was mentioned in their 1968 “Reflection” that they could do some additional reading or brief research on. They can discuss these the next day in class.