Case study – Australian Prime Minister – Gough Whitlam

Year 12 history extension -9 weeks (13.5 hours) plus optional later revision tasks

This document references the [History Extension Stage 6 Syllabus](https://syllabus.nesa.nsw.edu.au/history-extension-stage6/) © 2017 NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA) for and on behalf of the Crown in right of the State of New South Wales.

Description of unit

Students investigate changing interpretations of the Whitlam government over time. Through close study of the ongoing historiographical debate surrounding documentation relating to the dismissal, students comprehend the vast variation in historical perspectives on Whitlam's leadership, the socio-political drama surrounding the dismissal of his government and the lasting impact of his reforms. Students focus on the impact of the historian’s relationship to their subject, on the influence of new evidence and on historian’s context on the construction of History. They progress from teacher-directed learning into a student-directed approach that sees them constructing their own understanding of Whitlam histories.

Focus questions

* How does the historian’s relationship with their subject influence the construction of history?
* How does the discovery of new evidence influence the construction of history?
* How do the events and politics of the historian’s own context impact on the construction of history?

Objectives

Knowledge and understanding

Students develop knowledge and understanding about significant historiographical ideas and methodologies.

Skills

Students design, undertake and evaluate historical inquiry. Students communicate their understanding of historiography, changing interpretations and the results of historical inquiry.

Outcomes

* HE12-1 analyses and evaluates different approaches to history and the complexity of factors that shape historical interpretations.
* HE12-3 communicates through detailed, well-structured texts to explain, argue, discuss, analyse and evaluate historical issues.
* HE12-4 constructs an historical position about an area of historical inquiry, and discusses and challenges other positions.

Assessment

Formative – student inquiry on the legacy of the Whitlam government.

Summative – trial HSC Exam

| Outcomes/content | Teaching and learning | Evidence of learning |
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| The Whitlam storyHE12-1 analyses and evaluates different approaches to history and the complexity of factors that shape historical interpretations.HE12-3 communicates through detailed, well-structured texts to explain, argue, discuss, analyse and evaluate historical issues.* Introduction to the case study
* Context: The Whitlam years (1972-1975) and the Prime Minister
* Introduction to the Historians
 | Prior to session onePrior to commencing the course (Term 4) students should be assigned one of the four following texts to read in preparation for the case study. Teachers may also choose alternative texts they believe will prepare students for the case study. 1. Hocking, J (2012) “Gough Whitlam His Time”, The Miegunyah Press, Melbourne – the entire text – This volume covers the period of the Whitlam Government.
2. Freudenberg, G (1977) “A Certain Grandeur: Gough Whitlam in Politics”, MacMillan, Melbourne. In particular chapters 19-24 Pages 288-366.
3. Reid, A (1976) “The Whitlam Venture”, Hill of Content, Melbourne. In particular chapters 16/17 Pages 363-425.
4. Hocking, J; Land, C; Campo, N; & Tayton, S. n.d. [“Gough Whitlam: A Short Biography](http://guides.naa.gov.au/gough-whitlam/chapter1/index.aspx)” , National Archives of Australia, accessed 7 September 2017

Session one (45 minutes)Teacher provides students with a copy of the relevant section of the syllabus and guides them through its requirements. Students annotate syllabus documents with key notes from the discussion.1. The teacher identifies the three areas of debate as outlined in the syllabus:
2. The Reform Agenda
3. The Dismissal
4. Leadership and Legacy
5. Explain to the students that in the case of each chosen debate they will be required to focus on the following:
6. Identifying the historians to be investigated
7. Investigate their purpose in writing their histories
8. Identifying how the histories have been recorded and presented over time
9. Analysing how and why the interpretations have changed over time
10. Teacher should stress the interconnectedness between the case study, the historiography component and the research project
11. Teacher summarises assessment task requirements

Session two (90 minutes)1. Students review the readings they have completed prior to the start of the study:
2. Hocking, J (2012) “Gough Whitlam His Time”, The Miegunyah Press, Melbourne.
3. Freudenberg, G (1977) “A Certain Grandeur: Gough Whitlam in Politics”, MacMillan, Melbourne.
4. Reid, A (1976) “The Whitlam Venture”, Hill of Content, Melbourne. In particular chapters 16/17 Pages 363-425.
5. Hocking, J; Land, C; Campo, N; & Tayton, S. n.d. “[Gough Whitlam: A Short Biography](http://guides.naa.gov.au/gough-whitlam/chapter1/index.aspx)”, National Archives of Australia, accessed 7 September 2017
6. They discuss and write about the following topics using a selected activity from the suggested activities list:
7. The personality (Gough Whitlam)
8. Why his government was determined to be a reformist government
9. The challenges that confronted such a reformist government
10. Students collaboratively construct on-line using [Padlet](http://www.padlet.com) a timeline of the major events in Australia from the election of the Whitlam Government in December 1972 to its dismissal in November 1975

Session three (90 minutes)1. Teacher presents students with key biographical and professional information on the following important historians:
2. Jenny Hocking
3. Troy Bramston
4. Laurie Oakes
5. Paul Kelly
6. Gough Whitlam
7. Students record notes on the following aspects of each historian’s life and career:
8. Biography (brief)
9. Methodologies
10. Purpose of their work on Whitlam
11. Sources used to investigate Whitlam
12. Form of communication
13. Relationship to Whitlam and his government

Note – students could also complete this task as a jigsaw addressing one historian each and sharing their findings. In this case, Paul Kelly presents the opportunity for a simpler analysis than his colleagues.1. In addition the teacher needs to enable the students to differentiate between those historians who can be classified as academic as opposed to public or popular, and which historians fit into more than one category. Use one of the Discussion strategies from the suggested activities list here.
2. Students work collaboratively to develop a table using Google docs that answers the following five questions for all five historians. They can conduct independent research for this activity, or the teacher can provide key pages from the texts.
3. The direct involvement of the historian in the events associated with the Whitlam period of government.
4. The political party affiliation of the historian during and subsequent to the Whitlam period of government.
5. The publication/s for which the historian worked both during and subsequent to the Whitlam period of government.
6. Personal friendships with any of the major players in the events of the period.
7. Any other political, social or institutional links that might compromise the work of the historian.

Question 5 is more complex than the others and could be offered to a student seeking enrichment | * Students complete summary notes as evidence of the readings they have completed.
* Annotated syllabus document
* Piece of writing on the four topics specified
* Padlet summarising the key events of the Whitlam years
* Students complete brief notes on the key historians used throughout the course
* Table summarising historical perspectives on the Whitlam years
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| The Reform AgendaHE12-3 communicates through detailed, well-structured texts to explain, argue, discuss, analyse and evaluate historical issues.HE12-4 constructs an historical position about an era of historical inquiry and discusses and challenges other positions. | Session four (90 minutes)1. Teacher presents students with information on the political context of the Whitlam government. Students use one of the reading activities from the suggested activities list to access this.
2. Labor in opposition for 23 years
3. The established culture of the Public Service
4. Eagerness to implement a well-developed reform agenda
5. A sense of urgency under the perception that their time in Government might not extend beyond one term
6. The quality of the ministry circumscribed by the method by which the ministry was chosen and lack of experience in government
7. The refusal of the Opposition to accept the decision of the electorate to change the government
8. Students are allocated one area of reform by the Whitlam Government from the following list to research:
9. Education – free tertiary education/Funding of Private vs Public Schools - simplest option
10. Regional development & Urban Planning – Albury/Wodonga
11. Aboriginal Land Rights
12. Multiculturalism
13. Health – a universal health scheme (today’s Medicare) - most complex option
14. Students are then asked to take notes on their researched reform. They must focus on the following aspects:
15. The proposed reform/s
16. Why the reform/s was necessary
17. Which groups/institutions supported the reform/s
18. Which groups/institutions opposed the reform/s
19. Evaluate the success or failure of the reform/s as judged by the relevant historians
20. Account for changes in judgements of historians where relevant
21. Class should use one of the discussion strategies in the suggested activities list to share responses to questions d) and e)
22. The following resources may be useful for students in conducting their research:
23. Bramston, T (ed) (2013) “The Whitlam Legacy”, The Federation Press, NSW Focus on Part III Policy & The Whitlam Government, pages 166-280. Special attention should be paid to: Economic Policy – John Double pages166-178; Education Policy – Michael Hogan pages 186-195; Aboriginal Affairs – Frank Brennan pages 255-262; Immigration & Multi Culturalism – Mary Kalantzis & Bill Cope pages 244-254 \*
24. Oakes, L (1976) “Crash Through or Crash: The Unmaking of a Prime Minister” Drummond, Melbourne; Chapter I Remembrance Day pages 1-18; Chapter 10 Debagging pages 140-160; Chapter 13 Here Come the Judge pages 201-223
25. Reid, A (1976) “The Whitlam Venture” Hill of Content, Melbourne; Chapters 16/17 – pages 363-425
26. Sexton, M (1979) “Illusions of Power; the Fate of a Reform Government”, Allen & Unwin, Sydney.
27. To consolidate their learning, students select an analysis question from the list below to answer in essay format after the session is complete:
28. What influenced Whitlam to become a great reformer?
29. Why was it necessary to adopt a “Crash through or Crash” approach in endeavouring to bring about reform? Plus one enrichment question for advanced students:
30. Why was it perceived that the Commonwealth Government should become involved in policy areas hitherto the responsibility of the States?
 | * Student notes on the political context, as per the selected reading activity
* Notes on one area of reform, structured to focus on the dot pointed topics
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| The DismissalHE12-1 analyses and evaluates different approaches to history and the complexity of factors that shape historical interpretations. HE12-3 communicates through detailed, well-structured texts to explain, argue, discuss, analyse and evaluate historical issues.HE12-4 constructs an historical position about an era of historical inquiry and discusses and challenges other positions. | Session five (135 minutes)1. Introduce the students to the key points of debate with a focus on changing interpretations of these three key features of the dismissal.
2. The Senate
3. The Governor-General
4. Whitlam
5. Students put together a 5x3 table that cross references the three areas of debate with five historians. They should use the three primary historians (see below) and teacher can select two others according to access and preference
6. After the table is complete, students use one of the Writing activities in the suggested activities list to answer the four questions below:
7. Did Whitlam have a political solution?
8. Should Kerr have acted on the advice of the Prime Minister?
9. Was it appropriate for Kerr to consult with the Chief Justice of the High Court and another High Court Judge seeking this advice?
10. Was the consent of the Queen explicitly given or implied?
11. They should synthesise the evidence in their tables in answering these questions.
12. Students read one text each and summarise that historian’s perspectives on each of the three key areas. The following dot points can guide their reading and note-taking.

The Senate:* The role of the Senate in deferring supply in 1974 and 1975
* Whitlam’s attitude to the Senate and its role under the Constitution
* The disregard for convention surrounding the appointment of casual vacancies to the Senate by the Premiers of NSW and Queensland which altered the balance of power in the Senate in favour of the opposition.

The Governor-General* The Reserve Powers of the Governor-General under the Constitution·
* Malcolm Fraser, aware that the Governor-General had made up his mind to sack the Prime Minister?
* The nature of the correspondence between the Governor-General and Buckingham Palace. How much did the Queen know and did she play any role.

Whitlam* The so-called Loans Affair as a trigger for the actions of the Senate in deferring supply
* The actions of the Prime Minister in the lead-up to and during the controversy
* Why didn’t the Prime Minister sack the Governor-General
* The so-called “Ambush”
* Whitlam’s handling of the situation following his sacking

Sources useful for this activity include:* Kerr, J (1978) “Matters for Judgment: An Autobiography”, Macmillan, South Melbourne; Chapters 14 to 23 (p209-403)
* Whitlam, G (1979) “The Truth of the Matter”, Melbourne University Press, Victoria. Focus on three chapters: Chapter 6 – The Senate on Strike p99-122; Chapter 7 – The Governor-General Consults p123-146; Chapter 8 – Ambush p 147-168
* Fraser, M, Simons M (2009) “Malcolm Fraser: The Political Memoirs”, The Meigunyah Press, Victoria; Part I – Being Heard – Extremis p264-312
* Oakes, L & Solomon, D (1974) “Grab for Power: Election 1974”, Cheshire Publishing Pty Ltd, Melbourne. Chapter 30, The Aftermath. (A public/popular historical perspective)
* Kelly, P (1995) “November 1975 The Inside Story of Australia’s Greatest Political Crisis”, Allen & Unwin, Australia. This is a comprehensive account of the events leading up to the Dismissal. Chapter 6 – The Deadlock (p104-130); Chapter 7 – The Battle (p131-167); Chapter 11 – 1975 (p281-317) are essential reading. The appendixes contain invaluable primary sources.
* Browning, HO (1985) “The 1975 Crisis: An Historical View”, Hale & Iremonger, Sydney
* Smith, D (2005) “Head of State: The Governor-General, The Monarchy, The Republic & The Dismissal”, Macleay Press, Sydney. David Smith was the Governor-General’s official Secretary who at 4.45pm on November 11th, 1975 read the proclamation dissolving The House of Representatives & The Senate and by whose side, G Whitlam was standing and uttered those famous words – “Well may we say God Save the Queen because nothing will save The Governor-General”
* Bramston, T (ed) (2013) “The Whitlam Legacy”, The Federation Press. An academic and revisionist history of the Dismissal. Part IV – “The Dismissal”. It comprises 4 articles from p290-333. Contributors: Michael Sexton, Peter Van Onselen, Leigh Hatcher & T Bramston/P Kelly
* Hocking, J (2015) “The Dismissal Dossier: Everything you were never meant to know about November 1975”, Melbourne University Press, Victoria. This is regarded as the “Definitive Story” of the Dismissal. Hocking is seeking through the courts to have the private correspondence between Kerr & The Queen released into the public domain
* Pilger, J, How the US sacked Whitlam. Green left Weekly, 29th October 2014, issue 1030, PG

After the session/extra work1. Students should view the following documentary in their own time as an example of a popular interpretation of the histories they have already accessed: “DVD The Dismissal – 2 discs – 270 minutes” (also available on Clickview). This is a dramatic presentation of the events surrounding the Dismissal which went to air on the ABC in 1983. As a documentary, questions will arise as to historical accuracy within the context of the studies students have undertaken in historiography.
2. There is a book that accompanied the TV series which was produced by Politics Books. It is currently out of print, but a [synopsis can be found here](http://www.politicsbooks.com.au/index.php?app=ccp0&ns=prodshow&ref=the-dismissal-tv-mini-series-dvd&sid=u0bu2za5w523h4aqqk67813a9s)
3. Students can produce a written piece reflecting on the differences inherent in the documentary given its popular status.
 | * Table summarising the perspectives of five historians on three areas of debate
* Piece of writing on a selected analysis question
* Piece of writing reflecting on popular histories of Whitlam
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| Leadership and LegacyHE12-1 analyses and evaluates different approaches to history and the complexity of factors that shape historical interpretations. HE12-3 communicates through detailed, well-structured texts to explain, argue, discuss, analyse and evaluate historical issues.HE12-4 constructs an historical position about an era of historical inquiry and discusses and challenges other positions. | Sessions six (135 minutes)1. Students read one of the following texts to develop notes on the information provided from the text – the areas of focus for the student notes are presented below under task 2.
2. Bramston, T (ed) 2013 “The Whitlam Legacy”, The Federation Press, NSW; Part V – Reflections & Assessments; Chapter 38 “The Whitlam Legacy” by Paul Kelly (p385 to 398) is especially useful
3. Hockey, J (2015) “The Dismissal Dossier: Everything you were never meant to know about November 1975”, Melbourne University Press, Victoria. This is a short text and needs to be read in full
4. “Behind Gough Whitlam’s Legacy”, Green Left Weekly, 05 Nov 2014 Issue 1031, P24,7
5. “Gough Whitlam’s Tainted Legacy”. News Weekly, No. 2936, 08 November 2014: 24
6. “A Win for Morality’s Horseman: The Legal Achievements of Gough Whitlam”, Bulletin (Law Society of SA) March 2015, Vol 37(2), p34-35
7. “Gough’s WAR: Making a politician changing a nation”, Hocking, J – Griffith Review, 2015, Issue 48, p92-201
8. “It’s time for Reflection: Whitlam: The Power & the Passion”, Metro Magazine: Media & Education Magazine, No 178, 2013: 28-30
9. Student notes should focus on their chosen historian’s perspectives on the following areas:
10. Lasting legislation achievements of the Whitlam Government
11. The expanded role of the Commonwealth Government
12. The on-going influence of these events on the relations between the two major parties – the Liberal National Party & the Labor Party
13. The referendum which brought about a constitutional change relating to the filling of casual vacancies to the Senate
14. A heightened awareness of the reserve powers of the Governor-General and the Power of the Senate in relation to the Federal Budget
15. The composition of the Senate (with the exception of one brief period during the Howard era) the ongoing reluctance on the part of votes to give any major party control of this Chamber
16. The Republican Movement – the continual push for a Republic
17. Students select an inquiry question from the list below and use all sources accessed thus far to put together a response. Teachers could have students produce an essay, engage in a debate, or present work to their peers.
18. Is the Whitlam dismissal responsible for the struggle of political parties to gain a majority in Federal Parliament today?
19. Is the Whitlam dismissal responsible for the rise of minor political parties in modern Australia?
20. To what extent has the Republican movement remained on the Australian political agenda?
21. Is the Whitlam age responsible for ongoing political reform in Australia?

Students could consider contemporary issues here, such as reforms of the Marriage Act. Note – question 3 is a more accessible inquiry question and question 1 is a more sophisticated question for students who desire enrichment. | * Notes on various historians’ perspectives on the seven key questions on the Whitlam legacy
* Student debate, piece of writing or presentation on selected inquiry question
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Reflection and evaluation