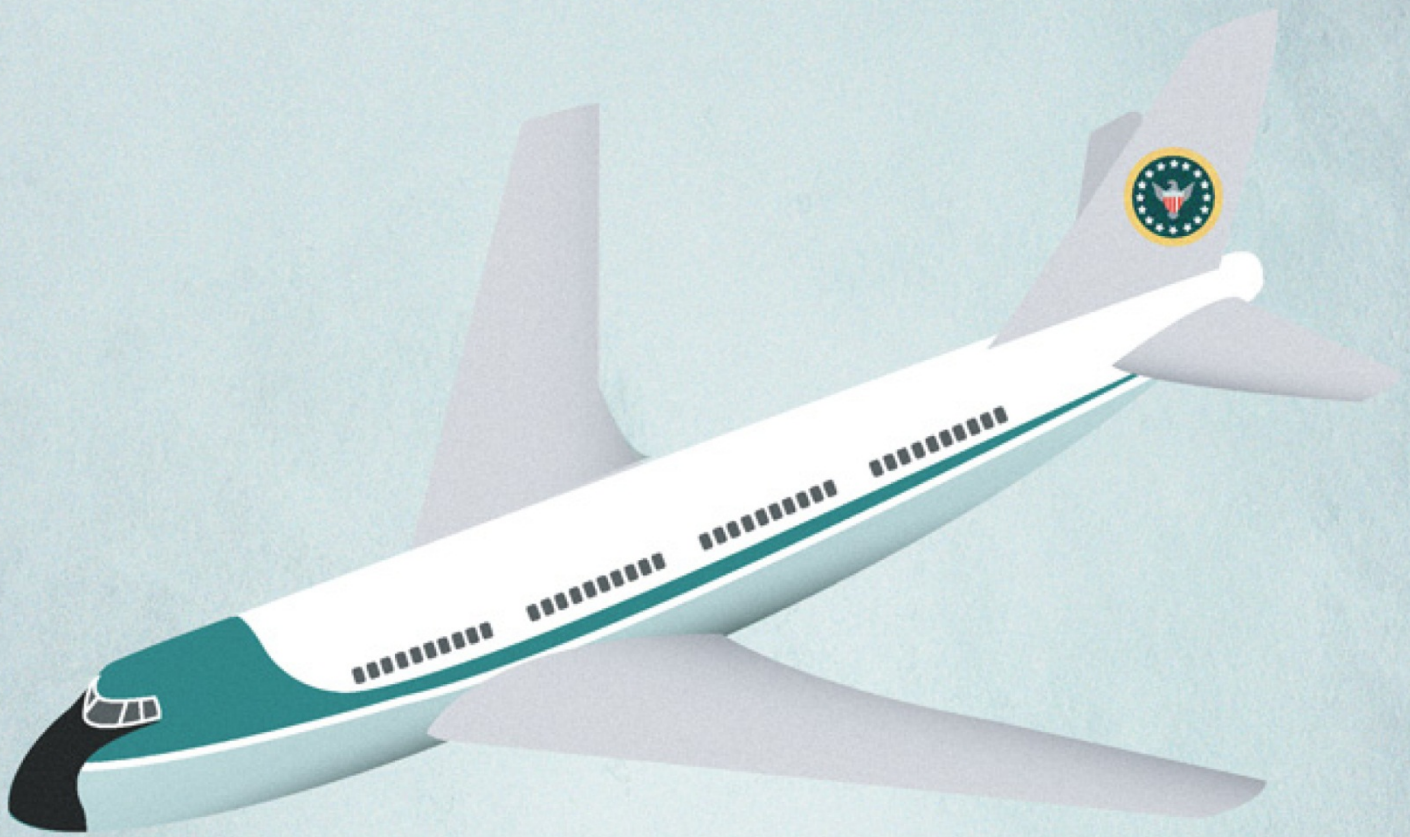




Victorian
Opera



NIXON

IN CHINA

EDUCATION RESOURCE
HISTORY

NIXON IN CHINA

'A masterpiece' - Variety Magazine.

In 1971, U.S. President Richard Nixon stunned the world when he revealed he would visit China. It was an historic turning point in American-Chinese relations after twenty five years of no contact, trade or diplomatic recognition. The following year, Richard Nixon and his wife Pat began a week-long visit to China, accompanied by over 100 journalists. And with them, the gaze of the world followed.

Fifteen years later, composer John Adams wrote *Nixon in China* inspired by 'the week that changed the world'. His heroic opera, with its powerful music and text, centres as much on the personal journeys of individual characters as on the grand historical narrative. Recently Variety Magazine called *Nixon in China*, 'a masterpiece'. In 2013, Victorian Opera re-imagines this compelling work bringing an all-Australian perspective to this grand American opera.

Nixon in China | John Adams
16 – 23 May 2013 Her Majesty's Theatre

These performances of *Nixon in China* by John Adams with libretto by Alice Goodman are given by permission of Hal Leonard Australia Pty Ltd, exclusive agents for Boosey & Hawkes Music Publishers Ltd of London.

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The Wall


**NIXON IN CHINA
COUNTDOWN**
35 DAYS TO GO... [BOOK NOW >](#)

**A JOURNEY OF
DISCOVERY FROM EAST
TO WEST**


The first act reveals a world of men and politics as the key players the nervous **Nixon**, the confident **Chinese Premier Chou En-lai**, the gnomish **Chairman Mao** and the stoic National Security Advisor **Henry Kissinger** go about their business. Then in the second, the focus shifts to the women in this story, the president's sympathetic wife **Pat Nixon** and the defiant **Madame Mao** caught up in an inevitable wave of change, before culminating in a moving final act in which they all reflect on their lives and their contribution to history.

f

A sneak preview of our photo shoot in Chinatown, in the style of 1970's propaganda posters. [Book now](#) to relive the week that changed the world!




**U.S. PRESIDENT IN CHINA
FIRST TIME IN 25 YEARS**




'By American standards, the capital airport is almost deserted only half an hour before the President touches down. Where are Chou En-lai and the palace guard? Around, say the Chinese officials, but not in sight. Finally, from behind some buildings come the sound of troops. Rhythmic marching, hard boots, the shout of a command.'

Source: Excerpted from the notebooks of Washington Bureau Chief Hugh Sidey and White House Correspondent Jerrald Schechter. Here with, Time Magazine, The Nation: The President's Odyssey Day by Day, Monday, Mar. 06, 1972. Image: Arrival of Air Force One in Peking, 02/21/1972 © White House Photo Office [Public domain]

**THE FAST LANE OF 1970'S
AMERICA**





THE PRESIDENT'S ITINERARY

First Day
Arrival in Peking. Trip from airport to city. Meeting with Mao. First banquet in the Great Hall of the People.

Second Day
People's Daily front-pages a picture of Mao and Nixon. Nixon and Chou En-lai confer privately for four hours. Evening at the ballet.

Third Day
More talks with Chou. Evening sports spectacle of gymnastics, badminton, table tennis.

Fourth Day
Again, talks with Chou. The visit to the Great Wall.

Fifth Day
Visit to the Forbidden City in Peking. Last banquet in the Great Hall of the People.

Sixth Day
Joint communiqué concluded. Flight to Hangchow. Boat ride in park with Chou.

[RESERVE YOUR SEATS >](#)

Source: Excerpted from the notebooks of Washington Bureau Chief Hugh Sidey and White House Correspondent Jerrald Schechter. Time Magazine, The Nation: The President's Odyssey Day by Day, Monday, Mar. 06, 1972.

NIXON IN CHINA - MAKING NEWS

USA Media covers Nixon in China

The following extracts from America newspapers in 1971 and 1972 frame the media coverage of Nixon's trip to China.

ACTIVITIES

- Write a short paragraph analysing the opinion expressed in each extract. Look particularly at the headline and author.
- Next, use the extracts to compile a list of factors contributing to Nixon's decision to undertake his political visit.

Our President goes vested with a tower of strength – the United States of America. The time will come to measure his accomplishments. Now is the time to go with him. If his endeavours are successful, they will clear away a lot of the underbrush now cluttering up the world's economy – thereby giving it, and our American economy, a badly needed boost.¹

President Nixon's decision to unfreeze relationships with China and to visit that country has major significance for American domestic politics. In its initial impact, this diplomatic move is a political triumph for Mr. Nixon. America wants peace and no President ever looked better than when he is seen to be working for peace in a large, statesmanlike way.²

NEWS HAS A NEW KIND OF MYSTERY



When a leader of a powerful nation steps onto foreign soil, the gaze of the world follows. Behind closed doors, leaders secretly draw battle lines, driven by fear. In public, they express a hope for peace and a shared understanding. Headlines break, images flash across networks, and people watch hypnotised as the words and gestures of these larger than life figures are magnified and scrutinised. This is drama on a grand scale, operatic in every way.

As the title character from *Nixon in China* reflects on his historic first meeting (pictured), he sings 'News has a kind of mystery'. It is a thrilling moment in this landmark opera in which the fears and hopes of a President come rushing forward, driven by a remarkable score, inviting the viewer to step inside the mind of one of the world's most powerful men.

Richard Mills, Artistic Director Victorian Opera

Image: Nixons wave from AFO 1972. Ollie Atkins, White House Photographer [Public Domain].

¹ 'Bridge to China'

By ALF M. LANDON, former Governor of Kansas was the Republican nominee for President in 1936. *New York Times (1923-Current file)*; Aug 11, 1971; ProQuest Historical Newspapers, p37.

² 'China and '72' By WILLIAM V. SHANNON

New York Times (1923-Current file); Jul 20, 1971; ProQuest Historical Newspapersp33.



Figure 1 Nixon shakes hands with Chou En-lai © White House photo by Byron Schumaker

Gus Hall, the general secretary of the Communist party, USA, and its candidate for President, yesterday decried President Nixon's trip to China and China's Communist chairman, Mao tse-Tung, as the party opened its 20th national convention here. "It's not a trip for peace," Mr. Hall told newsmen, as he summed up his three-hour report to the initial session at the Towers Hotel in Brooklyn. "It's an attempt to use the policies of Mao to divide the socialist countries, and the socialist countries from the national liberation movements." He charged that the President's trip was designed to "cover up the war in Indochina" and that the Nixon Administration had plans to "re-escalate the war after the election."³

A belief by speculators that the announcement of President Nixon's proposed visit to Communist China could result in increased trading in farm products sent grain and soybean prices higher yesterday on the Chicago Board of Trade.⁴

Even before he reached the Whitehouse, Mr Nixon had made it clear that he had put behind him his once fervent conviction that dealings with Peking would only increase its power and "probably irreparably weaken" its non-Communist neighbours. He concluded that the Chinese Communists had been much more prudent in deed than in word and that their continued isolation would be more dangerous to peace than their gradual involvement in world diplomacy.⁵

³ 'Communists Assail Nixon's Trip As Party Convention Opens Here' By PETER KIHSS
New York Times (1923-Current file); Feb 19, 1972; ProQuest Historical Newspaperp13.

⁴ 'Grains and Soybeans Advance On News of Nixon's China Trip'
New York Times (1923-Current file); Jul 17, 1971; ProQuest Historical Newspapers, p19

⁵ 'Nixon's "Great Leap Forward:" Plan to Visit China May Bolster U.S. in Soviet Talks' By MAX FRANKEL
Nixon in China Education Resource - History © Victorian Opera



THE PRESIDENT'S ITINERARY

First Day

Arrival in Peking. Trip from airport to city. Meeting with Mao. First banquet in the Great Hall of the People.

Second Day

People's Daily front-pages a picture of Mao and Nixon. Nixon and Chou En-lai confer privately for four hours. Evening at the ballet.

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More talks with Chou. Evening sports spectacle of gymnastics, badminton, table tennis.

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Visit to the Forbidden City in Peking. Last banquet in the Great Hall of the People.

Sixth Day

Joint communiqué concluded.
Flight to Hangchow. Boat ride in park with Chou.

Source: Excerpted from the notebooks of Washington Bureau Chief Hugh Sides and White House Correspondent Jerrold Schecter. *Time Magazine*, *The Nation*: The President's Odyssey Day by Day, Monday, Mar. 06, 1972.

President Nixon's announcement of his planned visit to China is quite a political coup. But this magnanimously volunteered journey in an aura of peace and friendship doesn't fit the President's historical image. Perhaps the truth is more nearly that Mr Nixon is being dragged kicking to Peking.⁶

If you assume that the cold war is a permanent condition of life – as many intelligent and sincere men and women do – it is easy to condemn Mr. Nixon's opening to China and Chancellor Will Brandt's opening to the Soviet Union; but Nixon and Brandt are trying to dismantle the cold war and go on from there to a more dependable world order. And even if they fail, which is quite possible, the historians of the future are likely to praise them for trying.⁷

ACTIVITY

In *Forrest Gump*, Forrest is part of the USA ping pong team invited to play in China in the early 1970s. This is based on a real event in April 1971, a year prior to Nixon's visit. Use the film to explain the concepts of 'Ping Pong Diplomacy,' the 'Cold War' and 'isolationism.'



Figure 2. Menu from Dinner Given During President Nixon's Visit to Peking, China, 02/25/1972. National Archives and Records Administration 595300

NIXON IN CHINA - HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The Meeting: 21st – 28th February 1972

Nixon's visit to China and meeting with Mao in 1972 was a key event in improving the relationship between the USA and China. The People's Republic of China was founded on a strong belief in the ideologies of communism, a system of beliefs which lay in diametric opposition to the western principles of capitalism. When Mao came into power, China became an isolationist country, with very little travel in or out. Like many Americans of the time Nixon was strongly opposed to communism and feared that communist ideology would spread to other regions of the world.

New York Times (1923-Current file); Jul 17, 1971; ProQuest Historical Newspapers, p3.

⁶ 'Letter to the Editor: Nixon's Plan to Visit China'

By JOHN L JOSEPH, New Jersey State Chairman, Americans for Democratic Action.

New York Times (1923-Current file); Aug 4, 1971; ProQuest Historical Newspapers, p32.

⁷ 'Mr. Nixon's Finest Hour' By JAMES RESTON

New York Times (1923-Current file); Mar 1, 1972; ProQuest Historical Newspapers, p32

The meeting between Nixon and Mao became a symbol of more positive political relationships between East and West. Two years after Nixon's visit, the US China Peoples Friendship Association (USCPFA) was founded. Its mission was to nurture amicable and lasting relationships between China and the USA by promoting cross-cultural understanding, trade and political dialogue between the two nations.



Figure 4: President Nixon meets with China's Communist Party Leader, Mao Tse-tung. National Archives & Record Administration 194759



What they want:

1. Build up their world credentials.
2. Taiwan.
3. Get U.S. out of Asia.

What we want:

1. Indochina [?]
2. Communists—to restrain Chicom [Chinese Communist] expansion in Asia.
3. In Future—Reduce threat of a confrontation by Chinese Super Power.

What we both want:

1. Reduce danger of confrontation and conflict.
2. a more stable Asia.
3. a restraint on the U.S.S.R.

Figure 3: *About Face: A History of American's Curious Relationship with China, from Nixon to Clinton.* JAMES MANN

Nixon:

Richard Milhous Nixon was the President of the United States of America from 1969 to 1974. He served in the United States army during WWII and resigned from office due to his involvement with the Watergate scandal in 1974.

Mao:

Mao Zedong or Mao Tse-Tung was a key founder of the People's Republic of China in 1949 and the leader of the Chinese Communist Party until his death in 1976. His key movements while in power included 'The Great Leap Forward', 'The Long March' and the 'Cultural Revolution.'

NIXON IN CHINA – INTERPRETING THE LIBRETTO

QUESTION

- How did the Chinese attitude to their ancient traditions change under communism?

CHOU:

*How much of what we did was good?
Everything seems to move beyond our remedy.*



'As always, Mao is everywhere. His works are on sale in five languages. An entire counter is devoted to posters of the Chairman in various poses, ranging from his youthful days in Yenan to swimming the Yangtze. There is Mao in a rice field, Mao in military dress, Mao surrounded by soldiers and sailors.'

Source: From Excursions in Mao's China, Time Magazine, Monday March 6, 1972. Image: By Zhang Zhenshi (1914–1992).

MAO:

*We cried "Long live the Ancestors!"
Once, it's "Long live the Living!" now.*

ACTIVITY

- Create a table showing discussing both a positive aspect of Chinese communism, e.g., improving the status of women and a negative aspect, e.g., the treatment of scholars during the Cultural Revolution.

MAO:

*You know we'll meet with your confrere
The Democratic candidate
If he should win.*

NIXON:

*That is a fate
We hope you won't have to endure.
I'd like to make another tour
As President.*

QUESTION

- What were Mao's motives for agreeing to the meeting with Nixon?

MAO, SECRETARIES;

We no longer need Confucius.

Let him rot... no curse...

Words decompose to feed their source...

Old leaves absorbed into the tree

To grow again as branches.

ACTIVITY

- Find a passage from Confucius which contrasts with the Chinese Communist manifesto.

QUESTION

- Nixon's final sentence echoes Neil Armstrong's words during the 1969 moon landing. What was the 'Space Race' and what was its connection to Communism?

NIXON:

"And though we spoke quietly

The eyes and ears of history

Caught every gesture ..."

"We came in peace for all mankind"

NIXON:

Your eloquent remarks, Premier,

And millions more hear what we say

Through satellite technology

than ever heard a public speech

before. No one is out of touch.

Telecommunication has

Broadcast your message into space.

QUESTION

- Nixon's visit, including the celebratory banquet with Mao, was televised. What was the purpose in broadcasting this event?

QUESTION

- Nixon uses the analogy of parallel roads to express his hopes for future relationships with China. But the 'Long March' has another significance. What

NIXON:

But let us, in these next five days

Start a long march on new highways,

In different lanes, but parallel.

PAT:

This little elephant in glass

Brings back so many memories.

The symbol of our party.

QUESTION & ACTIVITY

- The Elephant is the insignia for the Republicans. What are the policies and ideologies of the party? How do they differ from communism? Make a table showing the key differences.

Further Reading

- Dinner menu from Nixon's visit to China. [View here](#)
- Airforce One arrives in China. [View here](#)
- Photograph of the two giant pandas given to Nixon after his visit to China. [View here](#)
- BBC's John Sergeant reports on Nixon's visit to China. Includes extracts from Nixon's speech. [View here](#)
- Filmed panel from the Council on Foreign Relations in 2007 discussing the significance of Nixon's 1972 visit to China. [View here](#)

REFERENCES

With thanks to Jo Clyne and the [History Teachers Association of Victoria](#) for the research and preparation of this resource pack.



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Victorian Opera Education Program is generously supported by the Victorian Opera Education Syndicate.

CURRICULUM LINKS FOR TEACHERS

VCE UNIT 2: TWENTIETH CENTURY HISTORY: 1945 - 2000

- Outcome 1: Ideas and political power

Key Knowledge

Skills

The principal features of a post-war conflict(s)

Use key concepts relevant to the selected historical conflict; such as ideology, power, racism, communism, capitalism, imperialism, ethnicity and nationalism;

The ways in which the competing groups represented themselves and each other; for example, views on the individual in society, the proper function of the state, tolerance of dissent and minority groups, view of nationalism;

Analyse written and visual evidence;

The propagation and maintenance of ideological views both domestically and beyond their borders; for example, the use of the media, symbols, espionage, competition, physical force and the law;

Synthesise evidence to draw conclusions;

The outcome of the competition between ideologies; for example, military threats, propaganda wars, isolationism.

VCE UNIT 3 & 4: REVOLUTIONS: THE CHINESE REVOLUTION

- Outcome 2: Creating a new society

Key Knowledge

The contribution of individuals and groups to the creation of the new society; for example, in America, Benjamin Franklin, Patrick Henry, Thomas Jefferson and George Washington; in France, Danton, Marat and Robespierre; in **China, Mao Zedong**; and in Russia, Trotsky and Lenin;

The cause of difficulties or crises faced by the revolutionary groups or governments as a new state was consolidated; for example, the War of Independence in America, the revolutionary war in France, the Civil War and Foreign Intervention in Russia, the economic problems caused by the **Great Leap Forward** and the disunity caused by the **Cultural Revolution in China**.

The response of the key revolutionary individuals, groups, governments or parties to the difficulties that they encountered as the new state was consolidated; for example, Jacobin Terror in France and the Red Guard in Russia; Civil War, and War Communism in Russia; **the 'Speak Bitterness' Agrarian Reform Law campaign, the Hundred Flowers Campaign and the death of Liu Shaoqi during the Cultural Revolution in China**; the Constitutional Convention in May 1789 in America.

The compromise of revolutionary ideals; for example, the NEP in Russia and the Red Guard and 'literature of the wounded' in China; the radicalisation of policies; for example, during the authoritarian rule of the Committee of Public Safety in France, the Civil War in Russia, **the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution in China**;

The changes and continuities that the revolution brought about in the structure of government, the organisation of society, and its values, and the distribution of wealth and conditions of everyday life

Skills

Gather evidence of the difficulties faced by revolutionary individuals, groups, governments or parties in the creation of a new society;

Analyse evidence of the response of the key revolutionary individuals, groups, governments or parties to the difficulties that they encountered as the new state was consolidated;

Evaluate the degree to which the revolution brought about change from the old regime;

Consider a range of historians' interpretations.

INTERNATIONAL BACCALAUREATE: HISTORY

- Topic: The Cold War and the Americans 1945 - 1981

Key Knowledge

United States' foreign policies from Kennedy to Carter: **the characteristics of, and reasons for policies; implications for the region:** Kennedy's Alliance for Progress, **Nixon's covert operations** and Chile; Carter's quest for human rights and the Panama Canal Treaty.

Skills

The gathering and sorting of historical evidence

- *Developing research skills of locating and selecting relevant and appropriate evidence, from books, articles.*
- *Recognising the distinctions between different kinds of evidence: primary and secondary, textual, audio-visual, oral, graphic, and tabular.*

The evaluation of historical evidence

- *Recognising the subjective nature of the historical evidence.*
- *Examining sources for information and interpretation, and for cases where they corroborate, complement or contradict each other.*
- *Recognising the value and use of sources and reasons to use them cautiously.*
- *Recognising and appreciating why and how opinions and interpretations differ.*

Recognising and understanding historical processes and their relationship to human experience, activity and motivation

- *Recognising, explaining and analysing causes and consequences.*
- *Recognising, explaining and analysing continuity, change and development over time.*
- *Recognising, explaining and analysing similarity and difference.*
- *Relating human activities, experiences and motivations in history to a range of cultural and social dimensions.*

INTERNATIONAL BACCALAUREATE: HISTORY (cont.)

- Topic: The Cold War and the Americans 1945 - 1981

Key Knowledge

United States' foreign policies from Kennedy to Carter: **the characteristics of, and reasons for policies; implications for the region**: Kennedy's Alliance for Progress, **Nixon's covert operations** and Chile; Carter's quest for human rights and the Panama Canal Treaty.

Skills

Organizing and expressing historical ideas and information

- *Posing questions and hypotheses and answering or testing them.*
- *Handling and deploying information and ideas.*
- *Selecting and deploying information and ideas.*
- *Constructing narratives, with ideas, analysis and relevant substantiation.*
- *Summarising and arriving at conclusions.*