

ACTIVITY 5

Timeline of World Events in 1968

Introduction

This timeline is meant to be a companion to the Protest and Politics collection, supplementing the introductory and background information provided in the collection. Activity 5: Create a Classroom Timeline or Visual Thinking Wall About 1968, involves creating a timeline of events in 1968 as a classroom project, with students contributing entries related to the places and events studied in all of the activities in the collection. The information provided here can be useful for teachers wanting to populate the class timeline with additional events and context from this pivotal year.

Please note that there were numerous significant political, social, and cultural events happening around the world in 1968. This timeline includes only a small selection of them. This timeline is not comprehensive and excludes events from many parts of the world.

There are other timelines available online, some of which have been listed in “Reference Materials and Further Reading.”

If you would like to create a digital timeline for—or with—students, you can search online for tools and templates to use. For example, you could search “free technology for teachers” or “creating digital timelines.” The National Archives (www.docsteach.org) is one good source.

January

- Dr. Benjamin Spock and other prominent figures indicted on charges of conspiracy to encourage acts of violating the selective service’s draft.
- Alexander Dubček becomes the Czechoslovakian Communist Party Leader and announces he will pursue reforms for his country.
- 10,000th U.S. airplane lost over Vietnam since start of the war.
- Newsstand selling Western papers opens in Prague city center, an unprecedented access for people living in a Soviet Bloc country.
- North Vietnamese launch Tet Offensive and invade U.S. embassy in Saigon.

February

- Photographer Eddie Adams takes now-iconic image of South Vietnamese official executing Viet Cong prisoner, and it is published in *The New York Times* and widely seen.
- University students in Boston stage four-day hunger strike to protest the Vietnam War.
- More than 10,000 march through Paris, protesting the Vietnam War; later in the month, thousands in Berlin protest the war.
- Thousands of Czechoslovakians celebrate in the streets after the Czechoslovakian hockey team defeated the Soviets in the Olympic Games in Grenoble.
- The Japanese student organization Zengakuren, and other Japanese citizens, stage massive protests of the docking of the USS Enterprise, a nuclear armed vessel, in Sasebo harbor. Police use violence against protestors.
- Broadcast of Walter Cronkite's February 27 CBS News report about his Vietnam trip, in which he says, "For it seems now more certain than ever that the bloody experience of Vietnam is to end in a stalemate."
- Czechoslovakian journalists and writers call for the press censorship law of 1966 to be repealed.
- Activist César Chavez fasts for 21 days to promote non-violence in the struggle for farmworker rights and social justice. Chavez meets with Robert Kennedy at end of fast.
- Gallup Poll shows that 50% of Americans disapprove of President Johnson's handling of the war in Vietnam.

March

- New York University students protest Dow Chemical recruitment at the university. (Dow was manufacturer of napalm, a toxic chemical used in Vietnam.)
- A student movement in Mexico City protests the Vietnam War.
- Polish students protest for freedoms and are beaten by government-backed "workers militia."
- Thousand march in Warsaw to protest the brutal repression of previous march.
- Senator Robert Kennedy announces intention to run for Democratic nomination, entering the field with President Lyndon Johnson and challenger Eugene McCarthy.

- Warsaw Pact leaders meet in Moscow to discuss the resignation of Czechoslovakian President Antonin Novotny.
- Student protestors at Nanterre University, outside of Paris, occupy a faculty space and create “The Movement of March 22.”
- Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., leads a march in Memphis. One black youth is killed.
- Polish students march and demand an end to censorship, free trade unions, and a youth movement not affiliated with the Communist Party. Soon officials would shut down multiple university departments and make multiple arrests.
- President Johnson addresses the nation, describing a proposed step to limit the war and delivering the news that he will not seek reelection.
- U.S. magazines *Harper's* and *Atlantic Monthly* publish special issues on Vietnam.

April

- Assassination of Dr. King in Memphis, Tennessee, on the 4th. Riots ensue in U.S. cities.
- Czechoslovakian Communist Party puts for a plan for 10-year program of political reform, which would include elections in which parties other than itself could stand candidates. Dubček’s plan was to create “a unique experiment in democratic communism,” and “socialism with a human face.” The press becomes more outspoken.
- In Oakland, California, a gunfire exchange between police and members of the Black Panther group results in the death a 17-year-old Black Panther Party member.
- President Johnson signs Civil Rights Act of 1968, which prohibits discriminating on the basis of race in matters of housing.
- The U.S. Secretary of Defense calls up military reserves.
- Protesting the university’s involvement in the Institute for Defense Analysis and proposed gym site in Harlem, students occupy five buildings at Columbia University and take three school officials hostage.
- New York City police storm occupied buildings at Columbia and violently remove student protestors.

May

- May Day celebrations in Czechoslovakia express support for Dubček's political reforms.
- Education authorities in France decide to discipline Nanterre student Dany Cohn-Bendit. Angered by this, students seize university loudspeaker equipment to protest. Pierre Grappin, dean of Nanterre, asks the Ministry of Education to close the university. Demonstrators move into Paris and the Sorbonne. Police enter. They close the Sorbonne for the first time in its 700-year history.
- Czechoslovak leaders visit Moscow. Reforms are criticized by Soviets.
- Thousands of students protest the closure of Nanterre and the Sorbonne, marching through the Latin Quarter (with support from student and faculty unions). Strikes occur at multiple universities in France. Strikes continue, and the Sorbonne remains closed.
- Student protests in the Latin Quarter in Paris turns into the violent "night of the barricades," a battle with heavily armed riot police (May 10 and 11).
- Workers in France sympathize with student protestors and cause a general strike. In Paris, demonstrators number about a million. Students occupy the Sorbonne.
- French leader Charles de Gaulle leaves the country for Romania.
- Protestors occupy the Odéon Theater in Paris. Strikes continue.
- De Gaulle returns to France.
- By the third week of the month, nine million workers are now on strike in France. For the rest of May and June, France is paralyzed by a strike of all major sectors of work, from manufacturing to media, to garbage collection.

June

- Just after midnight on the day after the California primary election, after addressing political supporters, Robert Kennedy is assassinated by Sirhan Sirhan (June 5).
- Czech writer Ludvik Vaculik releases the manifesto "Two Thousand Words," which criticizes Communist rule and Soviet influence in Czechoslovakia and proposes reforms more radical than those in Dubček's Action Program.

- Responding to violence during UC–Berkeley student protests staged in support of French student and worker protests in, Mayor Wallace Johnson enacts a state of emergency and three-day curfew in the city of Berkeley.
- Students at UC–Berkeley protest in support of French student protestors and to demand ethnic studies.

July

- Warsaw Pact members—without representatives from Czechoslovakia—meet in Poland and send a diplomatic message to the Czechs that the country’s actions are jeopardizing the interests of the other socialist countries.
- A fight between rival high schools breaks out in Mexico City and spreads to the commercial center Plaza de la Cuidadela. The next day, two local gangs attack the students with police and military anti-riot units watching; the police eventually beat students and make many arrests.
- UNAM (Autonomous University of Mexico) holds a meeting with two visiting French students from Nanterre, adding to government concerns about student activists and leftists plans.
- Mexican students stage a demonstration to demand the release of students arrested three days before. This coincides with the annual Fidel Castro support march. Riots break out, with students suspecting government “plants” causing initial violence.
- Leadership of the Soviet and Czechoslovakian Communist Parties meet in Czechoslovakia. Dubček defends his reforms. Soviets threaten invasion.
- East Germany, Poland, Hungary, and the Soviet Union announce military exercises on the Czech border.

August

- U.S. troop totals in Vietnam peak at 541,000.
- Mexican student groups form a cooperative “National Strike Council” (CNH). They create “brigades” to educate the public in the absence of trustworthy press coverage of events. In a nod to the Prague Spring, one brigade is called the “Brigade Alexander Dubček.”
- Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev receives a letter from members of the Czech Communist party, requesting military intervention. (This letter is later proved fraudulent.)
- In Miami, Republicans nominate Richard Nixon as the Republican candidate for U.S. president.

- Overnight, about 500,000 Soviet and Warsaw Pact troops cross the Czechoslovakian border in the invasion known as “Operation Danube.”
- At about 1 a.m. on the 21st, Czech state radio announces the invasion, calling on citizens to keep the peace, and ordering Czech military to not resist advancing armies. At about 3 a.m., Soviet troops arrest Dubček and other Czech leaders. The invaders distribute propaganda claiming they came to Czechoslovakia to save the people, and Tass, the Soviet news service, reports that Czech government officials had requested help. At about 8 a.m., invading troops and crowd confront each other in two main squares of Prague. Tanks fire at Czech buildings.
- Having been taken to Moscow, Dubček and the others are strong-armed into renouncing reform and sign the “Moscow Protocol” agreeing to the presence of Soviet Bloc army troops in Czechoslovakia.
- Chicago Mayor Charles Daley opens the Democratic Convention in Chicago. There are widespread demonstrations.
- In actions widely believed to be unprovoked, Chicago police beat protestors, sending many to the hospital. This is captured on film.
- Censorship is reintroduced to Czechoslovakia.
- French president Charles de Gaulle orders the cobblestones of the Latin Quarter in Paris paved over.
- Mexico’s CNH is able to stage massive protests, with hundreds of thousands of demonstrators, against police violence.

September

- Feminists protest the Miss America pageant in Atlantic City, New Jersey.
- French student Claude Leveque from L’Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris comes to Mexico City and teaches student groups how to print political posters.
- Protests continue in Mexico City.
- The Mexican army surrounds UNAM campus and seizes students and faculty, holding them at gunpoint while the school is searched.
- Mexican police invade the Polytechnic University in Mexico City. Students fight back until the army arrives and fires.

October

- Student activists and others rally in Mexico City's Tlatelolco Square to announce plans for a hunger strike in support of political prisoners. Military troops and police massacre hundreds.
- Olympic Games open in Mexico City on the 12th. Thirty-two African nations boycott to protest the inclusion of South Africa.
- U.S. athletes Tommie Smith and John Carlos perform a black power salute during the playing of the Star-Spangled Banner at the medal ceremony, protesting the treatment of African Americans.
- President Johnson announces a halt to bombing in North Vietnam.

November

- Nixon wins the popular vote with 43.4 percent over Democrat Hubert Humphrey's 42.7 percent in the presidential election. This was the thinnest margin in a presidential election to date.
- San Francisco State University students strike, demanding changes to curriculum offerings. Students shut down the school for six months, and the SFSU creates the first ethnic studies department at a U.S. university.
- The South Vietnamese government agrees to join the Paris peace talks, which had begun in May.

December

- Launch of NASA's Apollo 8 mission, which orbited the moon. As their spacecraft orbited the moon on December 24, Commander Frank Borman and crew members William A. Anders and James A. Lovell worked together to create "Earthrise," the first color photograph of Earth taken by humans in lunar orbit.