



Boom!

Talking About the Sixties: What Happened, How It Shaped Today, Lessons for Tomorrow

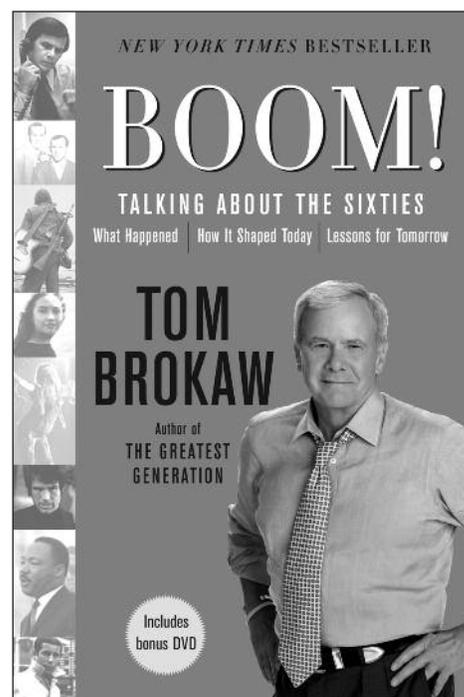
Written by Tom Brokaw

Random House | Trade Paperback | 978-0-8129-7511-6 | 688 pp | \$18.00 (Illustrated)

READING LEVEL: 9th Grade

Also available in Audio CD and Hardcover

Visit the official book site for *Boom!* www.boom-brokaw.com



“The book is not only right in its atmospherics but downright intellectually stimulating.”

—Hartford Courant

• note to teachers •

The 1960s was one of the most turbulent decades in American history. The combination of the sheer numbers of the baby boom generation, unprecedented economic prosperity for the middle class, and life-altering events such as the civil rights movement and the Vietnam War created an era of social activism and experimentation. In the opinion of many historians, the year 1968 was the watershed year of this activism and of the decade. The war's Tet Offensive, the assassinations of Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King, Jr., and the election of Richard Nixon in one of the closest presidential races of the twentieth century still influence American life forty years later.

In an effort to identify the extent and characteristics of this influence, Tom Brokaw, a self-described “child of the fifties,” investigates the effect of the Sixties on the people who lived through the decade and those who came after. Brokaw observed the social upheaval of the 1960s while covering these events for NBC, which he joined in 1966. The result of his efforts is *Boom!*, a social history of the 1960s and analysis of the years that have followed.

• about the book

Like Brokaw's best-selling *The Greatest Generation*, a study of the generation that experienced the Great Depression and World War II, *Boom!* allows students to see profoundly significant events through the eyes of the people who experienced them firsthand. The interviewees include leaders of the various movements of the Sixties, as well as those who played background roles. The book provides insight into the civil rights movement, Vietnam and the anti-war movement, feminism, politics, music, and the drug culture. Along with memories of the Sixties themselves, the book examines the effect of that decade on American life both public and private.

Because *Boom!* is written in an anecdotal style, there is an assumption of basic knowledge of the Sixties on the part of the author. For this reason, teachers should provide historical background before assigning the book to students.

• about the author

TOM BROKAW was born in Webster, South Dakota, in 1940, the son of what he describes as a "working-class family." After graduation from the University of South Dakota in 1962, he married Meredith Auld and began his career in broadcast journalism. After working in local television in Omaha, Nebraska, and Atlanta, Georgia, he joined the NBC news affiliate in Los Angeles, California, in 1966. During his tenure at NBC, Brokaw served as White House correspondent from 1973 to 1976, host of the *Today Show* from 1976 to 1982, and anchor of *NBC Nightly News* from 1982 until his retirement in 2004. Since his retirement from *NBC Nightly News*, Brokaw has participated in the production of numerous documentaries. His book on the World War II generation, *The Greatest Generation*, was published in 1998. In *Boom!* he uses a similar interview format to examine the role of the 1960s in the development of modern America. Brokaw is currently serving as interim moderator of *Meet the Press*.

• teaching ideas

Boom! is suitable for use in any study of 20th Century American history or political science on the high school or college level. However, since Brokaw references the major events and figures of the Sixties, additional historical information may be necessary for younger students.

The book provides an insightful analysis of the events of the Sixties and their influence on both the decade itself and on subsequent years. The connection between the presidential campaigns of 1964, 1968, and 1972 and the current political scene is a major theme of the book and provides a wealth of information for students of current American politics.

Boom! can be a valuable introduction to the historical events of the 1960s. The book is useful as a starting point for further research by students and could be utilized in individual or small-group assignments of specific sections of the book.

While the focus of the book is on history, teachers could also use the book in journalism or writing courses as an example of interview and anecdotal writing.

• comprehension

Introduction: *What Was That All About?*

1. Why do many baby boomers consider theirs to be “the greatest generation” in American history?
2. What relationship does Brokaw see between the presidential election of 1968 and the election of 2008?
3. What dates and events does Brokaw consider the beginning and end of the Sixties?
4. What year does Brokaw see as the “volcanic center of the Sixties”? Why?
5. What movements does Brokaw associate with this decade?
6. What social and cultural changes does Brokaw associate with this time period?
7. What new characteristics of life in post–World War II America contributed to the atmosphere of the Sixties?
8. Why does Brokaw call himself a “generational straddler”?

A Loss of Innocence

1. What “historic changes” does Brokaw attribute to the assassination of John Kennedy?
2. What journalistic assignments during his days in Los Angeles stand out in Brokaw’s memories of the Sixties?
3. What was the “domino theory” concerning Vietnam?
4. Who was Ed Brooke?
5. What events of 1967 does Brokaw see as a foreshadowing of 1968?
6. What were the unexpected and negative results of the civil rights victory to end segregation?
7. What literary emotion does Tom McGuane believe died with the Sixties?
8. What are the major works of the decade listed by Brokaw?
9. Why did Peggy Noonan decide to “get off the bus” of the Sixties?
10. What “affliction of the far left in the Sixties” might now be true of the right?
11. Why does Alan Brinkley consider 1968 a year of “counterrevolution”?

Part One—Part Three

Answer each of the following questions for each person interviewed by Brokaw.

1. What role did he/she play in the Sixties?
2. What major events did he/she witness or participate in?
3. What does he/she see as the defining moment of the decade?
4. How did the events of the Sixties impact his/her life at the time?
5. How do those events impact his/her life now?
6. How does he/she believe the events of the Sixties impacted the country at the time?
7. How does he/she believe those events impact the country now?
8. What, if anything, would he/she change about his/her role in the Sixties?
9. What does he/she see as the positive aspects and results of the decade?
10. What does he/she see as the negative aspects and results of the Sixties?

• comprehension (continued)

Discussion One

Address each of the following questions for each section of the book.

1. On what points did all of the interviewees of this section agree?
2. On what points did the interviewees disagree?
3. What explains these differences?
4. What conclusions can you draw concerning this aspect of the sixties?

Discussion Two

1. Representative John Lewis, a product of the civil rights movement, says that it is “time for people to get in the way again.” What does he mean by this statement? What issues currently demand that Americans “get in the way”?
2. Brokaw says that both candidates for president in 2008 “were shaped...by their personal and political experiences in the Sixties.” Is this assertion true of Barack Obama, who was born in 1961? What other periods or movements may have shaped him and his views?
3. Throughout *Boom!* people draw similarities between America’s experience in Vietnam and its involvement in Iraq. Are these viewpoints valid? What similarities and differences do you see in these two conflicts?
4. What is the legacy of the women’s rights movement of the 1960s for young women coming of age today? Are there negatives as well as positives? Explain.
5. How did the rock music culture of the Sixties influence today’s music? How did it influence American culture in general?
6. What do leaders of the civil rights movement see as the problems of the black community today? What solutions do they recommend?
7. According to Bill Clinton, “The Republicans made a living off the excesses of the Sixties until the 2006 election.” What does he mean by this statement? Do you agree or disagree?
8. Dolores Huerta anticipates a “revolution by election.” Do you think that the dramatic change she desires in America will ever take place?
9. Brokaw ends his study of the Sixties with a quotation from Stewart Brand suggesting that Americans concentrate on “what connects rather than what divides.” What does connect us as a nation? How can your generation emphasize these connections?
10. The book quotes Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis as saying, “The awful ruin of the Sixties was that such overwhelming hopes were raised and then they were so cruelly dashed.” After studying the Sixties, do you agree with her? What hopes were raised? Have they been dashed?

• class activities

1. Brokaw includes a timeline of the Sixties (1963–1974). Assign specific aspects of the decade—civil rights, the cold war, the women’s rights movement, and so forth—to students and ask each to construct a timeline for that concept that precedes and follows the Sixties. Use these timelines to discuss the historical context of that particular Sixties movement.
2. Ask students to do more detailed research on one of the people interviewed in the book.
3. Watch films based on the events of the Sixties—*Platoon*, *Mississippi Burning*, *Ghosts of Mississippi*, and *Separate but Equal*, for instance. Analyze the portrayal of the events and people of the decade as presented in these movies.
4. Show documentaries such as *1968: The Year That Shaped a Generation*, *Eyes On the Prize*, or *Vietnam: A Television History* for additional perspective on the events of the 1960s.
5. Study the popular entertainment of the Sixties (music, art, literature, movies, television). How does the popular culture reflect the historical, social, and political events of the decade?

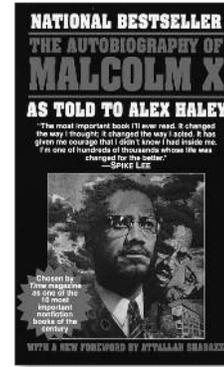
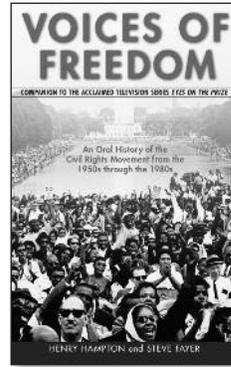
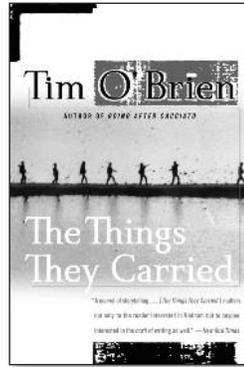
• beyond the book

1. Have students choose to read any of the works mentioned by Brokaw in his book and prepare a presentation to the class.
2. Encourage students to participate in a political campaign (local, state, or national) and report back to the class concerning their experiences.
3. Choose a topic of local interest, and conduct interviews with pertinent citizens to compile a study of that issue and its ramifications.
4. Interview friends and family from the “Sixties generation.” How do their memories and experiences compare to the ones in Brokaw’s book?
5. Research the organizations that developed in the Sixties. How has the focus and work of these organizations changed, or has it remained the same?
6. Choose one specific event of the Sixties for research. How did that event contribute to the image of the Sixties?
7. Research the presidential campaigns of the Sixties and early Seventies. How were these campaigns a reflection of the issues? Did they in any way influence public opinion of the issues?
8. Examine current political campaigns. What influences from the Sixties are evident in these candidates?

• about this guide’s writer

SUSAN CORLEY teaches high school history and government in South Carolina and has experience working with many different levels of students in grades 9–12. She has also taught high school English and served as an adjunct for local colleges.

• for further reading



Long Time Gone: Sixties America Then and Now
by Alexander Bloom

Gates of Eden: American Culture in the Sixties
by Morris Dickstein

A Generation in Motion: Popular Music and Culture in the Sixties
by David Pichaske

The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage
by Todd Gitlin

The Things They Carried
by Tim O'Brien

In Love and War
by Jim Stockdale and Sybil Stockdale

The Sorrow of War: A Novel of North Vietnam
by Bao Ninh

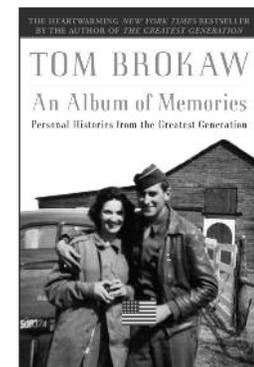
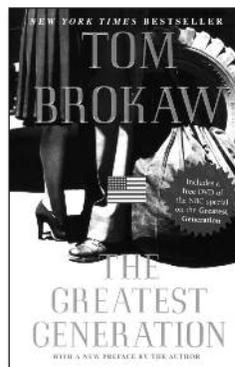
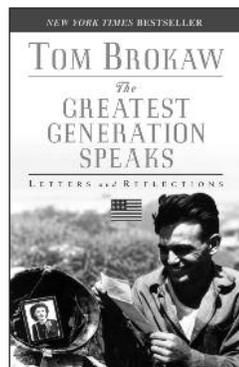
Voices of Freedom
by Henry Hampton and Steve Fayer

Carry Me Home
by Diane McWhorter

Soul on Ice
by Eldridge Cleaver

The Autobiography of Malcolm X
by Alex Haley and Malcolm X

Also by Tom Brokaw:



Boom!: Voices of the Sixties: Personal Reflections on the '60s and Today
Read by Tom Brokaw
Random House Audio | CD | 978-0-7393-4075-2 | \$29.95

The Greatest Generation Speaks: Letters and Reflections
Random House | HC | 978-0-375-50394-8 | 272 pp | \$19.95
Random House | TR | 978-0-8129-7530-7 | 272 pp | \$14.95

The Greatest Generation
Random House | TR | 978-0-8129-7529-1 | 464 pp | \$15.95

An Album of Memories: Personal Histories from the Greatest Generation
Random House | TR | 978-0-375-76041-9 | 400 pp | \$14.95
Random House | HC | 978-0-375-50581-2 | 336 pp | \$29.95

• notes

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Bradbury, Ray. **Fahrenheit 451**
Brooks, Terry. **The Shannara Trilogy**
Butler, William. **The Butterfly Revolution**
Cather, Willa. **My Antonia**
Cisneros, Sandra. **The House on Mango Street**
Clark, William van Tilburg. **The Ox-Bow Incident**
Clarke, Arthur C. **Childhood's End**
Cook, Karin. **What Girls Learn**
Crichton, Michael. **Jurassic Park**
Doctorow, E.L. **Ragtime**
Drew, Alan. **Gardens of Water**
Dunn, Mark. **Ella Minnow Pea**
Ellis, Ella Throp. **Swimming with the Whales**
Ellison, Ralph. **Invisible Man**
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Hansberry, Lorraine. **A Raisin in the Sun**
Hayes, Daniel. **Eye of the Beholder**
Hayes, Daniel. **The Trouble with Lemons**
Homer. Fitzgerald, Robert, trans. **The Odyssey**
Jones, Lloyd. **Mister Pip**
Kafka, Franz. **The Trial**
Khedairi, Betoool. **Absent**
Koontz, Dean. **Odd Thomas**
L'Amour, Louis. **Hondo**
Le Guin, Ursula K. **A Wizard of Earthsea**
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McCarthy, Cormac. **All The Pretty Horses**
McCarthy, Susan Carol. **Lay That Trumpet in Our Hands**
Miéville, China. **Un Lun Dun**
Mitchell, David. **Black Swan Green**
Mori, Kyoko. **Shizuko's Daughter**
Mullen, Thomas. **The Last Town on Earth**
Naylor, Gloria. **Mama Day**
Otsuka, Julie. **When the Emperor Was Divine**
Potok, Chaim. **The Chosen**
Pullman, Philip. **The Amber Spyglass**
Pullman, Philip. **The Golden Compass**
Pullman, Philip. **The Subtle Knife**
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Twain, Mark. **Adventures of Huckleberry Finn**
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Voigt, Cynthia. **Homecoming**
Vonnegut, Kurt. **Cat's Cradle**
Vonnegut, Kurt. **Slaughterhouse-Five**
Wartski, Maureen. **Candle in the Wind**
Wolff, Tobias. **Old School**

Nonfiction:

Armstrong, Karen. **Islam**
Baldwin, James. **Nobody Knows My Name**
Baldwin, James. **The Fire Next Time**
Bible. **The Five Books of Moses**
Bryson, Bill. **Short History of Nearly Everything**
Cary, Lorene. **Black Ice**
Chen, Da. **Colors of the Mountain**
Collins, Billy. **Poetry 180/180 More**
Conway, Jill Ker. **The Road from Coorain**
Farrow, Anne, et. al. **Complicity**
Frank, Anne. **Diary of a Young Girl**
Haley, Alex. **The Autobiography of Malcolm X**
Heath, Chip and Dan Heath. **Made to Stick**
Hickam, Homer. **October Sky**
Hunter, Latoya. **The Diary of Latoya Hunter**
Hunter-Gault, Charlayne. **In My Place**
Katz, Jon. **Geeks**
Kennedy, Randall. **Nigger**
Kidder, Tracy. **Mountains Beyond Mountains**
Lewis, Anthony. **Gideon's Trumpet**
Miller, Jennifer. **Inheriting the Holy Land**
Nafisi, Azar. **Reading Lolita in Tehran**
Nazario, Sonia. **Enrique's Journey**
Opdyke, Irene Gut. **In My Hands**
Pollan, Michael. **The Botany of Desire**
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