

History

Life in the 1960s - Lesson 5 of 6

Memories of the Sixties

What kind of stories can be told about the Sixties?

Mr Wallace



The people who lived it: their evidence

One of the ways we remember the Sixties is through the experiences of people who lived through it. This is only an option while we are close enough to this decade that people still remember it, such as family and friends. They have incredible, valuable lived experiences which can help us learn about the Sixties in a way that is personal. This can come through documents like diaries, photographs, letters, home videos, interviews, and so on. These documents give us valuable information even after their owner has passed away. Their memories help shape how we understand the Sixties, and what stories we tell.



History or Entertainment?

The most significant way that most people **encounter** the Sixties is through **popular culture** that is either *about* the 1960s, or *inspired* by it. One example of this would be the BBC TV series **Call the Midwife**, which is based on the **memoirs** of a real midwife at the time. This comes with its own strengths and weaknesses. It is watched by millions, and has the power to give knowledge of the past to a new audience. For example the show included episodes that dealt with abortion *before* it was legalised in 1967. However, it is true that TV shows are entertainment and not history. The makers are aiming to get as many viewers as possible. This could mean TV shows lack accuracy, and that viewers are being misled about the past.



Pop Culture - Reinforcing Stereotypes?

A key example of the Sixties in pop culture is the **Austin Powers** series of films. These films **spoof** the spy films of the Sixties, and are set at the height of 'Swinging London'. The first film was released in 1997, and included all the stereotypes of the Sixties, such as music and fashion. This reflects what people remember about the Sixties - a 'groovy' time of bright colours, breaking away from traditions.

One consequence of this is that it reinforces what people already remember and value - such as fashion - while ignoring the less memorable aspects of the Sixties. This can lead to the memory of those parts of life fading. This means Pop Culture sometimes **reinforces** the stereotypes that people already have, which leads to a simpler understanding of the past.



Pop Culture

Sixties culture influences us in other ways too. When the magazine *Rolling Stone* listed the '100 greatest albums of all time', 7 of the top 10 were from the Sixties. Four of those were The Beatles. Bands like the Beatles, Rolling Stones and The Who continue to be among the most famous and influential of all time. Modern musicians all over the world are still inspired by them.



National Pride

One of the most iconic and memorable moments of the Sixties was Bobby Moore lifting the World Cup for England in 1966. For football fans, this moment is the peak of sporting success.

Events like this give people the chance to look back and *imagine* a past that is glorious and full of pride. The failures, problems or disappointments of the Sixties are forgotten for one moment of joy. Memories like this are easy to cling onto, especially when faced with disappointment. Focusing on the *good times* (as if the past only had good times) can be a comforting distraction if you need to deal with disappointment in sport, or in other parts of life.



Glossary

Encounter: A meeting with something or someone

Memoir: A historical account based on personal experience

Reinforces: Strengthens

Popular Culture: Modern culture that is taken in through the mass media, such as TV or film, and aimed mainly at young people.

Spoof: A funny imitation of something



Questions

1. What types of documents can be left by people who lived through the Sixties?
2. What are the **strengths** and **weaknesses** of TV shows like Call The Midwife in learning about the Sixties?
3. What does a film like Austin Powers suggest we remember most about the Sixties?

Challenge: Why can popular culture like films and TV lead to a simpler understanding of the past?

4. Why do many people value sporting moments such as the World Cup win of 1966?

