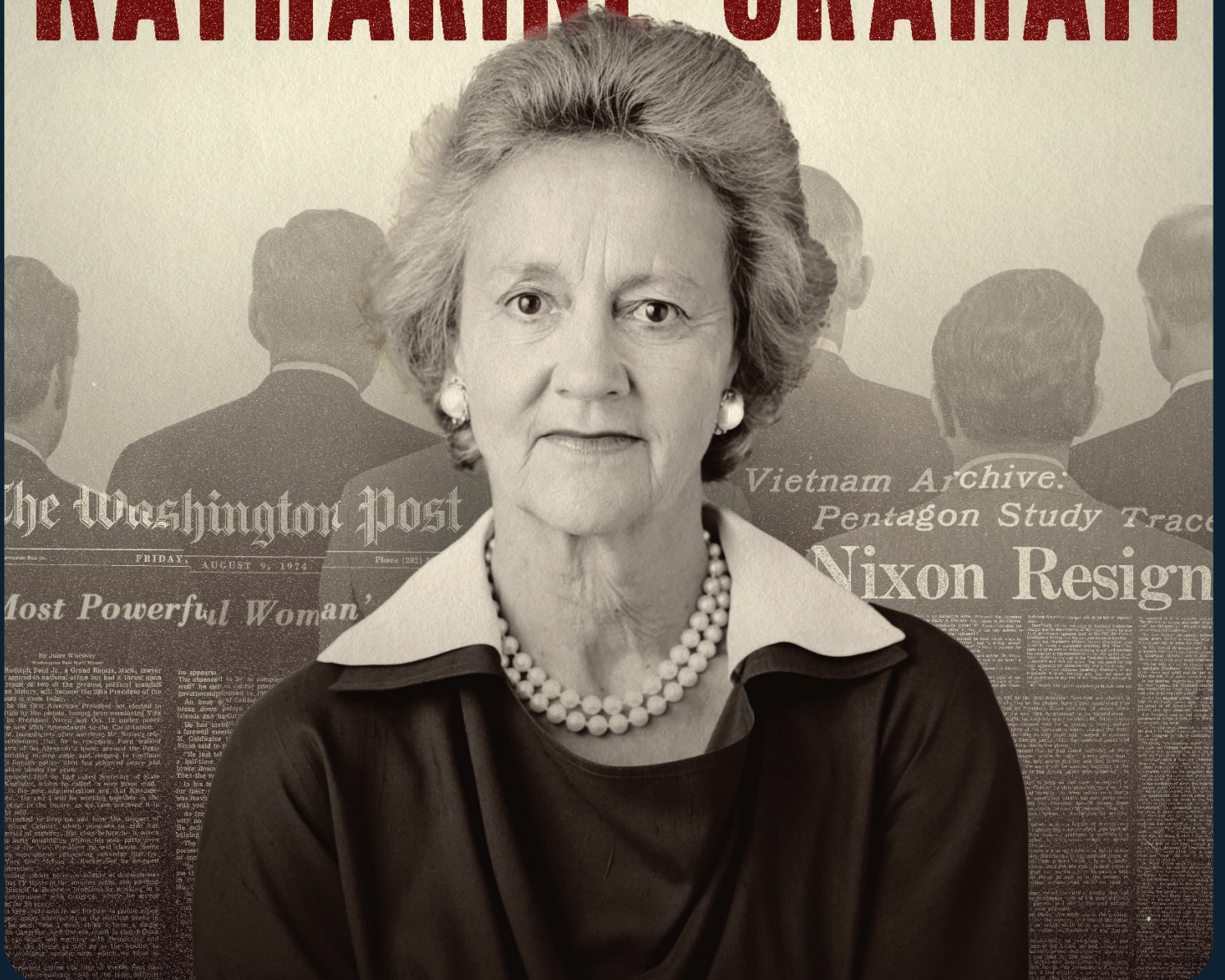


BECOMING KATHARINE GRAHAM



CIVIC COURAGE AND A FREE PRESS
TEACHING BECOMING KATHARINE GRAHAM



OVERVIEW

The First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution protects the freedoms of religion, speech, assembly, and petition and specifically identifies a free press as a cornerstone of constitutional democracy. While these rights are enshrined in law, they are sustained by individuals.

This week-long inquiry lesson explores how individual civic courage protects fundamental democratic freedoms. Using the documentary *Becoming Katharine Graham* as a primary text, students will investigate what it means to stand up for constitutional principles when doing so is risky or unpopular. Civic courage isn't just an abstract concept, but practical actions of defending public rights even when faced with significant personal and professional consequences.

GRADE LEVEL: High School
(Grades 10-12)

DISCIPLINES: Civics/Government,
U.S. History, Psychology

TIME: 5 class periods (50-minutes)
or 2+ block (90-minute) and 1 class
period

DOCUMENTARY LENGTH: 45 mins

STANDARDS

C3 Framework (Social Studies),
Common Core (ELA/History), and
APA Psychology, Media Literacy
(See Appendix for full listing).

MATERIALS NEEDED

- Documentary: *Becoming Katharine Graham* (45-minute version.)
- Access a free link to the film by completing [this form](#).
- All Handouts (Access in Appendix)
- *Becoming Katharine Graham: Discussion and Engagement Guide*

OUTLINE OF LESSON

C3 Framework (Social Studies),
Common Core (ELA/History), and
APA Psychology, Media Literacy
(See Appendix for full listing).

- Day 1: A Free Press in a Constitutional Democracy
- Day 2: Documentary Viewing
- Day 3: Media Literacy Analysis and Discussion
- Day 4: Modern Connections
- Day 5: A Free Press Assessment
- Additional Resources for Students

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- 01 How does the press function as a “watchdog” in a democracy?
- 02 What did *The Washington Post’s* Pentagon Papers (1971) and Watergate coverage (beginning in 1972) reveal about the importance of a free press?
- 03 What challenges does investigative journalism face today compared to the 1970s?

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Students will:

- 01 Explain how a free press protects democracy by holding institutions and the powerful accountable.
- 02 Analyze documentary film as a primary source to develop media literacy skills.
- 03 Investigate Katharine Graham’s leadership as an example of civic courage.
- 04 Construct evidence-based arguments about press freedom and democratic principles.

DAY 1:

A Free Press in a Constitutional Democracy (50 mins)



PEDAGOGICAL NOTE: MEDIA LITERACY INTEGRATION

This archival based documentary draws heavily on Katharine Graham reading her autobiography, *Personal History*, interviews with her family and colleagues, original footage, period headlines, and first-hand testimony.

Just as students practice “reading” an op-ed or historical speech, documentary films have a point of view, bias, and often an argument. This shift from passive watching to active analysis requires students to examine the filmmaker’s perspective, evaluate archival evidence, discover how First Amendment protections function in the real world, and make connections to their lives today.

Educators are encouraged to review the *Becoming Katharine Graham: Stories For Democracy* discussion guide, which provides additional background, discussion questions, historical themes, and contemporary connections to incorporate into the lesson. The guide is available at no cost.

OPENING ACTIVITY

(5 minutes)

QUICK WRITE PROMPT

- What is the press's job in a democracy?
- Should there be any limits on what journalists can publish?



ACTIVITY

(10 minutes)

OPENING

Read aloud to students:

“Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.”

- The First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution



“The press in this country, under a constitutional democracy, is set up to be the critic of the government. And it's very important that they do that with a lot of responsibility.”

- Katharine Graham

DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION

(10 minutes)

Direct students to organize themselves into small groups to discuss the following prompts:

- What specific freedoms does the First Amendment protect?
- According to Katharine Graham, what is the press 'set up' to do?
- Both sources address press freedom, but they were written nearly 200 years apart (1791 vs. 1980s). What has stayed the same? What tensions or questions have emerged?

STUDENT DISCOVERY/CLOSE READ (10 minutes)

Distribute (or have available online) the **Handout One: Explainer. Constitutional Democracy**. Direct students to conduct a close reading and respond to the following:

- How does the press function as an unofficial “fourth branch”?
- How can people govern themselves without news and information?
- Why do constitutional democracies protect independent journalism?

CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND (15 minutes)

Using the sample script provided, explain to students the focus of tomorrow’s class period.

SAMPLE SCRIPT

Tomorrow, we’ll watch the Emmy-nominated documentary Becoming Katharine Graham, a story of unexpected leadership and moral courage. After a personal tragedy, Katharine “Kay” Graham was forced to choose between selling her family’s newspaper or taking control of The Washington Post during an era when women were systematically excluded from corporate leadership.

As one of the first female leaders in corporate America, she navigated intense sexism while defending press freedoms against a government determined to suppress critical reporting. Her story exemplifies “civic courage”, the willingness to act on constitutional principles, even when doing so threatened her personal and professional safety during the Pentagon Papers and the Watergate investigations.

To prepare for the screening, we are going to read a letter from the director’s of the documentary, and go over your homework for tonight.

Distribute (or have available online) **Handout Two: Director’s Letter** and read aloud.

After reading, discuss as a class:

- Why did the filmmakers choose to make this film?
- What makes a documentary a primary text?
- Do the filmmakers have a specific point of view? What evidence suggests this?



HOMEWORK: NOTE CATCHER

Distribute **Handout Three: Note Catcher** and review the document. Explain what a note catcher is and its purpose for this lesson.

- Assign Question #1 for homework.
- According to Graham, what is the press ‘set up’ to do?

DAY 2:

Documentary Viewing (50 mins)

The Washington Post

FLN

Vietnam Archive:

Pentagon Study Trace

CONTENT NOTE: TRAUMA-INFORMED INSTRUCTION

This documentary includes the topic of a family suicide in the Graham family. This tragic event led to Katharine Graham's leadership of *The Washington Post*. Educators should be mindful of this sensitive content. It is recommended to view the film beforehand and provide alternative activities or additional support where necessary. (e.g., Students may opt to read a transcript of the same events or focus on summary documents on the Supreme Court case *New York Times Co. v. United States* if the film's discussion of the Graham family tragedy is too distressing).



QUICK REVIEW (3 minutes)

- Have students revisit **Handout Three: Note Catcher** handout and remind them to take notes throughout their viewing as they will be completing it for homework.
- Invite students to share out their homework responses to Question #1.

FULL DOCUMENTARY VIEWING (45 minutes)

INTRODUCTION: As you watch, it is important to pay attention and document the moments of decision—when Graham had to choose between safety and truth, between pressure and principle. Think about what was at stake each time, not just for her newspaper, but for democracy itself.

Tomorrow we will be looking closely at the role of press freedom in a democracy.

OPTIONAL: Pause briefly at 1-2 key moments. For example:

- Graham's decision moment on Pentagon Papers
- Transition to Watergate coverage

CLOSING (2 minutes)

HOMEWORK: Complete **Note Catcher** for homework and be prepared to share your insights in class tomorrow.

DAY 3:

Media Literacy Analysis and Discussion (50 mins)



OPENING: SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION (10 minutes)

In groups of 3-4, students discuss:

- Did reading the “Director’s Letter” prior to watching the documentary change how you “read” the film?
- What was the most difficult decision Katharine Graham faced? Why?
- What risks did *The Washington Post* take in publishing the Pentagon Papers and the Watergate investigation?
- Choose 2-3 questions to discuss
 - What was the climate for investigative journalism in the 1970s?
 - What did you learn about Nixon’s point of view?
 - How did that environment influence the way Katharine Graham made her decisions?
 - How did the gender expectations of the 1960s/70s make Katharine Graham’s display of civic courage different from that of a man in her position?
 - How would American democracy be different if *The Post* hadn’t published these stories?
- How does the First Amendment text (from Day 1) “back up” or justify the actions Graham took in the 1970s? Where do the sources align?

Explain that each question also reflects some aspect of media and information literacy, ethics, civic literacy, and socio-emotional skills. As a class, decide which term best fits with the question being asked:

Contextualization, Corroboration, Moral Reasoning, Resilience, and Sourcing.

WHOLE CLASS DISCUSSION: THE PRESS AS A CHECK ON POWER

(30 minutes)

PENTAGON PAPERS DISCUSSION

- What information did the government want to hide? Why?
- The Nixon administration argued publication of the Pentagon Papers threatened “national security.” Was this valid?
- What democratic principle was at stake? (Hint: Connect to Pentagon Papers)
- The Supreme Court ruled against “prior restraint” (government censorship before publication). Why is this principle important in a democracy?

WATERGATE DISCUSSION

- What role did the press play that other branches of government couldn't or wouldn't?
- Katharine Graham faced pressure from the White House, advertisers, and even other journalists to not continue this investigation. Why did she persist?
- How does investigative journalism function as a check on executive power?
- What happened because the press kept investigating the Watergate burglary?

CONNECTING BOTH EVENTS

- How did these two decisions, in particular, demonstrate the press as “democracy's watchdog”?
- What would have happened to President Nixon without a free, independent press willing to challenge the president?

CLOSING: PREP FOR CIVIL DIALOGUE (10 minutes)

1. Read this Katharine Graham quote aloud:

“We live in a dirty and dangerous world. There are some things the general public does not need to know, and shouldn't. I believe democracy flourishes when the government can take legitimate steps to keep its secrets and when the press can decide whether to print what it knows.”¹

2. Introduce tomorrow's Civil Dialogue activity

Unlike a debate where you try and win, a Civil Dialogue asks you to understand a specific side then work with your opponent to find common ground. The proposition we will be in dialogue is:

“The press should be able to publish any truthful information, even if the government claims it harms national security.”

3. Assign roles by numbering off 1, 2, 1, 2

#1's (Pro): You will argue that press freedom is absolute; democracy requires total transparency to function.

#2's (Con): You will argue that some secrets protect lives and that a responsible press must consider the consequences of what they print.

4. Homework

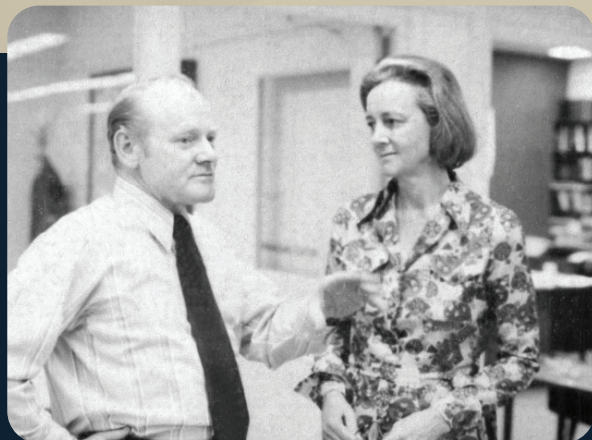
Instruct students to use the **Note Catcher and Explainer: Constitutional Democracy** to write down three bullet points supporting the assigned role. The class will follow this format tomorrow:

- **Pro side presents** (2 minutes)
- **Con side presents** (2 minutes)
- **Consensus Building.** Partners work together to write one sentence that balances national security with the public's right to know. (5 minutes)
- **Share out:** Partners share sentences with the whole class. (5 minutes)

¹ REMARKS BY KATHARINE GRAHAM CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD THE WASHINGTON POST COMPANY | CIA FOIA (foia.cia.gov)

DAY 5:

Modern Connections (40 mins)



PART I: CIVIL DIALOGUE ACTIVITY (20 minutes)

Students get into their assigned 1-2 pairings. The teacher acts as timekeeper for the following:

- (2 minutes): Side #1 (Pro) presents. (Side #2 listens/takes notes)
- (2 minutes): Side #2 (Con) presents. (Side #1 listens/takes notes)
- (1 minute): Open discussion—ask questions of each other.
- (5 minutes): Consensus Building. Partners put aside assigned roles to write one sentence that balances national security with the public's right to know.
- (5 minutes) Pairs share "consensus" sentences.

PART II: CURRENT SCENARIOS (20 minutes)

TRANSITION: "Now that the class has attempted to balance security and freedom based on Graham's era, let's apply those 'consensus' skills to current issues."

- Assign each group one scenario or choose one at a time for small groups to discuss.
- Distribute copies of **Handout Four: Modern Free Press Scenarios** and place in bold
- Group Work:
 - Read the scenario
 - Apply the consensus sentence from the Civil Dialogue exercise to this modern problem.
 - Does it work? Or do current issues in the media make your balance impossible?"
 - Then, read and discuss each Graham Question
 - Share out

DAY 5:

A Free Press Assessment



Introduce the assessment for this lesson. Students will choose either Option A or Option B and begin working on it in class. A first full draft of the essay will be due at the start of tomorrow's class. Remind students to use terms listed on **Handout Five: Key Terms for *Becoming Katharine Graham***.

By the end of class today, you should have:

- Selected your option and clarified any questions
- Made meaningful progress (draft outline, sources gathered)

OPTION A: ANALYTICAL ESSAY (2-3 pages)

Prompt: Is a free press essential to constitutional democracy?

Argue whether the “watchdog” role of the press is a necessary safeguard or a dangerous liability in a modern constitutional republic, using Katharine Graham as a case study.

Requirements:

- Definition of press freedom and press responsibility
- Analysis of Graham’s decision-making process and connection to civic courage
- Connection to constitutional democracy principles
- Modern example with analysis
- Recommendations for balancing freedom and responsibility

OPTION B: POSITION PAPER WITH MODERN APPLICATION (2-3 pages)

Prompt: What responsibilities come with press freedom in a constitutional democracy?

Define what a free but responsible press looks like by connecting Katharine Graham’s leadership to a contemporary press freedom issue.

Requirements:

- Definition of press freedom and press responsibility
- Analysis of Graham’s decision-making process and connection to civic courage
- Connection to constitutional democracy principles
- Modern example with analysis
- Recommendations for balancing freedom and responsibility

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR STUDENTS

BOOKS

- Graham, Katharine. *Personal History*. Knopf, 1997.
- Woodward, Bob, and Carl Bernstein. *All the President's Men*. Simon & Schuster, 1974.

ARCHIVES

- [Katharine Graham and Philip L. Graham Papers](#), Library of Congress
- [Publishing the Pentagon Papers](#), The New York Historical

RECENT ARTICLES

- Blog post: [The reluctant warrior: What Katharine Graham teaches us about democracy under stress](#)
- [The remarkable life of Katharine Graham | Bill Gates](#)

INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISM ORGANIZATIONS TO EXPLORE

- [International Consortium of Investigative Journalists](#): (ICIJ) is a global network of more than 190 investigative journalists. Was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Public Service in 2017.
- [ProPublica](#): *ProPublica* is a nonprofit investigative news site and in 2010 was the first online publication to win a Pulitzer Prize; it has earned two more since.
- [The Center For Investigative Reporting](#) (CIR) — Founded 40 years ago, CIR is a nonprofit partnering with other outlets. It collaborates with PRX Radio to produce [Reveal](#), the investigative radio program and podcast.
- [The Center for Public Integrity](#) (CPI): CPI investigates money in politics, national security, health care reform, business and the environment.

APPENDIX: STANDARDS

CIVICS/U.S. HISTORY

Based on the College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards.

D2.Civ.5.9-12: Evaluate the logical and ethical rigor of claims that protections of individual rights interpreted by courts and implemented by legislatures have increased over time. (Connect to the First Amendment and Supreme Court rulings on the Pentagon Papers).

D2.Civ.8.9-12: Evaluate social and political systems in different contexts, times, and places, that promote civic virtues and enact democratic principles. (Relevant to the study of Constitutional Democracy and Graham’s “Civic Courage”).

D2.Civ.10.9-12: Analyze the impact and the appropriate roles of personal interests and perspectives on the application of civic virtues, democratic principles, constitutional provisions, and law. (Connect to Graham’s decision-making process).

D2.His.1.9-12: Evaluate how historical events and developments were shaped by unique circumstances of time and place as well as broader historical contexts. (Connect to the 1970s political landscape, Vietnam, and Watergate).

D2.His.16.9-12: Integrate evidence from multiple relevant historical sources and interpretations into a reasoned argument about the past. (Connect to the Final Assessment and analysis of the documentary as text).

LITERACY IN HISTORY/SOCIAL STUDIES

Based on Common Core State Standards (CCSS).

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.1: Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources. (Connect to the Note Catcher and Day 3 analysis).

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.7: Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, as well as in words) in order to address a question or solve a problem. Connect to using the documentary as a “primary text”).

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.11-12.1: Write arguments focused on discipline-specific content. (Connect to the Day 5 Final Assessment).

PSYCHOLOGY

Based on the APA National Standards for High School Psychology Curricula.

Standard Area: Individual Variations (Personality & Resilience)

- Discuss the role of resilience in response to adversity.

Standard Area: Social Psychology

- Describe the power of the situation and how it influences individual behavior.

Standard Area: Multiculturalism and Gender

- Explain how social and cultural categories (e.g., gender) influence self-concept and relations with others.

MEDIA LITERACY

Based on the National Association for Media Literacy Education (NAMLE) Core Principles.

- **Principle 1.1:** Requires active inquiry and critical thinking about the messages we receive and create.
- **Principle 2.1:** Expands the concept of text to include all forms of media.
- **Principle 3.1:** Builds skills that help people understand the role of media in society.

HANDOUT ONE

Explainer - Constitutional Democracy

This explainer provides foundational knowledge about constitutional democracy that will help you analyze the film and participate in discussions.

Constitutional democracy is a system of government where political power comes from the people but is limited by law to protect individual rights and prevent abuse of authority. Its core, this system is built on two fundamental principles:

- The people are the ultimate source of governmental authority;
- There are clear, legally-defined limits on how that authority can be exercised.

CORE PRINCIPLES

Popular Sovereignty:

- Political power originates from the people's consent
- Citizens choose their representatives through free and fair elections
- Majority rule is balanced with minority rights protection

Limited Government:

- Power is constrained by constitutional frameworks
- Authority is divided among separate branches of government
- No single institution can become too powerful

HOW CONSTITUTIONAL DEMOCRACY WORKS

Separation of Powers:

- Legislative Branch: Makes laws
- Executive Branch: Enforces laws
- Judicial Branch: Interprets laws and ensures constitutional compliance

Checks and Balances: Each branch can limit the others

- Courts can declare laws unconstitutional
- Legislature can override executive vetoes
- Executive can veto legislative proposals

FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS AND VALUES

Constitutional democracies protect:

- Life, liberty, and property
- Freedom of expression
- Equal treatment under the law
- Access to education and economic opportunity

VARIATIONS IN STRUCTURE

Distributions of Power:

- Unitary: Centralized government delegates power to local units
- Federal: Power shared between national and regional governments
- Confederation: Loose associations of independent states

Leadership Models:

- Parliamentary: Executive chosen from legislature
- Presidential: Separate executive with fixed terms

JUSTICE AND EQUALITY

Constitutional democracy promotes:

- Distributive Justice: Fair allocation of societal benefits
- Corrective Justice: Appropriate responses to wrongdoing
- Procedural Justice: Fair decision-making processes

Equality includes:

- Equal voting rights
- Equal protection under the law
- Equal access to economic and social opportunities

THE ROLE OF CITIZENS

- Civic knowledge and critical thinking
- Understanding of governmental processes
- Commitment to democratic principles
- Active engagement in political life

Constitutional democracy is dynamic. It requires continuous citizen engagement, a willingness to address challenges, a commitment to protecting rights, and adaptability to changing needs.

The system's strength lies in its mechanisms for peaceful change, ongoing dialogue, and collective problem-solving.

HANDOUT TWO

Director's Letter

Our goal for *Becoming Katharine Graham* was to uplift “Kay” Graham’s story out of the shadows. As the owner/publisher of *The Washington Post* during the Pentagon Papers and Watergate, we wondered why she was not at the center of the many Nixon stories that have been told over the years. In the process of making this documentary, what we learned was that she was always overshadowed by men - by her husband, by many of the men who worked for her, and by the President himself. Because of this, she has been given far less credit than she deserves. When the movie *All the President's Men* premiered in 1976, Kay was nowhere to be seen.

Recognizing that Kay’s accomplishments occurred half a century ago, we wanted to bring her story back to life, revealing new details for older generations who remember her and introducing this brave change-maker to young people who can draw inspiration from her commitment to storytelling. So, we set out to tell a coming-of-age story, tracking Kay’s unconventional childhood, and her transformation from a self-described “doormat housewife” into the most powerful woman in America.

To humanize Kay, we decided early on that we did not want to use a narrator. Our challenge, then, was to source actual recordings of Kay speaking, enough so that she could tell her story in her own words. Led by our experienced producer Jill Cowan, we combed through hundreds of archives and found dozens of long-forgotten recordings, most of which had to be digitized for the very first time.

Early in production, we uncovered something extraordinary - throughout Watergate, Kay constantly heard rumors about White House retaliation toward *The Washington Post* and directed at her. Our team listened to hundreds of hours of tapes from President Nixon’s secret recordings and we found numerous attacks and threats against Kay. It was vital that we graphically illustrate these White House conversations so that viewers would clearly understand the cruel planning that went on behind Kay’s back, from the highest office in the land.

The film reveals how Kay’s story was as much about the changing role of women in the 70’s as it was about the golden age of journalism. Having now screened the film for a handful of journalists and people who knew Kay best, we are confident that we met our challenge – to make a 50-year-old story relevant, accurate and intriguing for a wide audience, and to give her the credit she so deserves for changing the course of history.

- **Directors Teddy Kunhardt, George Kunhardt**

HANDOUT THREE

Note Catcher

This Note Catcher is a way to actively engage with the documentary while watching it. Instead of passively viewing, you'll record specific observations, examples, and evidence that connect to key concepts.

NAME: _____

1. HOMEWORK: BEFORE VIEWING

What do I know about press freedoms?

Based on yesterday's 'Constitutional Democracy' reading, what is one reason the press is called the 'fourth branch' of government

Review: Katharine Graham

- First female publisher of major American newspaper (*Washington Post*)
- Unexpectedly took over after husband's death
- Faced enormous pressure: government threats, business risks, personal doubts
- Made consequential decisions to uphold the First Amendment that shaped American democracy

2. VIEWING AND POST-VIEWING NOTES

Who was Katharine Graham and what role did she play in defending the First Amendment?

3. PENTAGON PAPERS 1971

What was at stake in publishing the Pentagon Papers?

What risks did she face?

What was Katharine Graham's key decision? What risks did she face?

Review: Pentagon Papers (1971):

- Secret government study showing U.S. officials knew Vietnam War was unwinnable
- Daniel Ellsberg leaked to newspapers
- *New York Times* and *The Post* published them
- Nixon administration sought to block publication

4. WATERGATE INVESTIGATION (1972-1974)

What was Watergate?

What were Graham's key decision in regards to Watergate?

Review: Watergate (1972-1974):

- Break-in at Democratic National Committee headquarters
- Cover-up reached the White House
- *Washington Post* reporters Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein investigated
- Led to President Nixon's resignation

What risks did she face?

What do you think would have happened if the press had not investigated Watergate?

4. CONSTITUTIONAL DEMOCRACY PRINCIPLES I SAW IN ACTION IN THE DOCUMENTARY: WHAT, WHERE, WHEN, WHY?

Look back at your Constitutional Democracy Explainer for a refresher and try to connect Katharine Graham's actions as you reflect on these terms.

Where did I see the practice of press freedom?

Where were checks and balances exercised?

5. POST-VIEWING REFLECTIONS

'Reading' A Film

How do the filmmakers use interviews or music to show Graham's 'personal doubts' versus her 'civic courage'? (Remember civic courage is the choice to act for the public good despite great personal or professional risk.)

Civic Courage

In your opinion, what was the most courageous example of civic courage you learned about in this lesson?

How did being one of the only women in a room full of powerful men affect Graham's decision-making or the pressure she felt?

Final Reflection

Does this story change my understanding of a constitutional democracy? How?

HANDOUT FOUR

Modern Free Press Scenarios

SCENARIO #1: SURVEILLANCE AND SECURITY (A “Modern” Pentagon Papers)

A whistleblower leaks top-secret documents to a major news outlet proving the government uses a “secret algorithm” to monitor students’ private social media messages. The government orders you not to publish, claiming the leak will help “bad actors” bypass national security.

The “Graham” Question:

- Do you publish the story to protect the people’s right to know, or stay silent to protect national security?

SCENARIO #2: THE “DEEP FAKE” DILEMMA (Focus on Press Responsibility)

An anonymous source sends a “deepfake” video of a high-ranking government official taking a bribe. It looks 99% real. Publishing first will bring millions of views, but if it is fake, it will destroy the official’s career and the public’s trust in journalism.

The “Graham” Question:

- Does “civic courage” mean being the first to post the truth, or having the courage to wait and verify while others move ahead?

SCENARIO #3: THE “PRESS ACCESS” DILEMMA (Focus on the Watchdog Role)

A governor is upset with a reporter’s critical coverage of their administration. It bans your news outlet from all future press conferences and orders government employees to ignore your questions.

The “Graham” Question:

- How does this “blacklisting” threaten the First Amendment?
- Should your “rival” news organizations stand up for you, or stay silent to keep their own access?

SCENARIO #4: CORPORATE PRESSURES (Focus on Business Pressure)

A journalist discovers their newspaper’s biggest advertiser is selling user data to foreign governments. The company threatens to pull all funding and bankrupt the paper if the story is published.

The “Graham” Question:

- Katharine Graham faced similar financial threats. Can a free press truly exist if it can be “bankrupted” by the very people it is supposed to investigate?

HANDOUT FIVE

Key Terms for *Becoming Katharine Graham*

These film-specific terms and definitions are the language of democratic accountability. This is not a comprehensive list, but provides a way for audiences to navigate the intersections of journalism, government power, and public information.

CONSTITUTIONAL AND LEGAL TERMS²

Executive Privilege: The president's right to withhold certain information from Congress, courts, or the press.

First Amendment: Constitutional protection of freedom of speech and press.

Grand Jury: A group of citizens who determine whether there's enough evidence to bring criminal charges.

Indictment: A formal charge or accusation of a serious crime.

Impeachment: The process of charging a government official with wrongdoing; does not mean removal from office.

Obstruction of Justice: Actions taken to interfere with legal investigations or court proceedings.

Subpoena: A legal order requiring someone to testify or produce documents.

NATIONAL SECURITY AND CLASSIFIED INFORMATION³

Classified documents: Government information restricted from public access for national security reasons, and categorized by levels (Confidential, Secret, Top Secret).

Cover-up: Deliberate concealment of illegal or unethical activities.

Espionage: The act of obtaining secret or confidential information without permission.

Whistleblower: A person who exposes information about illegal or unethical activities within an organization.

JOURNALISM AND PRESS FREEDOM⁴

Accountability Journalism: Reporting that holds powerful institutions and individuals responsible for their actions.

Editor: Journalists who review, revise, and decide what stories get published.

Fourth Estate: The press's role as an unofficial fourth branch of government, serving as a watchdog on the other three branches of government.

Investigative journalism: In-depth reporting that uncovers hidden information, often

Prior Restraint: Government censorship of information before publication.

Public Interest: Information that benefits society's understanding of government actions and policies.

Public Service Journalism: Reporting that serves the public interest rather than commercial interests.

Publisher: The person or entity responsible for the final decision on what gets published.

Source: A person who provides information to journalists, either on or off the record.

² [law.cornell.edu](http://law.cornell.edu/rcfp.org), rcfp.org, freedomforum.org

³ archives.gov, fas.org, nsarchive.gwu.edu, eff.org

⁴ *The American Press (AP) Style Guide*, spj.org, americanpressinstitute.org, poynter.org

BECOMING KATHARINE GRAHAM



LIFESTORIES.ORG



Life Stories
Individual Lives. Collective Impact.