

AP US Government and Politics: Summer Reading Assignment

Your assignment is to read Hardball: How Politics Is Played By One Who Knows The Game by Chris Mathews. You must purchase the book on your own or borrow it from your library. You can order a used copy from Amazon very cheaply.

This book is an easy, and fun read. Mathews writes well and illustrates his points with numerous “war stories” from congressional and presidential politics. The book is broken into relatively short chapters each of which has its own theme. You will be required to answer a series of questions regarding the ideas discussed in the book. Most of the topics covered in the book correspond with many of the major themes that we will discuss throughout the year in this course!

Do not wait until the last minute to do the assignment. While the book is short and should be relatively enjoyable to read, the answers to the questions will take some time. I highly recommend that you read a chapter, do the questions and then move on to the next chapter.

Requirements:

You must answer all 14 questions. There is no length requirement. Note, however, that some questions will require a more detailed and substantive answer; therefore the number of paragraphs in your answers will vary. You may hand write or type your answers.

I will collect them on the first day of class. You will receive 5 pts off for every day that the assignment is late. The assignment is equivalent to a test grade.

Questions:

Chapter 1: What is retail politics? Why is it important? What is the significance of the congressional cloakroom to engaging in retail politics? What skills and characteristics does a politician need to be successful in retail politics? How did it help make Johnson a master retail politician? Discuss the limitations of retail politics. Is it still as important today as it was in the 1950s?

Chapter 2: What does the phrase “all politics is local” mean? Give examples from the chapter. Give at least one example from current events. How does this principle impact the way democracy functions and laws are crafted? How does it impact the loyalty of party members to the position of the party on policy issues? Does the phrase always refer to “local” geographical locations?

Chapter 3: Discuss, analyze and explain the basic principle examined in this chapter. How did Carter and Perot use this principle? Is there a downside to employing this strategy?

Chapter 4: Based on this chapter, discuss why it is so unusual for politicians to switch political parties. What risks does a politician run by switching positions on an important issue? Give examples. Explain the following quote: “The ideological difference between the parties has narrowed yet party loyalty is even more important.” Explain the reference to a Christmas card and how it relates to politics.

Chapter 5: Identify, explain and analyze the thesis of this chapter. Compare and contrast the ways in which Reagan and Carter employed the “keep your enemies in front of you” concept. Are there disadvantages to employing this principle?

Chapter 6: Identify, explain and analyze the basic thesis of this chapter. Relate the ideas in the chapter to what you have learned so far about political parties and the relationship between the President and members of Congress. What should a politician do instead of getting even?

Chapter 7: Identify, explain and analyze the basic thesis of this chapter. What is the risk of not responding quickly to political attacks? Give examples from the book. Discuss and explain each of the defenses to attacks identified by Matthews.

Chapter 8: Identify, discuss and explain each of the different ways in which silence can be used for political gain and provide examples. Are there potential risks to this strategy?

Chapter 9: Explain and analyze the basic principle discussed in this chapter and give examples from the text. What aspects of human nature does it exploit? Are there situations in which this strategy can’t be used? Give an example of how this principle has or could be used in your own life.

Chapter 10: Explain the “hang a lantern on your problem” principle. Why does it work? Cite two examples from the text. Are there situations in which it would not work? Are there situations in your own life where this principle worked or could have worked??

Chapter 11: What are the two steps to effective spin? How did Nixon employ these two steps and put his Democratic and Republican critics on the defensive in his famous “Checkers” speech? Is spin ethical? Can spin backfire?

Chapter 12: Discuss why politicians can’t trust the press? Do politicians need the press? How should a politician go about feeding the press without it backfiring? What do the principles in this chapter say about freedom of the press in America?

Chapter 13: Summarize and give examples of 3 of the following principles 1. Play your strengths 2. Low-balling 3. Sandbagging 4. Passing the Buck 5. Inchon Landing

Chapter 14: Explain and analyze the basic political lesson Mathews highlights in this chapter. Are there limits to how or how often this principle can be used?

Feel free to email me if you have any questions at shamusmruk@salemk12.org

AP US Government and Politics: Current Events Journal

AP Government is more directly related to current events than any course you will take in high school. Everything that we will study relates to how politics and government works in modern America. Accordingly, knowledge of current political and governmental affairs will significantly help you to understand the things we study, and will, in fact, be necessary to succeed in the course. If you know what is going on in the country with respect to politics and government, you will do better in the course.

You should follow major current events by doing one or more of the following on at least a weekly basis:

- Read either the print or online version of a major newspaper.
- Watch a national or international news broadcast (CNN, MSNBC, FOX News, PBS, ABC, CBS, NBC, BBC) – (not a local news broadcast).
- Read major newsmagazines or political journals (Time, Newsweek, US News and World Report, The Economist, The Atlantic, The New Yorker).
- Read articles from an online political journalism website such as Politico (politico.com) or Five-Thirty-Eight (fivethirtyeight.com)
- Watch daily or weekly news/current affairs programming (Hardball, Meet the Press, Face the Nation, This Week, etc.)

During the course of the summer (beginning the week of July 4th and ending the week of August 29th), keep a current events journal.

At the end of each week, type minimum two paragraphs (complete sentences; under 500 words) about a major event or events in American government and/or politics from the past week.

In the first paragraph, you should describe the event or events, and, in the second paragraph, you should analyze the significance of it/them and state any opinions, thoughts, or analysis that you might have about it/them. You must intelligently discuss one particularly important issue each week.

Your journal should deal with issues that are of significant importance to American politics and government. Such things include what the president is up to, what Congress is debating or legislation that they are passing, constitutional issues or major federal court decisions concerning them, debates over political issues in America, international crises or foreign policy issues that somehow affect the US or that our government must deal with, etc.

With each week's entry, you must cite whatever new sources you used in your research.