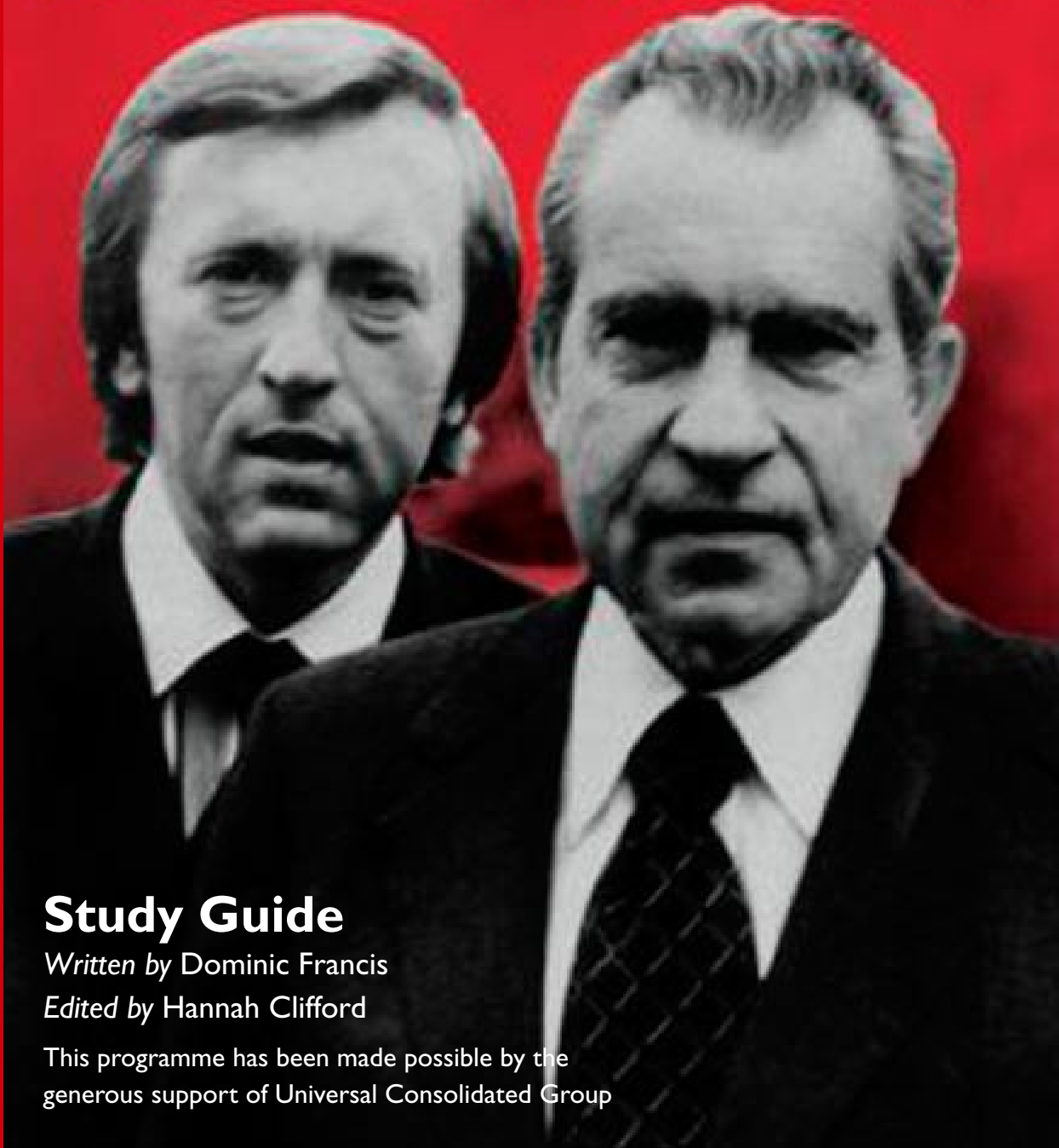


**DOMMAR**®

# FROST NIXON

BY PETER MORGAN



## **Study Guide**

*Written by Dominic Francis*

*Edited by Hannah Clifford*

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# Contents

- Section 1**      **Cast and Creative Team**
- Section 2**      **An introduction to Peter Morgan's new play**  
History man  
Politics and the media
- Section 3**      **Background to FROST/NIXON**  
Frost and Nixon in the ring  
Profiles of David Frost and Richard Nixon  
Watergate  
Who's who?  
A chronology of events
- Section 4**      **FROST/NIXON in performance**  
Practical and written exercises based on an extract from the play  
Questions on the production and further practical work  
An interview with Hamish Pirie, Assistant Director for FROST/NIXON
- Section 5**      **Ideas for further study**  
Reading and research  
Bibliography  
Endnotes

## Cast and Creative Team

### Cast

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<b>Frank Langella</b>	<b>Richard Nixon</b> , 37th President of the United States, the first to resign from office following the Watergate scandal. Three years later, in 1977, he lives in seclusion in California hoping to rehabilitate his career.
<b>Elliot Cowan</b>	<b>Jim Reston</b> , American university lecturer and staunch critic of Nixon. He joins David Frost's team as a researcher and acts as a narrator to events.
<b>Michael Sheen</b>	<b>David Frost</b> , British talk-show host with programmes on three continents and a playboy reputation. Having lost his show in America he hopes an exclusive interview with Nixon will launch him back into the limelight.
<b>Corey Johnson</b>	<b>Jack Brennan</b> , Nixon's Chief of Staff and loyal supporter, a tough negotiator in setting up the interview with Frost.
<b>Kate Roscoe</b>	<b>Evonne Goolagong</b> , tennis player, the first Aboriginal Australian to win Wimbledon and a guest on Frost's show.
<b>Rufus Wright</b>	<b>John Birt</b> , Head of Current Affairs at LWT and Frost's producer.
<b>Amerjit Deu</b>	<b>Manolo Sanchez</b> , Nixon's manservant.
<b>Kerry Shale</b>	<b>Swiftly Lazar</b> , legendary Hollywood agent representing Nixon, brokers the deal with Frost securing an unprecedented \$600,000 for the interview.
<b>Lydia Leonard</b>	<b>Caroline Cushing</b> , Frost's girlfriend.
<b>Vincent Marzello</b>	<b>Bob Zelnick</b> , veteran American reporter, well known in the Washington scene and a key member of Frost's team.

### Creative Team

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#### **Michael Grandage, Director**

Artistic Director of the Donmar Warehouse. Recent work includes, for the Donmar: *The Cut*, *The Wild Duck*, *Grand Hotel – The Musical*, *After Miss Julie* and *Caligula*; for the West End: *Evita* and *Guys and Dolls*; as Artistic Director of the Sheffield Theatres: *Don Carlos*, *Suddenly Last Summer* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

#### **Christopher Oram, Designer**

Recent work includes, for the Donmar: *Grand Hotel – The Musical*, *Henry IV*, *World Music* and *Caligula*; other theatre: *Evita* (Adelphi), *Guys and Dolls* (Piccadilly),

*Macbeth, The Jew of Malta and The Embalmer* (Almeida), *Stuff Happens, Marriage Play/Finding the Sun* and *Summerfolk* (NT).

**Neil Austin, Lighting Designer**

Recent work includes, for the Donmar: *The Wild Duck, The Cosmonaut's Last Message to the Woman He Once Loved in the Former Soviet Union, After Miss Julie* and *Caligula*; other theatre: *Henry IV Parts 1 & 2, A Prayer for Owen Meany* and *Further than the Furthest Thing* (NT), *Much Ado About Nothing* and *Romeo and Juliet* (RSC).

**Adam Cork, Composer and Sound Designer**

Recent work includes, for the Donmar: *Caligula, Henry IV, The Wild Duck* and *The Cut*; other theatre: *Don Carlos* (Gielgud), *Suddenly Last Summer* (Albery), *On the Third Day* (New Ambassadors), *Speaking Like Magpies* and *The Tempest* (RSC), *Five Gold Rings* and *The Late Henry Moss* (Almeida).



## An introduction to Peter Morgan's new play

### History man

'Having met most of the participants and interviewed them at length, I'm satisfied no one will ever agree on a single, "true" version of what happened in the Frost/Nixon interviews – thirty years on we are left with many truths or fictions depending on your point of view. As an author, perhaps inevitably, that appeals to me, to think of history as a creation, or several creations, and in the spirit of it all I have, on occasion, been unable to resist using my imagination...'<sup>1</sup>

As part of the research for his play FROST/NIXON, writer Peter Morgan travelled to Washington to immerse himself in the culture of the city and observe the American political machine at close quarters, employing a politics tutor whom he would quiz on the differences between senators and congressmen. He also met and interviewed most of the people who appear in the play, including David Frost, John Birt and several of Richard Nixon's former aides.

'Everyone I spoke to told the story their way. Even people in the room tell different versions. There's no one truth about what happened in those interviews, so I feel very relaxed about bringing my imagination to the piece. God knows everyone else has.'<sup>2</sup>

The 43-year-old writer dislikes the term 'docudrama' insisting that the play is 'a drama not a documentary'<sup>3</sup>. Best known for his television work, including 2003's *The Deal*, a powerful exploration of the leadership pact between Tony Blair (played by Michael Sheen) and Gordon Brown, Morgan's dramas have the thread of history running through them. He first had the idea for FROST/NIXON back in 1992 having watched a television biography of the broadcaster.

'I was always driven by this image I had of these two men,' recalls Morgan. 'The glamorous Frost, 54,000 feet up in the air, going backwards and forwards over the Atlantic on Concorde. And Nixon, a man really living in a cave. A man who found life very hard.'<sup>4</sup>

He first met with Frost to discuss the play two years ago. 'He was friendly, willing to be co-operative, yet, not surprisingly, slightly wary,' says Morgan, who thinks the broadcaster initially regarded him as a hatchet man.<sup>5</sup> Frost commented later, 'I was shown a first draft of the script on the condition that I had no editorial control, a bit like the agreement we extracted from Nixon.'<sup>6</sup> Morgan was surprised to discover a vulnerable side to the showman. 'I knew Nixon was complicated,' he says. 'But Frost, too, is far more complicated than his television image of "marvellous to see you" or "super". He's insecure and wants to please. A man who gets hurt, too.'<sup>7</sup>

So why when he's spent so long writing for television did he produce FROST/NIXON for the stage?

'I just always saw it as a play, and I didn't think that differently about doing a play from doing something for the screen. I'm a naturalistic writer who is character-

driven. My master is the story, and I thought this was a great story about the contrasts between two fascinating people.’<sup>8</sup>

## *Frost bite*

‘What makes for a good interview? First of all doing your homework. The second thing, which is incredibly obvious, is to listen. When I first went to America to do the talk show people reviewed me and said, “He really listens”. And the third thing is just striking up a relationship with the guest, particularly in a longer interview. Now that relationship may not be mutual respect, it may be mutual awareness or whatever, but the more there’s eye contact with the person you’re talking to the better.’<sup>9</sup>

## **Politics and the media**

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Every decade has its defining TV moment: the Kennedy assassination in the 1960s, Nixon’s resignation in the 70s. David Frost’s interviews with the disgraced former President, watched by millions, were one such landmark. The determination of both men to triumph over the other made for thrilling small-screen drama.

Unlike previous political scandals the public could follow Watergate in every detail, through the Oval Office tape recordings and on TV. The televised Senate Watergate Committee hearings gripped viewers and drove the soaps off air in the US. ‘Like everyone else, I had watched the Watergate drama play out in my living room,’ recalls academic Jim Reston. The way in which politics has been shaped by television is central to the play and director Michael Grandage believes the Frost/Nixon interviews force us to reflect on broadcasting’s shifting boundaries over the past thirty years.

‘What’s happened to us and television? There was a period where a colossal amount of people – millions – sat down to watch a serious political interview. What would that be tonight if it happened on television?’<sup>10</sup>

Journalist Andrew Marr agrees: ‘In the world of multi-channel television, broadband and blogs, it is becoming hard to remember just how great the power of television superheroes used to be, back in the days of two or three channels.’<sup>11</sup> Interviewers such as Frost were regarded by some as the people’s champion, crusading on behalf of truth. But, asks Marr, what were the long-term effects on public debate of such gladiatorial encounters?

‘Spin-doctors were brought in to arm politicians against aggressive interviewers with techniques such as the concealed non-answer, the body swerve or dead bat, the mind-numbing repetition of the point, and so forth. Interviewers responded by becoming more aggressive, leading to politicians defending more desperately, and it all became both macho and dull.’<sup>12</sup>

At a time when political apathy appears to be at an all-time high, and voter turnout at an all-time low, actor Frank Langella wonders, 'Whether, in becoming more media friendly, politicians have become less trustworthy, and thus the public feel more alienated from the political process?' <sup>13</sup>



### **Discussion Point**

How has the rise of 'celebrity culture' changed our perception and expectations of public figures? What are your own thoughts about the state of politics today? Do you feel it has any bearing on your life? Who do you trust more to tell you the truth, politicians or journalists?

## *Frost bite*

'It was very difficult to have a very personal feeling about Nixon because he was so impersonal. He closeted himself off from the rest of the world. A sad man who so wanted to be great was a phrase that occurred to me as I left him for the last time in San Clemente.' <sup>14</sup>

## Background to FROST/NIXON

### Frost and Nixon in the ring

The acquisition, exercise and loss of power is a recurring theme in Peter Morgan's work and it was here that he found parallels between Frost and Nixon in the late 1970s.

'In a way, both men were in the wilderness at the time,' actor Michael Sheen explains. 'Nixon was this disgraced, ostracised figure looking to rehabilitate himself. Frost had just lost his network talk show in America and wanted to restore his status.'<sup>15</sup>

'They were both desperate to be in the limelight,' adds Morgan, 'and they both saw the interview as their last chance to assure their posterity. They were both consumed by ambition.'<sup>16</sup>

On the eve of the final interview the two men talk on the phone:

**Frost** Only ONE of us can win. And I shall be your fiercest adversary. I shall come at you with everything I've got.

**Nixon** Good for you. Because the limelight can only shine on ONE of us. And for the other, it'll be the 'wilderness'. With nothing and no one for company, but those voices ringing in our heads.

The stakes could not have been higher. Frost not only paid Nixon \$600,000 for the interview, securing the funds himself, he also agreed to give him a percentage of all subsequent profits. News of the deal met with fierce criticism, particularly from rival journalists such as ABC's Mike Wallace.

'By outbidding them, you've made enemies of the Networks, who are already sounding off about cheque book journalism,' warns producer John Birt. As a result none of them would touch the interviews and Frost was forced to take them to independent channels. 'If the Networks are against you, syndication is always going to be a struggle,' says Birt summarising their predicament. 'No syndication, no advance sales. No advance sales, no commercials. No commercials, no revenue.' Put simply, if Nixon didn't give Frost something that would sell the interviews he wouldn't make any money and would lose his status-raising coup.

Many of his critics, including some initially within his own team, thought Frost incapable of putting Nixon on trial, dubbing him a 'British talk show host. Good with actresses. Not so good with stonewalling Presidents'. Nixon's agent Swifty Lazar reassures the President, 'It's going to be a biiiiig wet kiss. A "valentine". This guy is so grateful to be getting this at all, he'll pitch puff-balls all night and pay half a million dollars for the privilege.' The President's team were confident they had the upper hand. 'Nixon was clearly a very intelligent man, who thought he was Frost's intellectual superior,' says Morgan.<sup>17</sup>

The text is littered throughout with sporting metaphors, referring to Frost and Nixon as 'the two duellists', 'athletes waiting for the gun'. Like boxers in the ring they square up to one another, sparring, lashing out, then retreating back



to separate corners to lick their wounds. During breaks in recording, while the tapes are changed, the adversaries are given pep talks by their respective teams. 'Control the space,' counsels Nixon's Chief of Staff, Colonel Jack Brennan. 'Don't let him in.'

A bank of television screens at the back of the stage shows a live relay of the action below, the camera coming to rest on Nixon's face in the final interview. When Frost delivers the killer blow, revealing a previously unknown tape recording clearly indicating the President's knowledge of the Watergate scandal cover-up, Nixon is caught unawares: '[His] face visibly jolts,' read the stage directions. 'As if from a jab.' The eyes widen, the voice thickens and he licks his lips again and again as though trying to get rid of an unpleasant taste.

'In Spain bullfighters talk of the moment the bull in front of them has lost the fight and by implication, the will to live,' comments Jim Reston observing the 'disorientated' President. 'We were at that moment.'

Despite Brennan's best efforts to save him a fatigued Nixon elects to continue with the interview, Frost commenting to his team, 'He wants me to do this. To finish him off.' The final freeze frame of the President shows a broken man who later refers to Frost as a 'worthy opponent'. Ultimately it was the very skills that Frost's critics initially dismissed, his ability to talk to people, that prevailed over Nixon.

'Whatever it is you have,' comments the President, 'That facility with people. That lightness. That charm. I don't have it. Never have. Can't help it. That's how I was born. Hurt and suspicious. Makes you wonder why I chose a life which hinged on being liked. I'm better suited to a life of thought. Debate. Intellectual discipline. Maybe we got it wrong. Maybe you should have been the politician. And I the rigorous interviewer.'

## **David Frost - *Born to be on the tube***

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Born in Tenterden, Kent on 17 April 1939 Sir David Paradine Frost has been a leading figure in television news and entertainment for over forty years, hosting top-rated shows in both the UK and America and being the only person to have interviewed all of the past six British Prime Ministers and the past seven US Presidents.

Whilst still an undergraduate at Cambridge University, where he was also secretary of the Footlights Drama Society, Frost began presenting TV programmes, leading ultimately to the groundbreaking satirical show *That Was The Week That Was*, broadcast by the BBC from 1962 to 1963. Producer Ned Sherrin observes, 'He was the first of that generation who went straight from university to television. He took to it like a duck to water.'<sup>18</sup> As Nixon later comments, 'You were obviously born to be on the tube.' The programme quickly gained a massive cult following but riled politicians who appeared on it complaining that they were



being ridiculed by Frost and his team. Indeed, the young presenter's provocative interviewing style often resulted in charged exchanges and coined the phrase 'trial by television'.

'Frost was part of the first generation of television interviewers who could no longer stomach the deference of TV's early years,' explains Andrew Marr. 'Those journalists who had grown up with the young medium, and Frost was the greatest example, had a self-confidence in front of the camera which made all but a few politicians, men of the age of the debating chamber and the public meeting, look blundering and pedestrian.'<sup>19</sup>

Several other successful shows followed, including *The Frost Report* in 1966 in which Frost collaborated with comedians John Cleese, Ronnie Barker and Ronnie Corbett, and for ITV *The Frost Programme*. Interviewees from the world of showbiz included Muhammad Ali, the Beatles and Orson Welles. But it was after a moving tribute to the assassinated President John F. Kennedy on *TWTWTW* that Frost became famous in the US and began presenting *Frost Over America*. This was the beginning of a busy period for the broadcaster who spent much of the 1970s commuting across the Atlantic, usually by Concorde, earning himself the reputation of an international playboy.

It was the 1977 interviews with the disgraced former US President Richard Nixon that helped revitalise Frost's career, which was in decline in America following the cancellation of his network talk show. The four 90-minute programmes, in which Frost persuaded Nixon to admit he'd let the American people down over the Watergate scandal, achieved the largest television audience for a news interview ever and has since become a benchmark for political interviews.

In addition to being instrumental in the creation of two important TV franchises, LWT in 1967 and TV-am in 1982, Frost has produced several films and has his own production company, Paradine Productions, who are currently developing a remake of the war film *The Dam Busters*.

He is perhaps best known today as the presenter of such programmes as *Through the Keyhole* and *Breakfast with Frost*, a fixture of the Sunday schedules for over twenty years. 'It's hard to match up the mellow Sunday morning television presenter with the harder, cooler 1960s model,' admits actor Michael Sheen.<sup>20</sup> 'Look at his footage from the 60s, grilling the likes of Oswald Moseley, and you find he was the most confrontational of interviewers.'<sup>21</sup> Indeed Frost's critics argue that his latter-style flattering attention towards his interviewees, many of whom have since become friends, borders on the sycophantic, dubbing his show a cosy 'love-in'. But the change in his interview technique is a natural progression argues Ned Sherrin. 'In the 1960s, he was very hard. But from Nixon onwards it was always softly, softly catchee monkey.'<sup>22</sup>

'The key is knowing how to open people up rather than shut them up,' says Frost. 'It's all about the testing quality and intellect of the question, not the style. The late Labour leader John Smith told me: "You have a way of asking beguiling questions with potentially lethal consequences".'<sup>23</sup>

Friend and former producer of *The Frost Show* William G. Stewart comments, 'Of course he's mellowed and he's now part of the establishment, but there have only been a few people who have changed the face of television and David is one of them.'<sup>24</sup>

In 2005 Frost added a BAFTA Fellowship to his many awards and now, at the age of 67, he is still courting controversy having recently agreed to present a weekly current affairs programme for Al-Jazeera International, the English language version of the Arab broadcaster unpopular in the US.

'As my show from London will be shown around the world at different times, it isn't just *Breakfast with Frost*, but brunch, lunch, afternoon tea, and supper with Frost!' <sup>25</sup>

## **Richard Nixon – A life of thought and debate**

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Richard Milhous Nixon was born in Yorba Linda, California on 9 January 1913. A Republican, he was inaugurated as thirty-seventh President of the United States on 20 January 1969. Although he achieved diplomatic success with his foreign policy, in particular détente with China and the Soviet Union and ending American involvement in the Vietnam War, Nixon is now remembered as the only US President to have resigned from office, on 9 August 1974, following his implication in the Watergate scandal.

Raised as a strict Quaker Nixon won a scholarship to Harvard University but was unable to attend as the bursary didn't include living expenses. In 1934 he left local Quaker school Whittier College and went on to study at Duke University of Law where he excelled academically. Returning to California in 1937 and passing the bar exam Nixon began working in a small law firm in La Mirada. It was at this time he met his future wife Pat Ryan, a high school teacher. The couple married on 21 June 1940 and later had two daughters, Tricia and Julie.

During the Second World War Nixon served as a Lieutenant Commander in the Navy commanding cargo-handling units in the South Pacific. On leaving the service he was elected to the United States House of Representatives in 1946 and became widely known for his work on the House Committee on Un-American Activities and his tough line on communist sympathisers. In 1950 Nixon was elected to the United States Senate over Congresswoman Helen Gahagan Douglas who gave him the lasting nickname 'Tricky Dick'. Just two years later, at the age of 39, Dwight D. Eisenhower chose him to be his running mate in the successful Republican presidential campaign.

As the thirty-sixth Vice President of the United States, from 1953 to 1961, Nixon reinvented the office taking on wide-ranging duties and undertaking frequent official trips abroad, gaining the attention of the Republican Party and the media in the process. He demonstrated for the first time that the office could be a springboard to the White House, most Vice Presidents since having followed his lead and sought the presidency. In 1960 Nixon was nominated with huge support as the Republican Presidential candidate campaigning in support of the policies of the Eisenhower administration. He was narrowly defeated by John F. Kennedy who was thought to have performed better in a televised presidential debate, many viewers regarding Nixon as untrustworthy as a result of perspiration on his top lip and pronounced stubble. This fuelled Nixon's distrust of the media. He later quips to Frost in the play, 'They say moisture on my upper lip cost me the Presidency. That and the shadow from my beard. Of course – there's no actual

correlation between perspiration and guilt. Nor between facial hair and duplicity. But television and the close-up; they create their own sets of meanings.'

In 1962 Nixon suffered further defeat in the race for Governor of California. Worn down by years of campaigning he took a swipe at the media in his concession speech, 'You won't have Nixon to kick around anymore because, gentleman, this is my last press conference.'<sup>26</sup> Having lost the election he moved to New York City to become a senior partner in a leading law firm.

However, during the 1966 Congressional elections he began to rebuild his base within the Republican Party and just two years later made a remarkable political comeback by again winning their nomination for president. The political landscape had changed significantly in the five years since the assassination of President Kennedy and this was a new Nixon, rested and ready. He appealed to what he called the 'silent majority', conservative Americans who disliked the prevalent 'hippie' counter-culture. Regarding the continuing war in Vietnam, which had cost so many American lives, Nixon promised 'peace with honour' without claiming to be able to win the conflict and went on to defeat Vice President Hubert H. Humphrey at the polls.

Once in office Nixon began the phased withdrawal of US troops from South Vietnam leaving the fighting to the Vietnamese. American involvement in the war declined steadily until all the troops were gone by 1973 with Nixon widely praised for fulfilling his election promise. However, this was not before ordering secret bombings of Cambodia in March 1969 to destroy what was thought to be the headquarters of the National Front for the Liberation of Vietnam. In doing so Nixon knew he would be prolonging an unpopular war and breaching Cambodia's stated neutrality. This unorthodox use of executive powers was later raised during the investigations into the Watergate scandal.

In other areas of foreign policy Nixon eased Cold War tensions. In what would later become known as the 'China Card', he purposefully improved relations with the People's Republic of China to gain a strategic advantage over the Soviet Union, China's former communist ally, and stunned the world in 1972 by going to China himself to negotiate directly with Chairman Mao. Fearing the possibility of an alliance between the two nations the Soviet Union yielded to American pressure for détente.

At home Nixon's domestic policies included the establishment of the Environmental Protection Agency in 1970 and the Drug Enforcement Administration in 1973. One of the most dramatic events of his presidency came early on 20 July 1969 when he addressed American astronauts Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin via radio during the first ever moon landing.

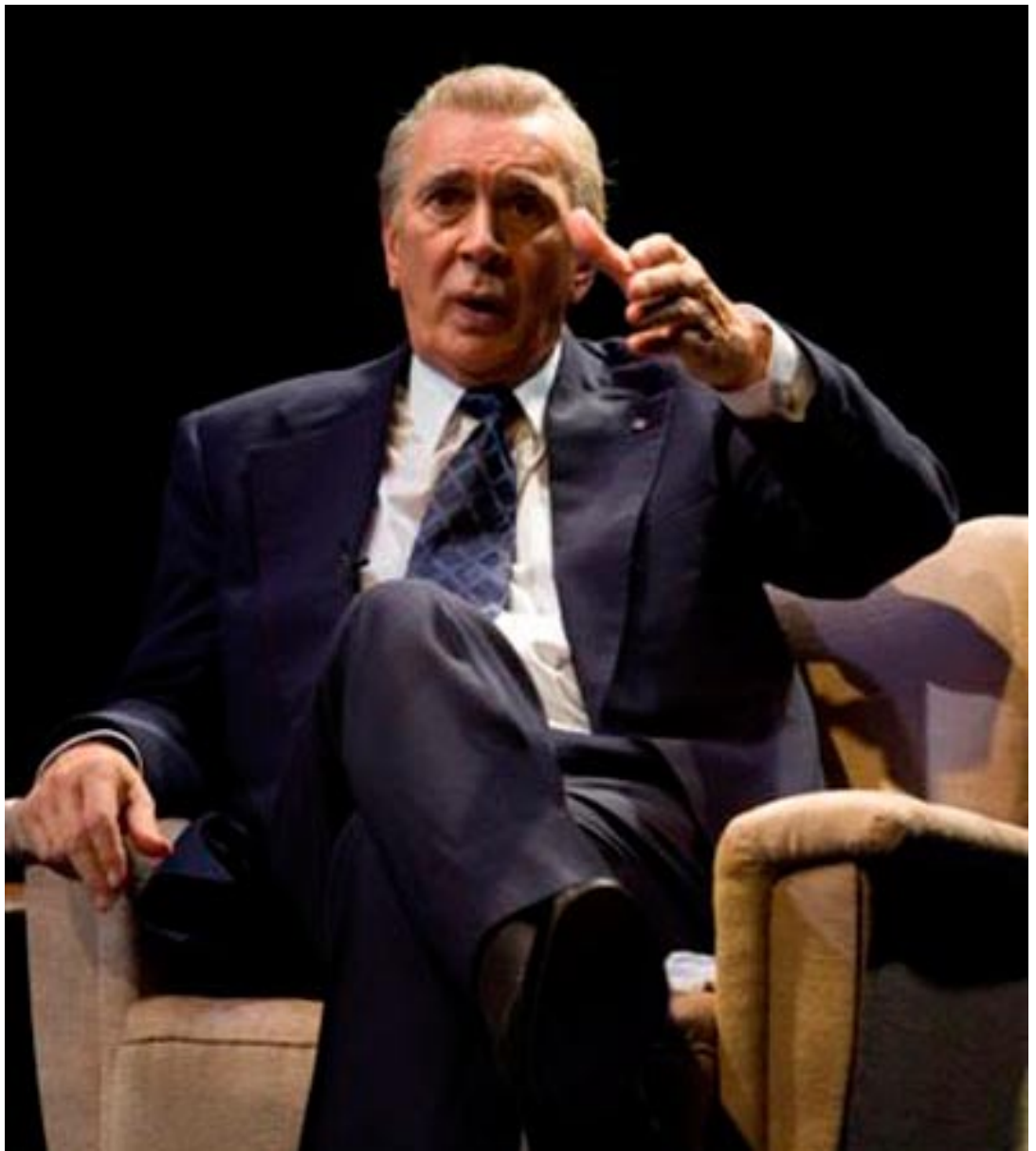
Despite some economic problems during his first term in office Nixon easily won re-election in 1972 with a landslide victory over the Democratic presidential candidate George S. McGovern, gaining over 60% of the popular vote. But within months Nixon's administration was embattled over the now infamous Watergate scandal (see below) which began with a burglary at the offices of the Democratic National Committee, inside the Watergate Hotel complex, and eventually exposed the corruption of the White House and the President's own paranoia.

Faced with the near certainty of both his impeachment by the House of Representatives and his probable conviction by the Senate, Nixon addressed the

nation by television on the evening of 8 August 1974 announcing that he would resign effective noon the next day. On leaving the White House he returned to his estate in San Clemente, California. A month later Nixon's successor President Gerald R. Ford, formerly Vice President, granted him a full pardon for any illegal acts he may have committed while in office, effectively ending any possibility of criminal proceedings against the disgraced leader.

In later life Nixon wrote many books on politics, including his memoirs, and worked hard to rehabilitate his public image gaining respect as an elder statesman in the area of foreign affairs. One of the lasting legacies of Nixon's Presidency is that so many key figures of the Ford, Reagan, Bush Snr and Jnr administrations, including Dick Cheney, Colin Powell and Donald Rumsfeld, first entered government service during his time at the White House. Nixon's administration was also the first to organise a daily message for the media, a practice adopted by all subsequent administrations.

Richard Nixon died on 22 April 1994, aged 81, after suffering a stroke. He was buried beside his wife, who had died less than a year earlier, in the grounds of the Richard Nixon Library in his birthplace, Yorba Linda.



## Watergate

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Early in the morning of 17 June 1972 police discovered five men inside the headquarters of the Democratic National Committee at the Watergate Hotel complex. It transpired that the intruders were there to adjust bugging equipment they had installed during an earlier break-in in May and to photograph documents. One of the five, James W. McCord Jnr, was Chief of Security at the Committee to Re-elect the President (CRP) suggesting a link with the White House. However, Nixon's Press Secretary Ron Ziegler dismissed the incident as a 'third-rate burglary'.

Washington Post reporter Bob Woodward was present at McCord's arraignment, which revealed his links with the CIA, and together with his colleague Carl Bernstein he began to investigate the burglary. The FBI already knew most of what they published but it kept the focus on the Watergate scandal. Woodward's relationship with an inside source, codenamed 'Deep Throat', added to the intrigue. The informant told the journalist that White House officials had hired as many as fifty people to sabotage the Democrat Party's chances in the 1972 election. Years later, on 31 May 2005, decades of speculation as to the true identity of the source was ended when W. Mark Felt, a leading figure within the FBI in the early 1970s, revealed that he was Deep Throat, a claim later confirmed by Woodward.

On 8 January 1973 the five intruders went to trial. They had been paid by the CRP to plead guilty and say nothing and all were convicted of conspiracy, burglary and wiretapping. The connection between the Watergate break-in and the President's re-election campaign dramatically raised the political stakes. Instead of ending with the trial and conviction of the five men the investigation broadened and a Senate Committee, chaired by Senator Sam Ervin, was established to examine Watergate, subpoenaing members of Nixon's own staff.

Four months later, on 30 April, the President was forced to dismiss two of his closest aides, White House Chief of Staff Bob Haldeman and John Erlichman, Assistant to the President for Domestic Affairs. They would later be indicted and imprisoned for their role in the scandal. Nixon also fired White House Counsel John Dean who would go on to become a key witness against the President.

The hearings held by the Senate Watergate Committee, in which many former White House officials gave dramatic testimonies, were broadcast from 17 May to 7 August 1973 causing great damage to Nixon. Each of the TV networks carried coverage of the hearings every third day and it was estimated that 85% of Americans tuned in at least once during the three months. Regarding Nixon's personal involvement in the scandal, Republican Senator Howard Baker of Tennessee famously asked, 'What did the President know and when did he know it?'

On 13 July Deputy Assistant to the President Alexander Butterfield made a shocking revelation. When asked if there was any tape recording equipment within the White House Butterfield reluctantly answered that everything in the Oval Office was automatically recorded. This radically altered the direction of the investigation as the recordings might prove whether Nixon or John Dean was telling the truth about key meetings. Special Prosecutor Archibald Cox subpoenaed the tapes but the President refused to hand them over citing executive privilege

and told Cox to drop his request. When he refused Nixon ordered the Special Prosecutor to be fired and several of Cox's colleagues resigned in objection. The date was 20 October 1973 and it became known as the 'Saturday Night Massacre'. Public reaction was intense with protestors taking to the streets outside the White House carrying banners which implored motorists to 'Honk to impeach'.

The President was forced to allow the appointment of a new Special Prosecutor, Leon Jaworski, who continued the investigation. Whilst still refusing to hand over the actual tapes Nixon did agree to provide transcripts of a large number of them, although edited to preserve national security. The recordings largely confirmed Dean's account of events and caused further controversy when eighteen and a half minutes of one tape was found to be missing. Initially the White House blamed this on Nixon's secretary who claimed to have accidentally erased the tape, but later forensic examination discovered that the section had been deleted several times. Finally, on 24 July 1974, the Supreme Court rejected the President's claims of executive privilege and ordered him to surrender the tapes which he did a week later.

Nixon's position was becoming increasingly precarious and the House of Representatives recommended three articles of impeachment against the President: the obstruction of justice in the investigation of the break-in at the headquarters of the Democratic National Committee; abuse of power by illegal wiretapping and interference with the lawful activities of the FBI; and contempt of Congress in failing to comply with subpoenas. On 5 August another tape, the 'Smoking Gun', was released. Recorded on 23 June 1972, only a few days after the break-in at the Watergate Hotel complex, it documented Nixon and Bob Haldeman formulating a plan to block the FBI investigations by getting the CIA to claim, falsely, that it would compromise national security. With this final piece of evidence the President's few remaining supporters deserted him and, facing the inevitable, Nixon became the first US President in history to resign from office on 9 August 1974.

The repercussions of the Watergate scandal were many and certainly didn't end with the resignation of the President and the imprisonment of several White House officials. It led to new laws regarding the financing of election campaigns and changes to the 1986 Freedom of Information Act as well as ushering in a new era of more aggressive reporting on political issues by the media. A new generation of reporters, hoping to become the next Woodward and Bernstein, embraced investigative journalism and sought to uncover new scandals. The Washington Post reporters who had helped to uncover the scandal wrote a best-selling book based on their experiences called *All the President's Men*, published in 1974, which was made into a film two years later, starring Robert Redford and Dustin Hoffman as Woodward and Bernstein respectively.



### **Who's who? Key people mentioned in the play**

Jack Anderson	Journalist, <i>Washington Post</i>
Alexander Butterfield	Deputy Assistant to President Nixon (1969-1973)
Charles Colson	White House Special Counsel (1969-1973)
John Connally	US Treasury (1971-1972)
John Ehrlichman	Assistant to the President for Domestic Affairs (1969-1973)
Dwight D. Eisenhower	34th US President, Republican (1953-1961)
Gerald R. Ford	Vice-President, Republican (1973-1974), 38th US President (1974-1976)
Pat Grey	CIA
Al Haig	Chief of Staff (1973-1974)
Bob Haldeman	Chief of Staff (1969-1973)
Lyndon B. Johnson	36th US President, Democrat (1963-1969)
John F. (Jack) Kennedy	35th US President, Democrat (1961–1963)
Henry Kissinger	US Secretary of State (1973–1974)
Tricia Nixon	Richard Nixon's eldest daughter
Mike Wallace	Anchorman of ABC's <i>60 Minutes</i>

## A chronology of events

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<b>21 January 1969</b>	Richard Nixon is inaugurated as the 37th President of the United States.
<b>13 June 1971</b>	<i>The New York Times</i> and <i>Washington Post</i> begin publishing the Pentagon Papers, the Defence Department's secret history of the Vietnam War.
<b>3 September 1971</b>	The White House 'plumbers unit', so called for their orders to prevent leaks in the administration, burgles a psychiatrist's office to find files on Daniel Ellsberg, the former defence analyst who leaked the Pentagon Papers.
<b>17 June 1972</b>	Five men, one of whom says he used to work for the CIA, are arrested at 2.30am trying to bug the offices of the Democratic National Committee at the Watergate Hotel complex.
<b>10 October 1972</b>	FBI agents establish that the Watergate break-in stems from a massive operation of political spying and sabotage conducted on behalf of the Nixon re-election campaign.
<b>7 November 1972</b>	Nixon is re-elected in one of the largest landslides in American political history.
<b>30 January 1973</b>	Former Nixon aides are convicted of conspiracy, burglary and wiretapping in the Watergate scandal.
<b>30 April 1973</b>	Nixon's top White House officials Bob Haldeman and John Ehrlichman and Attorney General Richard Kleindienst resign over the scandal. White House Counsel John Dean is fired.
<b>18 May 1973</b>	Senate Watergate Committee begins its nationally televised hearings.
<b>3 June 1973</b>	John Dean tells Watergate investigators that he has discussed the cover-up with Nixon at least thirty-five times.
<b>13 June 1973</b>	Watergate prosecutors find a memo addressed to John Ehrlichman describing in detail the plans to burgle the office of Daniel Ellsberg's psychiatrist.  Alexander Butterfield, Deputy Assistant to the President, reveals that all conversations and telephone calls in the Oval Office have been recorded since 1971.
<b>18 July 1973</b>	Nixon orders White House taping systems to be disconnected.
<b>23 July 1973</b>	Nixon refuses to relinquish tape recordings to the Senate Watergate Committee or the Special Prosecutor.
<b>20 October 1973</b>	'The Saturday Night Massacre'. Nixon fires the Special Prosecutor whose colleagues resign in protest. Pressure for impeachment mounts in Congress.
<b>17 November 1973</b>	Nixon declares 'I'm not a crook', maintaining his innocence in the Watergate scandal.

<b>7 December 1973</b>	The White House can't explain an eighteen-and-a-half-minute gap in one of the subpoenaed tapes.
<b>30 April 1974</b>	The White House releases edited transcripts of the Nixon tapes but the House Judiciary Committee insists the actual tapes be handed over.
<b>24 July 1974</b>	The Supreme Court rules unanimously that Nixon must hand over the tape recordings of sixty-four White House conversations, rejecting the President's claims of executive privilege.
<b>27 July 1974</b>	The House Judiciary Committee takes the momentous step of recommending that the President be impeached and removed from office.
<b>8 August 1974</b>	Richard Nixon becomes the first US President to resign. Vice President Gerald R. Ford assumes the country's highest office and later issues an unconditional pardon for any offences Nixon may have committed as President.
<b>2005</b>	Former FBI Deputy Head Mark Felt revealed as the anonymous source 'Deep Throat' who helped <i>Washington Post</i> reporters Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein uncover the Watergate scandal.

### **Did you know**

The Watergate scandal left such a lasting impression on the international consciousness that many scandals since have been labelled with the suffix 'gate', including: 'Camillagate' (1992), tape recording of telephone conversation between the Prince of Wales and his future wife Camilla Parker-Bowles; and 'Monicagate' (1998), named after Monica Lewinsky who had an 'inappropriate relationship' with 42nd US President Bill Clinton.



### **Discussion Point**

*'Every single time you're looking for some sort of parallel to help a scene along, you think, "Hang on, there was an analogy on this morning's news".'*<sup>27</sup>

**Michael Grandage, Director**

After you have seen FROST/NIXON what parallels can you draw between the issues within the play and today's political climate? Challenging Nixon on the bombing of Cambodia, Frost comments, 'By sending B52s to carpet bomb a country, wiping out whole civilian areas, you end up radicalising a once moderate people, uniting them in Anti-American sentiment'. How does this relate to the present situation in the Middle East and the 'War on Terror'?

## FROST/NIXON in performance

### Practical and written exercises based on an extract from the play

FROST/NIXON chronicles an important and incredibly complex period in contemporary American history, detailing key facts and dates. The play telescopes events, requiring swift changes in time and place. Navigating us throughout is narrator Jim Reston, himself a character within the story. The narrative is fast-paced, the action fluid. Stage directions read, 'A lighting change. Suddenly we're back in "Casa Pacifica". Nixon's bedroom.' The back wall of the stage is dominated by a bank of thirty-six television screens which are used not only during the interviews but also between scenes to indicate locations – London, New York, LA, etc.

The following extract is taken from Scene Fifteen, towards the end of the play. It is the night before the final interview and Frost has so far failed to gain any new revelations from Nixon, thereby placing the whole project in jeopardy. He has just learnt that his show in Australia has been cancelled with the one in the UK possibly to follow. The prospect is bleak. His girlfriend Caroline goes out to get them some food leaving Frost alone in their hotel room.

Working as a group read through the extract and experiment with the staging of this scene. As a director what atmosphere do you want to create? Consider the following: What has just happened? Where are the characters emotionally? At what point are we within the story? How does that affect your approach to pacing the scene? How would you establish the relationship between Frost and Nixon, the sense of intimacy at this moment, given that they are in separate spaces? You should also take into account other elements of production. For example, what should the lighting be like? Do you want any specific sound? Once you have seen the Donmar's production of FROST/NIXON consider how the staging of this scene compares with your own.

#### FROST/NIXON by Peter Morgan – Extract from Scene Fifteen

**Frost** alone. *He continues to pace up and down restlessly. He stands in the middle of the room. Visibly deflates.*

*It's an intensely private moment. His spirit has been broken. His face is long. His eyes baggy and tired.*

*Presently, the phone rings.*

**Frost** *stares at it a while. Cannot face it. Finally he goes to answer it. When he speaks, it's with a quiet, defeated voice.*

**Frost** I'll have a cheeseburger.

*But the slurring voice at the other end does not belong to **Caroline**.*

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*But the slurring voice at the other end does not belong to **Caroline**.*

**Voice** (On phone) Mmm. Sounds good.

**Frost** freezes. Immediately recognises **Nixon**, speaking from San Clemente.

**Nixon** I used to love cheeseburgers.

*There's something in the President's voice. A barely perceptible slurring.*

**Nixon** But Doctor Lundgren made me give them up. And switched me to cottage cheese and pineapple instead. He calls them my Hawaiian Burgers. But they don't taste like burgers at all. They taste like Styrofoam.

**Nixon** sways slightly, as he knocks back the drink.

**Nixon** I... ah... hope I'm not disturbing.

**Frost** No.

**Nixon** It's a Friday night. You... ah... probably have someone there... whom you're entertaining...

**Frost** puckers his face. *There's something almost lascivious about the question.*

**Frost** No.

**Nixon** Then what are you doing? A handsome young fellow. An eligible young, bachelor, alone on a Friday night?

**Frost** If you must know... I'm preparing for our final session.

**Nixon** Ah, the all-important final session.

**Frost** Yes.

**Nixon** Watergate. It's a small consolation to me that for the next couple of days, that word will be as much of a millstone around your neck as it has been around mine. Because I guess, the way you handle Watergate will determine whether these interviews are a success or failure. Should I be nervous?

**Frost** Well, I'm going to give it my best shot.

**Nixon** Quite right. No holds barred. No holds barred. You know, it's strange. We've sat in chairs opposite one another, talking for *hours*, it seems *days* on end... and yet I've hardly gotten to know you. One of my people... ah... as part of the preparation of this interview... did a profile of you, and I'm sorry to say... I only got around

to reading it tonight. There's some interesting stuff in there. The Methodist background, modest circumstances. Then off to a grand university. Full of richer, posher types. What was it? Oxford?

**Frost** Cambridge.

**Nixon** Did the snobs there look down on you, too?

**Frost** I... I...

**Nixon** Of course they did. That's our tragedy, isn't it, Mr Frost? No matter how high we get, they still look down on us...

**Frost** I... really... don't know what you're talking about...

**Nixon** Yes, you do. C'mon. You know exactly. No matter how many awards – or how many column inches are written about you – or how high the elected office is for me – it still isn't enough, am I right? We still feel like the little man? The loser they told us we were? A hundred times. The smart-asses at college. The high-ups. The well-born. The people whose respect we really wanted. Really craved. And isn't that why we work so hard now? Why we fight for every inch? Scrambling our way up, in undignified fashion, whatever hillock or mountain it is, why we never tire, why we find energy or motivation when any sensible person would lie down, or relax. If we're honest for a minute. If we reflect privately just for a moment... if we allow ourselves... a glimpse into that shadowy place we call our soul, isn't that why we're here now...? The two of us? Looking for a way back? Into the sun? Into the limelight? Back onto the winner's podium? Because we could feel it slipping away? We were headed, both of us, for the dirt. The place the snobs always told us we'd end up. Face in the dust. Humiliated all the more for having tried so pitifully hard. Well, to hell with that. We're not going to let that happen. Either of us. We're going to show those bums, and make them choke on our continued success. Our continued headlines. Our continued awards, power and glory. We're going to make those motherfuckers choke. Am I right?

**Frost** You are. Except only ONE of us can win. And I shall be your fiercest adversary. I shall come at you with everything I've got.

**Nixon** Good for you. Because the limelight can only shine on ONE of us. And for the other, it'll be the 'wilderness'. With nothing and no one for company, but those voices ringing in our heads.

*A pause.*

**Nixon** You ever serve your country, Mr Frost? Put on a uniform. Go into battle.

**Frost** No.

**Nixon** Forgive me... but I didn't imagine so. I was a naval man. Did your research tell you that? That's not the kind of stuff people want to hear about Dick Nixon. That he was willing to lay down his life...

*Nixon sways slightly.*

**Nixon** You can probably tell... the reason I'm being so... uncharacteristically forthright... I've had a drink. Not too many. Just one or two. But believe me, when I wake tomorrow, I'll be focused and ready for battle.

## Questions on the production and further practical work

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You may wish to work individually on completing these questions.

1. Rereading the extract what does the text tell us about the similarities and differences between Frost and Nixon? Can you find other examples within the play to support your theories?
2. When you go to see the Donmar's production of FROST/NIXON consider the following:
  - How does the design aid the pace of the narrative?
  - How do the videos shown on the TV screens work in relation to the action on stage? (See the interview with Assistant Director Hamish Pirie below.) How did you find watching the action in two places? Were you more interested in the actors on screen?
  - How does the production delineate the different worlds of Frost and Nixon?
  - What transformations take place within the characters through the journey of the play? How do the actors embody these changes?
3. Once you have seen the production you could improvise new scenes exploring the background to the play, taking the material within this Study Guide (Section 3) as a starting point. The scenes could include the meeting between Nixon and Bob Haldeman in which they discussed hampering the FBI's investigation of the break-in at the Watergate Hotel complex, a tape recording of which later became known as the 'Smoking Gun'. How do such improvisations inform your ideas about the play and characters?

### *Frost bite*

*'By this stage there was anguish. Various people analysed it, whether he had a tear or his eyes were glistening. He was struggling with going further than he had ever gone or would ever go again. And at that particular moment – one was close up, incredibly close – it was affecting. It was very touching in that sense.'*<sup>28</sup>

## The play in rehearsal

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### An interview with Hamish Pirie, Assistant Director for FROST/NIXON

**Q How much did the cast and creative team familiarise themselves with the background to the play or was your starting point the text itself?**

A On day one of rehearsals it was clear the cast had done a lot of their own research, some about Watergate others specifically about their characters. Both Frank Langella and Michael Sheen had viewed a lot of archive material, not only of the interviews themselves but almost everything from around that period that featured their characters. Frank had spent some time interviewing people who worked for Nixon while he was living in Casa Pacifica. He visited his museum and sat at his desk. We also had the real Jim Reston with us on the first day to give us that extra flavour of the time and events. At the same time Peter Morgan was always inputting with his vast knowledge of the period and giving us tit bits that didn't quite make it into the play.

However, by day two Michael Grandage was keen to emphasize that we were doing Peter's play about the events, not the events themselves. It was clear that the play chose to show us certain elements of the period and not others. Nixon was President of the most powerful country in the world for five years at one of the most turbulent times in its history, there is no way that all those historical facts can be brought into a thrilling evening at the theatre.

We have to respect the story that the playwright is telling, making sure we are playing the characters from the text not the newspapers. At the same time the Frost/Nixon tapes were available for everyone to see but people did this individually. All the creative team, however, saw them. Although we must be loyal, the text comes first. Taking advantage of seeing the actual interviews gives an extra flavour one seldom gets when doing other plays. Peter has edited the interviews and chopped them around heavily so it was important again not to become too lost in the sequence of the interviews themselves.

**Q With regard to playing real people, where does impersonation end and the actor's interpretation begin?**

A Michael Sheen has played many real people, most famously Tony Blair in *The Deal and The Queen*, both written by Peter Morgan. He talks about the fact that impersonations are things we see comedians do for a maximum of thirty seconds to work one or two gags. To maintain that level of satirical caricature on stage would simply be unwatchable. So already as an actor playing a character in a two-hour story you are approaching it in a different way.

The company made every effort for the characters on stage to be real people, we actually avoided using the phrase impersonation. It was seen as vital that a real truth was found in these people on stage. If they were



just presenting an array of ticks and voices that the actual people were famous for then the story itself would fall apart. The actors are, of course, bringing their own interpretations to the characters they are playing. That interpretation is committed to finding the truth of these characters as found in the text. Frank Langella as Nixon is playing one of the most easily impersonated political figures the world has seen, so he worked hard on finding an essence of Nixon that could grow through him into a version of the President that was instantly recognizable but was not going to be dismissed as caricature, that was rooted in something new and truthful rather than just public assumptions.

**Q How do you stage what essentially is a television event? What stops the interviews themselves becoming too static?**

A The other scenes in between add a variety of pace and texture. That principle is used in the interview scenes, just before the actual encounters between Frost and Nixon, ensuring that the audience is carried on a hub of active excitement so that when their focus comes down to these two men sitting in armchairs it is earned and we as an audience are ready to give it our complete attention. Each interview is built as its own crescendo to the events that have previously taken place.



Michael (Grandage) also works closely with his sound and lighting designers to find ways of bringing complete focus on stage to where it needs to be. When you see the production, watch out for the changes in lighting and sound just before each interview. As the audience's attention is focused so intensely on the two actors at every movement it allows a great amount of detail in their performances. We spend every day looking at people in chairs so audiences are quite well trained at reading the movements of actors in this situation. That sort of restriction is also naturally very revealing and in some ways you could watch them with the sound off, so to speak, and still be able to follow the sense of what was happening - at least who was in control and how the other was coping.

This production uses thirty-six television screens in one giant bank on the upstage wall. This immediately gives the audience a different view but at the same time poses a risk of undermining what is happening on stage. We have three cameras: one downstage left, one downstage right and one fixed on a long shot in a central position. Until the final few questions of the last interview we mainly see the long shot during the encounters, so the audience are encouraged to watch the more interesting action on stage.

Ultimately the TV screens must support the narrative without becoming a distraction or the main event. The camera, used in quite a static fashion, is more a backdrop than a viewing point until the last interview. Here the cameras cut to close up and jump from Frost to Nixon as each one speaks and when Frost listens to important answers in the same way a TV show would. At the same time the actors for this bit only are miked so they speak more softly. The audience may find themselves more engrossed in the screens but at the same time, because this is the climax of these two characters' journeys who the audience have travelled with for so long, the viewer is constantly flitting between the two. This offers a very rare experience, allowing the audience to pick and choose what they look at and when, which is why it can only work for a brief period. However, it happens at such a climatic point that it merely adds to the intensity of the moment. The key was for the team to be able to control the audience's points of attention on two levels, screen and stage, ensuring that they would always be seeing what we needed them to in order to tell the story completely.



### **Discussion Point**

Reflecting on FROST/NIXON, Assistant Director Hamish Pirie comments, 'It was clear that the play chose to show us certain elements of the period and not others.' Having seen the production and read through the background notes in this Study Guide what do you think he means? How does a writer gather material and construct an argument within a play?



### **Did you know**

David Frost and actor Michael Sheen were both nearly professional footballers. The 17-year-old Frost was offered a contract by Nottingham Forest, while Sheen was talent-spotted by an Arsenal scout at the age of twelve.

## Section 5 Ideas for further study

### Reading and research

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To gain a fuller understanding of President Nixon's administration and the Watergate scandal you may want to look at the following:

[www.whitehouse.gov](http://www.whitehouse.gov)  
[www.nixonfoundation.org](http://www.nixonfoundation.org)  
[www.washingtonpost.com](http://www.washingtonpost.com)

The following films provide a useful background to events:

<i>All the President's Men</i> (1976)	Directed by Alan J. Pakula, starring Robert Redford as Bob Woodward and Dustin Hoffman as Carl Bernstein.
<i>Nixon</i> (1995)	Directed by Oliver Stone, starring Anthony Hopkins as Richard Nixon.

To see the original Frost/Nixon interviews go to [www.frost.tv](http://www.frost.tv)

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[www.landmarkcases.org](http://www.landmarkcases.org)  
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#### Newspapers

*Times*, 1 July 2006  
*Sunday Times*, 23 July 2006  
*Guardian*, 1 August 2006  
*Independent*, 3 August 2006  
*Metro*, 9 August 2006  
*Times*, 14 August 2006  
*Time Out*, 9-16 August 2006

#### Miscellaneous

FROST/NIXON Programme, Donmar Warehouse, 2006

## Endnotes

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- 1 Peter Morgan's author's note, FROST/NIXON programme, 2006
- 2 Peter Morgan interviewed by Gareth McLean in the *Guardian*, 1 August 2006
- 3 Peter Morgan quoted in the *Times*, Ian Johns, 14 August 2006
- 4 Peter Morgan interviewed by Richard Brooks in the *Sunday Times*, 23 July 2006
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 David Frost interviewed by Ian Johns in the *Times*, 1 July 2006
- 7 Peter Morgan interviewed by Richard Brooks in the *Sunday Times*, 23 July 2006
- 8 Ibid.
- 9 David Frost interviewed by Fionnuala Sweeney, *International Correspondents*, CNN, 12 May 2006
- 10 Michael Grandage quoted in *Time Out*, Rachel Halliburton, 9-16 August 2006
- 11 Andrew Marr, 'The Case for Cheeky Young Men', FROST/NIXON programme, 2006
- 12 Ibid.
- 13 Frank Langella quoted in the *Metro*, 9 August 2006
- 14 David Frost interviewed on *Larry King Live*, CNN, 10 June 2002
- 15 Michael Sheen interviewed by Ian Johns in the *Times*, 14 August 2006
- 16 Peter Morgan interviewed by Gareth McLean in the *Guardian*, 1 August 2006
- 17 Peter Morgan interviewed by Richard Brooks in the *Sunday Times*, 23 July 2006
- 18 Ned Sherrin quoted in the 'The Guardian Profile: Sir David Frost', Owen Gibson, 27 May 2005
- 19 Andrew Marr, 'The Case for Cheeky Young Men', FROST/NIXON programme, 2006
- 20 Michael Sheen interviewed by Michael Coveny in the *Independent*, 3 August 2006
- 21 Michael Sheen interviewed by Ian Johns in the *Times*, 14 August 2006
- 22 Ned Sherrin quoted in the 'The Guardian Profile: Sir David Frost', Owen Gibson, 27 May 2005
- 23 David Frost interviewed by Ian Johns in the *Times*, 1 July 2006
- 24 William G. Stewart quoted in the 'The Guardian Profile: Sir David Frost', Owen Gibson, 27 May 2005
- 25 David Frost interviewed by Ian Johns in the *Times*, 1 July 2006
- 26 Richard Nixon quoted at <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard-Nixon>
- 27 Michael Grandage quoted in *Time Out*, Rachel Halliburton, 9-16 August 2006
- 28 David Frost interviewed on *Larry King Live*, CNN, 10 June 2002

## **About the Donmar Warehouse –**

a special insight into the theatre

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The Donmar Warehouse is an intimate (not for profit) 251 seat theatre located in the heart of London's West End. The theatre attracts almost 100,000 people to its productions a year. Since 1992, under the Artistic Direction of Michael Grandage and his predecessor, Sam Mendes, the theatre has presented some of London's most memorable theatrical experiences as well as garnered critical acclaim at home and abroad. With a diverse artistic policy that includes new writing, contemporary reappraising of European classics, British and American drama and music theatre, the Donmar has created a reputation for artistic excellence over the last 12 years and has won 25 Olivier Awards, 12 Critics' Circle Awards, 10 Evening Standard Awards and 10 Tony Awards for Broadway transfers.

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