

## SECTION TWO: GRADES SEVEN THROUGH NINE

Studying the American presidency offers students an unparalleled opportunity to explore the democratic political process and to deepen their understanding of how this process fits into the whole of American history. While learning about subjects as diverse as campaigns, the media, and presidential roles and responsibilities, students will sharpen their analytical skills and broaden their historical knowledge. The activities suggested are adaptable to various learning styles and levels and are keyed to the *National Standards for History*. The content in this section relates directly to the curriculum requirements of grades 7 through 9. The topics chosen are based on *The American Presidency: A Glorious Burden*, an exhibition at the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of American History.

### TOPICS

#### I. Campaigns and Elections: Slogans, Symbols, and Voters

Presidents Addressed: W. H. Harrison, Grant, McKinley, Harding, Coolidge, Hoover, F. Roosevelt, Eisenhower, L. Johnson, Reagan

Time Periods Covered: 1840-1980

#### II. Roles and Responsibilities: Ranking the Presidents

Presidents Addressed: could involve all presidents

Time Periods Covered: 1797-today

#### III. Life in the White House and After the Presidency: Internet Research

Presidents Addressed: Hayes, and current administration

Time Periods Covered: 1877-1881, present day

#### IV. Assassination and Mourning: Losing a President

Presidents Addressed: Lincoln, Truman, Kennedy, Ford, Reagan

Time Periods Covered: 1863-1981

#### V. Communicating the Presidency: The Media and Public Opinion

Presidents Addressed: could involve all presidents

Time Periods Covered: 1797-today

### I. Campaigns and Elections: Slogans, Symbols, and Voters

**Objectives:** Students will be able to explain the important role that campaigns, with their slogans and symbols, play in the American political process. Students also will be able to describe how the political process has become more inclusive over time.

**Skills:** Research, analysis of a primary source, evaluation of historical data.

**Time:** 1 to 3 class periods.

**Standards:** National Standards in Historical Thinking 1 (Chronological Thinking), 2 (Historical Comprehension), 3 (Historical Analysis), 4 (Historical Research), Eras 3-10 (1787-present).

### Teacher Background

Presidential campaigns are important national events that capture and reflect the fundamental principles of democracy. Every four years, Americans are given an opportunity to participate in a national dialogue about important issues and to choose the country's next leader. Because this is a national election, presidential candidates must reach out to as broad an audience as possible, crisscrossing the country to appeal to voters.

For much of American history, political parties took responsibility for orchestrating presidential campaigns. Today, candidates often work outside of the party apparatus, setting up their own campaign organizations to help them get elected. As a result of these changes, the role of the political party in the campaign itself has changed, while media experts and public relations teams now take active roles in the process, promoting their candidates in every possible venue. Such media coverage ensures that presidential campaigns remain highly visible, public events.



**FDR tire cover**

*Courtesy of the Smithsonian Institution, National Museum of American History, Political History Collections*



**Harrison log cabin**

*Courtesy of the Smithsonian Institution, National Museum of American History, Political History Collections*

## Student Activities

1. **Campaign Slogans:** There have been many memorable presidential campaigns and slogans in American history. Slogans can be effective for different reasons. They may express the character or aims of a candidate, or they simply may be catchy phrases that voters will remember (much like advertising jingles today). Have students read the slogans listed below and discuss what each means. For each slogan, students should answer the following questions: Is the slogan catchy? Does it work as a rallying call to voters? Why or why not? What, if anything, does it tell voters about the person running for office and about the issues of the day?

### Presidential Campaign Slogans

“Log Cabin and Hard Cider”

“Let Us Have Peace”

“Patriotism, Protection and Prosperity”

“Return to Normalcy”

“Keep Cool with Coolidge”

“A Chicken in Every Pot, and a Car in Every Garage”

“A Big Man for a Big Job”

“I Like Ike”

“All the Way with LBJ”

“Let’s Make America Great Again”

“America Needs a Change”

William Henry Harrison, 1840

Ulysses S. Grant, 1860

William McKinley, 1896

Warren Harding, 1920

Calvin Coolidge, 1924

Herbert Hoover, 1928

Franklin D. Roosevelt, 1932

Dwight D. Eisenhower, 1952

Lyndon B. Johnson, 1964

Ronald Reagan, 1980

Walter Mondale, 1984

- **Discussion:** After analyzing these slogans, discuss with the class what makes a good campaign slogan. Then, have students choose one of the slogans listed here, or one they find themselves, and do additional research about that particular presidential campaign. Do their opinions of the slogan change after they have learned more about the political moment in which it was written? Why or why not?

**Extended Activity:** Ask students to imagine that they are running for office in their own school, perhaps as president of their class. Each student should come up with a campaign slogan that will help him or her win the election. Students may want to create posters or banners to display their slogans. Many presidential campaigns create such visual aids, as well as buttons, hats, and other trinkets, like those pictured on the previous page, to help increase voter awareness of their candidates. Students may get some ideas from past presidential campaigns. Refer to the Resources section for print and electronic sources. After everyone has come up with a slogan, and visual aids, present them to the class. As a group, discuss which are most effective and why.

2. **Voting Rights:** As a homework assignment, have students read the Constitution to discover what constituted a “voter” in 1791. Have students define the word “suffrage.” In class, have students discuss their findings. Following the class discussion, ask students to pose questions regarding suffrage: How and when did voting rights change? When did African Americans get the vote? women? citizens under twenty-one? As a class, compile a list organized by date that shows changes in voting rights over the years, based on property requirements or wealth, age, gender, and race and ethnicity. Discuss the overall impact of these changes on the political process.

## II. Roles and Responsibilities: Ranking the Presidents

**Objectives:** Students will be able to explain the responsibilities of the president and will evaluate the successes and failures of past presidents.

**Skills:** Internet and print research, analytical writing, public speaking, evaluation of historical data.

**Time:** 2-week project for student team work outside of class, 15-minute presentations throughout a month or a unit, 2 to 3 class periods for vote and discussion.

**Standards:** National Standards in Historical Thinking 1 (Chronological Thinking), 2 (Historical Comprehension), 3 (Historical Analysis), 4 (Historical Research), Eras 3-10 (1787-present, depending on administrations chosen).

### Teacher Background

As a nation, we place no greater responsibility on any one individual than we do on the president, whose job is extremely complex and demanding. While the Constitution provides only a vague outline of the American presidency, Americans have defined and extended the powers of the office over time. Some presidents thrive at balancing the numerous roles they are expected to play, while others have stumbled, unable to master the many duties of the office.

**Commander in Chief:** The president serves as commander in chief of the armed forces, and during national crises and war, the power of the presidency has increased to include approval of military tactics, control over the economy, and authority to limit the civil rights of Americans at home.

**Chief Executive:** The president serves as the government's chief executive, or administrative officer, with the responsibility to see that the laws are faithfully executed. The president also has the authority to approve or veto laws proposed by Congress and to appoint officials, with the advice and the consent of the Senate. The federal government has grown in size and increased in function, leaving the chief executive to head an enormous bureaucracy. Through the cabinet and through federal agencies, the president has the power to influence every activity of the national government.

**Chief Diplomat:** As chief diplomat, the president has the power to make treaties with foreign governments and to maintain formal relationships with other nations. The president is expected to defend America's security and economic interests and also to promote democratic principles and human rights around the world.

**Ceremonial Head of State:** Since the United States has no monarchy or figurehead, the duties of serving as the ceremonial head of the nation fall on the president. Some of these activities are solemn; some are festive. Although these responsibilities can at times seem trivial, they offer an important opportunity for the president to connect with Americans, who are ultimately an essential source of presidential power.

**Manager of the Economy:** The increasing influence of the federal government over the economy has led Americans to expect the president to maintain the financial health of the nation. Many candidates run on the promise of creating sustained economic prosperity, and the public expects them to deliver.

**Party Leader:** Although the writers of the Constitution envisioned that the president would be above partisan politics, the system that they created encouraged, if not demanded, a rise of political parties and established the president as either a party leader or an ineffective executive. Several presidents rose to the office by building political parties or reshaping those that already existed by establishing new coalitions and bringing in new supporters.

**National Leader:** Americans ask the president to do more than govern; they want him to lead. While the role of president is multifaceted, no duties may be more important than the president's responsibilities to articulate the nation's principles, to take on new challenges, and to comfort and inspire in times of crisis.

## Student Activities

For the following project you may want to choose 10 to 15 presidents for the students to research in pairs, depending on which eras you plan to teach. In order for the project to be successful, students should be able to choose from a group of presidents with different styles, who succeeded and failed in a variety of roles. Because the theme of this project is evaluation of presidential performance, you may want to incorporate peer-evaluations and self-evaluations, so students can practice evaluating their own performances.

**1. Presidential Evaluation:** Assign each student a partner, and explain that they are about to become advocates for a past president. Allow them to choose, or assign them, a president. Then explain that it is their responsibility to learn all about this president's strengths and weaknesses. They must try to convince their classmates that their president deserves the title of Best President. This project has five components.

- **Roles and Responsibilities Handout:** (To be given to every member of the class by the group presenting.) This two-page handout should include the name of the students' president; the years he was in office; a statement about the economic, social, and political climate of the nation during his tenure; a chart that identifies and explains his achievements and failures in each of the presidential roles described above; two quotes from speeches or public statements given by the president while in office; one quote from an historian about the president's legacy; a summary statement identifying the two roles the president most effectively fulfilled; a bibliography of print and Internet resources used.
- **"Top Two" Poster:** (To be presented and hung on the wall the day of the group's oral presentation.) The poster should be clearly divided in half and should identify and explain the president's top two successes and top two failures. Since this poster will be hung on the wall as a visual reference during the vote for Best President, instruct the students to make their points clear and simple and to use visual aids, such as drawings, charts, and photos, to support their arguments.
- **Oral Advocacy:** (Each group of students will have ten minutes to present their poster and to advocate for their president.) The strongest presentations will confront the president's weaknesses in order to explain why his strengths outweigh them. Students should address the following questions: Did the president leave an especially important legacy? Did he take an extraordinary risk? Did he go beyond his constitutional limits? This is the time for students to convince the audience that their president is the Best President.
- **Vote for Best President:** After students have read all the handouts and heard all the presentations, ask them to refresh their memories by viewing the posters on the walls one last time. What criteria are students using to make their decisions?
- **Discussion:** Once the votes are tallied, discuss the results in small groups or as a class. Discuss how students voted and what criteria they used to make their decisions. What makes a great president? Which roles did students decide are most important for a president to excel at? Which are least important? Have the answers to these questions changed over time? What role(s) do students think will be most important for the president to fulfill in the twenty-first century?

### III. Life in the White House and After the Presidency: Internet Research

**Objectives:** Students will be able to explain the various roles that the White House serves within each presidential administration.

**Skills:** Internet skills, research, analysis of historical source material, résumé writing.

**Time:** 1 to 2 class periods.

**Standards:** National Standards in Historical Thinking 3 (Historical Analysis), 4 (Historical Research), Eras 3-10 (1787-present).

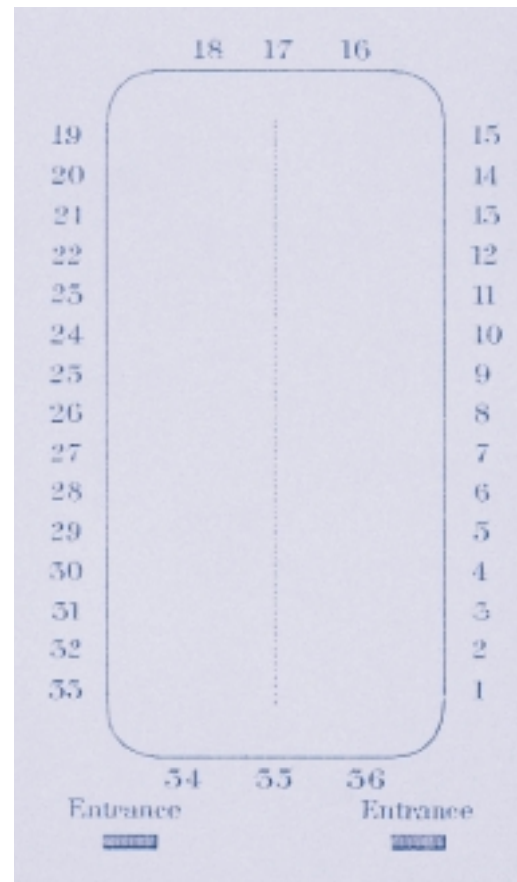
#### Teacher Background

Like the president, the White House has to fill many different roles. First and foremost, the White House is the president's office and a home for him and his family. Even though George Washington did not live in the White House, he set an important precedent when he decided that the president should work and live in the same residence. Every president since has followed his example.

The White House, as a historic building, also serves as a national museum and a symbol of American democracy. It is the place where important ceremonies and official gatherings occur, but it is also a place where ordinary American people have been frequent visitors. In 1800, for example, Thomas Jefferson opened the White House lawn to the public, and many presidents since have held similar kinds of festivities. Such events help make the American people feel that democratic ideals are being upheld and that they have access, admittedly limited, to the chief executive.

#### Student Activities

- 1. Web Search:** Using the official White House web site at [www.whitehouse.gov](http://www.whitehouse.gov), and the White House Historical Association web site at [www.whitehousehistory.org](http://www.whitehousehistory.org), have students go on a search to learn firsthand about the many roles that the White House plays! Students should find at least one picture of people, events, or rooms—from any time period—that demonstrates each of the White House's four roles mentioned in the text. (For example, students could use a picture of a meeting of foreign dignitaries to show how the White House serves as the president's office.) If possible, have students print out their pictures and share them with the class. Students may want to create a classroom exhibit on the White House. Alternatively, they can simply record the web site addresses where they located their images, along with brief descriptions of the photographs, under the headings for each role.
- 2. White House Dinner Party:** Many different people, some of them quite important, have graced the dinner table at the White House. As with any dinner party, figuring out who should sit next to whom, that is, who will get along well and who will not, is often a difficult task—especially when so many of the guests do not know each other very well! That is why seating plans, like the one shown here, used by Rutherford and Lucy Hayes, were so helpful to the hosts in deciding where their guests should sit for a successful dinner party. Ask students, individually or in small groups, to imagine that they get to have a dinner party at the White House. Like the Hayeses, they will need to invite 36



**Blank Hayes seating plan**

*Courtesy of the Smithsonian Institution, National Museum of American History, Political History Collections*

people to fill up the table. Among their guests should be 10 past presidents (living or dead), each of whom will bring a guest. A president might choose to bring his wife, one of his children, or a close friend. The student also should invite his or her own special guest to the dinner party. The remaining 14 people can be anyone the students choose, from history or today's world. Ask students to consider whom they will choose and why. Once students have made their selections, they should design a seating chart, using the plan from the Hayes administration, indicating where each guest will sit. Who will sit next to whom, and why? What will or might they discuss? Why? It may be useful for students to refer to an etiquette book, like one by Miss Manners or Emily Post, for help in mapping out their seating arrangements. Students should be prepared to explain their choices to their classmates.

- 3. Presidential Résumé:** When a president leaves office and the White House, there is no clear path ahead of him. Some presidents, such as George Washington, have chosen quiet retirement, spending time with their families and engaging in the activities that they find personally fulfilling. Others, such as William Howard Taft, have assumed active public roles. Whatever the former president's path, finding a fulfilling role can be very difficult for someone who has just left the most powerful job in the country! Have students imagine that they have been drafted to write a résumé for a president who is about to leave office in order to help him find employment after the presidency. (Refer to our Resources section for helpful tips on writing a résumé.) Students may choose any former president they wish and do some additional research on his background. When and where was he born? What was his profession before entering office? What are his skills and abilities? What kind of education did he receive? After reading about the president and taking some brief notes, students are ready to write their résumés. Remind students that a good résumé should be factual, brief, and informative and should highlight the candidate's strengths.

#### IV. Assassination and Mourning: Losing a President

**Objectives:** Students will be able to describe and explain the impact that presidential assassinations and assassination attempts have had on the American people and will practice the techniques of conducting an oral history.

**Skills:** Interviewing, research, analysis of oral history, evaluation of historical data.

**Time:** 2 to 3 class periods.

**Standards:** National Standards in Historical Thinking 3 (Historical Analysis), 4 (Historical Research), Eras 9 and 10 (1945-present).

#### Teacher Background

The American political system faces one of its greatest challenges when the life of the president is threatened. An attempt on the president's life throws the country into a period of questioning and reflection, and a presidential assassination traumatizes the nation and leads to a period of deep mourning. Since 1835, during the administration of Andrew Jackson, there have been eleven attempts on the president's life, four of them fatal. Abraham Lincoln, James Garfield, William McKinley, and John F. Kennedy all were killed in office by assassins' bullets.

The manner in which America mourned Abraham Lincoln evolved into rituals that shaped the way the country reacted to future tragedies, including John F. Kennedy's assassination one hundred years later. Mourning for Lincoln combined the use of traditional military rites, the need for official governmental commemoration, and the desire to provide a means for the public expression of grief. As his body was transported to Springfield, Illinois, parades in many cities honored Lincoln. The two-week-long funeral procession, retracing the train journey Lincoln took as president-elect, allowed one million Americans to pay their respects to "the savior of the Union."

Since 1901, the Secret Service has been charged with protecting the president from would-be assassins and has done its utmost in this capacity. However, the president of the United States is necessarily vulnerable to physical harm, given the nature of our democratic political system, which demands accessibility to and accountability from its elected leaders. Since John F. Kennedy's death in 1963, the number of agents assigned to protect the president has increased, and new technologies have brought improved security measures and better communication.

Because attempts on the president's life are so traumatic for the country, people who have lived through such events usually have very strong memories associated with them. There have been five attempts against a president's life since World War II, although only one was successful. Many people alive today remember these events clearly. Listening to the stories of these people helps us piece together the past and better understand our history.

## Student Activities

**1. Oral History:** Have students conduct an oral history interview with someone who remembers one of the events below. Students should ask their interviewees how they felt when they heard the news of the assassination or of the attempt. They should also inquire how the country as a whole responded to the situation. What sense of crisis was created by the events? Students will want to record their subjects' memories, so that they can share their findings with the class. They may use an audiotape or videotape recorder to document the interview. Either way, they can find guidance for preparing for, taping, and analyzing the interview on the following web site: [www.historychannel.com/classroom](http://www.historychannel.com/classroom). When they have finished their interviews, they should select one clip or segment to share with the class.

**1950: Harry S. Truman; 1963: John F. Kennedy; 1975: Gerald R. Ford;  
1975: Gerald R. Ford (second attempt); 1981: Ronald Reagan**

## V. Communicating the Presidency: The Media and Public Opinion

**Objectives:** Students will be able to describe how the president uses various media to communicate with the public. Students will discover the increasingly important role that media coverage has played in shaping public opinion of the president.

**Skills:** Analytical research, evaluation of primary sources, comparison of ideas, small group work, presentation of material.

**Time:** 2 to 3 class periods.

**Standards:** National Standards in Historical Thinking 2 (Historical Comprehension), 3 (Historical Analysis), 4 (Historical Research), Eras 3-10 (1787-present).

## Teacher Background

The ability to communicate effectively and efficiently to the American public is one hallmark of a successful presidency. Mastering the media of the period, whether newspapers, newsreels, radio, television, or even the Internet, is crucial to a president's capacity to excite people and convey the hopes and aspirations of his administration.

For some, the challenge of keeping up with the technological changes and demands in various media greatly limited their presidencies. Others achieved much politically because of their proficiency. Franklin Roosevelt, for instance, used the radio masterfully to speak directly to the American people, and Ronald Reagan's ease with television earned him the nickname "the Great Communicator."

## Student Activities

- 1. Media:** Have the class discuss the definition of “media.” What types of media are there? (newspapers, magazines, radio, newsreels, television, Internet) How have these media changed over time? Create a time line on the wall board to chart, as a class, when each of the different media was in use. Have students consider how much more complex this issue is now as we move into the twenty-first century.
- 2. Primary Sources:** As homework, assign students a fifty-year year period (1750-1800, 1800-1850, etc.) and ask them to select a president within that time period. Students should research the selected president’s use of the media of that time. For example, if a student is assigned 1750-1800, she or he might select Thomas Jefferson and look for primary sources, newspapers and broadsides, that show how Thomas Jefferson communicated with the public or how the press of the day covered what Jefferson did. A student who is assigned the time period 1950-2000 might select Reagan, etc. In class, create teams of five students each, making sure that each student in the group represents a different time period. Have the small groups share information with one another, looking for similarities and differences in the use of the various types of media over time, and create a simple chart outlining their findings. Each group should send a representative to the board to chart its results. As a class, examine your findings to draw some conclusions about the changing use of the media over time.
- 3. Current Affairs:** Over the period of a few days or a week, ask students to scan a daily newspaper or a weekly news magazine, like *Newsweek* or *U.S. News and World Report*, for articles relating to the president and his involvement in current affairs. Students should watch the network world news broadcasts and listen to the president’s weekly radio address, noting which issues he is calling out as important to the American public. Have students clip two or three articles that demonstrate the influence the media have in shaping the public’s perception of the president and presidential politics. Using a separate note card for each clipping, students should write a few sentences addressing the following questions: What is the article trying to say about the president? Is it about the president’s ideas or policy, or is it about his personal life? Is it favorable to the president? Can you tell what the president’s own ideas are from the article? Students may paste the articles and note cards to a poster board and make a short presentation to the class summarizing their findings. Ask students to compare their findings with their classmates. After all students have made their presentations, display the poster boards in a classroom exhibit on the presidency and the media.
- 4. Presidential Speeches:** Although the press is very influential in shaping public opinion of the president and of political issues, the president also can go straight to the public to get his message across through press conferences or during presidential visits or trips. One only has to think of the most memorable speeches to realize how important the president’s ability to speak in public is to his administration’s success. Everyone remembers, for example, this line from Abraham Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address: “Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.” Have students do additional research on a famous presidential speech. Each student should prepare a short presentation for the class, summarizing the speech and describing its historical importance. Students may wish to copy down a few memorable lines from the speech to present to the class, so that their classmates get an overall feeling of the speech.

**Extended Activity:** Ask students to imagine that they are the president and they have an important issue that they want to present to the American people about taxes, the environment, education, or international affairs, for example. Students should think about how they will present the message to the American people. What media will they use? Will they hold a press conference, address the nation on television or radio, hold a town meeting, or put their messages on the World Wide Web? Have students volunteer to present their messages to the class using one of these methods. Try to have an example of each method. After the presentations, discuss as a class the techniques that worked best in presenting the issues and in winning the support of the class.