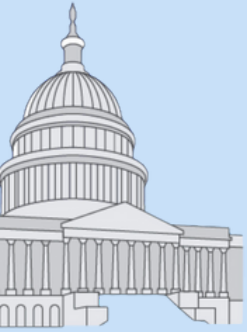


Ignite students' interest by sharing these resources, which demonstrate connections between the past and present. Please be sure to preview all resources.



What is the Role of the President?

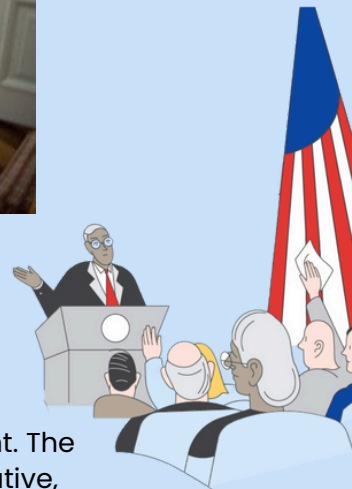
In 1789, the new nation had extraordinary leaders at its helm tasked with establishing a new government. The executive powers they set out in the Constitution were limited so as not to create a monarch like the one they had just defeated in the American Revolution. Today, the limited powers of the executive outlined in the Constitution remain unchanged, but the role of the president has grown. George Washington established many important presidential precedents during his time of office, such as his refusal to serve a third term and his appointment of strong leaders to his cabinet. How has the role of the president changed since Washington's inaugural presidency?



Discussion Questions

1. What are the roles and responsibilities of the president?

(Possible answer: The president is the head of state and government. The president has five responsibilities of office: chief of state, chief executive, chief administrator, chief diplomat, commander in chief, chief legislator, chief of party, and chief citizen.)



2. What are the qualifications for the office of the president?

(Possible answers: The constitution lists only three requirements for presidential candidates: they must be a natural-born citizen, over 35 years of age, and have lived in the country for 14 years.)

3. While each person has brought their own unique character and style to the presidency, what leadership skills and qualities do all great presidents seem to share?

(Possible answers: Vision for the future; exceptional communication, political, and crisis management skills; organizational efficiency; the ability to place the time in which they serve into the frame of history; responsible action; integrity, humility)

Share the online resources below with your class to stimulate discussion on these questions. Be sure to preview the clips before showing or sharing them in class to ensure the content is appropriate for your students.

Links to Resources



Video



Passage from John F. Kennedy Inaugural Address

Speaking to the nation on January 20, 1961, John F. Kennedy sought to be brief, inspire and unite the nation, and signal a message of peace during the challenges of the Cold War. Invite students to watch this clip and discuss which elements of this presidential speech speak to the nation and which speak to the global community. Ask students to brainstorm a list of strong leadership qualities after listening to the speech.

Lincoln

In his time, Abraham Lincoln was both ardently admired and aggressively opposed. This film is about his defining legacy: ending the Civil War, removing the constitutional protections of slavery, and ratifying the 13th Amendment, among the most important moments in American history. Share this video clip with students to spark discussion on the role of the president as “chief legislator.” Ask: What characteristics do you think made Lincoln a great leader?

Thirteen Days

This movie is set at the height of the Cold War, when the United States discovered that Russia had installed nuclear weapons on the island of Cuba, within striking range of many American cities. Amidst national terror, President John F. Kennedy was faced with the horrifying task of avoiding a nuclear war. Share this trailer with your students to generate discussion about the president’s role as chief diplomat. Ask: How were the president’s diplomatic skills especially important during this event in American history?

The World Leaders Dance

Share this clip from the TV series *Commander In Chief*, where fictional U.S. and Russian presidents share an interpersonal moment leading to discussing matters of state. Ask students why they think the scene in this clip upsets the President's staff? (It confuses or intertwines two of the President's separate roles: head of state and chief diplomat.)

Balancing the Budget

When a fictional president suffers a debilitating stroke, top White House advisors hire an impersonator to take his place to avoid revealing a scandal. They fail to see how popular he could become, as evidenced by this scene where he reallocates funds in the budget to find money for a social service program. Share this scene with your students to spark discussion about the president's role as chief administrator.

George W. Bush's Bullhorn Response to 9/11

Unexpected crises can crystalize the legacy of a president. A few days after the Twin Towers in New York City were destroyed by terrorists, George W. Bush addressed first responders amidst the rubble with a bullhorn. It was the first attack on the nation since World War II. Bush was never considered a great orator, and his enduring legacy of invading Afghanistan and Iraq have been widely criticized, yet in that moment, he captured the mood of a nation. Share this video to generate discussion of the president as chief citizen. Ask: What figurative words does Bush use to address the nation in crisis? What does he communicate with his body language? Ask why they think the crowd responded to him in the way they did.

"Tear Down This Wall"

After Germany's defeat in World War II, the country was occupied and divided between Allied Powers. West Germany came under the control of the United States, the United Kingdom, and France; East Germany came under Soviet communist rule. Massive emigration from East to West prompted East Germany to close their border with a wall. On June 12, 1987, Ronald Reagan addressed citizens of both East and West Berlin. Share his speech to generate discussion about how Reagan connects to the people of Berlin and discusses the legacy of World War II. Ask what themes they notice (such as freedom, unity, and prosperity). Invite them to discuss whether the role of the president includes defending democracy over totalitarianism around the world. (If short on time, screen from 10:47 to 14:27)

Inside the White House: The Cabinet

The president does not execute his role as chief executive alone. When the new government was formed in 1789, there were four members of George Washington's cabinet. Today there are 15, representing each executive department. Members of the cabinet are nominated by the president to advise on any subject relating to their office. Invite your students to watch this video to generate discussion about the president's role as chief executive and administrator, as well as the cabinet's relationship with the president.

What is the U.S. President's Role?

This short clip lists some of the responsibilities the U.S. presidency holds today and compares them to the 19th century.

We Be People



How the U.S. Supreme Court Decided the Presidential Election of 2000

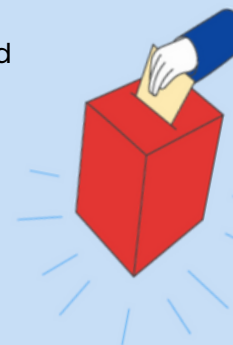
Florida's voting results from the presidential election of 2000 may have changed the future of voting in the United States. See how it all played out in this video which recounts the influence of Florida on the 2000 election.

How to Become President of the United States

Do you have what it takes to be the next U.S. president? This video reviews all of the requirements that you must have to become the next president of the United States.



Media



Letter from George Washington, 9 January 1790

Invite students to read this letter from George Washington to Catharine Sawbridge Macaulay Graham, a prominent English writer, historian, and supporter of the American Revolution, in response to congratulating him on his election as the first president of the new nation. Have them discuss Washington's interpretation of his role in the 2nd paragraph. Ask: What were Washington's personal feelings about being elected? What were the challenges before him?

O Captain! My Captain!

In this poem, Walt Whitman uses a ship and its captain to represent a war-weary nation at the end of the Civil War, and eulogizes Abraham Lincoln's life, deeds, and death. Invite students to discuss how repetition, imagery, and metaphor are used to convey Whitman's personal feelings about the character and impact of this president.

The Strength of Fields

James Dickey, a decorated wartime pilot and poet, wrote this poem for president Jimmy Carter's inaugural address. It depicts a private man walking the night in supplication, gathering strength for great acts. Invite students to discuss the meaning of this poem. Ask what the poet might mean by the phrases "Men are not where he is/ Exactly now, but they are around him/ around him like the strength of fields" and "My life belongs to the world."



Websites



United States Presidents

Invite students to explore this webpage to learn about American presidents past and present.