

Portraits of Power: American Presidents: Teacher's Guide

Grade Level: 9-12

Curriculum Focus: U.S. History

Lesson Duration: Two class periods

Program Description

Explore the presidency of George Washington and the precedents he set. See how Thomas Jefferson doubled the nation's size and James Madison secured lasting independence from Britain. Examine Lincoln's life from his early years in a log cabin to his fateful visit to Ford's Theater. And investigate forensic evidence behind two lesser-known presidential assassination attempts.

- George Washington (4 min.)
 - Thomas Jefferson (4 min.)
 - Abraham Lincoln (4 min.)
 - Crime-Scene Investigations: The White House (35 min.)
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Onscreen Questions

- What precedents did George Washington set for future American presidents?
 - How did Thomas Jefferson increase the resources of the nation?
 - How did President Lincoln handle the issue of slavery in the Southern states?
 - What are the consequences of a presidential assassination?
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Lesson Plan

Student Objectives

- Discuss the role of the presidency in the United States.
- Consider the people's relationship to the presidency, referring to evidence in the program.
- Write an essay describing the presidency, the people's relationship to it, and why presidential decisions can result in strong reactions.

Materials

- *Portraits of Power: American Presidents* program
- Computer with Internet access
- Newsprint and markers

Procedures

1. Ask students: What role does the president play in the U.S. government? Record students' ideas on a sheet of newsprint so you can refer back to it at the end of the lesson. Answers may include:
 - The president is the most important person in the government.
 - He runs the country and makes many important decisions.
 - He is the commander-in-chief of the armed forces.
 - He works closely with the other branches of government.
2. View the "Crime-Scene Investigations: The White House" segment in the *Portraits of Power: American Presidents* program.
3. Divide students into small groups and explain that they will discuss the role of the presidency as portrayed in the program. Suggest that they start the discussion by answering the following questions:
 - What actions did each of the presidents discussed in the segment – Abraham Lincoln, James Garfield, Zachary Taylor, and Richard Nixon – take that provoked strong responses from individuals?
 - What do the actions of these individuals tell you about the relationship between some members of the public and the presidency?
 - Based on what you saw in the segment, has the role of president changed since George Washington's presidency?
 - Could the kind of incidents relayed in the program happen again? Why or why not?
4. Give students time in class for the group discussions. Then have each student write an essay expressing his or her opinion about the role of the presidency, the public's relationship to the presidency, why incidents described in the segment took place, and whether they think these incidents could happen again. To supplement the information from the program, send students to the following Web sites.
 - General Information about the Presidency
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/President_of_the_United_States
<http://bensguide.gpo.gov/3-5/government/national/president.html>
http://bensguide.gpo.gov/3-5/government/national/president_list.html



- Richard Nixon
<http://movies.about.com/od/assassinationofrichardnixon/a/nixonnm122904.htm>
<http://www.wsws.org/articles/2005/feb2005/nixo-f05.shtml>
 - Abraham Lincoln
<http://home.att.net/~rjnorton/Lincoln75.html>
<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/alhtml/alrintr.html>
<http://www.angelfire.com/my/abrahamlincoln/Assassination.html>
 - James Garfield
<http://gulib.lausun.georgetown.edu/dept/speccoll/fl/f133%7d1.htm>
<http://www.nationmaster.com/encyclopedia/James-Garfield>
 - Zachary Taylor
<http://www.dailykos.com/storyonly/2005/5/29/135238/064>
<http://www.ornl.gov/info/ornlreview/rev27-12/text/ansside6.html>
5. During the next class, have students share their essays and discuss their ideas. What do they think about the role of the presidency? About the public's relationship to its highest official? Do they think such incidents could happen again?
 6. Conclude by reviewing the ideas recorded on the newsprint at the start of the lesson. What do students know now that they didn't know before? How have their ideas about the presidency changed?

Assessment

Use the following three-point rubric to evaluate students' work during this lesson.

- 3 points: Students were highly engaged in class and group discussions; developed a deeper understanding of the role of the presidency in the United States; produced a compelling essay, with all the requested components.
- 2 points: Students participated in class and group discussions; developed a somewhat deeper understanding of the role of the presidency in the United States; produced an adequate essay, with most of the requested components.
- 1 point: Students participated minimally in class and group discussions; did not increase their understanding of the role of the presidency in the United States; produced an incomplete essay with little or none of the requested components.

Vocabulary

James Garfield

Definition: The 20th president of the United States; he was shot on July 2, 1881, by Charles Guiteau, an emotionally unbalanced individual who was unhappy that he had not been appointed consul in Paris.

Context: James Garfield died on September 19, 1881, as a result of poor medical care after being shot 80 days earlier.



Abraham Lincoln

Definition: The 16th president of the United States who saw our country through the Civil War; he was assassinated by John Wilkes Booth on April 14, 1865.

Context: Historians continue to debate whether the assassination of Abraham Lincoln was the act of a single man—John Wilkes Booth—or whether there was a planned conspiracy in place.

Richard Nixon

Definition: The 37th president of the United States and the only president ever to resign from office; his involvement in the Watergate burglary and his attempts to cover up the crime led to his removal from office.

Context: Samuel Byck planned to assassinate Richard Nixon, and his weapon—a commercial airliner—eerily foreshadowed the September 11, 2001, attack on the World Trade Center.

presidency

Definition: The chief executive of the United States, responsible for leading the country, working with Congress to pass laws, and leading troops in time of war .

Context: The presidency in the United States is one of the most powerful jobs in the world, and many people aspire to this office.

Zachary Taylor

Definition: The 12th president of the United States who died of mysterious causes on July 9, 1850.

Context: As suspicious as Zachary Taylor's death appeared, most scientists now believe he died of natural causes, possibly from bacteria in the milk or the sudden onset of a severe ulcer.

Academic Standards**Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL)**

McREL's Content Knowledge: A Compendium of Standards and Benchmarks for K-12 Education addresses 14 content areas. To view the standards and benchmarks, visit <http://www.mcrel.org/>.

This lesson plan addresses the following national standards:

- Historical Understanding—Understands the historical perspective
- Language Arts: Viewing—Uses viewing skills and strategies to understand and interpret visual media

The National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS)

NCSS has developed national guidelines for teaching social studies. To become a member of NCSS, or to view the standards online, go to <http://www.socialstudies.org>



This lesson plan addresses the following thematic standards:

- Time, Continuity, and Change
 - Individual Development and Identity
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Support Materials

Develop custom worksheets, educational puzzles, online quizzes, and more with the free teaching tools offered on the Discoveryschool.com Web site. Create and print support materials, or save them to a Custom Classroom account for future use. To learn more, visit

- <http://school.discovery.com/teachingtools/teachingtools.html>
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DVD Content

This program is available in an interactive DVD format. The following information and activities are specific to the DVD version.

How to Use the DVD

The DVD starting screen has the following options:

Play Video – This plays the video from start to finish. There are no programmed stops, except by using a remote control. With a computer, depending on the particular software player, a pause button is included with the other video controls.

Video Index – Here the video is divided into four segments (see below), indicated by video thumbnail icons. Watching all parts in sequence is similar to watching the video from start to finish. Brief descriptions and total running times are noted for each part. To play a particular segment, press Enter on the remote for TV playback; on a computer, click once to highlight a thumbnail and read the accompanying text description and click again to start the video.

Curriculum Units – These are specially edited video segments pulled from different sections of the video (see below). These nonlinear segments align with key ideas in the unit of instruction. They include onscreen pre- and post-viewing questions, reproduced below in this Teacher's Guide. Total running times for these segments are noted. To play a particular segment, press Enter on the TV remote or click once on the Curriculum Unit title on a computer.

Standards Link – Selecting this option displays a single screen that lists the national academic standards the video addresses.

Teacher Resources – This screen gives the technical support number and Web site address.

Video Index

I. George Washington (4 min.)

Explore the presidency of one of our most-beloved founding fathers and the precedents this president of a new nation set for future U.S. leaders.

II. Thomas Jefferson (4 min.)

Examine how his reforms and policies, which included limiting federal powers and increasing the United States' territory, affected a young nation.

III. Abraham Lincoln (4 min.)

See how Lincoln maintained his passionate defense of the Union when the country was plunged into civil war and then throughout the conflict.

IV. Crime-Scene Investigations: The White House (35 min.)

Investigate whether Zachary Taylor was assassinated, Alexander Graham Bell's efforts to save James Garfield, and a foiled plan to assassinate Richard Nixon.

Curriculum Units

1. Our First President

Pre-viewing question

Q: What stories have you heard about George Washington?

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question

Q: In your opinion, what was President Washington's most important contribution?

A: Answers will vary.

2. Remembering Jefferson's Presidency

Pre-viewing question

Q: What would the U.S. be like today if the Louisiana Purchase hadn't happened?

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question

Q: How did Thomas Jefferson limit the federal government's powers?

A: When he came into office, Jefferson did several things to limit the powers of the federal government—he lowered government spending, fired tax collectors and many other government employees, and reduced the size of the military.



3. Abraham Lincoln: Defender of Freedom

Pre-viewing question

Q: Name someone who became successful despite being born into humble beginnings.

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question

Q: What would the country be like today if Lincoln had not ended slavery?

A: Answers will vary.

4. Garfield for President

Pre-viewing question

Q: Is the presidency a dangerous job?

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question

Q: Do you think Guiteau's published speech persuaded anyone to vote for Garfield?

A: Answers will vary.

5. Garfield's Assassin: A Deranged Job Seeker

Pre-viewing question

Q: What safety measures are in place to protect the president?

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question

Q: Why did Guiteau shoot the president?

A: Guiteau became upset when he was unable to get a job at the White House. He said that he shot Garfield to fulfill God's desires.

6. An Attempt to Save Garfield

Pre-viewing question

Q: Who was Alexander Graham Bell?

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question

Q: What lengths would you go to in order to save someone's life?

A: Answers will vary.

7. Garfield's Death and Bell's Future

Pre-viewing question

Q: If Garfield had lived, how would U.S. history be different?

A: Answers will vary.



Post-viewing question

Q: Would the metal detector have been invented without Garfield's assassination?

A: Answers will vary.

8. Taylor's Fight Over Slavery

Pre-viewing question

Q: What do you know about Zachary Taylor's presidency?

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question

Q: Do you think Toombs or Stephens had Taylor killed?

A: Answers will vary.

9. Taylor's Death: Accident or Murder?

Pre-viewing question

Q: Why would someone want to kill a country's leader?

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question

Q: Do you think Taylor was murdered?

A: Answers will vary.

10. Investigating Taylor's Death

Pre-viewing question

Q: Is it important to know how President Taylor died?

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question

Q: Was it right to exhume Taylor's body for the investigation?

A: Answers will vary.

11. Sam Byck and President Nixon

Pre-viewing question

Q: Can you tell when a person is lying to you?

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question

Q: Why did Sam Byck want to kill President Nixon?

A: Byck, who suffered from mental illness and could not hold a job, blamed his problems on the White House. Believing that the "corrupt" President Richard M. Nixon was mostly to blame, Byck wanted to kill him.



12. Byck's Suicidal Attack

Pre-viewing question

Q: How would you react in a hostage-type situation?

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question

Q: What do you think would have happened if Byck's airplane had taken off?

A: Answers will vary.

