

Roles & Powers of the President

Overview

This lesson introduces the office of President by discussing the qualifications necessary for serving in the office, as well as the roles and powers of the President as prescribed by the U.S. Constitution. Students will exercise these roles and powers themselves by assuming the position of President of the United States of America.

Grades

Middle & high school

Essential Questions

- What are the basic requirements one must meet to become President of the United States of America?
- What qualifications should a person have to be President?
- What powers are granted to the President by the United States Constitution?
- What are the various roles the President must serve in and what duties do these roles entail?
- What are the term limits for the US President?
- What is the order of secession should something prevent the President from fulfilling his or her duties?

Materials

- Powers of the President Political Cartoon, attached
- Textbook
- Powers of the President graphic organizer; attached
- Hail to YOU, Chief; worksheet attached
- Optional: Recording of Hail to the Chief:
<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/diglib/ihas/loc.natlib.ihas.100010434/default.html>
- Optional: For related content, the Consortium's lesson "Separation of Powers and Checks and Balances in the US Government," available in the Database of Civic Resources.

Duration

45 minutes

Procedure

Could I Be President?

1. As a warm-up, tell students that there are five people interested in being President of the United States and that their job is to determine whether or not they meet the basic requirements. Project the following descriptions and have students discuss whether they think each person is eligible:
 - Thirty-year old from New Jersey who has been a Senator for four-years already.
 - Seventy-six year old former House of Representatives member.
 - Thirty-seven year old Governor of California who was a famous actor after moving from his birth country of Austria.
 - Thirty-five year old business woman from North Carolina.

- Forty-nine year old military general stationed in Iraq for the past four years and who was born on a U.S. military base in Germany after WWII.
2. As students discuss, let them know that there are three basic requirements to become President:
 - At least 35 years of age
 - Native-born United States citizen
 - Resident of the United States for at least 14 years
 3. Discuss:
 - Why do you think the Founding Fathers set forth these basic requirements?
 - What is your opinion of these requirements? Do you agree that the age and citizenship stipulations are good ones? Why or why not?
 - What other requirements do you think a President should meet? (List these on the board or on chart paper. Allow students to note physical, emotional, mental, etc. qualifications that come to mind, but play devil’s advocate when appropriate. For example, if a student notes that a President should be in good health, ask the class whether a person with a life threatening disease should be able to be President.)
 - Once students have made a substantial list, discuss the differences in requirements and qualifications. Based on their responses, discuss which (if any) should be requirements, and which are preferred qualifications.

Roles & Powers of the President

4. To transition into discussing what power the President has, project or handout the attached political cartoon. Ask student to examine the political cartoon and then respond to:
 - What do you see here? (Students should point out all symbols, text, visual details, etc.)
 - What message is the artist trying to convey? What message is the cartoon implying regarding the powers of the President?
 - Does the President make his or her own rules? Explain.
 - In what ways does the structure of our government prevent the President from “making his/her own rules” or abusing his power? (Review the concepts of separation of powers and checks and balances. See also the Consortium’s lesson “Separation of Powers and Checks and Balances in the US Government,” available in the Database of Civic Resources.)
 - What powers does the President officially have, as granted by the US Constitution?
5. Tell students that they will be playing a game involving the powers of the President in just a moment, so they must first get a basic understanding of the powers the President has. Assign a reading from your textbook or from the Internet that addresses the President’s roles as Chief Executive, Chief Diplomat, Commander in Chief, Legislative Leader, Head of State, Economic Leader, and Party Leader, as well as the powers he has within each category. Provide the attached graphic organizer for students to fill out as they work. (This can be done individually or in partners.) Once students have worked for approximately 15 minutes, discuss together to ensure they have noted each of the President’s roles and powers.

Two Truths and a Lie

6. Next, test student knowledge by playing “Two Truths and a Lie.” Tell the class that you are going to tell them three statements at a time regarding the roles and powers of the President. Two of the

statements are true, and one is a lie. Students will need to guess which is which. Examples of statements you may use are:

A.

- The President gets paid to throw large parties. (*True! As “Head of State,” part of the President’s job is to hold ceremonies and dinners for foreign visitors.*)
- The President can declare war if America's national security is threatened. (*False. Only Congress can declare war.*)
- The President has the power to appoint ambassadors. (*True. This is part of his duties as “Chief Diplomat.”*)

B.

- The President has the right to withhold certain information from Congress if he thinks it would endanger America. (*True due to Executive Privilege!*)
- No president has ever made it to the highest office without being elected to either the Presidency or the vice-presidency (*False. Gerald Ford was not elected to either post.*)
- The President is allowed to campaign for other candidates of his same party running for office. (*True. This is part of his role as “Party Chief.”*)

C.

- The power of the vice-presidency has been increasing since the early 1990s. (*True*)
- The president is one of the highest paid members of American society. (*False. The President makes a mere \$200,000.*)
- No president has ever been elected to more than two terms. (*False. FDR held office four terms.*)

7. Depending on how much time you want to spend on this, you can also instruct students to then come up with their own statements for “Two Truths and a Lie” and allow them to challenge the class with their own creations.
8. Finally, either discuss as a class or have students respond in writing to:
 - Of all the president’s roles, which do you think is most important? Which do you think is least important? Explain.
 - If you were president, which of these roles do you think you would most enjoy?
 - What characteristics does a president need to fill all of these roles effectively? Explain.

Hail to YOU, Chief!

9. Next, tell students that you have wonderful news for them. (Optional: For effect, play “Hail to the Chief” while setting up this activity.) Explain that they have been elected President of the United States, and they must now use their newly learned knowledge to complete their duties appropriately. Hand out the attached “Hail to YOU, Chief!” and instruct students to complete the sheet, either individually or in partners. Explain that the sheet contains scenarios that they are faced with in their first year of presidency. They must determine how to handle the described issue, and then note what facet of their job grants them this power.
- **Teacher Note:** Another option is to place students into small groups and partners, and assign them one of the scenarios on the worksheet to act out in front of class. Students could then discuss the situation as a class to determine the answers.

10. Once students are finished, discuss answers as a class.

Term Limits

11. Next, ask the students how long they can serve as President. What are the term limits? Allow students to share their thoughts then project or handout the text of the 22nd Amendment:

- Amendment 22 - Presidential Term Limits

No person shall be elected to the office of the President more than twice, and no person who has held the office of President, or acted as President, for more than two years of a term to which some other person was elected President shall be elected to the office of the President more than once unless it shall have been ratified as an amendment to the Constitution by the legislatures of three-fourths of the several States within seven years from the date of its submission to the States by the Congress.

12. Explain that prior to the adoption of the 22nd Amendment, the Constitution set no limit on the number of presidential terms. Passed in 1947 and ratified in 1951, the only president elected to more than two terms was Franklin Roosevelt. Discuss:

- Why do you think it was determined that a president could only be elected to office for two terms? Do you agree or disagree with this amendment and why?

Presidential Secession

13. Next, tell students that while they are still imagining they are President, tell them to also imagine something terrible unfortunately happens that prevents them from continuing on in the role. Ask students what they think the order of Presidential secession is.

14. Discuss the Constitution's original provisions for presidential succession (*Vice President then Speaker of the House*) then explain that during the Cold War when tensions were high and America was wary of nuclear threat and Communism, Congress added the 25th Amendment to the Constitution which further clarified the matter of presidential succession. It established procedures both for filling a vacancy in the office of the Vice President as well as responding to Presidential disabilities.

15. Prior to class, use the attached Presidential Line of Secession handout as a guide to write each of the 18 successors onto large paper. At this point in the lesson, distribute one piece of paper to 18 volunteer students and ask them to guess what the order of secession is. Invite students still seated to help them. After students have had a few minutes to try and figure out the line of secession, put them in the correct order and pass out the attached handout and discuss.

16. As a culmination to the lesson, assign the following for homework (also described on their "Hail to YOU, Chief!" worksheet):

- Your homework assignment is to write a classified ad for the "Help Wanted" section of the newspaper. Your ad should be written as if it is seeking a new President of the United States of America. Your ad must show your understanding of the role of the President by containing:
 - Requirements and previous experience preferred for the position
 - What the position will entail (duties, roles, and responsibilities)
 - Compensation
 - Creativity

Additional Activities

- Give students newspaper articles regarding actions taken by our current president; have them note the various powers at play based on the president's actions.
- Give students a creative writing assignment in which they continue to assume the role of the president and write a narrative about their day. Instruct students to ensure their narrative includes performing one duty under each of the president's roles.

Political Cartoon: Powers of the President



**“THERE IT IS, JUST THE WAY IT
CAME OFF THE FOUNDING
FATHERS’ TYPEWRITER”**

March 13, 1974

Name: _____

Hail to You, Chief!

Congratulations! You have just been elected the President of the United States of America. Given what you have learned regarding the powers granted to the president, you must deal with the following situations in an appropriate manner, making good use of your power and justifying your right to handle these situations by noting what role gives you the power to make such a choice. Remember, the roles of the President include: **Chief Executive, Chief Diplomat, Commander in Chief, Legislative Leader, Head of State, Economic Leader, and Party Leader.**

1. Egypt and Israel continue to fight and bring even more instability to the Middle East. You are very concerned about this situation and would like to rejuvenate the peace process in the Middle East. What power do you have in this situation, and what role grants you this power?
2. You have been following the career of a woman by the name of Ruth Bader Ginsberg. Ginsberg was a professor at Rutgers University School of Law, Newark School of Law and Columbia Law School, a litigator for the ACLU, and a federal judge on the US of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit. You feel that she is very fair and even tempered, and you would like to give her a job. Where might she fit? In what way might you be able to get her a federal job and what specific power allows you to do this?
3. A bill has been sent to you by Congress that involves making flag burning illegal. You disagree with this bill and absolutely do not want such a law passed. What can you do to act on your displeasure, and what role enables you to do it?
4. You are a Republican president, and a fellow Republican is running for Governor of North Carolina. You would really like to help her win the office. What can you do to assist, and what gives you this power?
5. It is nearing the end of the year, and you have some concerns about the nation's economy. Constituents are looking to you to get our country back on track economically. You feel you need to spend some time examining and reevaluating the finances of the federal government. After you have a sense of the current financial state of America, what do you need to do to ensure there is a financial guideline to follow for next year? What role does this type of responsibility fall under?

6. The Marquis de Lafayette, a foreign visitor from France, is scheduled to arrive at the White House today. What should you plan for his visit? What specific power does this fall under?
7. You have been given reconnaissance imagery revealing Soviet nuclear missile installations in Cuba. You feel these nuclear weapons pose an incredible danger. What can you do, and what gives you this power?
8. It is about that time when you need to address Congress and outline your agenda for the year. You also need this information broadcast to the people. What annual tradition will you follow to deliver this information, and what role gives you this power?
9. It is December, and Washington, DC is buzzing with holiday spirit. You want to make sure the White House sticks with tradition and embraces this season. What should you make sure to mark on your calendar this December?
10. You are passionate about a new health care program that you have developed, which contains several laws that you want Congress to pass. Since only members of Congress have the power to introduce bills for consideration, what can you do to advocate for your health care legislation? What role gives you the ability to do this?

Homework
Wanted: Man or woman for top government position!

Your homework assignment is to write a classified ad for the “Help Wanted” section of the newspaper. Your ad should be written as if it is seeking a new President of the United States of America. Your ad must show your understanding of the role of the President by containing:

- Requirements and previous experience preferred for the position
- What the position will entail (duties, roles, and responsibilities)
- Compensation
- Creativity

Hail to You, Chief! ~ KEY

While student answers will vary, ensure students have mentioned and discussed the following (there are a few noted historical facts you may wish to share with your class as well):

1. As Chief Diplomat, I can help settle problems among other countries. I can facilitate discussion between the countries as well as facilitate the signing of a treaty.

*Historical Fact: Jimmy Carter brought Egypt and Israel together to sign the Camp David Peace Accords in 1979.

2. I can appoint her to the Supreme Court, allowed under the power of Chief Executive.

*Historical Fact: President Clinton appointed Ruth Bader Ginsberg to the Supreme Court.

3. As Legislative Leader, I can veto the bill.

4. As Party Leader, I can give a speech to assist her campaign.

5. As Economic Leader, I must prepare a federal budget.

6. Holding ceremonies and dinners for foreign visitors is part of my Head of State powers.

*Historical Fact: The Marquis de Lafayette was one of the first notable international guests of the White House. President John Quincy Adams honored the hero of the American and French Revolutions with a party on the Marquis de Lafayette's 68th birthday in 1825. The square across Pennsylvania Avenue would later be named to commemorate Lafayette.

7. As Commander-in-Chief, I can place the military on high alert.

*Historical fact: President Kennedy orders America's nuclear forces on high alert during the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962.

8. I will make the annual state-of-the union address to Congress in my role as Chief Legislator.

9. As Head of State, I carry out ceremonial functions, such as lighting the national Christmas tree.

10. As Legislative Leader, I can propose and advocate from my desired legislation by giving speeches, meeting with key senators and representatives, and appointing staff members to work closely with members of Congress, all in an effort to build support for my ideas.

Homework Example

WANTED: POSITION AVAILABLE FOR TOP GOVERNMENT OFFICIAL

Must have been born in the United States, be at least 35 years old, and be a U.S. citizen.

Duties include making speeches, talking to the press, acting as commander in chief of the United States military and making important policy decisions. Must like to travel, shake hands and kiss babies. Knowing how to compromise and get along with others is necessary.

Applicants must be willing to sign a four year contract if hired, with the possibility of renewal.

Previous governmental experience a requirement. Women and minorities are *strongly* encouraged to apply.

Salary: \$200,000 a year, plus expense account that includes \$50,000 per year for office expenses, \$20,000 per year for entertaining and \$100,000 per year for travel. Housing, transportation, and security provided. Must be willing to relocate to Washington, D.C.

