

The Inauguration of a President: What is an Inauguration?

Grade Level: Middle School (6-8)

Time Required: 15 minutes (expandable as needed)

Rationale:

“I am the son of a black man from Kenya and a white woman from Kansas. I was raised with the help of a white grandfather who survived a Depression to serve in Patton’s Army during World War II and a white grandmother who worked on a bomber assembly line at Fort Leavenworth while he was overseas. I’ve gone to some of the best schools in America and lived in one of the world’s poorest nations. I am married to a black American who carries within her the blood of slaves and slaveowners—an inheritance we pass on to our two precious daughters. I have brothers, sisters, nieces, nephews, uncles and cousins, of every race and every hue, scattered across three continents, and for as long as I live, I will never forget that in no other country on Earth is my story even possible.”

President-elect **Barack Obama**, in a speech on race offered at the **National Constitution Center, Philadelphia, March 18, 2008.**

On November 4, American voters selected the nation’s first black president. While that in itself is historic, given all of the circumstances listed in Senator Obama’s speech, it is also part of a much larger story that concerns the constitutional miracle of a peaceful and orderly transfer of power. In times of war, economic crisis, peace and prosperity, Americans have witnessed the arrival of new members of Congress and the new President without riots, revolution, and military intervention. Few nations can say the same. From the beginning of this nation, it has always seemed that Americans, made of a polyglot of cultures and backgrounds, have always been innovative in social institutions, building a society that can adapt to the challenges of the moment. Surely, the next few calendar years will test the strength of that cultural characteristic.

In the meantime, the country is preparing for an inauguration that could be witnessed by as many as four million people in Washington, D.C. and four *billion* people worldwide. Why all the interest? What happens within these ceremonies that span nearly twenty-four hours from start to finish? What exactly is an *inauguration* and why is it so important to the nation and its people, and for that matter, the world? The ceremony, its origins, and its meaning are the subject of a series of lesson plans designed especially for the occasion.

There are four 15-minute lessons included here for teachers who wish to take advantage of this timely historic opportunity. While together they constitute an interesting scope of the ceremony surrounding the inauguration of a President of the United States, they are also sufficient to stand independently and to serve as springboards for further study and discovery. In any case, these lessons are completely expandable to meet the needs of students in the classroom. The materials section provides links and resources that can be employed for different directions or more intense study. The lesson plans are organized like this:

- 1) What is an *Inauguration?*” (Roots, Traditions. Practices)
- 2) The Inaugural Address

- 3) Supreme Security
- 4) A National Celebration

Pennsylvania Standards:

Civics and Government

- 5.1.9.C Analyze the principles and ideals that shape government.
- 5.1.9.G Describe the procedures for proper uses, display and respect for the United States Flag as per the National Flag Code.
- 5.1.9.K Explain why symbols and holidays were created and the ideals they commemorate.
- 5.1.9.M Interpret the impact of famous speeches and writings on civic life.
- 5.3.9.B Compare the responsibilities and powers of the three branches within the national government.
- 5.3.9.J Analyze the importance of freedom of press.

History

- 8.1.9.A Analyze chronological thinking.
- 8.1.9.B Analyze and interpret historical sources.
- 8.1.9.C Analyze the fundamentals of historical interpretation.
- 8.1.9.D Analyze and interpret historical research.

Big Ideas:

Engaged citizens understand the workings of government and use historic precedents in shaping thought and action.

An engaged citizen is a life-long learner continuing to benefit from internal maturity and external influences.

A thoughtful citizen evaluates the accuracy of communications and analyzes media sources attempting to influence the public agenda.

Essential Questions:

Why is the American flag such a powerful symbol of patriotism and of protest?

How are holidays and local, state and national celebrations symbolic of our national identity?

How are nationalism and patriotism important to national identity?

How can nationalism and patriotism be used responsibly?

What is truth in the media? What sources of information can we trust to tell us the truth?

Are citizens responsible for the success or failure of our government?

How does nationalism impact social institutions in an increasingly interdependent world?

Materials

There are a number of materials and sites dedicated to the inauguration, some including specious and misleading information. The listings here are not all-inclusive nor are they intended to be. At the least, they are offered here to provide a basis for each of the lessons and to stimulate further discovery by students.

Primary Documents:

- [*The Constitution of the United States*](#). This copy of the Constitution and Amendments is posted courtesy of the **U.S. House of Representatives**. There are many sites that feature the U.S. Constitution, but this one is particularly good because of the associated primary documents and educational materials surrounding the central document.
- Teachers familiar with **National History Day** are also familiar with [Our Documents](#), 100 documents critical to the development of America. Washington's First Inaugural Address is included in the collection.

Other Primary Sources:

- The transcripts of ALL inaugural addresses have been compiled by the [Avalon Project](#) at the **Yale University Law School**.
- The **National Archives** also offers transcripts of a number of inaugural addresses, but includes images of the originals as well. See, for example, [George Washington's First Inaugural Address](#).
- President John F. Kennedy's Inaugural Address is one of the most famous, and perhaps more meaningful when heard in [this audiofile](#) from the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library. One of the great advantages is that a researcher can also get good audio, video, AND a transcript, such as some of the presidential holdings of the [Miller Center at the University of Virginia](#). Watch, for example, [President Ronald Reagan's First Inaugural Address](#) precisely 20 years after JFK's. [The University of Arkansas Little Rock](#) has also amassed a number of good presidential resources. There are also some

interesting curiosities out there, with one of my favorites being the late [Charlton Heston adding his sonorous voice to George Washington's First Inaugural Address](#) for PBS.

- Many of you are already familiar with the **American Memory Project of the Library of Congress**. For the Inauguration, the LOC has compiled an excellent collection of digital files in [I Do Solemnly Swear...](#)
- **Springfield High School** (Springfield Township School District, Springfield, Delaware County) is providing the schools of the Commonwealth with an unparalleled opportunity in regard to the inauguration. Springfield is undertaking an ambitious project that combines 21st century skills with advanced student involvement in learning. One team of students will be in place in Washington, D.C. (Jan. 17-23) while another is at the National Constitution Center in Philadelphia on Inauguration Day. At the same time, the broadcast journalism students at Springfield High School will be streaming informational video through the district website. Schools will be able to interact with these correspondents and view their contributions through a [dedicated blog](#).

Useful Secondary Sources:

- The [Joint Congressional Committee on Inaugural Ceremonies \(JCCIC\)](#) offers one of the best overarching sites, with appropriate historical perspective, customs, traditions, weekly photos of the platform construction at the inaugural site, an overview of the 2009 inauguration, advisories for travelers to the event, and the ability to subscribe to e-mail updates.
- [Inauguration Day Central](#), from the *Washington Post*. What should a traveler to what is prospectively the largest crowd ever assembled in Washington, D.C. know in advance? The respected *Washington Post* tries its hand at attempting to prepare visitors while providing a webcam view of preparations and RSS feed capability. A similar site is posted by the [District of Columbia](#).
- [FREE \(Federal Resources for Educational Excellence\)](#) offers several lesson plans concerning the inauguration that may be of interest.
- [The Smithsonian Institution](#) has developed an excellent site to help bring the inauguration into classrooms.
- [EdSitement](#), in cooperation with the **National Endowment for the Humanities**, also offers several alternative lesson plans designed in 2002 that may be useful to you. These plans were originally designed to accompany the **Library of Congress** materials for "I Do Solemnly Swear." They are not aligned to Pennsylvania Standards, but they are adaptable.

Instruction

Anticipatory Set

The inauguration of a new President of the United States is nearly upon us, and there are many problems facing him, the national government, all of the state governments, and all of the local governments, too. Historically, an “inauguration” signifies a new and positive beginning to something, and the United States has, over time, built elaborate rituals and ceremonies around the inauguration of the chief executive. What all is involved in an inauguration and where did the practices originate?

Procedures/Activities

Students will read the pertinent documents behind the inauguration of the chief executive. They are not at all lengthy. In fact, they are quite sparse.

Constitutional Basis for the Inauguration:

- Article II, Section 1 sets forth the Oath of Affirmation.
- Amendment XX establishes January 20 at noon as the close of the terms of the President and the Vice President, changing it from the previously established March 4.

(Links to these documents are included in the materials list above)

The Inaugural Day Schedule:

- Morning Worship Service
- Procession to the Capitol
- Vice-President’s Swearing-In
- President’s Swearing-In
- Inaugural Address
- Departure of the Outgoing President
- Inaugural Luncheon
- Inaugural Parade
- Inaugural Ball

Source: Joint Congressional Committee on Inaugural Ceremonies, in materials list above

How did the limited and simple Constitutional basis become such an elaborate event? Assign small groups to conduct brief research to determine how these additional events were established. **Include how these events represent America and its ideals and principles.** Report back to the whole group and include some “nice to know” items.

Evaluation

For Discussion/Writing:

Have any of the events associated with the inauguration lost their meaning? Should any new practices be established?

Consult the “Assessments” section for more ideas or as a means to move into another lesson plan associated with the inaugural ceremonies.

Assessments

Further Discussion/Writing/Reflection:

Write an editorial or a letter to the editor calling for the discontinuation of the wasteful and expensive practices of inaugural balls.

Write an editorial or a letter to the editor supporting inaugural balls as necessary to the “dignity” of a presidential inauguration.

Suggest, in a letter to the JCCIC, a new practice or tradition to be implemented in future inaugurations that would embody an ideal or principle upon which America is founded.

Pen (or more appropriately, type) a letter to President Obama from President Bush, to be handed over during the farewell and before the departure on Marine-1. Include national priorities that should not escape the attention of the new President, as well as advice on living in the White House.

The Inauguration of a President: the Inaugural Address	
Grade Level: Middle School	Time Required: 15 minutes (expandable as needed)
Rationale	
<p>The overall rationale for this set of lessons is succinctly offered in lesson one. The focus of this lesson is the importance of the inaugural address, thought by many experts to be the linchpin of the inaugural ceremony. Over the years, inaugural addresses have been very short (George Washington’s second was about the length of a short Super Bowl commercial) and very long (William Henry Harrison’s 8,000+ word behemoth was delivered in a cold, heavy rain—you can bet that was well-received). Some have been vastly inspirational to citizens and others have been vastly short on details and direction. In the end, though, the inaugural address has been used as a sort of preamble for a new administration or new term; an insight into what course the nation will take in the next several years.</p> <p>In 2009, the President-elect will have no trouble finding challenges and eligible content for the address. “May you live in interesting times,” an old maxim (or perhaps a curse) reads. All of us can now affirm that we live in “interesting times.” There seem to be crises of all sorts on all horizons, and citizens of the U.S. (as well as many throughout the world) will be watching and listening as the new President hints at policies to be pursued that will address a multitude of economic issues, a long-running war, civil liberties, education and health care for an aging population. Will he challenge the citizens of the U.S. to take action? Will he underscore the responsibilities as well as the rights that we have? January 20 will answer those and many other questions.</p>	
Pennsylvania Standards	
<u>Civics and Government</u>	
5.1.9.C Analyze the principles and ideals that shape government.	
5.1.9.M Interpret the impact of famous speeches and writings on civic life.	
5.2.9.E Explain the importance of the political process to competent and responsible participation in civic life.	
5.3.9.B Compare the responsibilities and powers of the three branches within the national government.	
5.3.9.J Analyze the importance of freedom of press.	
5.4.9.D Contrast how the three branches of federal government function in foreign policy.	
<u>History</u>	

8.1.9.A Analyze chronological thinking.

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Big Ideas

Engaged citizens understand the workings of government and use historic precedents in shaping thought and action.

A thoughtful citizen evaluates the accuracy of communications and analyzes media sources attempting to influence the public agenda.

Political and economics ideas motivate societies to new behaviors.

Essential Questions

What is the balance between rights and responsibilities?

What are the roles of the citizen in American democracy?

How have the concepts of equality and liberty evolved in American history?

How are holidays and local, state and national celebrations symbolic of our national identity?

How are nationalism and patriotism important to national identity?

How can nationalism and patriotism be used responsibly?

How can we come to new perceptions concerning an issue upon which we already hold strong opinions?

What is truth in the media? What sources of information can we trust to tell us the truth?

Are citizens responsible for the success or failure of our government?

How does our current standard of living impact the lives of others around the world?

What constitute the greatest international challenges facing the world's nations in the next half century?

In what ways does the U.S. political scene impact international society?

How do ideas impact nations AND international society?

What are the greatest challenges facing United States foreign policy over the next decade?

What skills and knowledge do American citizens need to be able to compete in the Flat World?

Materials

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- **Springfield High School** (Springfield Township School District, Springfield, Delaware County) is providing the schools of the Commonwealth with an unparalleled opportunity in regard to the inauguration. Springfield is undertaking an ambitious project that combines 21st century skills with advanced student involvement in learning. One team of students will be in place in Washington, D.C. (Jan. 17-23) while another is at the National Constitution Center in Philadelphia on Inauguration Day. At the same time, the broadcast journalism students at Springfield High School will be streaming informational video through the district website. Schools will be able to interact with these correspondents and view their contributions through a [dedicated blog](#).

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- **The National Constitution Center** offers an intriguing lesson plan on the [Six Words to Inspire America](#), challenging students to develop a six-word inaugural speech. While it is not aligned to Pennsylvania Standards, it is easily adaptable.
- [FREE \(Federal Resources for Educational Excellence\)](#) offers several lesson plans concerning the inauguration that may be of interest.
- [The Smithsonian Institution](#) has developed an excellent site to help bring the inauguration into classrooms.

Instruction

Anticipatory Set

As the inauguration approaches, many Americans are anxious to learn what President Obama and his administration plan to do for *them*. Instead, it is a good bet that the new chief executive will urge action of American citizens, as part of our responsibilities of citizenship. What will the President ask of America? What advice would you offer?

Procedures/Activities

See the National Constitution Center link in the “Materials” section for the *Six Words to Inspire America* lesson plan. You may employ this strategy individually or in teams. The beauty of this lesson is its simplicity. Essentially, students are distilling a number of themes; patriotism, personal responsibility and the roles of government. It is both fun and challenging.

Evaluation/Closure

Students may share their inspirational words with each other and with the President-elect. Of course, there are other assessment instruments that may be more appropriate to your tastes. See “Assessments.”

Assessments

As an advisor to the President-elect, what major tasks or missions would you include for the nation to address over the course of the next decade (i.e., what major accomplishment do you expect America to conclude by 2020?). What's the top priority, and how should it be handled in the Address?

Having watched the President's inaugural address, what are the major challenges facing the nation as outlined by the President? What is your role to be in meeting those challenges? What do you need before you can address the challenges?

The Inauguration of a President: Supreme Security

Grade Level: Middle School

Time Required: 15 minutes (expandable as needed)

Rationale:

Lesson one examined the roots and practices associated with the inauguration while lesson two turned toward the importance of the inaugural address. In this lesson, the matter of security for such a large event is the focal point.

The fifty-eight agencies responsible for overall security at the inauguration are expecting as many as four million people to be in Washington, D.C. on January 20 to witness the ceremony and join in the celebrations (the previous record for inaugural crowds was just short of one and one half million for the 1965 inaugural of Lyndon Baines Johnson). There may be as many as four *billion* people watching on live streaming video. How can those agencies hope to provide security for the assembled leaders of the three branches of the national government as well as the general public? How will “normal” life be impacted in the region? What sorts of precautions must be taken? Why not just have the ceremony in an underground bunker or something of the sort?

There are reasons for a *public* inauguration, and they are central to who we are and what we believe as Americans.

Pennsylvania Standards:

Civics and Government

5.1.9.K Explain why symbols and holidays were created and the ideals they commemorate.

5.3.9.B Compare the responsibilities and powers of the three branches within the national government.

5.3.9.J Analyze the importance of freedom of press.

History

8.1.9.A Analyze chronological thinking.

8.1.9.B Analyze and interpret historical sources.

Big Ideas:

Citizens understand their rights and practice their responsibilities in a vibrant society.

A thoughtful citizen evaluates the accuracy of communications and analyzes media sources attempting to influence the public agenda.

Essential Questions:

How are holidays and local, state and national celebrations symbolic of our national identity?

What is the proper course of action when individual rights and liberties conflict with the common good?

What is truth in the media? What sources of information can we trust to tell us the truth?

Materials

There are a number of materials and sites dedicated to the inauguration, some including specious and misleading information. The listings here are not all-inclusive nor are they intended to be. At the least, they are offered here to provide a basis for each of the lessons and to stimulate further discovery by students.

Primary Sources:

- [Miller Center at the University of Virginia](#). Documents, audio files, photos, video clips are included in the holdings. There may be some interesting clues on security issues from inaugurations past.
- [The University of Arkansas Little Rock](#) has also amassed a number of good presidential resources.
- Many of you are already familiar with the **American Memory Project of the Library of Congress**. For the Inauguration, the LOC has compiled an excellent collection of digital files in [I Do Solemnly Swear...](#)
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- [“Big Brother to Watch Inaugural Crowd,”](#) from WAVY-TV
- An [extraordinary piece on security issues](#) from **Ari Shapiro at National Public Radio** (just under five minutes) outlines the astonishing tasks anticipated. Is this responsible journalism or does it merely give desperate people ideas?
- [Inauguration Day Central](#), from the *Washington Post*. What should a traveler to what is prospectively the largest crowd ever assembled in Washington, D.C. know in advance? The respected *Washington Post* tries its hand at attempting to prepare visitors while providing a webcam view of preparations and RSS feed capability. A similar site is posted by the [District of Columbia](#).

Assessments

Questions for writing/reflection/discussion:

How does technology make the inauguration ceremony safer? How does it make it less safe?

What national ideals or principles make the inauguration and the ceremonies surrounding it a statement to other nations around the world?

Should the news media be able to report on security measures for the inauguration? What about the concerns that some of the security agencies have? Is there a limit to a “free press?” Even if the press does have the right to report something, does it have to report it if it means a possible security breach? Why or why not?

Instruction

Anticipatory Set:

Americans have suffered the assassinations of four presidents (none of them at inaugurations) and have often had grave misgivings about the vulnerability of presidents at large public

gatherings. It doesn't lessen anyone's anxiety that nearly all of the nation's leadership will be assembled in a very confined space on January 20. Given the effectiveness of 21st century weapons and the tight perimeters of a 19th century Capitol complex, it would seem that the notion of a public inauguration ceremony borders on the foolhardy. While it may seem like security concerns are only a relatively recent phenomenon, history offers contrary evidence. In this case, we're going to look at the 1829 inauguration of Andrew Jackson.

Procedures/Activities:

Only 40 years had passed since the relatively quiet inauguration of George Washington, but in that time the nation's capital had moved yet again, this time permanently, to the District of Columbia. Jackson was not representative of the eastern elites who had held the office up to that time, and he was idolized by a rather coarse element of American society.

Read a letter that describes the [Crush of Jackson's inaugural](#). You can also consult an artist's representation of what the [post-inaugural crowds](#) were like for Andrew Jackson in 1829. Are there any parts of the account that seem far-fetched? Who was responsible for controlling the "mob?"

Fast-forward 140 years to the inauguration of Lyndon Baines Johnson in 1965. The [crowd at the swearing-in](#) was the largest ever at 1.5 million. Even by the time of the Inaugural Ball, it looked as though the Secret Service, charged with the protection of the President, was caught [a bit unprepared](#). How did that happen? Just barely over a year since the assassination of President Kennedy, how could the Secret Service have been caught flat-footed?

If you desire, play [Ari Shapiro's NPR story](#) on security tasks for the inauguration of President-elect Obama. Does it appear that the Secret Service and the 57 other agencies charged with airtight security are prepared?

Discussion certainly should follow. Have we reached a time where it is no longer desirable or possible to have a public inauguration? What aspects of America are best represented by a public ceremony?

The discussion certainly could lead to all sorts of assessment possibilities as well as further study. See the "Assessments" section for other possibilities.

The Inauguration of a President: A National Celebration

Grade Level: Middle School

Time Required: 15 minutes (expandable as needed)

Rationale:

The series of lesson plans so far has examined with some depth the reason and tradition behind the inauguration (lesson one), the inaugural address (lesson two), and the security for the inauguration (lesson three). In this lesson, the attention is turned to the roughly twenty-four hours that mark the ceremonies and celebrations that surround the inauguration.

Over the years, some have argued that the inauguration should once again become a low-key affair, with the ceremony conducted in the Capitol building and the pomp and extravaganzas kept to a minimum. Others have argued that the inauguration should reflect the outlook and enthusiasm of the American people and should be worthy of a superpower. Is it really worth it to stage such a spectacle? What is gained? What would be lost by a small and dignified transfer of power? Can America survive an inauguration without a glamorous ball?

Pennsylvania Standards:

Civics and Government

5.1.9.C Analyze the principles and ideals that shape government.

5.1.9.G Describe the procedures for proper uses, display and respect for the United States Flag as per the National Flag Code.

5.1.9.K Explain why symbols and holidays were created and the ideals they commemorate.

5.1.9.M Interpret the impact of famous speeches and writings on civic life.

5.2.9.G Analyze political and civic participation in government and society.

5.3.9.B Compare the responsibilities and powers of the three branches within the national government.

5.3.9.J Analyze the importance of freedom of press.

5.4.9.D Contrast how the three branches of federal government function in foreign policy.

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What is truth in the media? What sources of information can we trust to tell us the truth?

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- [The Smithsonian Institution](#) has developed an excellent site to help bring the inauguration into classrooms.

Instruction

Anticipatory Set

Imagine for a moment that the Joint Congressional Committee on Inaugural Ceremonies has given you oversight of the inaugural parade. Your overall objective, according to the JCCIS, is to project to the rest of the world the image of the United States through this parade, which could conceivably last up to three hours.

Procedures/Activities

Divide the class into groups, with no group numbering more than six. The groups represent a planning committee that is going to design an inaugural parade that meets the JCCIS objective. You will want to consider the following issues:

- 1) What is the image that you want to present? Strength? Liberty? Diversity?
- 2) What kinds of entries in the parade will help you with this image? How will the states be represented?
- 3) Can celebrities help? If so, who and how?
- 4) Upon which American symbols will you rely heavily in this parade to convey the image?

Allow sufficient time for collaboration. 15 minutes could be adequate, but students may be heavily engaged, so be flexible.

Bring the committees back to the whole group and report out on parade schemes. Were there noticeable themes running through the committees? What was the most difficult part of the assignment?

Wrap-up with some manner of assessment. Turn this task into a more detailed, finished project. Share it with the JCCIC! Of course, you may wish to turn to other aspects of the inaugural ceremonies (see “Assessments” section in this document).

Assessments

Items for Further Study/Discussion/Writing/Reflection:

Watch the coverage of the Inauguration and the subsequent parade with a small group of colleagues. Discuss and summarize from a personal perspective the following:

- Most memorable segment of the proceedings
- Most surprising segment of the proceedings
- Was there substantial interpretation of the inaugural ceremonies by the covering news organization? Who was the chief correspondent? Who provided analysis? Was there a detectable bias or slant to the reporting?
- Were “patriotism” or “patriotic symbols” employed to support and/or protest the inauguration? How were they employed and by whom?

What is nationalism? How did the ceremonies surrounding the inauguration appeal to a sense of nationalism? How were American symbols and ideas used to present a sense of nationalism?

How did the inaugural ceremonies use history to appeal to Americans?