

INAUGURATION

I-20-2009



Classroom Activities about the
Presidential Inauguration



Morningside Center for Teaching Social Responsibility

INAUGURATION 1-20-2009:
Classroom Activities about the Presidential Inauguration

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Introduction

Although Morningside Center is best known for its conflict resolution programs like Resolving Conflict Creatively and The 4Rs (Reading, Writing, Respect, and Resolution), a strong aspect of our work during our 25 years has been to provide guidelines and resources teachers and students can use to explore important issues of the day. The election of President of the United States is such an issue, and in October we offered some classroom activities titled "VOTE 2008." Here are some new activities we've just created around the presidential inauguration.

When teaching about this or any event, the teacher's role is to promote understanding of the political traditions and process so that students can follow what's going on. Teachers must also take into account their students' stage of development.

This pamphlet contains two sets of suggested classroom activities on the inauguration, one for grades 4-8 and one for high school students. The activities for Grades 4-8 might be adapted for younger elementary school students or for high school students.

I hope you enjoy the activities!

Tom Roderick Executive Director

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To download these and many other free activities, go to www.teachablemoment.org.

Inauguration Activities for Grades 4 - 8

The following classroom lessons are most appropriate for grades 4-8, but can be adapted for younger students.

Activity I: Web & Discussion about Barack Obama

Create a “web” to introduce your students to the topic and to find out their knowledge and interest in it.

Write “President Barack Obama” on chart paper and circle it. Ask students: What do you know about Barack Obama? What words do you associate with him? Write their contributions on the chart paper, drawing lines to connect each of their words to the circle.

You might prompt students with more specific questions such as, Where did he come from? What do you know about his history? What political party is he from? What else do we know about him?

If students share misinformation, note it with a check to remind yourself to come back to it, but don’t interrupt the flow of students’ contributions.

When the web seems completed, ask students if they have questions about Barack Obama or things they would like to know more about. Write their questions on another piece of chart paper.

Afterwards, provide students with some basic background information about Barack Obama. This might include:

- Barack Obama was born in Hawaii and spent much of his childhood there.
- He also spent part of his childhood in Indonesia, a country in Asia.
- Obama’s father came from Kenya, a country in Africa, and was black. His mother, who was white, was born in Kansas.
- Barack Obama is the first African-American person to be elected president of the U.S.
- Barack Obama was a community organizer in Chicago, Illinois, for several years: He helped poor people go to school and get housing.
- He went to law school and later taught law at the University of Chicago.
- He became a U.S. Senator from Illinois four years ago. He’s a Democrat.
- He is married to Michelle Obama and has two daughters.
- He likes to play basketball.

Activity 2: Pair Share: What should President Obama Do?

Ask students to turn to the student next to them so they can talk in pairs. Explain that each person in the pair will have one or two minutes to respond to each of the questions below.

1. Barack Obama will become president at a time when our country is facing many problems and issues. What problems and issues do you know about?
2. What do you think is the most important thing for Obama to do once he becomes president?

Tell students when it's time to let the other person in the pair respond.

Reconvene the class. Ask students to share their responses to each of the questions. You might prompt student with additional questions. (Responses to question 1 might include: the economic crisis, with people losing jobs and homes; wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, school budget cuts, healthcare, global warming.)

Ask: Can a president always do whatever he or she wants? Why not? What might keep President Obama from doing some of the things he said he would do in his campaign?

Ask: What can WE do as citizens if we want our president and our government to do something? (You might question students about ways people can influence their government in addition to voting – such as with letters, petitions, protests.)

Writing Assignment

Ask students to write, either in class or as homework, a short essay answering this question: What is the most important thing you think President Obama should do when he takes office?

If you are happy with the care and thoughtfulness students put into their essays, you might offer to help the class send their essays to the local newspaper and/or to the Obama administration.

Activity 3: Discussion about Obama’s “Inauguration”

Sometime during the week before President Obama is inaugurated, conduct a discussion with the class about what an inauguration is and what will happen during Obama’s inauguration.

Ask students: What does the word “Inauguration” mean?

Explain: “Inaugurate” is a fancy word that means to begin. A president’s “inauguration” is the official start of his or her new term of office.

Every four years, Americans elect or re-elect their president. The election takes place in November, and in January, the president begins his/her term of office at an inauguration ceremony. As part of this ceremony, the president takes an “oath of office.” The presidential oath, which is included in the U.S. Constitution, says: “I do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will faithfully execute the office of President of the United States, and will to the best of my ability, preserve, protect and defend the Constitution of the United States.”

Ask students: Have you heard anything about what will happen on Barack Obama’s Inauguration Day?

Explain: The inauguration will take place on Tuesday, January 20. At noon, President-elect Obama will take the oath of office in front of the U.S. Capitol, using President Lincoln’s inaugural bible. The oath will be administered by the Chief Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court, John Roberts.

After he takes the oath and becomes the United State’s 44th president, Obama will make a speech, called an “inaugural address.” Afterwards, there will be an “inaugural parade,” led by President Obama and Vice President Biden, which will make its way from the Capitol to the White House.

It is expected that two million people will come to Washington, D.C., to celebrate Obama’s inauguration. For the first time, the entire National Mall (the 2-mile-long park between the U.S. Capitol Building and the Lincoln Memorial) will be open to the public.

Many people will be listening closely to President Obama’s inaugural address. Our country has a history of slavery and discrimination against African Americans and other people of color. So Barack Obama’s inauguration as our first black president is an especially important event in our history.

People will also be listening to what President Obama has to say about the huge problems that now face our nation and the world, which we discussed earlier.

Ask students to pay attention to news reports about the Obama inauguration, because they will discuss it in class afterwards.

Activity 4: Student Reading & Discussion on Past Inaugural Speeches

Barack Obama's inauguration is expected to be a historic one: He will become the United State's first black president. In addition, he comes to office at a time when the U.S. is in the midst of economic crisis and two wars.

Two of our greatest presidents also came to office at a time of crisis: President Abraham Lincoln in 1861 and President Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1933. Both made important inaugural speeches. Some excerpts (pieces) of these speeches are below.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

Lincoln was first elected in 1860, at a time when Southern states were threatening to secede (separate) from the North mostly over the issue of slavery. Lincoln was opposed to slavery, and he was also opposed to war and the splitting of the nation.

Below are excerpts from his inaugural speech:

“One section of our country believes slavery is right and ought to be extended, while the other believes it is wrong and ought not to be extended. This is the only substantial dispute....

Physically speaking, we can not separate. We can not remove our respective sections from each other nor build an impassable wall between them. A husband and wife may be divorced and go out of the presence and beyond the reach of each other, but the different parts of our country can not do this. They can not but remain face to face, and intercourse, either amicable or hostile, must continue between them.....

In your hands, my dissatisfied fellow-countrymen, and not in mine, is the momentous issue of civil war. The Government will not assail you. You can have no conflict without being yourselves the aggressors. You have no oath registered in heaven to destroy the Government, while I shall have the most solemn one to “preserve, protect, and defend it.”

I am loath to close. We are not enemies, but friends. We must not be enemies. Though passion may have strained it must not break our bonds of affection. The mystic chords of memory, stretching from every battlefield and patriot grave to every living heart and hearthstone all over this broad land, will yet swell the chorus of the Union, when again touched, as surely they will be, by the better angels of our nature.”

Discussion:

1. Who is Lincoln appealing to in this speech?
2. What is he asking his listeners to do?
3. What is he pledging that his government will not do?

What happened:

Just a month after Lincoln's inauguration, the Civil War began. Lincoln called on the governors of every state to send troops to protect the capitol and "preserve the union." The war continued, and the following year, Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation, which declared freedom for all slaves in the Confederacy (southern states that had seceded). By Lincoln's second inaugural speech in March 1865, the Confederacy was on the verge of defeat. By the war's end, about 620,000 people had died in the Civil War. In June 1865, Congress ratified the 13th Amendment, which outlawed slavery in all of the United States.

Discussion:

One hundred and forty years after the U.S. abolished slavery, we are about to inaugurate our first African American president. This has been called an important historical event and a symbol of the progress the U.S. has made since the Civil War. Do you agree? Why or why not?

FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT

Franklin Roosevelt came to office in 1933, more than three years into the Great Depression. Fifteen million workers had lost their jobs—about one of every three workers in the country. Farms were failing and people were going hungry. About a thousand people a day were losing their homes.

Millions of people took to the streets in protest, calling for major change: They wanted jobs and to keep people from losing their homes and farms. They wanted their government to provide more help for the needy. Workers in auto factories sat down on the job, demanding the right to be in a union that would fight for better wages and working conditions.

In his presidential campaign Franklin Roosevelt had promised to do something about the terrible conditions people faced. "The country needs, the country demands, bold persistent experimentation," he said. "Take a method and try it. If it fails admit it frankly and try another. But above all, try something."

Below are excerpts from Roosevelt's inaugural speech:

"This is preeminently the time to speak the truth, the whole truth, frankly and boldly. Nor need we shrink from honestly facing conditions in our country today. This great Nation will endure as it has endured, will revive and will prosper. So, first of all, let me assert my firm belief that the only thing we have to fear is fear itself—nameless, unreasoning, unjustified terror which paralyzes needed efforts to convert retreat into advance. In every dark hour of our national life a leadership of frankness and vigor has met with that understanding and support of the people themselves which is essential to victory. I am convinced that you will again give that support to leadership in these critical days...."

Our greatest primary task is to put people to work. This is no unsolvable problem if we face it wisely and courageously. It can be accomplished in part by direct recruiting by the government itself, treating the task as we would treat the emergency of a war, but at the same time, through this employment, accomplishing greatly needed projects to stimulate and reorganize the use of our natural resources....

We face the arduous days that lie before us in the warm courage of national unity; with the clear consciousness of seeking old and precious moral values; with the clean satisfaction that comes from the stern performance of duty by old and young alike. We aim at the assurance of a rounded and permanent national life.

We do not distrust the future of essential democracy. The people of the United States have not failed. In their need they have registered a mandate that they want direct, vigorous action. They have asked for discipline and direction under leadership. They have made me the present instrument of their wishes. In the spirit of the gift I take it.”

Discussion:

1. What does Roosevelt mean when he says that we have “nothing to fear but fear itself?”
2. What does Roosevelt think is the most important task facing the nation?
3. How does Roosevelt think Americans should act during a period of crisis?
4. Do you see any connection between the conditions Roosevelt faced when he first became president and those facing Barack Obama today?

What happened:

In the first 100 days of his presidency, FDR, as he became known, enacted what people called “the New Deal.” Many of the changes the Roosevelt administration made still affect us today, over 70 years later. The New Deal:

- Raised the income of farmers
- Helped people hold onto their homes and farms
- Provided direct relief for people who had lost their jobs
- Established huge jobs programs that put people to work planting trees, and building bridges, roads, and sewer systems.
- Passed many new rules to regulate bankers and speculators who had helped created the Great Depression.

Discussion:

How do you think Roosevelt managed to get so many things done in his first 100 days?

Activity 5: Discussion of Obama's Inaugural Speech

After Obama's inauguration, get a transcript of his speech. Either read excerpts out loud or provide students with a written version of the speech or excerpts.

Then have a class discussion about the speech. You might ask students:

- What did you like about the speech? What did you not like?
- What are the major points Barack Obama is making?
- Do you think his proposals are good ones? Why or why not?
- Does Obama's speech have anything in common with the speech Abraham Lincoln gave in 1865?
- Does Obama's speech have anything in common with the speech Franklin D. Roosevelt gave in 1933?
- Does Obama's speech make you want to do something differently yourself or take some action? What?
- Did the speech make you change your mind about anything? What?

Inauguration Activities for High School Students

The following classroom lessons are appropriate for high school students. Some lessons from our unit on the Obama inauguration for younger students may also be adapted for high school, in particular the excerpts from inaugural speeches by Lincoln and FDR.

Student Reading

Newly elected American presidents have faced daunting problems in the past.

Between the time Abraham Lincoln was elected president in November 1860 and his inauguration on March 4, 1861, seven Southern states had seceded from the Union. Four more followed that spring. Five weeks after Lincoln officially became president, Confederate forces fired on Ft. Sumter and the Civil War began.

Franklin Delano Roosevelt entered the presidency in 1933 during a worsening depression. One of every three Americans had lost their jobs. National income had been cut in half. Five thousand bank failures had wiped out nine million savings accounts.

What Barack Obama faces is also daunting. He becomes president during a worsening recession that could become a full-fledged depression. Two million Americans lost their jobs in 2008. Many lost the health insurance that went with the jobs. Millions have lost their homes or are in danger of losing them. Major financial institutions have gone bankrupt or needed federal bailouts to avoid bankruptcy.

Barack Obama also becomes president with the country embroiled in two wars--a worsening war in Afghanistan and a war in Iraq. Although violence has lessened in Iraq, American soldiers and many Iraqis continue to die there, and internal conflicts threaten to erupt at any time.

Other serious problems facing Obama include:

In the United States:

- America's oil addiction and the resulting environmental damage
- The nearly 50 million Americans without health insurance and millions more whose health insurance is inadequate.
- The degradation of the rule of law under the Bush administration -- including sanction for prisoner torture, indefinite detention of prisoners without charge or trial, and rendition of prisoners to foreign countries where they were likely to be tortured

Globally:

- Global warming
- The Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which has recently intensified
- Terrorist hideouts in Pakistan

For discussion

1. What questions do students have about the reading? How might they be answered?
2. What do students know about each problem? What do they think they know but are unsure about? What don't they know? What are they misinformed about? In each case, how might they learn more?

Studying President Obama's inaugural address

If possible, have students view the inaugural address. Since a transcript will immediately be available online, make copies available to students for close reading.

Fish bowl

This is an especially good activity to use when students are likely to have conflicting views. A fish bowl involves the whole class in one small group discussion.

Begin the conversation by asking five to seven students to make a circle with their chairs in the middle of the room. Try to ensure that the group reflects diverse points of view. Ask everyone else to make a circle of chairs around the fish bowl to create a larger circle around the smaller circle. Only people in the fish bowl can speak.

Make use of the questions raised by students and others that might be worth raising. For example:

- What programs are President Obama's priorities? Why?
- What promises, if any, does he make to the American people?
- Does his address include any memorable passages, like President Roosevelt's "the only thing we have to fear is fear itself"? What questions do students have about the address? How might they be answered?

Begin the fish bowl by asking a question and inviting students to speak to it in a “go-around” with each student responding without being interrupted. Next, designate a specific amount of time for clarifying questions and further comments from the fish bowl group.

After 15 minutes or so, invite students from the larger circle to participate in the fish bowl conversation by tapping a fish bowl student on the shoulder and moving into that student’s seat. Continue with additional questions.

Assessing the fish bowl

1. How useful was the discussion? If useful, why? If not, what problems can you identify? How might they be corrected for the future?
2. Did each person feel that his or her comments were heard and respected even if challenged?
3. Did students hear anything that complicated their thinking? That offered new insights or information?
4. What specific ideas do you have to improve our next fish bowl?

For post-inaugural inquiry, study, and discussion

Form groups of two or three students. For a prescribed period of time, each group is to keep abreast of Barack Obama’s presidency through newspaper and TV reports and designated online sites—his speeches, executive actions and legislative proposals, congressional responses to his proposals and any other news bearing on the presidency.

Ten groups of three students, for example, might make such a study for 10 days, meet in committees to prepare a class presentation, make that report and then conduct a discussion of it. Such questions as the following might guide the study.

1. What are the three most important presidential actions for the period studied?
2. What form does each action take? An executive action? A legislative proposal? Meetings with legislators or foreign leaders? A speech? A trip to consult with foreign leaders? What has been the public response to each?
3. Does the action fit in with the plans the president described in his inaugural address? If so, how? If there has been a change of plans, why?

For writing and citizenship

Write a well-developed paper in which you describe, discuss and critique what you view as the three most important actions taken by President Obama during the period studied.

Include your answers to the following:

- Why do you regard these actions as important?
- Why and how, if at all, has Obama changed his position since his inauguration?
- What is your overall assessment of the president's performance for the period studied?

Have the papers read in small groups and ask each group to select the best one for reading and discussion by the class. Have students revise their papers based on what they have heard and then mail them to President Obama.



Morningside Center for Teaching Social Responsibility

Contact Morningside Center for professional development services in

- conflict resolution
- diversity
- countering bullying, harassment, and teasing
- social and emotional learning, and
- planning and implementing an effective advisory program

Morningside Center for Teaching Social Responsibility, formerly Educators for Social Responsibility Metropolitan Area (ESR Metro), has been providing professional development services for New York City public schools since 1982. Through our introductory courses, workshops, and classroom coaching, teachers create respectful classroom communities and students learn skills in dealing well with conflict and diversity. Rigorous scientific studies have demonstrated the powerful impact of our programs on students and teachers. We are an approved provider of professional development services for the NYC Department of Education.

We founded the **Resolving Conflict Creatively Program** in collaboration with the NYC Board of Education in 1985. Since then, the program has touched the lives of thousands of teachers and hundreds of thousands of students, grades pre-k to 12. The RCCP prepares teachers to provide regular classroom instruction in conflict resolution and trains students to be peer mediators. It has become one of the nation's largest and most effective school-based conflict resolution programs, and has been replicated in schools across the U.S.

Our **4Rs™ Program** (Reading, Writing, Respect & Resolution), created in 1999, integrates conflict resolution and language arts for grades pre-k through middle school. The 4Rs prepares teachers to provide regular classroom instruction in The 4Rs curriculum, and supports peer mediators and younger “peace helpers” in contributing to a positive school climate. Preliminary results from a rigorous federally funded five-year study of The 4Rs show that children in the nine 4Rs schools developed significantly more positively—socially, emotionally, and academically—than their peers in the nine control schools.

Our new **Pathways to Respect** program focuses on building community and eliminating bullying at the elementary and middle school levels.

Our **SEL School Improvement Project** helps schools implement our model for school transformation based on the principles and practices of SEL (social and emotional learning).

Our **More Effective Advisories** program provides consultation, curricula, and professional development to support middle and high schools in planning and implementing advisory programs.

Through our **Peace in the Family** workshops, parents develop communication and problem-solving skills to help them build strong, collaborative relationships with their children.

Teachablenoment.Org, our on-line resource center, offers teachers inquiry-oriented curricula on current events, as well as other fresh teaching ideas.

In addition, we conduct workshops for after-school providers based on our model after-school program, **PAZ (Peace from A to Z)**, which serves 250 children at P.S. 24 in Sunset Park, Brooklyn.

- *For free, downloadable activities on the inauguration and many other topics, visit our on-line teacher resource center at www.teachablenoment.org.*
- *For more information about our services to schools, please visit our website at www.morningsidecenter.org and contact Lillian Castro, director of administration, at LCastro@morningsidecenter.org or 212-870-3318 x33.*