Abraham Lincoln and Presidential Leadership

- Student Activity: Eloquence and Empathy
- Student Activity: May I Have His Address?
- Student Activity: Two Presidents, Four Years and Six Traits
- Student Activity: Presidential Legacy, Leadership and Precedents
- Further Reading: “‘No one talks about that. No, no no!’ At a reunion of presidential descendants, don’t ask about Trump.”
This special issue, presented by The Washington Post’s Newspaper In Education (NIE) program and Digital Department, has been created for use with The Post’s “Presidential” podcast series. It particularly focuses on the episode “Abraham Lincoln: His hand and his pen.”

“Presidential” is a series of 44 podcasts, one for each president, hosted by Post reporter Lillian Cunningham. For every episode, she interviewed historians, biographers, reporters and other experts who were uniquely positioned to explain and explore the presidents’ lives and their time periods, the influences on their personalities and skills, and the contributions each made to presidential leadership.

Some of the suggested activities indicate time markers; others do not. We have provided approximate times to begin and end listening to certain segments. The exact time can vary depending on the device used or the length of ads served on different streaming sites. Transcripts for all podcasts are also available at wapo.st/presidential.

Some teachers have 45-minute class periods, others much longer blocks. Some of you will use the podcasts with KidsPost readers, others with high-school or college students. We have tried to vary the questions, activities and reprints to give you flexibility for in-class and homework assignments and discussion. They will serve as springboards as you use the 44 “Presidential” podcasts to meet your educational goals. Students can listen to the episodes referenced in this guide at wapo.st/presidential.
Eloquence and Empathy

Abraham Lincoln, self-educated and encouraged by his stepmother to read books, is noted for his eloquence — in written and oral expression. He wrote and read poems from a young age. He would borrow books to read classic literature as well as the Bible. The plays of Shakespeare were among the works that he read more than once — or twice. He cared about what he said and how he said it.

1. Listen to the first 13 minutes of the podcast episode “Abraham Lincoln: His hand and his pen.” Lillian Cunningham, host of the “Presidential” podcast, interviews Michelle Krowl, a Civil War and Reconstruction specialist at the Library of Congress, as well as Lincoln biographer Doris Kearns Goodwin.

   a) What is the emphasis of this episode on Lincoln?

   b) What influence did his stepmother have on him?

   c) What influence did his father have on him?

   d) What does the poem he wrote when he was very young reveal about him?

2. Lincoln grew up on the American frontier and taught himself through books. What do these two experiences -- frontier living and his love of literature -- reveal about the young Abe Lincoln?

3. What is “empathy”?

4. Historian and biographer Doris Kearns Goodwin found President Lincoln to be the embodiment of empathy (listen from approx. 44 to 48 minutes). Give two examples of Lincoln exhibiting empathy.

5. Goodwin states:

   “I think what I saw in Lincoln that becomes almost a trademark attribute that I look for in my other presidents is that sense of empathy and humanity. Somehow, he had this internal — from the time he was a child, I think — ability to feel other people’s feelings. … It comes from that fundamental empathy, which I now think of as one of the most important traits I’m looking for in any leader that I study.”

   Why might the ability to empathize be a valuable leadership trait?
6. When has a recent president exhibited empathy? Give one example and support it with articles from the newspaper or online news sources. (Why do you consider these to be reliable sources?)

7. When has a recent president failed to exhibit empathy? Support your example with articles, video news clips, White House press releases or other documentation.

8. Explain why you do/do not consider empathy to be an important trait for a president to exhibit.

9. We can draw insights into Lincoln’s person from his letters and speeches, since these often provide glimpses into his thinking and his approach to leadership (listen from approx. 16 to 39 minutes). What do each of these tell us about Lincoln’s leadership style?
   a) Blind memo
   b) Conkling letter
   c) Emancipation Proclamation
   d) First Inaugural Address
   e) Gettysburg Address
   f) Second Inaugural Address
   g) War letters

10. Answer one of the following questions in a short essay. Support your response with examples from the podcast and from Lincoln’s writings.

   • Which of Lincoln’s writings do you think is most applicable to today’s society?
   • How does Lincoln’s blend of humor and elegant expression show his understanding of the American people?
   • Do you think Lincoln’s eloquent language is better suited for past generations? Do today’s Americans prefer/require being spoken to in a different style?
   • In what ways does the body of a president’s writing (inaugural address, required messages to Congress, speeches, letters, tweets) reveal character, political positions, philosophy and leadership?
   • Washington Post journalist and biographer Bob Woodward noted in the first “Presidential” podcast episode that presidents need to use different leadership traits in different situations. Sometimes, for example, they need to be tough. Other times, they need to understand how to cajole and compromise. Having listened to episodes of the “Presidential” podcast, what are two other important leadership qualities that you think presidents should possess?
May I Have His Address?

Yes, you may. Presidents’ inaugural addresses are all public records. The inaugural ceremony, with the oath of office being given at noon, is an acknowledgement and celebration of the peaceful transfer of power in an American democracy. Some presidents are remembered for the length of their address, others for the new direction they said they would lead the country in, and still others for the eloquence of their expression.

1. Find online and then read George Washington’s First Inaugural Address, delivered on April 30, 1789. In it, he reflects on his personal calling to serve and his confidence in the provisions of the Constitution.
   a) Summarize the ideas presented in the six paragraphs of his address.
   b) Which of these concepts should still apply to the presidency?

2. George Washington’s Second Inaugural Address was delivered on March 4, 1793. It is the shortest inaugural address ever given by a U.S. president.

   It reads as follows:

   “Fellow Citizens:
   I am again called upon by the voice of my country to execute the functions of its Chief Magistrate. When the occasion proper for it shall arrive, I shall endeavor to express the high sense I entertain of this distinguished honor, and of the confidence which has been reposed in me by the people of united America.

   Previous to the execution of any official act of the President, the Constitution requires an oath of office. This oath I am now about to take, and in your presence: That if it shall be found during my administration of the Government I have in any instance violated willingly or knowingly the injunctions thereof, I may (besides incurring constitutional punishment) be subject to the upbraidings of all who are now witnesses of the present solemn ceremony.”

   a) Why do you think Washington chose to make such a short statement?
   b) What is his main idea?
   c) What is the public’s responsibility in this relationship?
3. Select one of the following inaugural addresses:

**Abraham Lincoln**
Second Inaugural Address | Saturday, March 4, 1865

**Franklin Delano Roosevelt**
Second Inaugural Address | Wednesday, January 20, 1937
Third Inaugural Address | Monday, January 20, 1941

**John F. Kennedy**
First Inaugural Address | Friday, January 20, 1961

**Barack Obama**
First Inaugural Address | Tuesday, January 20, 2009

a) What themes for his presidency are established?

b) Identify and list literary devices used to communicate ideas.

c) Elegant use of language is often what makes a speech memorable. What part of the address do you find most effective? Why?

4. Select any American president, then read that president’s first inaugural address and listen to that president’s podcast episode.

a) What are the main ideas and goals presented by this president in the inaugural address?

b) From what you learned in the podcast, what were the highlights and disappointments of this presidency? How effective was the leadership the president ultimately provided to meet the issues facing the country?

c) Did the president’s actions in office, and the leadership he exhibited, match the aspirations he presented in the inaugural address?

d) What impact did unexpected events have on those presidential goals and leadership?
Two Presidents, Four Years and Six Traits

Select any two presidents from The Washington Post’s “Presidential” podcast series, then listen to the full podcast episode for each of them.

1. For each of the two presidents, list three leadership skills or personality traits he displayed early in his life.

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2. For each president, pick one of the traits you listed above. What childhood circumstances led him to develop this trait? Or what family expectations influenced this trait?

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3. For each president, how did that trait you focused on in question 2 exhibit itself during his term of office?

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4. Did that trait help or hurt his ability to respond to challenges and to be an effective leader of the country?

_____________________________________
President’s Name

_____________________________________
President’s Name

5. What is the main reason this presidency and person should be remembered?

_____________________________________
President’s Name

_____________________________________
President’s Name
Presidential Legacy, Leadership and Precedents

It is your turn to examine the presidents. Each of The Washington Post’s “Presidential” podcasts focuses on leadership, life influences and precedents set. Presidents may have followed their party’s platform, been driven by a personal agenda or been forced into unexpected actions due to social and economic conditions or conflicts.

For the following exercise, you will select two presidents to compare and contrast their narratives, their personal aspirations, their administration policies and their leadership styles. You will explore what is similar -- and different -- about how these individuals influenced the presidency and the country. You will also examine how they set precedents for the office or created yardsticks against which other presidents would later be measured.

First, choose the criteria and the presidents. Here are some ideas for interesting pairings:

- Pick presidents from different eras
- Pick presidents who were in office when the country was going through different economic circumstances
- Pick presidents from different political parties
- Pick presidents who were both in office as war threatened or was in full force
- Pick lesser known presidents who have stirred your curiosity
- Or, use your own criteria to pick presidents who would be interesting to compare and contrast

For example, Barack Obama was elected president in the same year that Lincoln’s bicentennial was celebrated. Both were lawyers and politicians from Illinois (though neither was born there). Both presidencies marked turning points in America’s progress toward racial equality. You could examine how the actions, ideals and values of Lincoln seem similar to or different from Obama’s.

1. Once you have selected the two individuals, listen to the “Presidential” podcasts that feature each one. What childhood experience(s) or circumstance(s) led each person to develop the distinct personality, attitudes and leadership approaches exhibited in adulthood?

2. What do you find to be a key similarity between the two presidents? Do you think it is important for all presidents to have that in common?

3. What do you find to be a key difference between the presidents? Was this difference important to how they led the country at the time of their presidency?

4. Given what the podcast episodes revealed to you about these presidents’ leadership styles and their time in the White House, which one do you think was a better leader? Why?

5. After listening to the podcasts and answering the above questions, form a thesis statement about presidential leadership that becomes the basis for an essay or a speech you share with classmates. Use the two presidents you studied as examples to support your thesis about what makes for/doesn’t make for an effective presidential leader.
“‘No one talks about that. No, no no!’ At a reunion of presidential descendants, don’t ask about Trump.”

BY ELLEN MCCARTHY

Originally Published August 30, 2018

The nation’s first families are knit together in a small co-ed fraternity filled with fun, inoffensive facts and a reverence for the White House.

Fun fact about John Tyler, 10th president of the United States: He was born in 1790, married twice and was 63 years old when the last of his 15 children was born.

Another fun fact about President Tyler: He has two grandsons who are still alive, and one of them spent part of this week in Washington.

Ninety-three-year-old Lyon Gardiner Tyler Jr. joined nearly 50 other descendants of presidents and more than 400 scholars, librarians and preservationists at the four-day summit, hosted by the White House Historical Association.

The presidential relatives shared their personal recollections and old family yarns. They stayed as far away as they could from the modern-day politics that swirled around the rest of the city.

What did they think of President Trump’s claim this week that Google has been unfair to him? Or the Trump-Russia controversy? Or Ivanka Trump’s official role in the West Wing of the White House? Any opinions at all on the White House’s current residents?

“No one talks about that,” insists Susan Ford Bales, daughter of President Gerald Ford. “No! No no
no no no.”

It is sooo not a topic of conversation that the conference managed to pull off two hours of panel discussions at the Kennedy Center on the subject of the White House and no one onstage so much as breathed the word “Trump.”

Besides, this is a strange sort of family reunion and everybody knows better than to discuss politics at a family reunion. Even if your dad was president. Especially if your dad was president.

“Since you’ve lived there, you have a respect for the office, whether you like the family or not,” explains Ford Bales, who was a teenager when her father was in office. “I remember being criticized for wearing blue jeans at the White House. And the criticisms that you get are very felt. So you never want to criticize.”

“It’s just about respect and dignity,” says Jason Van Buren, a descendant of Martin Van Buren, as he stood in front of a Kennedy Center stage made to look like the Oval Office. “So you want to keep anything that could be political out of it.”

So what did they talk about? Well, Lynda Johnson Robb, daughter of President Lyndon Johnson, boasted that the marriage resulting from her White House wedding lasted longer than that of any other couple married there. She and former senator Chuck Robb celebrated their 50th anniversary last December.

Ford Bales recalled what it was like to date while living at the White House. “The poor boys would show up dripping wet. It wasn’t just that they were going on a date — it was meeting the commander in chief,” she said. And having a Secret Service tail never helped her romantic life. “I’ve never been parking in my entire life,” she bemoaned. (She did, however get to host her high school’s senior prom in the East Room of the White House.)

Tweed Roosevelt explained that every time he uses a credit card, he has to explain that he’s the great-grandson of Theodore Roosevelt, not Franklin.

Clifton Truman Daniel offered anecdotes about what it was like to be the grandson of Harry S. Truman. Once the former president came to visit Daniel’s childhood home in New York. Daniel remembers his grandfather waking early and positioning himself in a sitting room with a stack of newspapers.

When Daniel and his little brother tried to sneak past to watch TV their grandfather sternly called them back. By the time his mother, Margaret Truman, woke up, she found her two sons perched on either side of their grandfather’s chair.

“Neither of us was moving while he read to us from a book that didn’t have any pictures in it,” Daniel recalled. “And she said, ‘What in God’s name are you reading to those children?’ And he showed her it was Thucydides. The History of the Peloponnesian War. At 6 o’clock in the morning. To a 4-year-old and a 2-year old.” Even offstage, there were more reminiscences on the past than reflections on the present.
When the presidential descendants were sitting at the bar of the Willard Hotel, where the summit was held, they talked about the rooms they slept in at the White House, the staff members they got to know.

“It’s the staff at the White House that make it such a special place to live,” Ford Bales says.

At a tree-planting ceremony on the South Lawn hosted this week by first lady Melania Trump, Ford Bales recognized a groundskeeper who’d been around since her father’s administration. She gave him a hug.

But it was when she first entered the White House grounds that she was faced with a reminder that every first family is just renting: “I have a pacemaker. They wanted to wand me. He said, ‘This is really safe,’” recalls an unconvinced Ford Bales. “‘Well, you can call my cardiologist if you set this thing off,’” she told the Secret Service guard, before adding, “You know, I used to live here.”

“He was very unaffected. Very unaffected. He just looked at me like, ‘I really don’t care,’” says Ford Bales. “I was like, ‘Okay!’ I got the message.”

All of the presidential descendants had one other opportunity to visit the White House when they were invited to a private reception by the Trumps on Wednesday night. There they gathered in the East Room to hear the president call them each out by name. Then, Trump surprised the crowd by announcing that the guests, including all of the White House Historical Association summit attendees, would be welcome to tour the Oval Office that evening.

Lyon Gardiner Tyler was there, accompanied by his daughter, Susan. He bears an uncanny resemblance to his grandfather and smiled for photo after photo with those who wanted to capture a connection to the past.