



Presidents' Day: *Discussion Guide*

Overview

Our country celebrates Presidents' Day every February. It's the day we set aside to honor the men who have been elected to lead our nation. When presidents are sworn in they agree to preserve, protect, and defend the Constitution of the United States. But what does this mean, and how does it affect the country's citizens?

Use this discussion guide and related videos in your classroom to help students understand the role and responsibilities of the president of the United States.

Classroom Activities

1. Show the segment "The Powers and Duties of the Executive Branch" from the *Our Federal Government: The Presidency* video.

Ask students to list four jobs that are the duty of the president. Then discuss how the other branches of government provide checks and balances on the president's power. Hold a class debate on whether the checks and balances built into our system of government are good or bad.

- Should the president have unlimited power? Why or why not?
- Do the checks and balances make the government more or less efficient?
- How do the checks and balances protect the American people?

2. Show the segment "Limitations to a President's Power" from the *Our Federal Government: The Presidency* video. (Access to *unitedstreaming* is required.)

Briefly discuss with students how the judicial and legislative branches can limit a president's power. Then have students brainstorm other factors that can limit his power. Create a class list of the factors and have students write brief essays in which they consider the following questions. Assign as an in-class project or homework.

- What is the role of the press in limiting the power of a president?
- How does serving a four-year term limit a president's power?

3. Show the segment “Presidential Review: What Does It Really Mean to Be President?” from the *So You Want to Be President?* video. (Access to *unitedstreaming* is required.)

Discuss with students the ways presidents have tried to make the United States a better place. Have students write one-page essays about how they would improve life in this country if they were elected president. Before writing their essays, students should consider the following questions:

- What kind of things could you do to look toward the future?
- What kind of things could you do to improve people’s daily lives?
- What kind of things could you do to make the world a better place?

4. Show the segment “Part Three: The Civil War President” from the *American Heroes and Heroines: Abraham Lincoln* video. (Access to *unitedstreaming* is required.)

Discuss Lincoln’s presidency with your students.

- What was one important decision Lincoln made as commander in chief?
- What did Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation say? Why was it important?
- Why is it important for a president to be a strong leader?

Academic Standards

This discussion guide addresses national standards.

National Council for the Social Studies

<http://www.socialstudies.org/standards/strands/>

- Individuals, Groups, and Institutions
- Power, Authority, and Governance
- Civic Ideals and Practice

Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL)

<http://www.mcrel.org/compendium/browse.asp>

- Language Arts—Viewing: Uses viewing skills and strategies to understand and interpret visual media; Writing: Gathers and uses information for research purposes

