

# Lesson Plan: Presidents' Day



AMERICAN  
**A E**  
ENGLISH

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# Presidents' Day

[1] Presidents' Day is celebrated in the U.S. on the third Monday in February. This date was chosen because two famous U.S. presidents, George Washington and Abraham Lincoln, had birthdays in February. Washington and Lincoln are two of the most respected American presidents. They served during **challenging** times in American history, and their decisions helped to shape the country.

[2] George Washington was the first President of the United States of America. He was a **military** leader who led Americans in their fight for freedom from Britain. Although he was an army general, he did not wear his **uniform** when he became president. He was very popular, but he thought leaders should not stay in power for a long time. His ideas about leadership became American custom, and later, the law. Today a president cannot serve more than eight years.

[3] Abraham Lincoln became the sixteenth president of the U.S. in 1861. He was born into a poor family and grew up in a one-room house in Kentucky. He had less than two years of formal schooling, but he studied on his own. Lincoln's life is often taught in schools to show children they can reach their goals if they work and study hard like he did.

[4] Lincoln was a great public speaker. He was president during the American Civil War. He kept the country together when it

almost broke apart. He is also remembered as the president who helped to free slaves. Sadly, not everyone agreed with his ideas. On April 14, 1865, only five days after the war ended, he was shot by someone who didn't like the changes he was making. This was a very sad moment in American history, but Lincoln's ideas and leadership continue to inspire people today.

[5] Because Washington lived so long ago, we only know what he looked like from paintings or **sculptures**. By Lincoln's time, cameras were invented, so we have photographs of Lincoln. However, the tradition of painting a presidential **portrait** has continued. The Smithsonian National Portrait Gallery in Washington, D.C., contains official portraits of all U.S. presidents.

[6] Leaders are remembered in the U.S. in many ways. For example, George Washington is on the U.S. one-dollar **bill** and Abraham Lincoln is on the five-dollar bill. The **principles** and public service of leaders are also **commemorated** through architecture, art, and the naming of public spaces. Washington and Lincoln are remembered by famous **memorials** in Washington, D.C. Mount Rushmore is a national memorial in South Dakota. It has the faces of four U.S. presidents carved into the mountain. Washington, Lincoln, Thomas Jefferson, and Theodore Roosevelt were chosen for the sculpture because they were important leaders. Many people visit each year to learn more about U.S. history.



## Overview

In this 90-minute lesson, students learn about Presidents' Day in the United States. Students identify principles of good leaders and work together to brainstorm ways to commemorate leaders in their schools or communities.

## Goals

Students will:

- Practice reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills.
- Learn about Presidents' Day traditions in the U.S.
- Make connections between their own lives and how leaders are commemorated in the United States.
- Strengthen collaboration, communication, creativity, and critical thinking skills on the topics of leadership and public service.

## Lesson Materials

1. Printed or projected copy of the photo at the beginning of this lesson.
2. Printed or projected copy of the Presidents' Day reading included with this lesson.
3. Printed or projected copy of the Portrait Gallery handout included with this lesson.
4. Printed copies of the Paragraph Title Match handout included with this lesson.
5. Printed or projected copy of the Emojis and Icons handout included with this lesson.
6. Paper, pens or pencils, and tape.

## Preparation

1. Read through this lesson in its entirety.
2. Review the Presidents' Day reading and the Vocabulary from the Reading list below.
3. Determine whether you will need to activate students' prior knowledge, pre-teach, or otherwise provide scaffolding, or support, for your students beyond the suggestions in the Procedures section.
4. Consider if, or how, you will adapt or change this lesson to better meet your students' needs.

## Vocabulary from the Reading

- **bill** (noun) – A piece of paper money.
- **commemorate** (verb) – To remember an important person from the past with a special action or object.



- **challenging** (adjective) – Especially difficult.
- **memorials** (plural noun) – Special places created to honor important people and events and help people remember and learn about the past.
- **military** (noun) – The armed soldiers of a country.
- **portraits** (plural noun) – Pictures, photos, or drawings of a person, usually of the face.
- **principles** (plural noun) – Strong beliefs or qualities that guide actions and are important to a person or group of people.
- **sculptures** (plural noun) – Art representing a person or object that is made by carving or shaping hard materials like wood, stone, clay, or metal.
- **uniform** (noun) – The special set of clothes required for a job. People in the military, firefighters, and chefs are some of the jobs that require uniforms in the U.S.

## Procedures

### Introduction and Communication Activity: Zoom In, Zoom Out (10 minutes)

1. Show students the photo at the beginning of this lesson. Zoom in so students can only see the woman taking the photo or use paper to cover up the other parts of the photo.
2. Ask students to focus on the woman taking the photo and discuss these questions with a partner:
  - What is happening here?
  - What might this person be thinking?
3. Now ask students to look at the whole image and discuss these questions:
  - What is happening here?
  - Where do you think this is?
  - Have you ever seen or experienced something like this or know of a place like this? If so, where?

### Listening and Speaking Activity: Portrait of a Great Leader (20 minutes)

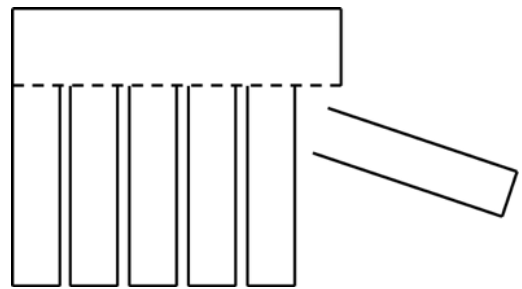
1. Remind students of the meaning of a portrait and explain that portraits of American presidents are in a special exhibit at a museum in Washington, D.C.
2. If necessary, review or teach vocabulary to describe people. (See examples below.)
  - To describe:
    - Hair length – long hair, short hair, bald
    - Hair texture – curly, wavy, straight
    - Facial hair – a beard, a mustache, sideburns
    - Hair color – black hair, brown hair, red hair, blond hair, white hair
    - Face shape – round, oval, long, wide



- Eye color – brown, blue, green
  - Accessories – glasses, earrings
3. Assign half of the students to the role of **artist** and other half to the role of **assistant**. Assistants look at the portrait and describe the person in it. Artists draw based on their assistant’s directions without looking at the portrait.
  4. Pair artists and assistants. Arrange them so that assistants can see a picture from the Portrait Gallery, but the artist cannot.
  5. Tell assistants to describe the portrait to the artist. Tell the artist to draw based on the description from the assistant. The artist can ask the assistant questions as they draw.
  6. After a few minutes, the assistant shows the artist the portrait and the artist shows the assistant their drawing.
  7. If there is time, ask students to switch roles and repeat the activity with a new portrait.

### Reading and Collaboration Activity: Paragraph Title Match (15 minutes)

1. Tape one copy of the Paragraph Title Match handout on the front wall for each group. Cut the paragraph titles into strips so students can tear them off easily.
2. Put students into small groups and ask them to read the Presidents’ Day article.
3. When a group finishes reading, one student from that group goes to the wall, tears off **one** paragraph title strip, and brings it back to their group. The group works together to decide which paragraph matches that title. When they finish one match, a **different** group member goes to get the next title.
4. Repeat Step 3 until each paragraph has a title.
5. When all groups have matched titles to paragraphs, review the correct answers as a class.
  - Correct answers:
    - [1] The Meaning of Presidents’ Day
    - [2] The First President
    - [3] Lincoln’s Early Life and Education
    - [4] Lincoln’s Leadership
    - [5] Portraits of U.S. Presidents
    - [6] How Americans Commemorate Their Leaders



## Critical Thinking and Communication Activity: Presidential Principles (10 minutes)

1. Remind students that images and symbols, like emojis, are a way to share meaning.
  - 🧠 A brain can be used to communicate smart, intelligent, or wise.
  - 🗣️ A person standing behind a lectern can mean public speaking.
2. Put students into pairs or groups. Tell them to look at the images on the Emojis and Icons handout, decide on the meaning, and sort them into “Good Leader” or “Not a Leader” categories.
3. Ask students to choose people they think are good leaders and create sentences about them.
  - I think George Washington was a good leader because he was wise.
  - I think Abraham Lincoln was a good leader because he was a good public speaker.
4. If there is time, ask a few students to share their sentences.

## Critical Thinking and Collaboration Activity: Gallery of Greats (25 minutes)

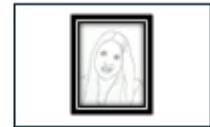
1. Ask students to think about good leaders in their schools or local communities. What qualities do they have? List them on the board.
2. Remind students that in the U.S., leaders are often commemorated through art or by naming public places after them.
3. Ask students to think about how leaders are commemorated in their communities.
  - Do they have public places, like buildings or parks, named after them?
  - Do they appear on coins or other money?
  - Are they represented in art like paintings, sculptures, songs, poems, or other media?
4. Put students in groups and give them blank paper or a section of the board to work on. Ask them to choose someone who is a good leader in their school or local community and work together to brainstorm some ideas to commemorate that person. Groups can write or draw their ideas.
5. After groups have generated some ideas, guide students through a brief gallery walk. As they see ideas from other groups, ask students to vote for their favorite ideas by drawing a star next to their favorite idea from each group.

## Creativity and Writing Activity: Vocabulary Cards (10 minutes)

1. Hand out a notecard to each student or cut paper into flashcard-sized pieces and give one to each student.



2. On one side, ask students to write one new word they learned in today's lesson. On the other side, ask students to draw a quick picture to show the meaning of that word.



3. Ask each student to hand in their vocabulary card as they leave.

4. At the beginning of the next lesson, review the vocabulary with the students using the flashcards that they created.

## Variations and Extensions

### Critical Thinking and Communication Activity: Presidential Principles Cell Phone Variation

Students may complete this activity in place of the Presidential Principles activity.

1. Remind students that images and symbols, like emojis, are a way to share meaning.
  - 🧠 A brain might be used to communicate smart, intelligent, or wise.
  - 🗣️ A person standing behind a lectern may be used to communicate public speaking.
2. Put students into pairs or groups. Ask them to look for emojis on their phones that represent things they believe make a good leader. Ask students to draw their emoji on a piece of paper and write down a note about what the emoji communicates.
3. Ask students to choose people they think are good leaders and create sentences about them using some of the emojis that they found.
  - I think George Washington was a good leader because he was wise. 🧠
  - I think Abraham Lincoln was a good leader because he was a good public speaker. 🗣️
4. If there is time, ask a few students to share their sentences.

### Listening and Speaking Activity: Portrait of a Great Leader Extension

Students may complete this activity as an extension to the Portrait of a Great Leader activity.

1. Ask students to choose George Washington or Abraham Lincoln and write down what they know about him.
2. Guide students to draw, use collage materials, or access digital tools to create a new presidential portrait.

3. When they finish, ask students to share a brief description of their artistic choices (color, size, symbols, etc.). This can be shared orally or in writing.

### Creativity and Writing: Vocabulary Cards Extension

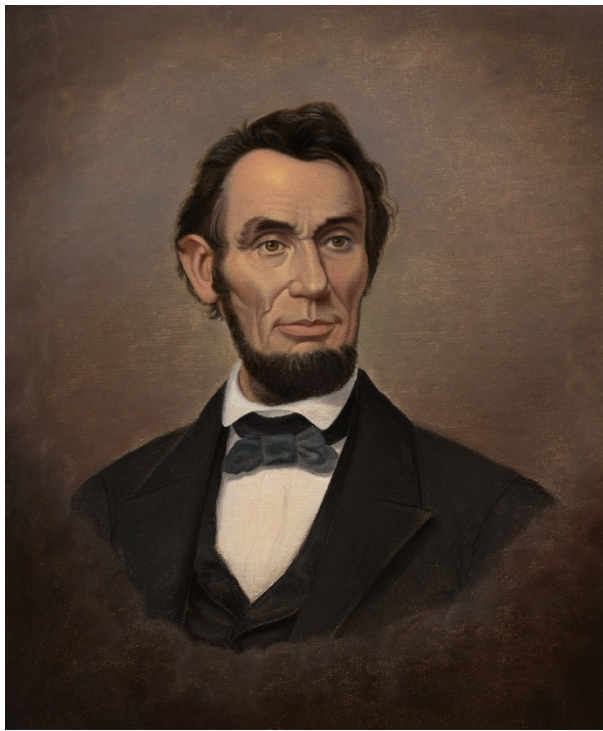
Students may complete this activity as an extension to the Vocabulary Cards activity.

1. Collect the student-made vocabulary cards and mix them up.
2. Give each student a vocabulary card.
3. Ask students to find a partner.
4. Tell students to show the drawing to their partner and ask them to guess the vocabulary word.
5. When each partner has guessed the correct word, they trade cards and find a new partner.
6. Students can repeat Steps 4 and 5 several times.

## Portrait Gallery



Painting, 1795. Rembrandt Peale.  
National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian  
Institution.



Painting, 1865. Unknown artist. National  
Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution.

## Paragraph Title Match

To the teacher: Cut along the dotted lines and tape one copy for each group in the front of the room.

Lincoln's Leadership

How Americans Commemorate Their Leaders

The First President

The Meaning of Presidents' Day

Lincoln's Early Life and Education

Portraits of U.S. Presidents

Emojis and Icons

