

LEARNING HISTORY:

History of the Inaugural Address



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Grades: 6-12, with adaptations for elementary grades

Content Areas: Social Studies, Language Arts, Technology

Objectives: Students will examine the text of various inaugural addresses to understand how the context of events influenced the way presidents addressed the American people on Inauguration Day.

Materials Needed: Internet access, former presidents' inaugural addresses

Instructional Procedures:

Students should select two to three former presidents' inaugural addresses to research. Possible resources students can use to help them select which addresses they want to focus on:

- Inaugural speeches: http://avalon.law.yale.edu/subject_menus/inaug.asp
- Inaugural facts and firsts: <http://inaugural.senate.gov/history/factsandfirsts/index.cfm>
- Chronology of inaugurations: <http://inaugural.senate.gov/history/chronology/index.cfm>

Once students select the addresses they want to examine, they should identify the quote or quotes that most resonated with them, why they appreciate those particular parts of each speech, and what they think those words meant to the Americans who heard them for the first time. Students also should research the historical context of the speeches using the Internet and other resources. Have students share their quotes with the class, including the quotes' historical contexts. As they report out, list for the entire class the various themes that are addressed in each quote.

Have students write an essay that discusses a theme or themes that appear in the addresses. (You might want to include President Obama's address in this part of the activity.) The essay should focus on whether the context or implication of the selected theme(s) changed over time. Students should provide examples to provide support for their conclusion.

Themes that are common to inaugural addresses include: national unity, war, education, economy, national security and community service.

Adaptations for elementary teachers: Discuss the role of the inaugural address with your students. Highlight some of the inaugural facts and firsts found at <http://inaugural.senate.gov/history/factsandfirsts/index.cfm> (the longest, the shortest, the first that was photographed, the first that was recorded, the first that included a poet, etc.). Ask students to think about what they would include in their inaugural address if they were president. Have them share with the class, create a drawing or write a journal entry.