

MAKING HISTORY: 2009 Inaugural Events



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- Grades:** 6-12, with adaptations for elementary grades
- Content Areas:** Social Studies, Language Arts, Technology, Fine Arts
- Objectives:** Students will learn about the various events held during the inauguration and how they have evolved over time.

Materials Needed: Internet access

Instructional Procedures:

Have students review the inauguration schedule, which covers several days (www.pic2009.org/pages/schedule/) as well as the events scheduled for Inauguration Day itself (<http://inaugural.senate.gov/history/daysevents/index.cfm>).

Based on available time, focus on one or more of the following events or activities:

January 19, 2009—Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday

This federal holiday is recognized as a national day of community service to commemorate a man who lived his life in service to others. On this day, President-elect Obama and his family will participate in community service activities, like many Americans across the country.

Ask students what they know about Martin Luther King Jr. and chart their responses. Below are several key facts about King that you may want to incorporate into the discussion if your students do not mention them first:

- Martin Luther King Jr. came from a long line of Baptist pastors.
- He studied theology extensively, as well as nonviolent activism to promote social change as exemplified through the teachings of Mahatma Gandhi.
- King was president of the Montgomery (Ala.) Improvement Association, which coordinated the Montgomery Bus Boycott that helped end segregation on public buses.
- He also helped form the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), whose main goal was to coordinate nonviolent protests in the South.
- Throughout his life, King helped motivate hundreds of thousands of activists—both black and white—through his speeches and the example he set.
- Assassinated in 1968, Martin Luther King Jr. remains today one of the most influential figures of the civil rights movement, and his words continue to inspire generations of peaceful protesters and nonviolent activists.

Remind students that the Martin Luther King Jr. holiday is recognized as a national day of community service. Have your students break into small groups and research King's legacy in the context of community service. Here are two good Web-based resources on Martin Luther King Jr. that you might want students to use to help them complete this activity:

“Eyes on the Prize”

This 1989 PBS documentary focuses on the civil rights movement, key players and important gains made. The site contains lesson plans based on the documentary, as well as thematic lesson plans, primary source documents, and profiles of key figures and organizations.
www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/eyesontheprize/about/index.html

The King Papers Project

Housed at Stanford University, this site includes speeches, audio clips, and timelines of King's life and efforts to bring civil rights to African-Americans.
www.stanford.edu/group/King/

Have each group report to the class on how King served not only his community, but also his country and the world.

Adaptations for elementary teachers: Talk with your students about what it means to “serve your community.” Provide examples that will help them better understand the concept: volunteering to help a neighbor in need, helping pick up litter in the park, recycling, etc. Ask students to come up with more examples and put them up on the wall.

Then introduce them to some of the heroes from the Heroes Club, which is a set of 25 trading cards that depict American heroes and the virtues they represent, including Martin Luther King Jr. Every hero description also includes an example of community service that can help students understand the wide range of things they can do to serve their community now and as they grow up. Worksheets and lesson plans prompting students to think about the challenges a particular hero faced, and why our lives are better today because of that person, are also posted there. www.theheroesclub.org/heroes.php

Swearing-In Ceremony

While the inauguration activities cover several days, very little is actually required for the president-elect to be sworn into office. According to Article II, Section 1, Clause 8 of the Constitution:

Before he enter on the Execution of his Office, he shall take the following Oath or Affirmation: “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.”

In addition, the 20th Amendment provides:

The terms of the President and the Vice President shall end at noon on the 20th of January ... and the terms of their successors shall then begin.

Ask students: Do you think more should be required to officially take the office of president? Have them explain their answers.

Adaptations for elementary teachers:

For primary students: Ask students what they know about the presidential inauguration. Discuss and develop an understanding of the terms related to the inauguration, such as president, oath, presidential inauguration, inaugural address, inaugural parade, inaugural balls. Discuss how words such as “address” and “ball” mean something different when talking about the inauguration than they do in students’ usual, everyday conversations. Use word webs to record aspects of the meaning of the words studied. See www.nea.org/tools/18422.htm for an example of a word web.

For later elementary students: Provide students with the oath that President-elect Obama must take to become president. Ask them what they think it means, and chart the themes they suggest. Then ask students if they think the oath is sufficient or if more should be added to it. If more were added, what do they think it should say?

Inaugural Address Poet

After President Obama takes the oath of office and delivers his inaugural address, poet Elizabeth Alexander will deliver a poem celebrating the day and the inaugural theme. Only two other presidents have featured poetry as a part of their inaugural activities: President Kennedy and President Clinton.

Sample questions:

- Do you think poetry should be a regular feature of the inaugural festivities? Why, or why not?
- Review the poems delivered at previous inaugurations and the work of Elizabeth Alexander. What themes do you think Elizabeth Alexander will address in her poem?
- Poet Robert Frost wrote a poem for the Kennedy inauguration but was unable to read the poem due to the glare from the sun on his paper. He was forced to recite a poem he knew by heart instead. Read both poems and discuss which poem you think was the most appropriate. Provide support for your conclusion.

Resources:

Robert Frost poems for Kennedy inauguration
www.pbs.org/newshour/inauguration/frost_poem.html

Maya Angelou poem and Clinton inauguration
www.youtube.com/watch?v=HDtw62Ah2zY (video)
<http://poetry.eserver.org/angelou.html> (text)

Miller Williams poem and Clinton inauguration
www.australianpolitics.com/usa/clinton/speeches/miller.shtml

Elizabeth Alexander poem and Obama inauguration
“The Intersection of Poetry and Politics”
www.nytimes.com/2008/12/25/books/25poet.html?_r=2

Collection of poems by Elizabeth Alexander
www.elizabethalexander.net/poems.html

Adaptations for elementary teachers: Discuss with students the role of the poet in the inauguration, especially as a way to highlight the hope and promise of the new administration. Be sure to let students know that poetry has not been used at most inaugurations. Ask students if they think poetry should be a regular part of the inauguration. Why, or why not? Have students pretend that President-elect Obama has asked them to be his poet for the inauguration. Have students write a poem to share with the class.

Art and the Inaugural Luncheon

After the inaugural address, President Obama will be the guest of honor at a luncheon held in the National Statuary Hall in the U.S. Capitol. Since 1985, a painting has been selected to serve as a backdrop for the head table. The painting reflects the official themes of each president's inaugural ceremony. What style of painting do you think Obama selected for this luncheon and why?

Resources:

Inaugural Luncheon History

Learn about the paintings selected for previous administrations.

www.senate.gov/artandhistory/art/common/collection_list/inaugural_luncheons.htm

Obama's favorite painting

This Christian Science Monitor article discusses one of Obama's favorite paintings.

www.csmonitor.com/2008/1128/p04s02-woeu.html

Adaptations for elementary teachers: Talk to students about the inaugural luncheon and the role of the painting at the luncheon. Ask students to pretend they are the president of the United States. What picture would they want to have at their luncheon, and why? Have students create a painting or drawing of the image they would use.