

**Project Title:** “President Presentations”

**Target Audience:** Intermediate to advanced English and Civics students (NRS levels 4-5)

**Description and Objectives:**

In this project, each student will be assigned a U.S. president to research. Through their research, students will develop a better understanding of the structure of the U.S. government, responsibilities of the executive branch of government, important presidents and key events in U.S. history. At the end of their research, students will give an oral presentation to their classmates on what they have learned.

The goals of this project related to the Equipped for the Future Standards for Adult Literacy and Lifelong Learning are:

- ≥ learn through research
- ≥ take responsibility for learning
- ≥ read with understanding
- ≥ use information and communications technology
- ≥ speak so others can understand.

**Collection Materials Used:**

For resources that can help answer student questions regarding a U.S. president, see the biographies of U.S. presidents available in the “History” section of [www.whitehouse.gov](http://www.whitehouse.gov)

For information on the structure of U.S. government, see “2004 Elections” and “Government” links at [www.firstfind.info](http://www.firstfind.info) as well as the “U.S. President Resources” under the “Government” section of the Scholastic Social Studies Page.

For an understanding of the responsibilities of a president, see “Democracy for Kids” by at [www.pbs.org](http://www.pbs.org) in particular, the activity “President for a Day.” See also bibliography of selected resources at the end of this lesson plan.

**Activities:**

**Activity 1: One Thing I Know/One Question I Have.**

This activity will generate a list of authentic questions related to the theme of study. Post a sign that reads “U.S. Presidents”. To the left, post a sign that reads “What We Know.” To the right, post another sign that reads “Questions We Have.”

Introduce the theme to the class by explaining the class will explore U.S. presidents. Suggest a few possible categories to learn about such as, responsibilities of the president, famous presidents in the past, electing the president. Distribute 2 sticky notes to each student. Ask students to write *one thing they know* about U.S. presidents on one sticky note. On the other sticky note, they should write *one question they have*. Model two of your ideas for them. When

finished, students should post their sentences under the sign “What We Know” and their questions under “Questions We Have.”

Students are sometimes reluctant to get started but will get inspired after the first few examples. This is a good time to provide some reading for students who finish first. For example, you might provide a photocopy of “Three Branches of Our Government” from the Truman Library available at [www.firstfind.info](http://www.firstfind.info) by clicking “How Government Works in the U.S.” then “The Federal Government” then “The Three Branches of Federal Government.” This reading will prepare students for a discussion of their statements and questions later.

I usually do this activity the day prior to starting the unit. This way, I can type and share responses as a handout the next day of class, making language corrections as necessary. Another option would be for students to read their statement aloud and for you to re-write it with corrections on a poster. For a sample handout, see “Handout 1: Presidents KWL”.

This activity usually generates many interesting questions and also confusions. Under “What We Know”, students sometimes don’t have the facts correct. For example, in the sample handout, one student responded, “The President must be elected by the people.” However, the Electoral College in fact chooses the president. (See *Mr. President: A Book of U.S. Presidents*, page 13, for more information.) As you read the handout, ask students to decide if the statement is true, false, or if they are not sure. The teacher can use this list as a guide for what students need to research more carefully.

For statements that students are not sure about, hang a poster that reads “Additional Questions” and help students formulate additional questions based on what they want to know. At this point, you might also want to discuss that the research project may not be able to answer *all* of the students’ questions, but that the goal of their research will be to answer as many questions as possible.

One advantage of this activity is that each time the unit is taught, each class poses different questions to be explored. This allows the teacher to genuinely participate in the process of research and inquiry alongside students. It also provides a forum for students to ask questions anonymously without fear of mistakes in front of their peers.

In the sample handout, it is clear this activity generated some statements that were presented as facts and others that were opinions. Students also generated questions about facts, and questions about other students’ opinions on the issues. This is a good time to help students make this distinction before they prepare their presentations. You will want to make clear that you will ask students to research facts about a president. However, you may want to discuss as a class whether students will be asked to include any opinions in their research presentations, such as what they found interesting about their president.

After reading the statements and questions and identifying any new questions, the next step is for students to choose which statements and questions they will research further.

## **Activity 2: Identify who will research what.**

On the sample handout, I have divided students' questions into three areas: questions about the U.S. presidency in general (# 1-10), questions about specific U.S. presidents in the past (# 11-27), and questions soliciting students' opinions (# 28-31).

Ask each student to choose one U.S. president to research. You can distribute a list of U.S. presidents and pass around a sign up sheet (see "Handout 2: 25 Interesting Presidents"). Or, students can randomly draw a name from an envelope.

For a list of U.S. presidents, visit [www.whitehouse.gov](http://www.whitehouse.gov). Click the link "History & Tours" (top) then "Presidents" (left). This list can be sorted alphabetically or chronologically. Another helpful resource is the "U.S. Presidents Pocket Flash Cards" (Trend Enterprises, Inc.: St. Paul, MN, 2001). Students can pick a flash card at random and use it to copy some essential first facts.

Brainstorm a list of possible details for students to research. Elicit ideas from students about what they want to know about a president. Depending on how much time class has to dedicate to the project, students can create a basic or more advanced report. Examples might include:

<i>Basic</i>	<i>Advanced</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>≥ dates lived</li> <li>≥ birthplace</li> <li>≥ childhood</li> <li>≥ education</li> <li>≥ political party</li> <li>≥ presidential term</li> <li>≥ family/first lady</li> <li>≥ interesting facts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>≥ what did he do before he became president?</li> <li>≥ what did he do after he was president?</li> <li>≥ accomplishments</li> <li>≥ fame: was he a good president?</li> <li>≥ history: what was happening at the time? what were the issues?</li> <li>≥ what makes learning about this president interesting for you or your classmates?</li> </ul>

Assign additional questions from Activity 1 to the students responsible for the presidents mentioned.

In the following class, distribute a checklist of what topics the class decided to include to help guide student research. For a sample, see "Handout 3: Checklist for Presentations."

### **Activity 3: Learn more about the office of the president.**

Through Activity 1, students have identified a list of questions that they want to learn about the office of the president. Ask students to work in pairs. Decide whether each pair will research one question or whether each pair will try to find the answers to all the questions. The research can either be done through in-class reading or through online research.

For research done through in-class reading, bring in a selection of books from the bibliography and model using the table of context or index to help students to find the answers themselves. Alternatively, prepare photocopied handouts related to student questions from online resources. Ask students to write the answer to their question and the sentence and page number from their reading that supports their answer.

In addition to these questions, there are twenty-five citizenship questions related to the U.S. president (see "Handout 4: Citizenship Questions about the President"). "100 Sample History

Questions with Answers” can be found as a PDF or HTML file at:  
<http://uscis.gov/graphics/services/natz/general.htm> Students can practice at the online self-test at:  
<http://uscis.gov/graphics/exec/natz/natztest.asp>

#### **Activity 4: Find information about a president.**

Brainstorm with students a list of ideas of where they can find more information about a president. For example, the class may want to visit a library together and review how to find information in an encyclopedia and the online catalog system. Weekend homework might include bringing a book about the presidents from their local library to share in class. Or, bring a selection of books to the classroom that students can use to research their questions in class.

Students with access to computer lab can use “Handout #5: Presidents Online” to collect facts and information.

Teachers can find print materials at:

<http://teacher.scholastic.com/researchtools/articlearchives/uspres/index.htm>

For all students, stress that it is important to use their own words in their presentations. For example, you may want to explain that copying *facts* is ok; copying *sentences* is not. This will be one of the most challenging aspects of preparing their presentations.

To guide students through their research, model how to use a T-chart for research as follows:

<b>Topic</b>	<b>Notes</b>
<i>name</i>	<i>George Washington</i>
<i>term</i>	<i>1789-1797</i>
<i>first lady</i>	<i>Martha Washington</i>

Distribute a manila folder to each student to hold their research pages. Ask students to submit this project portfolio the day they present their project to the class.

#### **Activity 5: Prepare the presentation.**

Decide as a class how students will share their information, for example: poster board, overhead projector pages, or using Microsoft PowerPoint for classes with time to develop presentations in a computer lab. For suggestions on using PowerPoint with students, see “Handout 6: Organizing a PowerPoint Presentation.”

Model preparing a presentation for students. Assign students into work groups in chronological order to help one another.

#### **Activity 6: Practice the presentation.**

Ask students to practice reading their presentation to their work group. As they read, they should make a list of words that are difficult for them to pronounce. Post these words on the wall as a class list and practice them together. Ask students to include this list in their project portfolio. For a list of words from past student presentations, see “Handout 7: Pronunciation”.

Areas of pronunciation to review:

- ≧ dates
- ≧ past tense verbs
- ≧ state names
- ≧ words related to government

### Activity 6: Class presentations.

Ask each student to share their research, starting with the first president and continuing chronologically, if possible. You may want to schedule a few students each day or a whole class over two or three days, depending on class size. Using “Handout 3: Checklist for Presentations,” check what students accomplished in their presentations. Ask students to evaluate one another in their own words orally or in writing using some simple prompts:

Name	I liked...	I learned...

If possible, collect and share peer responses in the student’s project portfolio once the presentations have concluded.

### Evaluation and Assessment:

Revisit the 25 citizenship questions related to the president as well as selected student questions from Activity 1 to create a final assessment. Ask students to work alone, in pairs, or in teams to see how many more questions they can answer now that the unit is complete.

Alternatively, students can self-test one another in class through one question interviews. Cut the 25 questions into strips and allow each student to pick one question from the envelope. Tell each student they will *ask everyone in the class that question*. Allow time for students to record their classmates’ answers in their notebooks. After everyone has had a chance to ask and answer questions, review as a group how many students had the correct answer for each question.

Using the 5 EFF skills, ask students to evaluate this project with the following sample questions:

Check the skills you can do based on your participation in this project:

- \_\_\_\_\_ I can learn through research.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I can take responsibility for my learning.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I can read with understanding.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I can use information and communications technology.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I can speak so others can understand.

What did you like about this project?

What did you learn from this project?

What would you like to learn in the future?

### Extension Activity:

Identify places in the community to visit as a class where students can learn more about famous presidents. For a sample field trip list for the New York City area, see “Handout 8: Presidential Field Trips.”

### Selected Print Resources:

- U.S. Presidents Pocket Flash Cards* (Trend Enterprises, Inc.: St. Paul, MN, 2001).  
*Mr. President: A Book of U.S. Presidents* by George Sullivan (Scholastic: New York, 2001).  
*How the U.S. Government Works* by Syl Sobel (Barron’s Educational Series: New York, 1999).  
*Presidential Elections and Other Cool Facts* by Syl Sobel (Barron’s Educational Series: New York, 2001).  
*The U.S. Constitution and You* by Syl Sobel (Barron’s Educational Series: New York, 2001).  
*Everything You Need to Know about American History Homework: A Desk Reference for Students and Parents (Fourth to Sixth Grades)* by Anne Zeman and Kate Kelly (Scholastic: New York, 1997).  
*America’s Story* by Vivian Bernstein (Austin, TX: Steck-Vaughan Company, 2001).  
*U.S. Citizen Yes: Interactive Citizenship Preparation* by Ronna Magy (Boston, MA: Heinle & Heinle, 1996).  
*Equipped for the Future Content Standards: What Adults Need to Know and Be Able to Do in the Twenty-First Century* by Sondra Stein (Washington, D.C.: National Institute for Literacy, 2001).

### Selected Internet Resources:

URL	RESOURCES AVAILABLE
<a href="http://www.firstfind.info">www.firstfind.info</a>	search web for topics in basic English including bibliographic information on presidents and the structure of the U.S. government
<a href="http://www.whitehouse.gov">www.whitehouse.gov</a>	find bibliographic information on presidents
<a href="http://pbskids.org/democracy/">http://pbskids.org/democracy/</a>	find activities related to understanding U.S. government
<a href="http://bensguide.gpo.gov/">http://bensguide.gpo.gov/</a>	find activities related to understanding U.S. government
<a href="http://teacher.scholastic.com/research_tools/articlearchives/uspres/index.htm">http://teacher.scholastic.com/research_tools/articlearchives/uspres/index.htm</a>	find activities related to understanding U.S. government
<a href="http://uscis.gov/graphics/services/natz/general.htm">http://uscis.gov/graphics/services/natz/general.htm</a>	find information related to U.S. citizenship requirements and test questions
<a href="http://www.americasstory.org">www.americasstory.org</a>	find bibliographic information on presidents and famous Americans
<a href="http://www.biography.com">www.biography.com</a>	find bibliographic information on presidents
<a href="http://www.encyclopedia.com">www.encyclopedia.com</a>	find bibliographic information on presidents
<a href="http://www.google.com">www.google.com</a>	search engine for links and images