

Lesson Plan: Powers of the President

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Featured resource

[The Lowdown: What's the President's Actual Job Description?](#)

Opening quick write prompt:

What are some big campaign promises you have heard Hillary Clinton or Donald Trump make during this presidential election season? Do you think whoever is elected will actually be able to keep these promises? Why or why not?



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A quick write allows students to write down their thoughts before discussing the opening question in order to increase participation and make the discussion more accessible to English Language Learners.

Objectives

- Students will analyze the role of the president and the powers the office holds.
- Students will reflect on the powers of the president in the context of the 2016 presidential campaign.

Essential Question and Lesson Context

What powers does the president have? What are the checks and balances on the president's power?

During election years—and this one is no exception—presidential candidates make promises on the campaign trail that are meant to sway voters and give a preview of policies they would push for if elected. Candidates often make promises that they wouldn't actually have the power to enact without support from Congress or other governmental agencies. This lesson explores the formal and informal powers of the president and asks students to evaluate some of the campaign promises they have heard.

Key vocabulary

Pre-teach key vocabulary before students do the activity, especially if you have English Language Learners. After going over the simple definition, consider providing a visual aid or having students draw one. More ideas for how to pre-teach vocabulary can be found [here](#).

Word	Simple definition
Executive branch (n.)	One of three branches of the federal government, this branch is led by the president, and primary responsible for implementing and enforcing the nation's laws.
Demagogue (n.)	A political leader who seeks support by appealing to popular desires and prejudices rather than by using rational argument.
Formal powers (n.)	Powers explicitly granted to the president in the Constitution.
Informal powers (n.)	Powers that not mentioned in the Constitution, but that presidents have adopted over time.
Implement (v.)	To make happen, to put a decision, agreement or law into action.

Activity

- **Before watching videos:** Explain that presidents have both formal and informal powers.
- As a class, watch [Presidential Power: Crash Course Government and Politics #11](#) (6:29)
 - Note: The host on the video speaks very quickly. Stop frequently and ask the comprehension questions (some are listed below) OR use a platform like [EdPuzzle](#) or [PlayPosIt](#) to insert questions directly into the video.
 - Find strategies for how to make classroom videos interactive [HERE](#).
- **While watching:**
 - Pause at 2:03: Who can become president, according to the Constitution?
 - Pause at 2:28: Who actually elects the president (hint: not the people)? Why don't the people directly elect the president?
 - Pause at 3:09: Name at least three of the five types of power the president has. (Bonus if you get all five!)
 - Pause at 3:55: What is the first job of government, according to the video?
 - Pause at 4:37: Name one of the diplomatic powers of the president.
 - Pause at 5:02: How does the State of the Union speech make the president more powerful?
 - Pause at 5:28: What are two specific powers of the president mentioned in the video?

- Pause at 5:50: Why did the framers of the Constitution only give the president limited formal powers? What were they worried about?
- **After watching**: Make a list of the formal powers of the president (formal powers: veto laws, act as commander-in-chief, appoint federal judges, propose laws, give the state of the union address, make treaties and receive ambassadors, convene special sessions of Congress, grant pardons)

Independent/group work

- In groups or individually, students watch [Presidential Powers 2: Crash Course Government and Politics](#)
- While watching: Students make a list of the **informal** powers of the president.
 - Note: This video starts by reviewing the formal powers of the president. Check in with students to make sure they are keeping track of the informal powers.
- **After watching**: Discuss the questions below.

Discussion questions

- What did you learn about the formal powers of the president that surprised you?
- What did you learn about the informal powers of the president that surprised you?
- What are 2-3 limitations of the power of the president?
- What do you think a president's most important power is? Why? Use evidence to support your answer.
- What's one way the president can spend money without the approval of Congress?
- Think of a campaign promise Hillary Clinton or Donald Trump has made during the campaign. If this candidate became president, would s/he have the power to act independently or would s/he need Congressional approval?

[Circle chats](#), small-group discussions and [think-pair-share](#) provide a safer space for students to practice speaking and listening, and also boost participation during whole-class discussions.

Extension activities

Writing prompt: Would you want to be president? Why or why not? Think about what you've learned about the powers and limitations of the job. What's appealing to you? How would you handle the stress? Students can post their answers in the comment section of the [Lowdown post](#).

A national platform for your students' voices: Students make their voices heard on issues they care about by participating in [Letters to the Next President 2.0](#). This national initiative gives youth a platform to express their opinion about election issues that matter most to them. Teachers must sign up and get a group code that students can use to upload letters. For more resources and examples, see also [KQED's student video project](#), My Backyard Campaign.

Common Core standards

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.1	Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.7	Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.
D2.Civ.3	Examine the origins, purposes, and impact of constitutions, laws, treaties, and international agreements.
D2His.17	Compare the central arguments in secondary works of history on related topics in multiple media.