

# WHO ARE OUR GREATEST PRESIDENTS?

**LEVEL:**

High School

**TIME:**

An hour and a half

**OBJECTIVES:**

- Students will reach consensus within their group regarding the five most important categories/criteria needed to rank or rate a President of the United States and will use their selected categories/criteria to rank U.S. Presidents.
- Students will analyze how their selected categories/criteria apply to past Presidents of the United States and apply selected categories/criteria to the current U.S. President and/or presidential candidates.

**STANDARDS:**

- |  |                              |
|--|------------------------------|
| - Reading and Writing Literacy in History/Social Studies | - Principles of Democracy    |
| - Reading Informational Texts                            | - Evaluating Data            |
| - Foundations of the Political System                    | - Developing Research Skills |
|  | - Speaking and Listening     |

**PROCEDURE:**

1. Have students brainstorm criteria that could be used to rank leaders. Begin by considering an example of a type of leader with which students are familiar, such as a Student Council President, Coach, Scout Troop Leader, Mayor, School Principal, or Governor. Classify student responses into categories such as:

Organizational Skills  
Personality or Attitude  
Interpersonal Skills  
Thinking/Problem Solving Skills

Motivational Skills  
Communications Skills  
Talents  
Personal Accomplishments

2. Brainstorm additional or different categories that could be used specifically to rank Presidents of the United States.
3. Introduce and define Arthur M. Schlesinger's presidential rating criteria (or any similar criteria you may wish to use).

Background  
Communication Ability  
Court Appointments  
Luck  
Willing to Take Risks  
Overall Ability  
Domestic Accomplishments  
Executive Ability  
Leadership Ability  
Avoid Crucial Mistakes

Party Leadership  
Relationship with Congress  
Handling of U.S. Economy  
Ability to Compromise  
Executive Appointments  
Imagination  
Integrity  
Foreign Policy Accomplishments  
Intelligence  
Your Present Overall View

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4. Use a desired method to form small students groups (assigned/self-selected/drawing names/counting off, etc.). Ask each group to select and agree upon five presidential leadership criteria they find *most* important.
5. Once identified, students will use a comparison matrix to research their five criteria as they apply to President George Washington and two other presidents from the following list of frequently top ranked U.S. Presidents: Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln, Theodore Roosevelt, and Franklin D. Roosevelt.
6. Students should analyze their research findings to create and support their own ranking of their three selected presidents.
7. Students can analyze the current President of the United States with their comparison matrix and develop a research-based conclusion about how this president will rank in U.S. history. During Election years, this lesson can be modified to include presidential candidates.
8. For a concluding activity have students support their positions on both historic figures and current political actors.