



THE MUSEUM OF *We the People*

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# STATE OF THE UNION BINGO

★★ Lesson Plan ★★

GRADES  
7-12



## ABOUT THIS LESSON

State of the Union Bingo is a tool designed to engage students in the president's annual address to Congress. The lesson begins during the class prior to the address with the teacher providing background information about the State of the Union Address and examining the Constitutional requirement underlying the annual speech. As a homework assignment, each student is given a *State of the Union Bingo Card* to fill in while watching the speech. The next class session, the cards are used as a discussion starter and a tool to analyze the president's agenda for the coming year.

## AUTHOR

National Constitution Center

## BACKGROUND

Today an annual fixture of American politics, the State of the Union Address has evolved substantially over the last two hundred years. Article II, Section 3 of the Constitution tasks the president only to “from time to time give to the Congress Information of the State of the Union,” without mention of method, comprehensiveness or frequency. In January 1790, George Washington established an early tradition of delivering what was called the “annual message” to a joint session of Congress. This tradition was soon broken by Thomas Jefferson, who began a practice of sending a written message to Congress. In 1913, President Woodrow Wilson reintroduced the tradition of delivering the message in person to Congress.

State of the Union Addresses have varied greatly in their content, ranging from the general to the specific and covering a vast array of both domestic and foreign policy topics. Since the early 20th century, each president has used the State of the Union to lay out his vision for the nation in the coming year. President Roosevelt presented his now-famous “Four Freedoms” in the address and Lyndon Johnson used the speech to outline his domestic reform plan known at the “Great Society.”

Presidents have also changed the way the speech is presented to the American people. President Coolidge was the first president to have his speech broadcast live on the radio, and President Truman’s 1947 address was the first broadcast on television. President Reagan began a tradition that continues to this day, providing a human face to past accomplishments and future plans by inviting guests to sit in the gallery and mentioning them during the address.

The annual State of the Union address provides a rare opportunity for Americans to see the complete federal government in one place. Representatives from all three branches gather in the House chamber to listen to the address.

## GRADE LEVEL(S)

7-12

## CLASSROOM TIME

- 20 minutes in the class prior to address
- 45 minutes in the class following address

## MATERIALS

- Copies of the United States Constitution: Available at [www.constitutioncenter.org/constitution/constitution.pdf](http://www.constitutioncenter.org/constitution/constitution.pdf)
- State of the Union Bingo Card

## CONSTITUTIONAL CONNECTIONS

Articles II, Section 3

# OBJECTIVES

## Students will:

- Understand the Constitutional requirement for the State of the Union address.
- Examine the choices the president makes in the State of the Union Speech.
- Describe the events and topics addressed in the State of the Union speech.
- Analyze the president's legislative plan for 2012.

# ACTIVITY

## CLASS PRIOR TO THE ADDRESS

1. Ask students to read Article II, Section 3 of the United States Constitution. Highlight this section:

*He shall from time to time give to the Congress Information of the State of the Union, and recommend to their Consideration such Measures as he shall judge necessary and expedient...*

2. Ask students to explain the following:

- What does this section require of the president?
- What specific requirements does it include?

3. Share with students the history of the State of the Union address:

- George Washington was the first president to deliver a State of the Union Address.
- Thomas Jefferson, third president of the United States, did not present his address in person, but instead sent a written message to Congress. The message was read aloud to the joint session of Congress. This became the standard for fulfilling the Constitutional requirement.
- In 1913 Woodrow Wilson resumed the tradition of giving the address in person.
- Calvin Coolidge was first president to have his address broadcast over the radio.
- Harry Truman was the first president to have his address broadcast on television.
- In 2002, George W. Bush's State of the Union was the first one webcast on the White House's website.

4. Give each student a *State of the Union Bingo Card*. Instruct the students to watch the president's annual message to Congress.

**Note:** You may encourage students to brainstorm their own list of words they anticipate the president to use in his speech. Students can use their words to populate the blank Bingo Card that follows the completed version in this packet.

5. Provide students with information on when and where the address will be broadcast. The address can be seen on all major TV stations and cable news stations, as well as live on the internet.

## CLASS FOLLOWING THE ADDRESS

1. Prior to class, print out a copy of the address from the White House website: [www.whitehouse.gov/stateoftheunion](http://www.whitehouse.gov/stateoftheunion). This can be used by the classroom teacher as a reference for classroom discussion.
2. On a separate sheet of paper, ask students to spend five minutes completing a quick write about their thoughts on the speech.
3. Going around the classroom, ask students to share what they have written.
4. Have students share the results of their bingo cards. Encourage students to compare terms they have checked off. Refer back to the printed transcript to clarify disagreements.
5. Divide the class into mixed ability pairs. Instruct students in their pairs to create a list of President Obama's top five priorities for 2012. Students should use their quick write and completed bingo cards as reference. Give students five to ten minutes to complete the lists.
6. Going around the classroom, each pair should share their list. Compile the results in the front of the class for all to see.
7. The class as a whole should examine the complete list and, working collaboratively, create a list of President Obama's top five priorities for 2012. Encourage students to support their opinions with examples from the address and information gathered in their pair discussion.
8. Once the students have come to a consensus on the list, have them note it on a large sheet of paper and hang this in the classroom for the remainder of the school year.

## ALTERNATIVE PROCEDURES

If you do not want to assign students to watch the address at home, you can watch it in class or have students complete the activity by reading the transcript.

# ASSESSMENT OPTIONS

1. Assign students to write a newspaper article covering the State of the Union address. Encourage analysis of the effectiveness of the president in the delivery of his message.
2. Give each student a copy of the transcript of the State of the Union address and, in groups, have them rewrite the speech so that it lasts no more than five minutes.

# STATE OF THE UNION BINGO

1. Fill out your card with the words you think the president will use in the State of the Union Address, using one word or phrase for each space.
2. Watch the address and listen carefully to President Obama's speech
3. When the president says one of the key words, mark your card.

		<b>FREE SPACE</b>		



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