

Stepping Stones to the White House:

Visual Artifacts from the Life and Presidency of Barack Obama

Grades 3-6

Overview

In this lesson, students examine key events from the life of former President Barack Obama in order to understand the “stepping stones” that led him to become the first Black president of the United States. Looking at images, videos, and primary sources, they also review noteworthy moments from his presidency. Students will then place these moments in chronological order on an interactive timeline and discuss their significance.

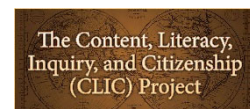
This lesson is a supplement to any lesson on the structure and functioning of the system of government in the United States, including the role of the presidency, as laid out by the U.S. Constitution.

This lesson complies with California Assembly Bill 1912 to require instruction on the historical significance of President Obama as the first African American President. The bill was introduced by California Assemblymember Chris Holden and signed into law in 2014.

Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Identify President Barack Obama as the first Black president of the United States.
- Place key events in his life leading up to and events during his presidency in chronological order on a timeline.
- Discuss the significance of these timeline events in a whole-class discussion.
- Choose one event from the timeline that they think was most consequential for President Obama and explain why in a paragraph.



Standards

California History-Social Science Standards 4.5: Students understand the structures, functions, and powers of the local, state, and federal governments as described in the U.S. Constitution. **5.7** Students describe the people and events associated with the development of the U.S. Constitution and analyze the Constitution's significance as the foundation of the American republic.

California Common Core State Standards RI 3: (Grade 4) Explain events, procedures, ideas, or concepts in a historical, scientific, or technical text, including what happened and why, based on specific information in the text. **(Grade 5)** Explain the relationships or interactions between two or more individuals, events, ideas, or concepts in a historical, scientific, or technical text based on specific information in the text. **RI 7: (Grade 4)** Interpret information presented visually, orally, or quantitatively (e.g., in charts, graphs, diagrams, time lines [sic], animations, or interactive elements on Web pages) and explain how the information contributes to an understanding of the text in which it appears. **(Grade 5)** Draw on information from multiple print or digital sources, demonstrating the ability to locate an answer to a question quickly or to solve a problem efficiently. **SL 2: (Grade 4)** Paraphrase portions of a text read aloud or information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally. **(Grade 5)** Summarize a written text read aloud or information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally. **W1: (Grades 4 and 5)** Write opinion pieces on topics or texts, supporting a point of view with reasons and information.

C3 Framework Indicators: D2.His.3.3-5: Generate questions about individuals and groups who have shaped significant historical changes and continuities.

Materials

Access to Padlet, a free, online tool that includes interactive timelines. Teachers access the platform using Google credentials; there is no need to register or create a new account if you have a Google account.

[Handout \(or electronic PDF\)](#) of timeline items for students. Note that these items are not in order.

Answer Key listing timeline artifacts with exact dates, in chronological order.

Preparation

Access the timeline on Padlet by clicking here: <https://padlet.com/crfusa/9j7corlm80e8lqn6>

In the top right-hand corner of the screen, click on “**Remake**.” In the menu that appears, make sure to check the box that says, “**Copy posts**.” You can also change the title if you would like. Now you can use and manipulate the timeline as you work through it with your students.

Procedure

I. Focus Discussion

- A. Remind students that in November of 2008, Barack Obama was elected president of the United States, becoming the first Black person to be elected to this country's highest office. He was re-elected to a second term in 2012.

Ask students what they know about his life before he was elected president. Note relevant and appropriate responses on screen or whiteboard.

Ask students if they know of any events or accomplishments from Obama's presidency (January 2009-January 2017). Note relevant and appropriate responses on screen or whiteboard.

- B. Tell students that today they will be examining several events from the life and presidency of Barack Obama.

II. Timeline Activity

- A. Bring up the Padlet timeline on your screen.

Explain that it features a variety of events from the life and presidency of Barack Obama, but that they are out of order. Tell students that their task is to work with each other and with you to arrange the events in chronological order.

Note: If you think that your students may need some scaffolding for constructing or understanding a timeline of someone's life, you may want to help them anticipate the assignment by discussing life events that always (or typically) happen before or after one another. For instance, a person starts school around three to five years *after* they are born; a person goes to law school *after* they have graduated from high school and college; a person must campaign for an office *before* they can get elected to it. This may help to give them some clues or guideposts as they arrange the events in President Obama's life.

- B. Pair students up, and make sure that each member of each pair has their own copy (either printed or electronic) of the timeline events. Give the pairs time to put their heads together to see if they can figure out the correct order of some or all of the events on the timeline. They can do this initial attempt by either numbering the events on the paper with a pencil, or by numbering directly on the PDF (with a stylus or their finger). If they are really stumped, they can move on to another event.

The point here is to focus them and get them thinking before the whole class starts weighing in on the timeline on the screen. Feel free to give them hints as necessary. And remind them that there are clues in many of the captions or even in the photos themselves!

- C. Bring the students' attention back to the timeline on the board/screen and call on volunteers to drag (or tell you where to drag) the different events to the correct place on the timeline. Work together, calling on pairs or individual students to rearrange all the events. (See the attached "cheat sheet" for reference if you are unsure of the order.)

III. Debrief

- A. Give students a couple of minutes to look at the correctly ordered timeline and to review the trajectory of President Obama's life.

Ask students:

- What do you notice about any of these events or sequence of events?
- Is there something on here that really jumps out at you or surprises you? What is it? What about it grabs your attention?
- What is a question that you have now that you see all these events from Barack Obama's life and presidency? (Note and/or answer any of the students' questions that will help further develop their understanding of Barack Obama's presidency).
- Why is it important to you that the U.S. elected its first African American president in 2008?

Assessment

Assign students to write a paragraph addressing the following prompt: Besides getting elected, which event on this timeline do you think is the most important one for Barack Obama's presidency? Why?

Answer Key

President Barack Obama Timeline Events in Chronological Order

1. August 4, 1961: born Honolulu - Google map image
2. n.d.: Barack Obama as a young boy with his mother, Ann Dunham - photo
3. 1967-1971: lived in Jakarta - Google map image
4. n.d.: Playing in high school basketball game - photo
5. 1979: Graduated from Punahou School - link to school website
6. 1990-1991: President of Harvard Law Review - photo
7. ca. 1997-2002: During tenure as Senior Lecturer at University of Chicago Law School - photo
8. July 2004: Keynote speech at Democratic National Convention in Boston - [link to C-SPAN video](#) (Recommend showing students clip until 3:10 for a brief snapshot of Obama's family story)
9. ca. 2005: With wife, Michelle, and daughters Malia and Sasha
10. 2008: Shepard Fairey "Hope" campaign poster - © Shepard Fairey/AP
11. January 20, 2009: Crowd at first Inauguration - photo by Sarah Badawi, used with permission
12. March 23, 2010: Close up of signature on Affordable Care Act - photo
13. November 20, 2013: With his then Vice President (now President), Joe Biden - photo
14. January 22, 2014: Draft of State of the Union speech - photo
15. September 19, 2014: Signing a bill at the Resolute Desk - photo
16. March 2015: At the 50th anniversary of the Selma-to-Montgomery march - photo
17. November 10, 2016: Meeting with then President-elect Trump at the White House - photo credit JIM WATSON/AFP via Getty Images

Unless otherwise noted, all photos were obtained from Obama White House social media accounts and are used Courtesy Barack Obama Presidential Library.