

Lesson Plan: The Obama Years

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Featured resource

[KQED's The Lowdown: The Obama Years](#)

[The Guardian: The Legacy of Barack Obama in Seven Drawings](#)

(video 2:36)

Opening quick write prompt:



Pete Souza

What is something you will remember about President Obama or his presidency? Explain why this memory is significant to you.

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.

Objective

- Students will analyze key events of President Obama's time in office.
- Students will reflect on and write about the impact of the Obama's presidency on their own lives.

Essential Question and Lesson Context

What are the achievements and setbacks of the Obama presidency? What do President Obama's years in office mean to you?

President Obama has inspired passionate reactions among admirers and detractors alike. He is also likely the only president most students remember being in office. The nation's first African-American president, Obama was elected on an ambitious platform of change just as the country was sliding into the biggest financial crisis since the Great Depression. This lesson asks students to explore President Obama's achievements and setbacks through an interactive timeline of events, and reflect on how his presidency has affected their own lives.

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
Clandestine (adj.)	Kept secret or done in secret
Formidable (adj.)	Inspiring respect or fear by being impressively powerful or capable
Galvanize (v.)	To cause people to become energized or excited about something in a way that causes them to act
Overhaul (v.)	To change something completely
Tenure (n.)	The amount of time someone holds a job, office or title

Direct instruction and guided practice

- Discuss the quick write prompt to discover what stands out for students about the Obama presidency. Make a list of particular events or actions.
- If students have primarily mentioned memories that don't have to do with legislation or national/international events, ask them: What laws or executive actions did President Obama take that you remember? Add to the list.
 - *Optional:* Show [the video from The Guardian](#) to remind students of several of Obama's key achievements and controversies.
- As a class, briefly review the first items on the interactive timeline of the Obama presidency found in [The Lowdown post](#). After reviewing each item, ask: Was this an achievement, a setback, or both? What do you think this event tells us about the kind of president Obama was?

Independent practice

- In small groups or individually, students continue to read and explore the interactive timeline found on [The Lowdown post](#).
 - After reading the timeline, students identify the event or issue from Obama's presidency that is most significant or meaningful to them. Explain this can mean something they agree with, disagree with, or they feel is important to their lives or the lives of others.
 - Even if students are working in small groups, each individual should choose the event or issue that means most to them.

- Individually, students briefly describe the event or issue they chose. They should then explain why they chose it and what it says about the kind of president Obama was.
 - Model the writing prompt, if needed: *Looking back at the Obama presidency, I chose _____ as the event/issue that is most important to me. I chose this because _____* (Students should explain the significance of the event to them in 2-3 sentences.) *I think this event shows that President Obama was _____* (Students explain what the event/issue says about Obama as a president in 1-2 sentences.)

Discussion/reflection

- Students share the event/issue they chose in small groups or with the class.
- How do you think President Obama has influenced students like you? Do you think his presidency has made you more or less interested in political issues like the ones we discussed?
- What do you think people 20 years into the future will most remember about the Obama presidency? Explain your thinking.

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

Follow your issue through the first 100 days. While President Obama is leaving office, significant issues from his presidency will continue to be debated and decided on. [Using these resources and others](#), encourage students to follow the issue they care about through the first 100 days of the Trump administration.

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.
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.1	Write arguments to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence.