



# Making the Grade: What Makes a Good President?

(Middle/High School)

## Introduction

Every President has had his critics, yet among most of the United States Presidents, certain qualities recur that have made them effective leaders for our country. These same qualities make good leaders in other areas besides politics, and are good things to look for when choosing any kind of leader. This lesson will provide students with a way to evaluate their leaders and with background material to use when studying about various Presidents.

## Objectives

- To help students understand what qualities make a good leader.
- To help clarify the duties of the President.
- To give students a mechanism to evaluate leaders and to recognize and develop their own leadership qualities.

## Materials

None needed.

NOTE: The lists developed as part of this lesson can be saved so the characteristics and responsibilities can be used when studying actual U.S. Presidents.

## Procedure

1. Explain to the class that they are going to find out what qualities a person needs to be a good leader and how those qualities are important to be a good President of the United States. Use three sheets of butcher block paper taped on the board and write the following words across the top of each: (A) Characteristics, (B) Responsibilities, and (C) Presidents.
2. As a class, brainstorm the characteristics of a good president and list them under Column A. Examples that you may hear are intelligent, brave, honest, diplomatic, not afraid to speak his mind, moral, able to work well with others, good speaker, creative, etc. Suggest they think about people they have known who were good leaders to spark ideas. After a number have been listed, discuss each item by asking students why that characteristic is important to them. Write down reasons next to each characteristic. By vote or consensus, decide which five of the items are most important. Rank those characteristics.
3. In similar fashion, brainstorm a list of presidential responsibilities and list them under Column B. Examples might be to create foreign policy, put together a Cabinet of trusted advisors, suggest laws for Congress, develop programs for education, social welfare, etc., determine defense policy, inform the public what the government is doing. As a class or in small groups (3-5 students), decide how the characteristics in Column A could help a president with the responsibilities in Column B. Write these ideas next to the listed responsibilities.

4. Save the lists and, as you study each president, discuss each in terms of characteristics and responsibilities. See which characteristics each one exhibited and how that helped (or lack of them hindered) his effectiveness as president. Add additional items to the A and B lists as necessary. Discuss the following questions:
  - Why have presidential responsibilities expanded throughout U.S. history?
  - What characteristics do you think people look for in a Presidential candidate? Are these the characteristics they should be using? Why or why not?
  - How can an interested voter find out about a candidate?
5. *Resource Person (option)*: a city council member, organization leader or business leader could all discuss leadership qualities and how they are necessary to being a good community, school or business leader as well as a president. Provide them with a copy of your A and B lists in advance so they can point out the areas in which other leaders have similar responsibilities and how the stated qualities assist them in performing their jobs.