

American History Toolkits

TeachingAmericanHistory.org

Introduction

TAH.org is pleased to present our American History Toolkits, topically-focused collections, each made up of resources from around the site, and organized to provide for easy access to a variety of materials for teachers. These toolkits are made possible by the generous support of the [Arthur N. Rupe Foundation](#). Our initial collection is made up of the following topics, which address some of the major eras and issues in American history and government.

- [The American Founding](#) – trace the development of the American Idea of government from the years leading up to the Revolution through George Washington's terms as president
- [Expansion & Sectionalism](#) – the country grew swiftly during the first half of the 19th Century, and with that growth came opportunities, challenges, and eventually problems that drove the country to turn on itself.
- [Civil War & Reconstruction](#) – 1861-1877, some of the most pivotal in America's history, as faction tried to tear the country apart, and attempts to build a new sociopolitical order after military victory yielded mixed results.
- [The Progressive Era](#) – more dramatic change, economic and social, motivated Americans to seek equally dramatic political changes, in search of solutions to problems not only new to Americans, but novel in world history.
- [The Great Depression and World War 2](#) – another pair of potentially existential challenges to America and its system of government, addressed and resolved by American means.
- [Civil Rights](#) – MLK and others sought to cash the check written by the Founders, and their work changed the political, economic, legal, and social status of millions of American minorities, all the while bringing America closer to the ideals of the Declaration of Independence.

The American Founding

The era of the American Founding lasted from the 1770s through either the late 1780s or early 1790s, depending on one's perspective or school of thought. For the sake of this resource, the Founding is defined as being the period from 1776 through 1789 – that is, from the writing of the Declaration of Independence through George Washington's inauguration as the country's first president.

During this period, the “American Mind,” as Thomas Jefferson called it, was expressed through a revolution, initial attempts at government, and finally the creation of the Constitution, the instrument intended to bring to fruition the lofty goals of the American Revolution.

Guiding Questions

1. How did American thinking about the nature of leaders and the people—the rulers and the ruled—evolve from the colonial days of allegiance to the King to the presidency of George Washington? What qualities did they believe that leaders should exhibit, how much power should they have, and why was it important that such power be checked and monitored?
2. Can we say that Americans of the founding era valued some ideals and principles more than others—security or freedom? Liberty or union? A confederated republic or a rising national empire? Or did they try to reconcile all these goals and ideals as they built a new nation?
3. How did Americans in the Founding era think about the relationship between the Constitution and the American Revolution? What had the Revolution achieved and what did it mean, and would the Constitution uphold those achievements or roll them back? Why did Federalists tend to see the Constitution as the fulfillment of the Revolution while Anti-Federalists criticized it as a betrayal? Why did the Constitution generate such diverse opinions on such a key issue? How did the ratification debate and the creation of the new government address these hopes and fears?
4. Could the broad, universal principles declared in the Declaration of Independence be limited or deferred once they were articulated? In what ways were the debates of the founding era really about extending the principles of the Revolutionary movement to more than just a few Americans—and for whom, and how fully, and how soon those rights and benefits should be conferred?

[Suggested answers](#)

Essential Documents

1. [Declaration of Independence](#), 1776, Thomas Jefferson
2. [Vices of the Political System of the United States](#), 1787, James Madison
3. [Notes of the Debates in the Federal Convention of 1787](#), James Madison (excerpts)
4. [Constitution of the United States](#), 1787
5. [Brutus I](#), 1787
6. [Federalist I](#), 1787
7. [Brutus II](#), 1787
8. [James Wilson's State House Speech](#), 1787
9. [Federalist 10](#), 1787
10. [First Inaugural Address](#), 1789, George Washington

Resources

Webinars

1. [Documents in Detail: George Washington's Farewell Address](#)
2. [Documents in Detail: James Madison's Federalist 10](#)
3. [American Presidents: George Washington](#)
4. [American Controversies: Is the Constitution Pro- or Anti-Slavery?](#)
5. [American Controversies: Did the Founders Misunderstand Democracy?](#)
6. [American Controversies: Did the Founders Misunderstand Equality?](#)
7. [Making a Constitutional Republic](#)
8. [Reflection and Choice versus Accident and Force: Making the Constitution](#)
9. [Religious Liberty and the American Founding](#)
10. [Religion in American History & Politics: Hamilton and Jefferson](#)

Online Exhibits

1. [The Constitutional Convention](#) – an immersive, multi-genre study of the Convention of 1787, examining the people, ideas, and event from documentary, visual, and contextual angles, all supported by a rich selection of original documents.
2. [Federalist-Antifederalist Debates](#) – the in-doors and out-of-doors debates, from late 1787 through late 1788, about the Constitution, and whether the people and

the states should ratify it, with a focus on the issues debated and personalities involved.

3. [Ratification of the Constitution](#) – how was the Constitution actually ratified? How did conventions in the states debate and vote on the document, and through it the future of the country?
4. [The Bill of Rights](#) – examine the English, colonial, and revolutionary roots of the Bill of Rights by individual right and amendment, and see where Americans' most fundamental rights came to be codified.

Presidential Academy

These archived courses will help teachers expand their documents-based knowledge of a time period and the topics found within it.

[Part 1: Declaration of Independence through the Federalist Papers](#) – includes links to 11 hour-long sessions with documents

Lesson Plans

1. [A Walking Tour of the Constitution](#) – help your students learn and retain the fundamentals of the Constitution, and create a useful reference for themselves in the process
2. [Founding Principles](#) – a writing lesson that will help students identify and explain a few of the core principles expressed in the Constitution
3. [The Origins of the Bill of Rights](#) – a study of the historical and ideological origins of the first ten amendments
4. [American Revolution Socratic Seminar](#) – a model for purposeful discussion of a topic, with a focus on the ideas that animated those who waged the War for Independence
5. [The American War for Independence](#) – three related lessons about the war
6. [The Constitutional Convention of 1787](#) – three related lessons exploring different phases of the Convention
7. [The Federalist-Antifederalist Debates: Diversity and the Extended Republic](#) – two related lessons exploring key issues debated over ratification of the Constitution
8. [Other Lesson Plans on the Founding](#) – a selection

Expansion & Sectionalism

From the first years of the republic under the Constitution through the 1850s, America experienced rapid growth and expansion, opening new lands and opportunities for its people, and experiencing a variety of growing pains in the process. Political, social, and economic challenges confronted American political leaders, in some cases threatening the union.

Guiding Questions

[Suggested answers](#)

Essential Documents

1. [First Inaugural Address](#), 1801, Thomas Jefferson
2. [Letter to John Holmes](#), 1820, Thomas Jefferson
3. [Monroe Doctrine](#), 1823, James Monroe
4. [The Webster-Hayne Debates](#), 1830
5. [Fort Hill Address](#), 1831, John C. Calhoun
6. [Proclamation Regarding Nullification](#), 1832, Andrew Jackson
7. [What a Revival of Religion Is](#), 1835, Charles Finney
8. [Address Delivered at Seneca Falls](#), 1848, Elizabeth Cady Stanton
9. [“What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?”](#) 1852, Frederick Douglass
10. [Speech on the Repeal of the Missouri Compromise](#), 1854, Abraham Lincoln

Resources

Webinars

1. [Landmark Supreme Court Cases: *Marbury v. Madison*](#)
2. [Landmark Supreme Court Cases: *McCulloch v. Maryland*](#)
3. [Landmark Supreme Court Cases: *Dred Scott v. Sandford*](#)
4. [American Presidents: James Madison](#)
5. [American Presidents: Andrew Jackson](#)
6. [American Presidents: James K. Polk](#)

7. [American Controversies: Is there a Constitutional Right to Nullification or Secession?](#)
8. [Sectional Divide in Antebellum America](#)

Online Exhibits

1. [Religion in American History and Politics](#) – although larger in scope than this era, the RAHP exhibit's coverage of the Second Great Awakening makes it especially useful to a study of this period of American history, government, and thought.
2. [From Bullets to Ballots: The Election of 1800](#) – a full digital copy of John Zvesper's book of the same name, examining the first peaceful transfer of power between presidents and parties after a rancorously partisan election.

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These archived courses will help teachers expand their documents-based knowledge of a time period and the topics found within it.

1. [Session 13: The Rule of Law, Slavery, and Constitutional Self-Government](#)
2. [Session 14: Abolitionism and Constitutional Self-Government](#)
3. [Session 15: Lincoln Confronts Stephen Douglas's Popular Sovereignty](#)
4. [Session 16: Lincoln-Douglas Debates](#)

Lesson Plans

1. [Jigsawing Lincoln and Stephens](#) – a weeklong series of lessons focused on the words and ideas of the Lincoln-Douglas Debates
2. [A House Dividing](#) – four related lessons about the growing sectional rift between North and South

Civil War and Reconstruction

The American Civil War was fought from 1861-1865, and followed by the period of Reconstruction, generally accepted by scholars to have ended in 1877. The following collections include documents essential to gaining and understanding of how the war began, progressed, and ended, and how Reconstruction was conceived and attempted. Documents, at the core of any study of history, are spread throughout the toolkit, associated with the webinars, lessons, and in the Essential Documents list, as well.

Guiding Questions

1. What did Americans think about slavery and emancipation as a constitutional matter, and how did their disagreement over the institution and its possible elimination shape the coming of the Civil War and its prosecution?
2. How did Americans understand secession and the problem it posed for the viability of self-government?
3. How did Lincoln and Americans understand the nature of the federal union and Constitution in relation to state sovereignty?
4. What problems did Reconstruction pose for Presidents and Congresses both during and after the Civil War, and to what extent did the federal structure of the American union, along with the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments, complicate the return of peaceful self-government to the United States?

[Suggested answers](#)

Essential Documents

1. [Fragment on the Constitution and Union](#), 1861, Abraham Lincoln
2. [South Carolina Declaration of Causes of Secession](#), 1860
3. [“Corner Stone” Speech](#), 1861, Alexander Stephens
4. [The War – Its Cause and Cure](#), 1861, William Lloyd Garrison
5. [Message to Congress in Special Session](#), 1861, Abraham Lincoln
6. [Letter to Horace Greeley](#), 1861, Abraham Lincoln
7. [Final Emancipation Proclamation](#), 1863, Abraham Lincoln
8. [Gettysburg Address](#), 1863, Abraham Lincoln
9. [Resolution Submitting the Thirteenth Amendment to the States](#), 1865, Abraham Lincoln
10. [Oration in Memory of Abraham Lincoln](#), 1876, Frederick Douglass

Resources

Webinars

1. [American Presidents: Abraham Lincoln](#)
2. [Documents in Detail: Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address](#)
3. [American Controversies: Did Lincoln Violate the Constitution?](#)
4. [Slavery and the Civil War](#)
5. [The 13th Amendment: Beginning of a Constitutional Revolution?](#)
6. [The 14th Amendment: How it Completes the Constitution](#)
7. [The 15th Amendment: Providing the Vote](#)

Online Exhibits

1. [The Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial](#) – created to mark the 200th anniversary of Lincoln's birth, this exhibit includes speeches and letters from Lincoln, scholarly commentaries about the president, and links to lessons and outside sites that focus on him.
2. [The Civil War Sesquicentennial](#) – a collection of documents, commentaries, and useful links to mark the 150th anniversary of the beginning of the Civil War.

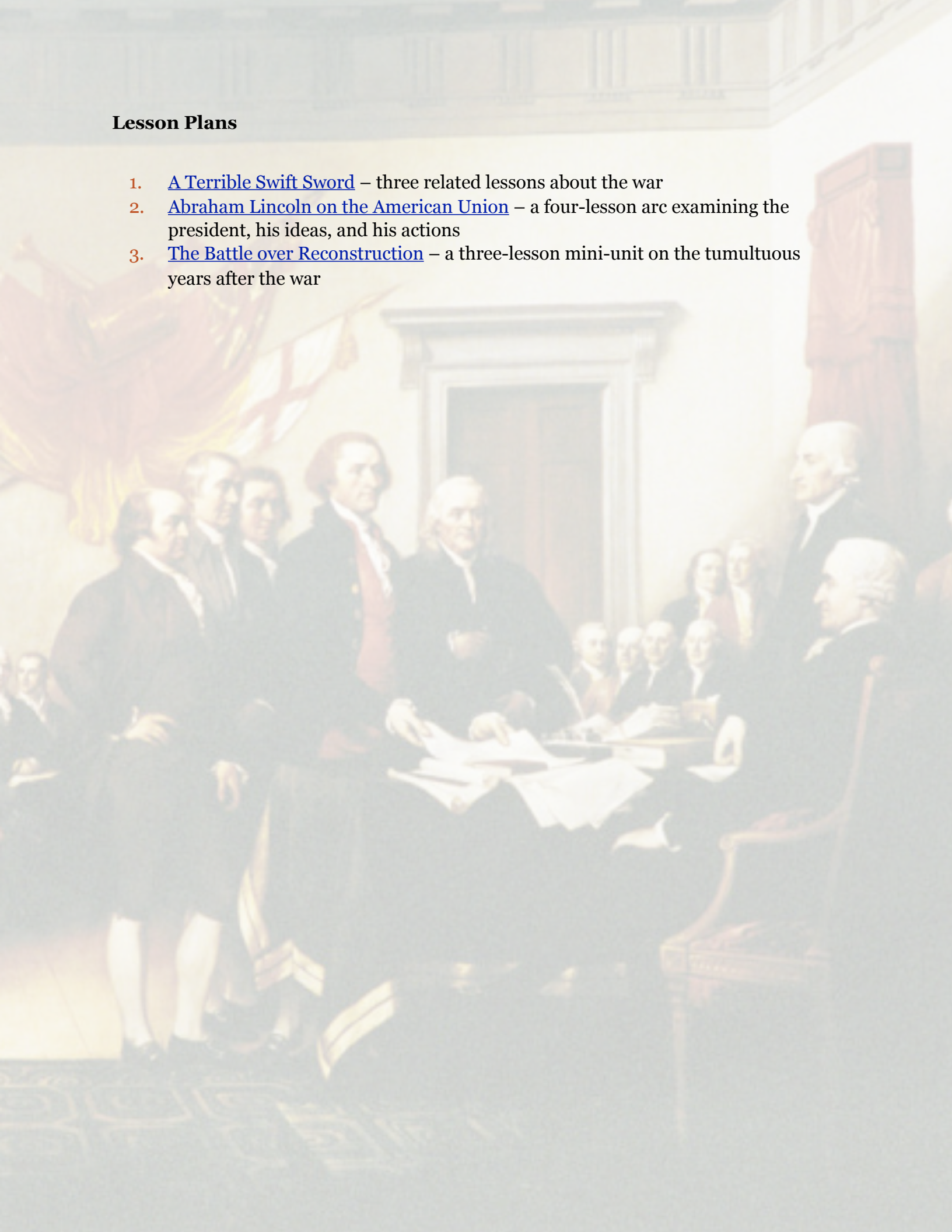
Presidential Academy

These archived courses will help teachers expand their documents-based knowledge of a time period and the topics found within it.

1. [Session 17: Causes of the Civil War](#)
2. [Session 18: The Rights and Wrongs of Secession](#)
3. [Session 19: Lincoln's Election Secession, and the Civil War](#)
4. [Session 20: Lincoln and Civil Liberties](#)
5. [Session 21: Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation](#)
6. [Session 22: "A New Birth of Freedom" and Lincoln's Re-election](#)
7. [Session 23: Frederick Douglass – Reconstruction and the Future of Black Americans](#)

Lesson Plans

1. [A Terrible Swift Sword](#) – three related lessons about the war
2. [Abraham Lincoln on the American Union](#) – a four-lesson arc examining the president, his ideas, and his actions
3. [The Battle over Reconstruction](#) – a three-lesson mini-unit on the tumultuous years after the war



Progressive Era

A confluence of factors, including the quickening pace of industrialization, urbanization, increasing immigration, and a growing presence on the world stage faced America in the late 19th Century. These pressures gave rise to various political movements, each seeking to provide answers to the more serious questions of the day. Overall, Americans found answers to these issues in the ideas of the Progressives. From both major political parties, the Progressives offered solutions to economic, social, and political problems, in some ways using and in others changing the American system of government that had existed for almost a century at that point.

Guiding Questions

[Suggested answers](#)

Essential Documents

1. [The Sherman Anti-Trust Act](#), 1890
2. [The Significance of the Frontier in American History](#), 1893, Frederick Jackson Turner
3. [In Support of an American Empire](#), 1900, Albert J. Beveridge
4. [Roosevelt Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine](#), 1904, Theodore Roosevelt
5. [New Nationalism Speech](#), 1910, Theodore Roosevelt
6. [Progressive Party Platform](#), 1912
7. [The New Freedom, Chapters 1 and 2](#), 1913, Woodrow Wilson
8. [Invisible Government Speech](#), 1915, Elihu Root
9. [“Fourteen Points” Message](#), 1918, Woodrow Wilson
10. [Speech on the 150th Anniversary of the Declaration of Independence](#), 1926, Calvin Coolidge

Resources

Webinars

1. [American Presidents: Theodore Roosevelt](#)
2. [American Controversies: Has “The Day of Enlightened Administration” Come?](#)
3. [The Progressive Re-Founding of America](#)

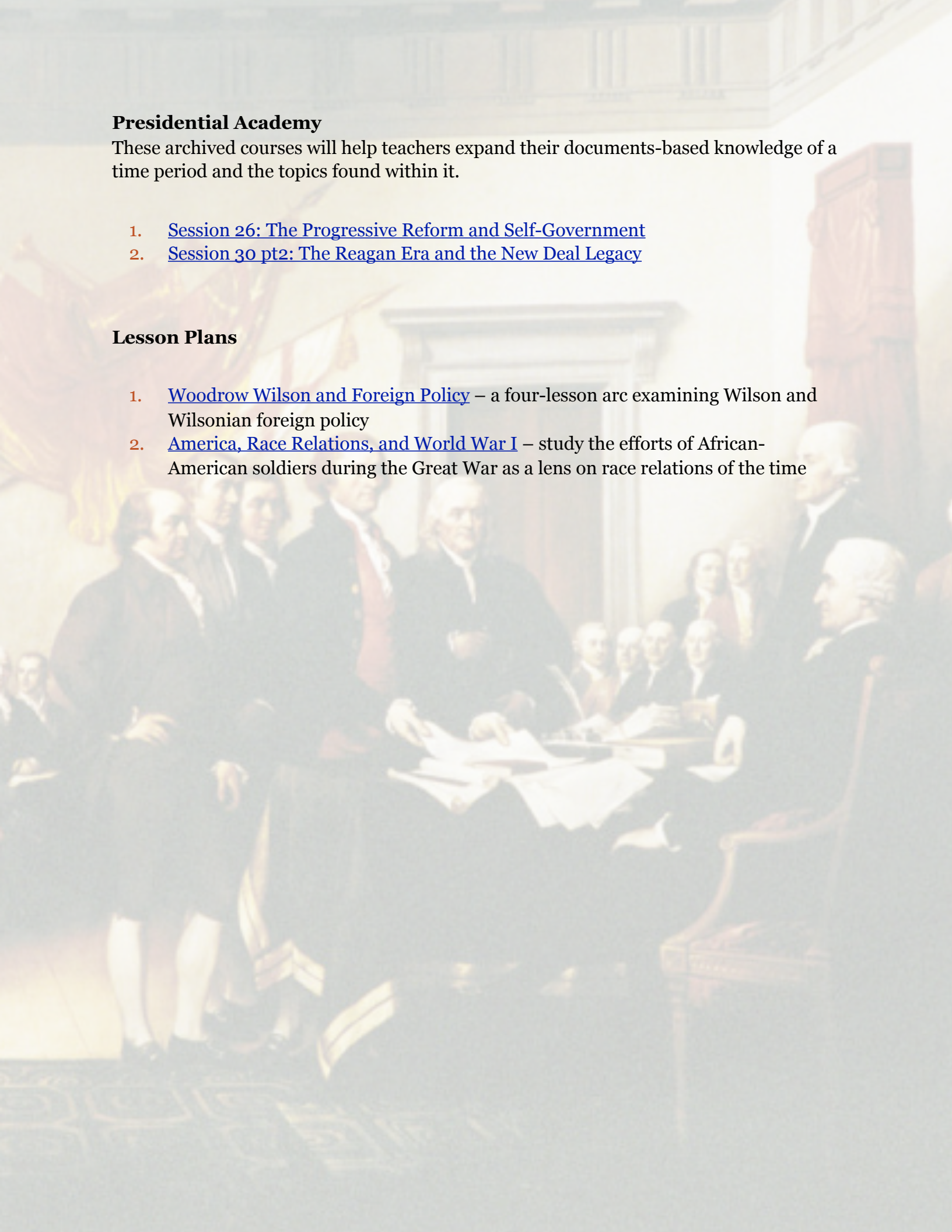
Presidential Academy

These archived courses will help teachers expand their documents-based knowledge of a time period and the topics found within it.

1. [Session 26: The Progressive Reform and Self-Government](#)
2. [Session 30 pt2: The Reagan Era and the New Deal Legacy](#)

Lesson Plans

1. [Woodrow Wilson and Foreign Policy](#) – a four-lesson arc examining Wilson and Wilsonian foreign policy
2. [America, Race Relations, and World War I](#) – study the efforts of African-American soldiers during the Great War as a lens on race relations of the time



Great Depression and World War 2

Americans and the American system of government were faced with two existential challenges, overlapping, in the form of the Great Depression and the Second World War. The Great Depression, lasting more than a decade, created economic, social, and political challenges the country had never before experienced to such extents, and resulted in political and legal activity that had never before been considered. FDR's expansion of the federal government was not only one of scope, but also reach, acting directly on individual Americans' lives in ways it had never before. Adding to the challenges of the 1930s was the rise of expansionistic and belligerent dictatorships in Germany, Italy, and Japan, and the world war they caused.

Guiding Questions

1. How did Hoover and FDR differ in their approaches to addressing the Great Depression?
2. How did the federal government and its scope change as a result of Roosevelt's New Deal?
3. What arguments did Roosevelt and Wheeler offer for or against aiding Great Britain in 1940-41?
4. What was the United States fighting for in World War II?

Suggested answers

Essential Documents

1. [Commonwealth Club Address](#), 1932, FDR
2. [Speech on the Consequences of the Proposed New Deal](#), 1932, Herbert Hoover
3. [First Inaugural Address](#), 1933 (excerpts), FDR
4. [Fireside Chat on the New Deal](#), 1933, FDR
5. [Fireside Chat on the Plan for Reorganization of the Judiciary](#), 1937, FDR
6. [Radio Address](#), 1940, Senator Burton Wheeler
7. [The Four Freedoms](#), 1941, FDR
8. [Pearl Harbor Speech](#), 1941, FDR
9. [D-Day Message](#), 1944, Dwight D. Eisenhower
10. [The Yalta Conference](#), 1945

Resources

Webinars

1. [American Presidents: FDR](#)
2. [Origins of the Cold War](#)

Presidential Academy

These archived courses will help teachers expand their documents-based knowledge of a time period and the topics found within it.

1. [Session 27: Franklin D. Roosevelt and Democratic Leadership](#)

Lesson Plans

1. [The Road to Pearl Harbor: 1915-1941](#) – a four-lesson series that traces the roots of Japan’s decision to attack the United States in 1941.
2. [From Neutrality to War](#) – a multi-day examination of American isolationism after WW1, neutrality during the stormy decade of the 1930s, and eventually war.
3. [American Diplomacy in WW2](#) – a four-day study of American foreign policy and diplomacy, with both enemies and allies, during the Second World War.
4. [The United States in World War 2](#) – a four-lesson arc focused on the decisions and actions of the United States within the war itself.

Civil Rights

The African-American Civil Rights movement is typically seen as having taken place mostly in the 1950s and 60s, when a confluence of social and economic factors enabled political change. The movement, however, has much deeper roots, and thus our toolkit starts in the 19th Century, some two generations before leaders like King, Parks, and others were born. Viewing the Civil Rights movement as a generational one provides a broader perspective on the ideas and people at the foundation of this work to achieve “a more perfect union” for all Americans.

Guiding Questions

1. In the years following emancipation, African Americans soon realized the absence of slavery did not equal the presence of freedom. Indeed, Frederick Douglass warned that slavery “has been called a great many names, and it will call itself by yet another name; and you and I and all of us had better wait and see...in what new skin this old snake will come forth next.” Based off of these primary sources, what were some of the battles African Americans fought to overcome the various “names” of slavery?
2. There was significant disagreement among activists as to how best to achieve equality and even how to conceive of it. How did activists’ definition of equality inform their approach to securing equality?
3. After the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 passed, the Civil Rights moved splintered into factious divisions which steered the movement in more radical (socialist and nationalist) directions. Explain this shift and the distinction between the more conservative and radical leaders.
- 4.

[Suggested answers](#)

Essential Documents

1. [Black Codes of Mississippi](#), 1865
2. [What the Black Man Wants](#), 1865, Frederick Douglass
3. [Plessy v. Ferguson](#), excerpts, 1896
4. National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) Platform, 1909
5. To Secure These Rights: The Report of President Truman’s Committee on Civil Rights, 1946
6. [Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka I and II](#), excerpts, 1954

7. [“I Have a Dream” Speech](#), 1963, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.
8. [The Ballot or the Bullet](#), 1964, Malcolm X
9. [Commencement Speech at Howard University](#), 1965, Lyndon B. Johnson
10. Black Power: Its Need and Substance, 1965, Stokely Carmichael

Resources

Webinars

1. [Landmark Supreme Court Cases: *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke*](#)
2. [Landmark Supreme Court Cases: *Brown v. Board of Education*](#)
3. [Documents in Detail: MLK’s Letter from Birmingham City Jail](#)
4. [American Presidents: Dwight D. Eisenhower](#)

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These archived courses will help teachers expand their documents-based knowledge of a time period and the topics found within it.

1. [Session 25: Booker T. Washington; W.E.B. Du Bois](#)
2. [Session 28: Thurgood Marshall and the NAACP](#)
3. [Session 29: *Brown v. Board of Education*; Martin Luther King, Jr., Non-Violent Resistance, and the American Dream](#)
4. [Session 30 pt1: Martin Luther King, Jr.; Malcolm X](#)

Lesson Plans

1. [Competing Voices of the Civil Rights Movement](#) – a two-lesson series examining the diverse voices and ideas that animated the African-American Civil Rights Movement in 1960s America