

Using Presidential Rating Systems to Foster Historical Learning

Charles V. Fattore
Lee High School

INTRODUCTION

Suddenly, the light of my vocational future flashed before my eyes as I daydreamed in my eleventh grade American History class. Without warning, I found myself awakened to the desire to teach the social sciences, particularly American History. Reflecting back upon my epiphany, I credit my American History teacher, Mrs. Rowe, with instilling a desire to know more about our country's past. Perhaps this feeling developed as I gained confidence in my academic accomplishments in her class as well as an understanding of what made America the great nation she has become (the collective contributions of its diverse peoples).

True to my calling, I majored in the social sciences (area major) as an undergraduate and minored in education. My first teaching assignment included a four-year tour of teaching seniors at a consolidated public high school in Indiana the principles of American Government and American History. Despite the personal satisfaction gained from those four years of teaching and interacting with students, I succumbed to the allurements of orchestrating scholastic change as the headmaster of a private school.

Despite my career move into administration, I never lost my love, nor vision for teaching American History. To fulfill that need, I organized travel study programs to key American historical sites (Boston and environs, New York City, Philadelphia, Washington, D. C., and the historic triangle of Williamsburg, Jamestown and Yorktown).

By implementing the planning for each trip (pre-trip meeting, review of itinerary, creation of interactive notebook, and nightly follow-up meetings), I realized the teaching/learning value of establishing a context for the learning/appreciation of historical facts. Students who traveled to these historical sites would often comment, days, weeks and months later, on facts they recalled from their personal experiences.

ACADEMIC SETTING

Twenty-one years later, I find myself back in the classroom at Lee High School teaching American History to students who are labeled *at-risk* due to their recent arrival to America and the paucity of their family's economic circumstances. My daily challenge is to create a learning environment that invents a context for them to learn American History. While not having the resources to escort them on a wanderlust tour of key American historical sites, I believe that the next best teaching strategy would be to use the performance of a President to provide students with a context to study and learn the cognitive details of American History's significant historical eras.

It is only human nature to personalize the past, often putting a recognizable face on bygone eras and movements. Aware of this human tendency and the need for teaching ESL students to use picture clues (pictures/portraits of Presidents), I perceive that the studying of chief executive's performance in office will assist them in understanding the circumstances and significance of American historical eras.

Published presidential rating systems offer students the opportunity to visualize an historical era within a context of a president's performance. The analysis of the president's performance exposes what scholars consider to be the critical events and people of the era as well as providing an interpretive history that includes an era's historical description and facts. In discussing a president's performance they emphasize the success or failures associated with the president's leadership activities.

A presidential rating system will also enable ESL students to create graphic organizers as they arrange the reasons why scholars assign their ratings to a president's performance. The criteria used in moving a president up or down the scale of great to failure produces a list of qualities that distinguish one president's performance from another president's performance. An analysis of the criteria forces students to review the dynamic political and societal relationships that interact during the administration of a president.

The study of published Presidential rating systems created by historians and polling agencies could serve as a means to create a context to learn the facts and historical nuances of each era in American History. By giving students information concerning the failures and accomplishments of an era's presidents, they will be challenged in analyzing the criteria used by scholars to determine whether a particular president was great, near-great, average, below average or a failure. In the analysis of criteria students would be forced to learn more about the era and could begin to associate facts with the achievements of individual presidents who served as the nation's chief executive during that era. By narrowing the events of an historical era into the timeframe of a president's administration, my goal is to have the ESL student acquire sufficient understanding of the facts to allow him to build concepts and vocabulary that would enable him to succeed on the TAKS exam.

The American History textbook used by Houston I. S. D. breaks down the chronological study of American History by introducing the students to themes that differentiated unique eras from one another (Gilded Age, Progressive Era, World War I, Roaring 20s, Great Depression, World War II/Cold War, Age of Technology, and the War on Terrorism). Each thematic presentation is characterized by a timeline of people and events that contributed to the establishment of the era's characteristics. Students can easily be overwhelmed by the sheer quantity of facts and assortment of new names associated with each of these eras. The study of a particular president could serve as a simplified reference point allowing students to come to understand the evolving nature of American History through the analysis of his performance in office.

To assist students in gaining insights to a president's performance students would review various published presidential rating systems. In the process of reviewing the existing criteria used in establishing presidential rating systems, students would begin to develop a sense of understanding of the issues guiding the development of each historical theme. The investigation of a president's actions or inaction will contribute to a sense of understanding the issues and people who contributed to the overall characterization of each era. Furthermore, students should develop a sense of perspective and understanding of the major cause and effect events that characterize the era.

By using current presidential rating systems, students can begin to formulate understandings of how each era's presidents' performance impacted the nation's domestic and foreign policy. It is always interesting to note how scholars view a president's performance in office and what criteria are used to establish their rating system. As students engage in their analysis, they will be challenged to create a defense of their position either for agreeing with the existing rating for a president or disagreeing for whatever defensible reasons.

The study of presidential rating systems should engage the interests of the students as they reflect upon how presidential reputations and images are created and remembered. As students engage in this analysis, hopefully, they will begin to envision the basis for their own criteria in determining whether their assigned president was great, near-great, average, below average or a failure. Forcing them to focus on a single president within each of the eras should give them a sense for the social, political, emotional, and perhaps spiritual, characteristics associated with a certain time in American History. This evaluation process has the purpose of creating an awareness of an historical context that would facilitate the learning of key events and dates that are targeted by the state's TAKS (Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills) testing program.

UNIT BACKGROUND

Rating the presidents is an anomalous practice. Whatever the pedigree of scholars, they are influenced by their ideology, partisan affiliation, gender, and/or race and will likely chose a presidential rating criteria that makes sense to them. This highly individualistic approach to rating the presidents serves to inform my students that their assignment of agreeing with current ratings or disagreeing with them is not an absolute science. The value in ranking presidents lies in the reasons why we rank some presidents higher than others. In different eras different values and issues come to the fore in evaluating a president. This is not a sign of inconsistency; rather, it reflects the need to adapt to new social, economic realities and priorities. The importance of this assignment is to consider the actions/impact of the president as they review the era's events that contribute to the establishment of its theme and render their judgment based upon the facts as they know them.

Vocabulary building

Since a majority of my students are ESL, I will spend time during the introduction of a unit attempting to make my students familiar with the terms and vocabulary used in unit. I plan to introduce my students to new words by using graphic organizers to pictorially illustrate a word's meaning. In addition to teaching the meaning of the word, I plan to demonstrate how the word relates to the historical activities of an era. Hopefully, through a thorough discussion of key words, students will begin to understand syntactic cues as they give meaning to the words they read. Part of my preparation for each unit will be to construct a "content-area" word wall that will feature definitions for new concepts and vocabulary. The students will be required to give me feedback on other vocabulary they do not comprehend and I will add those words to the "word wall."

SECTION I: DYNAMICS OF PRESIDENTIAL RATINGS

Presidential Ratings – How They Are Developed

At the onset of this series of assignments (one presidential analysis for each historical era) I will explain to my students that presidential reputations are likely to grow or lessen as the public (via scholars?) gains a more accurate perspective of their accomplishments and failures. It will be noted that political and social circumstances of an era often set limits or gives presidents unbridled opportunity to accomplish distinctive service to the nation.

To prepare the students for making their analysis of the criteria for the rating a president receives, I will identify through an extended presentation, the chief characteristics and events of each of the eras described in the text. This presentation will occur as each era is introduced and will be followed up with student learning activities that emphasis the study of people, events and dates that give definition to this era.

According to ESL literature, an effective teaching strategy to use in creating learning activities for ESL learners includes using visuals and differentiated learning stimulus (*Project*

CLEAR ESL Modifications). One application of this strategy includes the creation of a timeline that is complete with pictures (presidents, important events) and/or symbols of people, events, and dates along with descriptive passages that explain their significance.

It has been my experience working with ESL students that they prefer to work together and collaborate on their work. Therefore, in making this assignment, I would assign a particular president to a student dyad and they would collaborate in evaluating the criteria used in the rating of a president. This collaboration will allow for peer teaching and extended verbalization of concepts that are new or unfamiliar. I will be monitoring the dyads to insure that they remain on task and making progress towards completion of the project.

In establishing the structure of an historical learning activity, I will model what is expected as the learning activity's outcome. During the explanation of the model (timeline and its corresponding rubric), I will clarify the significant or benchmark events that rendered substantial influence in the labeling an era. My goal in this instruction is to provide contextual support to the task of generating a defense of a student's evaluation of the criteria used in rating a president.

A component of this instructional unit will also seek to equip the students with sufficient historical description, narrative, and facts that would inform their opinions of presidential rating systems. To accomplish this goal, I will provide students with written and electronic resources that can reinforce this unit's learning activities. I intend to assist in their data collection and interpretation of information.

Characteristics of Presidential Rating Surveys

It will be a significant undertaking to instruct my ESL learners in gaining an understanding of the criteria that constitutes a great, near-great, average, below average and failure rating designations. I will have my students take notes on what criteria is used to define the great to failure presidential activities and have them write summaries of the notes they have taken. I will give them feedback on how their understanding of the criteria is developing and oversee their initial remarks concerning their analysis of scholar's criteria.

To guide my students in developing an understanding of the factors that affect the scholars' rating, I will use existing presidential rating studies to demonstrate how scholars and polling agencies arrive at their rating criteria (Schlesinger 33). This presentation will use developmentally appropriate teaching strategies that will combine knowledge with cultural understanding and consideration.

I plan to spend time explaining how presidential reputations are made and why certain presidents have had their reputations rise or stumble over time. With the introduction of each era, my students will study the changes in the office of the president since 1866 to note how current understandings of the office can impact our assessments of past presidents.

Role of Reputational Entrepreneurs

In our culture there exists "agents" who have vested interest in influencing public opinion to support their causes. Students are sometimes naïve (especially ESL) to the fine distinctions between objective news reporting and advocates of a cause. Gary Alan Fine called those who attempt to control the memory of historical figures "reputational entrepreneurs." They attempt to control historical memory by "cobbling together 'facts' of history to create renditions of reality" (Fine 1160).

To provide my students with a concrete example of this manipulative behavior, I can cite numerous current events where individuals attempt to impose their version of the "facts" to persuade the general public that their perspective is the only "right one." Typically, these

“reputational entrepreneurs” wish to create support for a social construct of character that reinforces their version of appropriate social character.

Fine makes the point that presidential ratings are an exercise in memory that is not necessarily a summation of historical events, but rather, a processing and repackaging of “facts” and “slogans” that are attempts to make “historical sense” that follows a “cultural logic.” In identifying the work of “reputational entrepreneurs,” I am demonstrating that any rating system criteria can be called into question when based upon uncertain facts or biased viewpoints.

Role of Bias

The issue of bias based upon a scholar’s political partisanship, social/political ideology, race, gender or any assortment of human characteristics also enables the teacher to lead a discussion of how president’s rating can change over time. The literature suggests that the most significant variable that influences a president’s ranking is date of service (Blessing 24). This statement argues that the period in which a president serves is most likely to shape a retrospective evaluation of his presidency.

Crisis will not create a *Great* president, but *Great* presidents must rise to the challenge of crises (Schlesinger 331). While managing crisis is a critical test of presidential competency, presidents must also build congressional and public support for their administration’s program for this country’s social and economic advancement. Great presidents in a democracy must educate the public on the merits of his vision and acquire the public consent to implement his legislative program.

Other criteria have been suggested as problematic in rating a president’s performance. Burns suggests that among the problems of rating presidents is scholarly and public disagreement on the role of the presidency as an institution, the lack of common criteria for making comparative evaluations, and the importance of a president’s political environment in determining opportunities for greatness. He proposes five criteria be used in evaluating a president’s performance: character, competence, courage, conviction, and commitment.

The study of the criteria used by scholars will generate numerous opportunities to discuss the subjective nature of presidential ratings. I will encourage students to develop rationales why they agree or disagree with the criteria in hopes that students will learn to express themselves effectively. Diverse rather than conforming opinions will be encouraged as I emphasize the uniqueness of opinion as a positive characteristic of a democracy and conformity a potential weakness.

My expectation is that each student attempt to do his or her best in making a defense of his or her opinion on the rating of a president. The instructional purpose of this assignment is to increase the student’s cognitive academic language. Assessing the validity of scholar’s work is not the learning focus for this assignment. Students are encouraged to view scholar’s ratings as means to understand the strengths and weaknesses of a particular president and his performance in office.

I believe that there is good instructional promise in encouraging students to study the impact that good leadership has on the development of our country’s history. There are ample historical examples of how ineffective leadership delayed the implementation of democratic principles and caused blemishes upon our country’s historical record. Students need to note the causes of failures in past governing mistakes and determine how government can best serve the needs of a diverse people.

SECTION II: HISTORICAL ERAS

Understanding Historical Eras

One of the goals of this instructional unit is to stimulate creativity and allow students to arrive at their own understanding of what types of social, economic and personal behaviors constitute the rating levels for a president. In applying higher-order thinking skills to their task of analyzing presidential rating criteria, it is my hope that students learn to think critically, a skill which is an important component of effective citizenship. This is especially difficult for ESL students as they are easily confused and overwhelmed with unfamiliar concepts presented in an instructional unit.

Anticipating this challenge, I intend to devote significant time in the beginning of each unit to explain the organizing themes of each historical era and show how they collectively define an era. Using this background information, I propose to explain how the office of the president is forced to change with the dynamic growth of our nation and the different challenges that face the executive office. Through the identification of the era's key events and/or people, students should be empowered to make independent judgments concerning the performance of a particular president whose leadership (or lack thereof) provided a political impetus for sustaining a cultural status quo or growing a more progressive domestic and foreign policy.

Through the study of a president's performance in office, students should ascertain the significant events that define an era. Because we have a pictorial record of history since 1866 that captures and records the images of presidents, events and other significant individuals, students should be able to create a visual as well as mental link to an era's timeline. This instructional unit could serve as either an introduction with an ongoing project of reviewing the rating of a specific president or a nine-week project designed to extend the learning for given units within the nine-week period.

Overview of Significant People and Events of the Gilded Age

In our textbook, *American Nation* by Holt, Rinehart and Winston, the Gilded Age is identified as the time period from 1865 to 1897. It is an era of nouveau riche as life in America began to change quickly due to the rapid growth of industrialization and new opportunities in the U.S. cities. The new rich headed growing corporate monopolies of important industries (railroads, oil, banks, steel) while the newcomers to the city lived in slum-like tenements always on the brink of starvation and homelessness. The great divide between the classes led to corrupt government practices and human right abuses of immigrants, African Americans and Native Americans.

In search of the elusive reality clearly stated in our Constitution's Preamble "...in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice..." the episodes of corrupt government and unfair business practices inspired new efforts to "establish Justice." These efforts included the passage of the Pendleton Civil Service Act (1883), Interstate Commerce Act (1887) and the Sherman Anti-Trust Act (1890). In addition, the Gilded Age records the growth of the middle-class who began to increase in number with the rise of modern corporations.

By the late nineteenth century the maturation of the Industrial Revolution enabled business entrepreneurs in railroads, mining, oil, steel, and banking to accumulate untold wealth. This quest for riches was often gained from the profits derived from abusive employment practices and near-criminal methods of destroying all competitors by whatever ruthless means available. The era has often been referred to as the reign of the robber barons.

These titans of business created far-reaching monopolies and were often characterized by cartoonist as merciless medieval royalty. Men like John D. Rockefeller, Andrew Carnegie, J.P. Morgan, and the Vanderbilts lived better than ancient royalty while their workers bordered on the brink of starvation. As students study this era, it will be important to note that this economic stage

of a country's development (vast wealth for a few and poverty for everyone else) was occurring throughout the industrialized world in the nineteenth century and provided capital that fueled the country's future economic growth.

A number of our students at Lee High School are from developing countries where there is a great schism between the wealthy and the poor. As a matter of fact there are more millionaires in Mexico than there are in Germany. It takes years of stable democratic government before a nation's wealth can be more equitably distributed among its population.

As the students study the leadership behavior of the various presidents who served during this era, they will note the important role that the free press served in ushering in business and political reforms. My students will be assigned various newspaper articles that are critical of today's presidential politics and write critics of how this reporting is similar and different.

It was during the Gilded Age that the American social conscientious began to heighten as Jane Addams, Ellen Gates Starr, Caroline Bartlett and Susan B. Anthony became promoters of improved living conditions, child welfare and women rights. Labor unions also began to organize unskilled laborers in order to improve dangerous, deplorable working conditions that paid low wages and featured hiring practices that made the workers highly expendable. Over a short period of time, the just criticism of the excesses of the Gilded Age ushered in a more focused era of social reform entitled the Progressive Era.

How are the presidents rated who served during this era? How did the form and/or function of the presidency change during this era? Presidents who served during 1866-1897) are:

Andrew Johnson (1865 - 1869)
Ulysses S. Grant (1869 - 1877)
Rutherford Hayes (1877 - 1881)
James Garfield (1881)
Chester Arthur (1881 - 1885)
Grover Cleveland (1885 - 1889, 1893 - 1897)
Benjamin Harrison (1889 - 1893)

By analyzing the scholar's criteria for rating each president, students could visualize the key events/people of the era and what impact a president's leadership had in forming positive civic and economic growth. Furthermore, students will be able to associate events with a president that will reinforce an awareness of chronological sequence and context. This arrangement of events, rating of president and details of an era should provide students with substantive reference points to facilitate their understanding of American History.

Overview of Significant People and Events of the Progressive Era

In our textbook, *American Nation* by Holt, Rinehart and Winston, the Progressive Era, which is coupled with American Imperialism, is identified as the time period from 1897 to 1919. It is an era in America history where the public consciousness began to demand more fairness in the free enterprise system. This spirit of reform was a coming together of both rural (populists) and urban forces (muckrakers) to arouse the American public to take action against corrupt politicians and business practices.

This era witnessed the support of an emerging middle class to reform American institutions and make them accessible to more people. While preserving the ideals of the past, the progressive and populists reformers took a leading role in promoting change in the United States. Women suffrage, worker safety, political machines, and business monopolies are samples of the reforms strongly promoted during this era.

The relentless criticism offered by the muckrakers prompted people to act on political initiatives that would address the imbalances of American society. Writers like Rheta Childe Dorr, Walter Rauschenbush, Ida Tarbell, and Theodore Dreiser informed the American public of the excesses and corruption that were being practiced in the halls of government and the boardrooms of business.

Students will also be introduced to W.E.B. DuBois and his efforts to humanize the cause of African Americans. The old racist attitudes and prejudicial practices of government and business insured that the African American would never have access to equality and civil rights. The progressive era made bold attempts to clean up the city and even legislate morality (Prohibition), but did nothing to champion equal justice for African Americans.

Against this backdrop, students will evaluate the administrations of McKinley, T. Roosevelt, Taft, and Wilson and research the performance rating that each achieved as rendered by scholars. I think that this era could be quite interesting as students discuss the changes in social awareness and legislation that is passed to correct past wrongs.

Right in the middle of this era, the textbook documents the outbreak of the Spanish-American War (1898), which leads to the acquisition of Spanish territory in the Pacific Ocean and elsewhere. This move in coupled with imperial advances into Hawaii, Somoa and even China (Open Door Policy) suggests that the United States was joining the European nations in a grab for colonies. This is a good place for a “What If” scenario to be play as students are asked to reflect and write about some probable imperialistic scenarios. These scenarios may include the American quest for more land (other countries as colonies), influence of business in this land grab, and the advanced start that Europeans had on the Americans in colonizing Africa, Asia and South America.

LESSONS PLANS

Lesson One: ESL Strategy for Teaching a Presidential Rating System

To introduce the Gilded Age, on an overhead, I would provide students with the instructional sequencing using a semantic map. The target word of this era would be “wealth.” From this word I would have students generate as many words as possible that relate to the word “wealth.” After generating their list, I would have them work in dyads to develop categories that their words would fit under. From their categories and words, I would create the links of a semantic map that would associate key words with significant elements of an era.

The word “wealth” could generate words like riches, prosperity, affluence, possessions, treasure, houses, popularity, and money. A quick analysis and discussion of the meanings of these words could render categories like business and ownership. Under the category of “business” you could place the words “riches,” “prosperity,” “affluence,” “popularity,” and “money,” while placing the words “possessions,” “treasure,” and “houses” under the category of “ownership.”

At the end of this mapping, I would simplify ideas associated with developing the theme of the Gilded Age. In this exercise of clarifying key ideas, I would explain the growth of big business and refer to text references to the development of specific companies and the men who became industrial barons. During this era of unprecedented growth of business, a few men obtained riches that would dwarf the wealth of today’s rich and famous. Yet, the majorities of people, almost one third of the workers were immigrants, were pitted against other unskilled workers by greedy barons who determined to make each worker wholly dependent upon the company for their human existence and the existence of their family.

Against this backdrop, the paired students would be given the rating of a specific president who served during this era. His record of leadership and comments made by the rating scholars

would be shared with the students. They would be asked to evaluate the president based upon the information they had received and determine if the president's rating (great, near-great, average, below average or failure) was justifiable or whether they had a different rating viewpoint based upon their analysis of the evidence presented. This learning activity would feature reading, writing, speaking and listening to others while coming to their own conclusions.

Once students had completed making a defense of their agreement or disagreement with the rating of their president, I would lead a class discussion to summarize their findings and demonstrate how there is continuity and volatility in ranking presidents. The Gilded Age is replete with examples of excesses; yet, the beginnings of a public conscious supported by newspaper editors and cartoonists start to emerge as these excesses are called into question. How did the president react to this information and how did he lead the nation toward a greater fulfillment of Americans' "unalienable rights" identify qualities that define presidential greatness.

Lesson Two: Debate of a President's Rating

Using the text passages on the Gilded Age to guide a class presentation, I will provide students with a listing of each president's major legislative initiatives as well as examples of political, economic and social issues that dominated the country's cultural landscape during the Gilded Age era.

After introducing the background to this era, I would convey the results of various presidential ranking surveys to the students who have been grouped into teams of fours with the intent of debating the ranking of the president. The debate teams would be given the task of defending or opposing a rating. I have also may modify the assignment by informing the students that they must be able to argue either side of the debate upon a moment's notice.

A key element to the debate would be for each team to examine the common features of what criteria constitutes a great, near great, average, below average or failure ranking. This examination would lead to a discussion of the criteria's appropriateness in evaluating a president's administration. Using the results of various presidential surveys, students would be required to provide evidence to defend their position of either agreeing or opposing the ranking of a particular Gilded Age president.

The preparation for defending their position should expose the students to a wide range of ideas that should cause them to reflect and analyze the substantive issues involved in the selection of the scholar's criteria. I would hope that they would ask questions of themselves as to whether they agreed with the criteria selected by the scholars or were there other leadership qualities that should have held greater weigh.

By conducting a debate before their peers, students will practice speaking the English language as well as be force to think of arguments to rebut the remarks made by their opponents. This debate experience will allow students to test their comprehension of both vocabulary and the contextualized content of historical eras.

In their pursuit of evidence to support their position students would be exposed to the details of American life and history of the Gilded Age. This type of meaningful study should provide my ESL students with a better understanding of key events and people who participated in making the Gilded Age a significant stage of development in American History.

Lesson Three: President's Ranking as an Outcome of Federal Government Performance

It has been mentioned that presidential ratings are problematic, but there are compelling reasons to conduct such studies (Pfiffner 12). The intent of presidential rankings includes the desire to know which presidents did the best job in office and how they stack up against the performance of other presidents. Requiring students to dissect a president's performance in light

of a scholarly ranking should expose them to the details of a particular era and allow them to contextualize the events in an association with a time period in American history.

The assignment would begin with students divided into groups of five for the purpose of evaluating a particular president's ranking. Each group would brainstorm on the subject of what makes a good president and information they need to know in order to make a viable judgment on a president's performance.

After completing this assignment and documenting their results, each group would be given the results of various presidential ranking surveys and told that they are to access available resources (textbook, Internet, other books) to acquire information that would enable them to secure information about how the federal government responded to the needs of the people during this era.

Students would be informed that at the conclusion of their research and findings, they would present to the class the information they have gathered about the president and his leadership of the federal government. In defending their president's ranking, they would be responsible for presenting information to the class on the following topics: general introduction of their president and his ranking, economic policies, domestic policies, foreign policies, American lifestyle during the period, and a conclusion that justifies the president's ranking.

The class presentations could take the form of a PowerPoint presentation, a poster, role-play or other presentation formats. Each group would be advised to create a focused listening outline that could be given students to fill in as a means of note taking the critical issues of the presentation (particularly helpful to ESL students). As part of this assignment, students would have to stand before their peers and share their findings.

CONCLUSION

To assist students in understanding the significant details of a particular historical era, it is important to create a context that can be rationally construed. Presidential rankings are great fun and can provide a student with an opportunity to better understand the details of an era through the examination of how the scholars arrived at the ranking of a particular president.

In discovering that certain presidents consistently ranked as great (Lincoln, Washington, FDR) or consistently ranked as failures (Harding, Grant), students can realize that scholars and the public share common evaluating criteria when ranking a president's performance in office. In applying and weighting different values for different eras is a sign that we have adapted to new realities that color our vision of the past. It is important to deliberate and understand the values of the past in order to inform our decisions that shape our future.

Knowing that American history has progressed and continues to progress (we hope) toward a greater realization of the self-actualization of every person, empowers the young student with ideals of citizenship. Using presidential ranking surveys to assist students in learning about past eras in American history enlightens their understanding that American has become great through the collective actions of its people. Presidents can play an important role in our country's progressive history, but it's her people that make the difference.

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Supplemental Resources

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Neal, Steve. "Our Worst and Best Presidents." *Chicago Tribune Magazine*. 10 June 1982, 8-13.
Results of a presidential rating poll conducted in 1981.

Neustadt, Richard. *Presidential Power*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1986.
According to Neustadt, power is a primary drive of an effective president. Because the Constitution only provides the president with a limited role in the distribution of governing power, the president must persuade people to action.

Piereson, James. "Historians and the Reagan Legacy." *Weekly Standard*. September 1997, 72-74.
Compares discrepancies over the ranking of recent presidents and equates it with the national debate of the federal government's role in our society.

Wayne, Stephen J. "Evaluating the President: the Public's Perspective through the Prism of Pollsters." *White House Studies*. (Winter 2003). 7 May 2005. <http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0KVD/is_1_3/ai_109025097>
Suggests that presidential ratings criteria are results oriented and focus on the here and now.

Books for Students (Lee High School Library)

Blassingame, Wyatt. *The Look-It-Up Book of Presidents*. New York: Random House, 2001.
Good biographical material on each president based on his performance as Chief Executive.

Bunch, Lonnie G., and Harry R. Rubinstein. *The American Presidency*. Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2000.
Excellent book that gives a narrative account of the American Presidency and includes artifacts from each of the administrations.

McPherson, James M. *The American Presidents*. New York: Dorling Kindersley, 2000. Provides background information on all the presidents.

Pious, Richard M. *Presidency of the United States*. New York: Oxford Press, 1993.
A collection of articles that provide biographical information and other interesting commentary on the lives of those who served as president.