

## Assessing Presidential Greatness: Establishing Criteria for Evaluation

**Subjects:** AP U.S. Government, U.S. Government, U.S. History

**Grade Levels:** 9-12

**Time Frame:** 1-2, 50-minute class periods

**Materials Needed:** Barber, Greenstein, and Landy handouts (included with this lesson).

**Summary of the Lesson:** Using readings and discussion, to establish an agreed-upon methodology for the class to rate presidents.

**Key Concepts and Terms:** (Barber) Character, World View, Style, Climate of Expectations, Power Situation, (Greenstein) Public Communicator, Organizational Capacity, Political Skill, Vision, Cognitive Style and Emotional Intelligence, (Landy and Milkis) Conservator, First Citizen, Party Leader.

### Lesson objectives:

Students will be expected to

- determine possible qualities of a “great” president.
- define key concepts and qualities related to “greatness.”
- compare, rank, and organize criteria into a system to be used to evaluate presidents.

### Opening the Lesson

Write the following on the chalkboard: *Do great events make great presidents or vice versa?*

Using information contained in the three reading packets, ask students to brainstorm what they believe to be the qualities of a “great” president. Write their suggestions on the chalkboard.

### Developing the Lesson

- Draw a 5 by 6 grid on the chalkboard.

Some useful ways of presidential evaluation:

(Barber)

**Character** - The way the president orients himself towards life—not for the moment but enduringly.

**World View** - The president’s primary, politically relevant beliefs, particularly his



conceptions of social causality, human nature, and the central moral conflicts of the time.

**Style** - The president's habitual way of performing his three political roles: rhetoric, personal relations, and homework.

**Power Situation** - The support the president has from the public and interest groups, the party balance in Congress, and the thrust of Supreme Court opinion.

**Climate of Expectations** - The sense of reassurance, progress and action, and legitimacy a president brings to the office.

(Greenstein)

**Public Communicator** - the proficiency in communicating with the public.

**Organizational Capacity** - the ability to rally colleagues and structure their activities effectively.

**Political Skill** - the president's ability as a political operator.

**Vision** - president's view of public policy.

**Cognitive Style** - the way in which a president processes advice and information.

**Emotional Intelligence** - the ability to manage emotions and turn them to constructive purposes.

(Landy and Milkis)

**Conservator** - The idea that the president serves to stand guard over a democratic/republican system which limits his power, tempers the public opinion, and perpetuates the principle of deliberative constitutional government.

**First Citizen** - The notion that a president's power and authority come from his standing among his fellow citizens as opposed to his ability to coerce them.

**Party Leader** - A vital source of presidential authority which provides a stable basis of popular support and also an ability, during periods of partisan realignment, to embark on ambitious projects of national reform.

(Barber)

Four personality types revolving around how much energy the president puts into the job (active/passive) and whether or not he seems to enjoy his political life (positive/negative).

**Active/Positive (Jefferson)**

**Active/Negative (Adams)**

**Passive/Positive (Madison)**

**Passive/Negative (Washington)**

- Distribute the above to students either on hard copy, overhead, blackboard, or computer presentation. Together with the students, determine and write down the key components of each in a combination of single words and/or phrases. Discuss briefly the differences



and similarities, using the definitions, of the different ways of rating presidents.

- Break the class into groups of four or five students, have each group determine the five most important attributes from that list or the ideas generated on the chalkboard, and have each group report its ranked findings on a grid on the chalkboard.

### **Concluding the Lesson**

- Have students select five criteria—in order of importance—for rating “greatness” that they will use to rank presidents in the subsequent lesson.
- Discuss the following excerpt with your students:

“I want to focus on the characteristics – the changeless characteristics – of presidential greatness. What makes presidents able to rise to the moment? What makes presidents successful as history judges them in retrospect? Being a successful president means being a leader, but what, exactly, are the characteristics of leadership? What are the characteristics, most importantly, of successful leaders in the Oval Office?” (Karl Rove, November 13, 2002)



*Assessing Presidential Greatness worksheet.*

What are the five most important criteria for presidential greatness?

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

4. \_\_\_\_\_

5. \_\_\_\_\_

How do you justify the order in which you placed your criteria?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

What might be some criteria for establishing a president as a “failure”?

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

