



LITERATURE CONNECTION ACTIVITY

Presidential Leadership edited by James Taranto and Leonard Leo

OBJECTIVE

Students examine the qualities of effective presidents.

MATERIALS

Presidential Leadership – James Taranto and Leonard Leo, Editors

GET READY

- ✓ Obtain a copy of *Presidential Leadership*, edited by James Taranto and Leonard Leo, for your classroom. (If possible, secure a copy for each group of students.)
- ✓ This activity is most effective when students are familiar with presidents. If students do not have a knowledge of presidents, consider investigating various presidencies with your students before engaging in this activity.
- ✓ See “The Office of President” in the Appendix.

INSTRUCTIONS

- ✓ Engage your class in a discussion of the qualities that make a good leader. Make sure to ask your students to share the qualities that make an effective president.
- ✓ Write the qualities the students came up with on the board under a heading called, “Good Presidential Leadership Qualities.” Give your students a few minutes to write down the name of the president who they think exemplifies the qualities previously discussed. Have a few students share and explain their choices.
- ✓ Next, familiarize your students with the book, *Presidential Leadership*. Explain that it is a series of essays on the presidents written by

prominent Americans. Mention that the book ranks the presidents from best to worst. Ask, *How can we rank presidents? Can they be ranked by the qualities we listed on the board? Are there other things by which we judge and rank presidents? What are those?* Write these items on the board under a heading called, “Criteria for a Good President.”

- ✓ Now ask your students to look at the names they had written down before. Ask, *Do your choices from before still hold up? Why or why not? Does anyone want to change who they think the best president is/was? Why do you want to change your choice?*
- ✓ Say, *Now that we have examined what makes a good president and the criteria for judging presidents, I want you to make a final decision on who you think is/was the best president in our country’s history. You need to make that decision and be able to defend it against the qualities and criteria listed on the board.*
- ✓ Without discussion, have your students write their new choice on a piece of paper. Have everyone that names the same president group together. (If any students are alone, have them make a second choice based on the current presidential groups.)
- ✓ Tell each group that they must work as a team to develop their argument. They must also select one or two people who will make the argument on behalf of the group.



LITERATURE CONNECTION ACTIVITY (continued)

- ✓ Tell each group that they must use *Presidential Leadership* as a source in their argument. They may use it to both support their claims and/or to explain why other presidents do not meet the criteria. (Ideally, each group will have its own copy, but if not try to have multiple sources on presidential leadership available.)
- ✓ Provide class time for students to work together to prepare their arguments.
- ✓ Give each group a specified amount of time to make their argument. Encourage students to take notes on what they hear from the other groups.
- ✓ Engage the class in a discussion of the presentations, asking if any students were persuaded and why.
- ✓ Have a final vote on the most effective president. Remind students to think in terms of the qualities and criteria listed on the board. (You can mark votes off next to the team names on the board.) Discuss reasons why this president was selected.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- ★ *If you did not choose the final selection, could you understand why other students did? Why or why not?*
- ★ *Did this activity change your thinking as to the qualities needed of our president. If yes, how so?*
- ★ *Were there any arguments that you found especially convincing? Which ones? Why were they so convincing?*
- ★ *How does this activity relate to living in a democracy?*