



K 12 Civic Learning Opportunities State of the Union

STATE OF THE UNION ADDRESS

The address is televised on major networks and news channels. The text is usually printed the next morning in the newspaper, and the video available online. GenerationNation will post the text and video at www.generationnation.org .

What is the State of the Union Address?

The State of the Union is an annual address presented before a joint session of Congress and held in the House of Representatives Chamber at the U.S. Capitol. The address reports on the nation, and allows the President to outline his legislative agenda and national priorities to Congress and the American public.

Objective and Activity

In this activity, students will watch or read the State of the Union address and think critically about the speech, its content, how it is communicated and how it is reported.

A variety of activities are available. Modify based on your grade level or subject area. For example, you can focus students on the community, North Carolina, the United States or another country. Connect this to history, literature or in a global community.

Students may watch the State of the Union live, watch it in class or read the text. There are many opportunities for writing, reading, small group discussion and oral presentation. The activity aligns with several core standards. Skills include:

- Persuasion
- Critical thinking and analysis
- Reading and writing information
- Active listening
- Civic literacy
- Media literacy
- Collaboration
- Civic leadership
- Local and State Government
- Federal Government
- Effective communication
- Family dialogue and group discussion
- Connecting historic events, personal knowledge, current events or global life



Getting ready

What is the purpose of the State of the Union Address?

The State of the Union is an annual address presented before a joint session of Congress and held in the House of Representatives Chamber at the U.S. Capitol. The address reports on the condition of the country, and allows the President to outline his legislative agenda and national priorities to Congress (and the American public).

When and where is the State of the Union Address?

The address is held at the US Capitol, in Washington, DC. It happens each January, after each year of the President's 4 year term begins on January 20.

It is televised on major networks and news channels. The text is usually printed the next morning in the newspaper, and the video available online. GenerationNation will post links to the text and video at www.generationnation.org.

Who attends?

Three branches of the federal government: Executive (President and Cabinet), Legislative (Congress) and Judicial (Supreme Court). *At least one important official is selected to not attend. This is so that someone is available in the event something bad happens to the many important leaders who will be meeting in one location.*

First Lady and Special Guests: often, the President will invite guests who have been newsworthy or who represent a topic he will address. For example, if he plans to talk about education he may invite a teacher. The guests sit in the balcony with the First Lady.

What is the ceremony?

The State of the Union Address not only provides important information about the President's goals, it is a ceremonial event that has taken place (in some form) since 1790. The location and method of delivering the speech has changed over the years.

- § Usually, the members of the House enter and are seated at 8:30PM.
- § Then the Vice President and Senate are announced and take their seats.
- § The Supreme Court Justices and President Cabinet members enter, go to their seats.
- § At 9, the President is announced. He enters the meeting room, and usually takes some time to shake hands and greet a few people as he makes his way to the podium. People clap and cheer.
- § Then he delivers the address for about an hour.



Politics and news coverage

The Vice President and Speaker of the House sit behind the President. It is sometimes interesting to watch their expressions as he speaks. They will also stand up and/or clap and cheer (or stay seated) when the President makes a point they like or don't like.

During the address, the different political parties will stand up and clap and cheer about parts of the speech they agree or disagree with. Often, when one party claps, the other party makes a big deal out of *not* clapping or standing up – almost as if they were sitting on their hands to symbolize that they do not agree!

In 2011, it was proposed that the attendees *not* sit by political party or stand and clap during key points in the speech, to symbolize their bipartisanship.

Watch how the media covers the State of the Union address, including before the speech, the discussions afterward, and the news reporting the next day.

After the State of the Union address, the opposing party (this year the Republicans, because the President is a Democrat) will issue their response. This is usually televised immediately after the State of the Union, and made available by text and video online.

Topics in the State of the Union Address

The President may cover a variety of topics such as:

- | | | |
|-------------------|------------------|-----------------------|
| § Children/ Youth | § Guns | § Military |
| § Cities | § Health | § Politics |
| § College | § Housing | § Research |
| § Economy | § Immigration | § Safety and security |
| § Environment | § Jobs | § Taxes |
| § Global issues | § Justice | § Technology |
| § Government | § K 12 Education | § Terrorism |
| § Graduation rate | § Leadership | § Working together |



Activities

Watch, read and discuss

Watch or read the address, either the night it is delivered, the next day, or later in the week.

Write an outline of the important topics covered.

Discuss the speech in small groups.

Write your own State of the Union Address, and share it with your class.

Pick and predict

Before you watch or read the address, decide which 1-3 topics are most important to you. Then decide which 1-3 topics you predict the President will talk about. Are they the same or different? Why?

Watch or read the address. Were your topics covered? How many times? Did you correctly predict what the President would talk about?

What's for kids?

What does the President talk about that is of interest to or affects kids? How many times does he talk about those topics? Why do you think that is?

Connecting to schools, cities, states, country and the world

If you are studying any form of government in school, keep track of the number of times the President mentions something that could impact one of these levels of government:

- | | | |
|-------------------|-----------------|----------|
| § Student Council | § County | § Global |
| § School Board | § State | § Other? |
| § City or town | § United States | |



Write the headline

If you were reporting on the State of the Union address, what would your headline say?

The next day, read news headlines. Were you close? Were they right? Why or why not?

Read headlines about the address from different news sources. What do they say? How are they similar or different? Why?

Charlotte Observer <http://www.charlotteobserver.com>

CNN <http://www.cnn.com>

Fox News <http://www.foxnews.com>

Wall Street Journal [http://online.wsj.com/home page](http://online.wsj.com/home_page)

BBC <http://www.bbc.com/>

NPR <http://www.npr.org/>

CSPAN <http://www.cspan.org/>

Scorecard or Bingo

Use or create a score or bingo card with words and topics you think the President will cover.

What's your Response?

Write and/or deliver your opposition response to the State of the Union address.

You can play the role of the opposite political party or a global leader. Take it back in history and write a response to an address delivered in the past.

Getting the Message Across

How does the President communicate the information?

- § Does he read from a piece of paper?
- § Does he raise or lower his voice or move his hands to illustrate a specific point?
- § What emotions and expressions does the President show?
- § Does he look confident?
- § How is he dressed? Does this matter?
- § Is he persuasive? How?
- § What do you think is the most effective thing he does to communicate the information? Least effective?



Web resources

Wikipedia http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/State_of_the_Union_address

State of the Union addresses in earlier years

http://generationnation.org/index.php/CLC/entry/state_of_the_union

The American Presidency Project <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/> *History of State of the Union Address, copies of speeches, lists of guests, opposition responses and more*

Factcheck.org <http://www.factcheck.org/> *Check out the facts from the State of the Union address and the Opposition Response*

News media (variety of sources)

CSPAN <http://www.cspan.org/>

Primary sources

National Archives

<http://search.archives.gov/query.html?qt=%22state+of+the+union%22&submit=GO&col=1arch&col=social&qc=1arch&qc=social>

Docs Teach

<http://docsteach.org/documents/search?menu=open&mode=search&sortBy=relevance&q=%22state+of+the+union%22&commit=Go>

Office of the President

www.generationnation.ehclients.com/index.php/CLC/entry/office_of_the_president



State of the Union Bingo/Scorecard

Watch or read the State of the Union Address. Mark the topics discussed.

Bi partisan	Military /Defense	Civility	My fellow Americans	Global issues
Environment	Education	Hear Ye Hear Ye	Competitive	Vision
Work together as Americans	Jobs	Healthcare	Graduation	Nuclear
Immigration	Schools	War on Terror	Kids	Speaker of the House stands
Leadership	Guns	Dropout	Uninsured	Economy



Generation Nation

Create your own!

WRITE THE HEADLINE



Watch the State of the Union Address. Pay attention, and answer these questions. Write your answers to share in groups or with your class or with your family.

- § If you were reporting on the speech, what would your headline be?
- § The next day, read actual headlines. Were you close? Were they right? Why or why not?
- § Read headlines from different news sources. What do they say? How are they similar or different? Why?

EVENT NAME AND DATE: _____	
<u>MEDIA SOURCE</u>	<u>HEADLINE</u>
My Name:	My headline:
Charlotte Observer http://www.charlotteobserver.com	
CNN http://www.cnn.com	
C SPAN http://www.cspan.org	
Fox News http://www.foxnews.com	
BBC http://www.bbc.com/	
NPR http://www.npr.org/	
(OTHER NEWS SOURCES)	

GETTING THE MESSAGE ACROSS



Watch the State of the Union. Write your answers to share in groups, or with your class or family. You can also use this activity to watch, and analyze, addresses from prior years.

- § What is the key message the President is trying to deliver?
- § How does he communicate the information? Does he read from a piece of paper?
- § Does he raise or lower his voice or move his hands to illustrate a specific point?
- § Does the President show emotions and expressions? How? Why? When?
- § Does he look confident? How?
- § How is the President dressed? The First Lady and special guests? People in Congress and the Supreme Court? Does this matter?
- § Is the President persuasive? How?
- § What do you think is the most effective thing he does to communicate the information? Least effective?
- § If you were advising the President for his next speech, what would you tell him worked well or needs to be improved?

GETTING THE MESSAGE ACROSS



<u>Date:</u>	<u>Speech:</u>
Speaker Name:	
Key message	
Communication skills	
Confidence	
Appearance	
Do people pay attention	
Is the person persuasive?	
Most effective point	
Least effective point	

STATE OF THE UNION: ANALYSIS

Before the State of the Union Address, make predictions about what you think will be covered. Then, watch and analyze the speech.

	PREDICTION	ANALYSIS
Theme for this President		
Vision for U.S.		
Big ideas/goals		
President's strengths/challenges		
Who is recognized, thanked, etc.		
Quotes from famous leaders (who, what)		
Current events addressed		
Main topics covered <i>Do you agree that the topics are important? Why/ why not?</i>		

STATE OF THE UNION: ANALYSIS

Before the State of the Union Address, make predictions about what you think will be covered. Then, watch and analyze the speech.

	PREDICTION	ANALYSIS
Effective speech? Why or why not?		
What did you learn?		
What surprised you? What did you hope to see that you didn't?		
What will you remember about this speech? Other comments, notes and questions		