



Election of 1980: Conservative Resurgence TEACHER GUIDE

Lesson Overview

This lesson uses primary source analysis and exploration to examine the ways in which the election of 1980 represented a resurgence of conservative ideology that ended the New Deal coalition that had largely dominated American politics for much of the previous five decades. It is designed for students currently studying U.S. history or government in the classroom and scaled to the 11th grade TEKS. Lessons can also be used with younger students with some modifications.

The lesson is designed to be completed in a single 45- to 60-minute class period.



Essential Question

In what ways did Reagan's victory in the presidential election of 1980 represent a resurgence of conservative values and the end of the New Deal coalition in U.S. society?

Objectives

- Students will engage with primary sources to understand the conservative ideology that took hold of much of American society in the 1980s.
- Students will use multimodal engagement strategies to develop their historical thinking skills.
- Students will analyze, organize, and use information from a variety of primary sources and communicate that analysis through writing and discussion.

Key Vocabulary

Students will need to have an understanding of the following terms to effectively complete the lesson:

- Détente
- Culture Wars
- Coalition
- Trickle-down



TEKS

113.41.10.B,D,E; 113.41.18.A
113.44.1.F

Lesson Procedure

Warm-Up

There are two possible components for the lesson warm-up: an election snapshot and a primary source document for the class to analyze together. Depending on your classroom needs, you may choose to complete one or both components. The content for both the snapshot and the warm-up document analysis are available as PDF documents and a teacher slide deck.

1. Using the election snapshot, briefly review the main ideas, issues, and players of the election of 1980.
 - a. Be sure to remind students that while the election was important for many reasons, the main thing that you'll be focusing on today is how the election can be seen as the beginning of a conservative resurgence in the United States.
2. Using the sample primary source, review with your students how to thoroughly analyze and explore primary sources.
 - a. This lesson uses a simplified version of the [National Archives and Records Administration's Document Analysis](#) strategies.
 - b. As a group, use the warm-up exercise to review the campaign poster "America: Reagan Country." Remind students that it is important to use close reading skills and apply historical context that they have already learned.
 - c. After analyzing the source as a whole, answer the "Checking for Understanding" questions to ensure student comprehension.

Exploring Primary Sources

The purpose of this section is to have students explore primary sources that describe the ways in which the election of 1980 represented a conservative resurgence known as the "Reagan Revolution."

There are many ways that you can choose to engage with the primary sources with your students. Depending on interest, student level, and classroom goals, you may choose to engage with any or all of the provided primary sources.

Three possible engagement models are suggested here:

Write

Using the worksheets provided, have your students work individually to read and examine the documents and then write their answers to the comprehension questions.

The most important takeaway for this engagement model is determining WHO is writing/speaking and WHAT each primary source is about.

Speak

Divide students into groups and provide one primary source to each group. After reading the source on their own, students should consider the author of the source and their perspective.

The most important takeaway for this engagement model is determining HOW the author is communicating and WHY they are saying what they are saying.

Draw

Have students, working individually or in pairs, design a creative, visual representation of the main argument of one primary source. They may choose to create a Venn diagram, a flow chart, or an identity map.

The most important takeaway for this engagement model is determining WHO is writing/speaking and HOW they are getting their point across.

Discussing Primary Sources

In this section, students will discuss their observations, analysis, and conclusions gleaned from analyzing primary sources about the central issues of the election of 1980.

Lead a discussion of the issues at hand. Students will use the key ideas learned during the warm-up and their analyses of primary sources to answer questions.

1. What was Reagan's vision for the role of government?
2. How did this vision differ from that of previous Democratic presidents, who were supported by the New Deal coalition?
3. How did Reagan plan to achieve this vision?
4. How did Reagan seek to persuade the American public of his vision?
5. What did Reagan believe was the source of peace and prosperity?
6. How did Reagan's anti-communism compare with Carter's approach to the Cold War?
7. What were the critiques of Reagan's economic policy objectives?

Closure

If desired, use the final few minutes of the lesson to write or discuss, or assign as homework, the following prompt, which encourages students to compare the issues in the election of 1980 to contemporary election cycles:

How important is it for a political leader to have a charismatic personality?



Election of 1980: Conservative Resurgence Election Snapshot

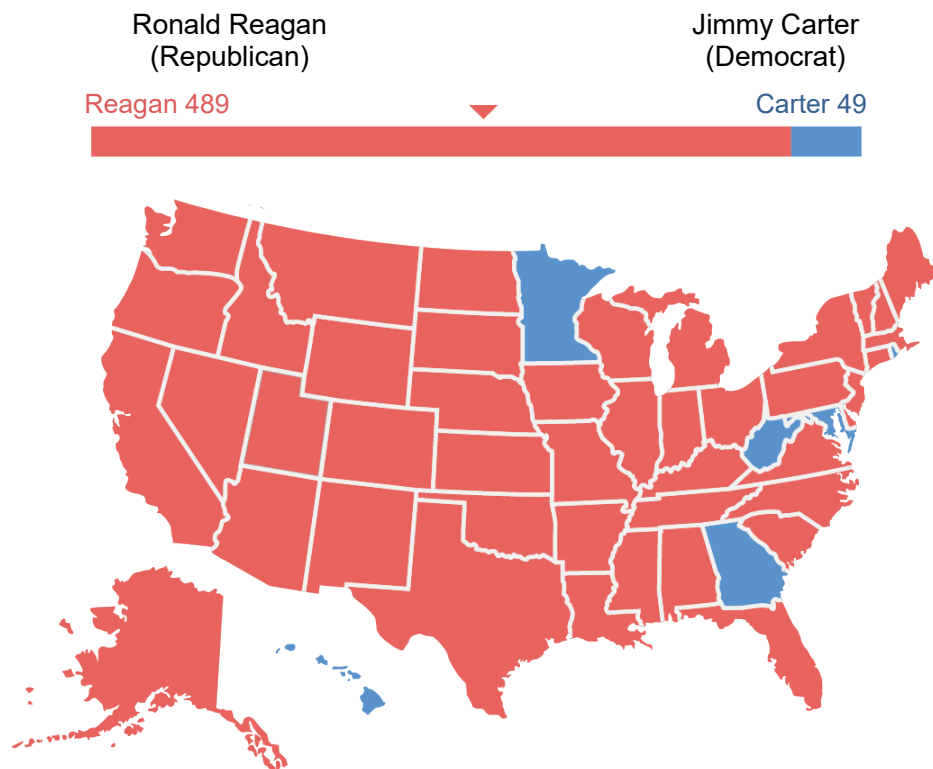
Essential Question

In what ways did Reagan's victory in the presidential election of 1980 represent a resurgence of conservative values and the end of the New Deal coalition in U.S. society?

Key Ideas

- Between 1964 and 1980, social, political, and economic unrest created significant upheaval throughout America. The Vietnam War and escalating Cold War tensions contributed to that unrest until détente in the 1970s. Throughout much of the 1970s, rising inflation, the oil crisis, the decline of manufacturing industries, and economic stagnation created one economic crisis after another. These issues influenced voters.
- Leading up to and following this election, political allegiances became more and more based on social and cultural issues. The increasingly polarized and competing perspectives provided the foundation for what many historians have since deemed the “culture wars.”
- Reagan's victory signaled the end of the New Deal coalition, which had been responsible for eight Democratic presidential victories since 1932 and Democratic control of Congress for most of the previous five decades.
- With the support of a growing number of conservative organizations, Reagan sought to limit the scope of government and to promote conservative values by rolling back spending on social programs, reducing taxes, and increasing military funding.

Candidates and Outcome





Election of 1980: Conservative Resurgence Primary Sources and Questions

Warm-Up

America: Reagan Country [visual source], 1980

Creator Unidentified

[Library of Congress collection](#)

Primary Sources

1980 Party Platforms on Taxation [excerpts], 1980

RNC/DNC

The economic turmoil of the 1970s made economic policies a major part of the campaigns leading up to the election of 1980. Republicans and Democrats had very different visions of how to move forward, as demonstrated by their opposing platforms on taxation.

[Republican Party Platform](#), [Democratic Party Platform](#)

Acceptance Speech at the Democratic National Convention [excerpt], 1980

Jimmy Carter

In his acceptance speech, Jimmy Carter laid out the distinctions between his view of the future and Reagan's view, primarily by showing what he saw as the negative consequences of Reagan's proposals.

[The Miller Center](#)

"A Strategy for Peace in the '80s" [excerpt] [video], 1980

Ronald Reagan

While Reagan argued for limiting spending in many areas of government, he lobbied for increased military spending to keep the U.S. military ahead of the Soviet military. In this speech, he made the case for how military strength can ensure peace.

[The American Presidency Project](#)

First Inaugural Address [excerpt], 1981

Ronald Reagan

Reagan's simple explanations of conservative values and public dissatisfaction with the previous administration helped him win the election. He laid out the conservative view of a more limited government in this inaugural address.

[Read the transcript.](#), [Watch the Video](#)

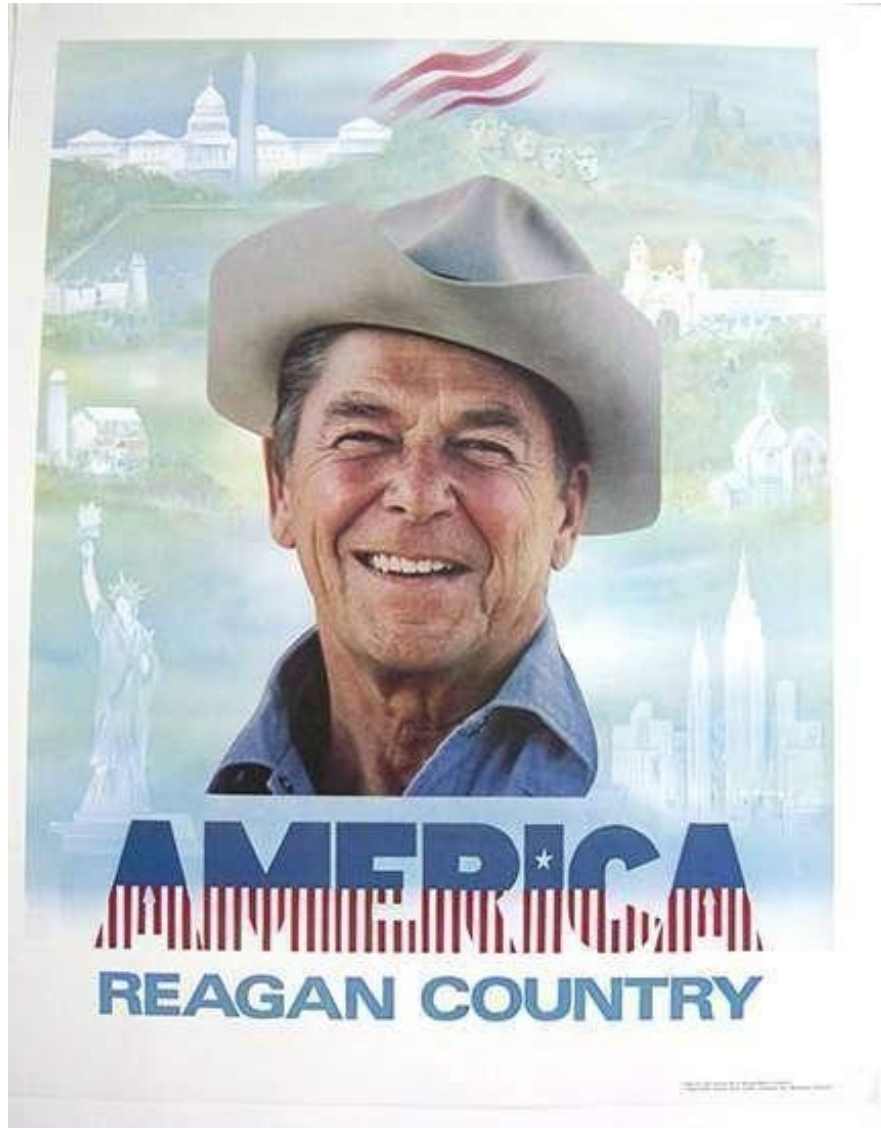
"I think this is called a trickle-down turkey" [visual source], 1982

Bill Sanders

"Reaganomics" had four main pillars: tax cuts, deregulation, decreased domestic spending, and reduction of inflation. Career political cartoonist Bill Sanders illustrated a response to this economic theory, also known as "trickle-down economics."



Warm-Up: America: Reagan Country
Creator Unidentified
1980



Student Name:

Class Period:

Date:

Warm-Up Exercise: Understanding Perspective America: Reagan Country

Analyzing a Source: Use the chart below (which is based on the National Archives and Records Administration analysis model) to examine the primary source. Remember that every document is created by a person with a specific point of view that is based on their background, beliefs, and experiences. These questions help you to understand that point of view, or perspective.

Meet the source. What type of source is it? What do you notice first? How would you describe it to someone who hasn't read it?	
Observe its parts. Who created it? Who is the intended audience? When was it created? Where was it created?	
Try to make sense of it. What is it talking about? Why did the maker create it? What was happening at the time in history when this source was created?	
Use it as historical evidence. What did you find out that you might not learn anywhere else? What evidence does the creator present that you should "fact check"? What questions do you have that this source doesn't answer?	

Checking for Understanding: After reviewing the source using the chart above, answer these questions as a class.

- Why do you think Reagan is wearing this outfit? What symbolic figure of the American West does he want to resemble?
- What are some of the images seen in the background? Why do those images have symbolic value to Americans?
- How do these symbols reinforce the message of the poster?
- What is the caption on the poster? What message does the caption convey?
- How do the image of Reagan, the background images, and the caption work together to imply support for values often associated with political conservatives?



Excerpts from 1980 Party Platforms on Taxation

Context: The economic turmoil of the 1970s made economic policies a major part of the campaigns leading up to the election of 1980. Republicans and Democrats had very different visions of how to move forward, as demonstrated by their opposing platforms on taxation.



Republican

Elsewhere in this platform we discuss the benefits, for society as a whole, of reduced taxation, particularly in terms of economic growth. But we believe it is essential to cut personal tax rates out of fairness to the individual.

Presently, the aggregate burden of taxation is so great that the average American spends a substantial part of every year, in effect, working for government.

Substantial tax rate reductions are needed to offset the massive tax increases facing the working men and women of this country. Over the next four years, federal taxes are projected to increase by over \$500 billion due to the Carter Administration's policies. American families are already paying taxes at higher rates than ever in our history; as a result of these Carter policies, the rates will go even higher. The direct and indirect burden of federal taxes alone, imposed on the average family earning \$20,000, has risen to \$5,451—over 27 percent of the family's gross income. During the Carter term, the federal tax alone on this family will have risen \$2,000.

The Republican Party believes balancing the budget is essential but opposes the Democrats' attempt to do so through higher taxes. We believe that an essential aspect of balancing the budget is spending restraint by the federal government and higher economic growth, not higher tax burdens on working men and women.

Democratic

In 1976, this Party pledged to seek fundamental tax reform, for we believed that our tax system had lost much of its needed fairness and equity. President Carter honored that pledge by proposing to Congress the most comprehensive and far-reaching set of tax reform proposals ever made by any Administration. That proposal would have closed over \$9 billion worth of tax loopholes, simplified our tax laws, and provided funds for substantial tax reduction for low and middle income taxpayers.

Once again, we call on Congress to legislate meaningful tax reform. We cannot any longer allow the special interests to preserve their particular benefits and loopholes at the expense of the average taxpayers. The fight for tax reform must go forward, and the Party pledges to be a part of that important effort. . . .

. . .

New tax reform efforts are needed to increase savings and investment, promote the principle of progressive taxation, close loopholes, and maintain adequate levels of federal revenue.

Republican National Convention (Detroit, Michigan). Platform of the Republican Party, 1980. From The American Presidency Project. <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/republican-party-platform-1980>.

Democratic National Convention (New York, New York). Platform of the Democratic Party, 1980. From The American Presidency Project. <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/1980-democratic-party-platform>.

Student Name:

Class Period:

Date:

Questions for Excerpts from 1980 Party Platforms on Taxation

1. According to the Republican Party platform, who benefitted from reduced taxes, and why did the party believe it was essential to cut taxes? How did this plan differ from the Democratic Party platform's pledge on taxation?
2. The two party platforms proposed very different means of balancing the federal budget. What were they?
3. A key tenet of the Republican platform was "spending restraint," but little detail was offered about what the effects of this spending restraint might be. Why do you think the Republican Party platform did not offer more detail?
4. How were these two policies regarding taxation indicative of the parties' larger visions for the United States?

ANSWER KEY

Questions for Excerpts from 1980 Party Platforms on Taxation

1. According to the Republican Party platform, who benefitted from reduced taxes, and why did the party believe it was essential to cut taxes? How did this plan differ from the Democratic Party platform's pledge on taxation?

The Republican Party platform indicated that all members of society would benefit from reduced taxation. They argued that tax rate reductions are necessary to offset tax increases on "working men and women."

The Democratic Party platform was more specific as to increases and decreases in taxation, rather than emphasizing cutting taxes across the board as the Republican platform did.

2. The two party platforms propose very different means of balancing the federal budget. What were they?

The Republican Party platform proposed to balance the budget by cutting both taxes and spending. The Democratic Party platform proposed getting rid of tax loopholes and special-interest benefits to rebalance who was paying into the tax system.

3. A key tenet of the Republican platform was "spending restraint," but little detail was offered about what the effects of this spending restraint might be. Why do you think the Republican Party platform did not offer more detail?

Student must make a claim and support it with evidence. Answers should pay particular attention to what is and is not stated in the platform language.

4. How were these two policies regarding taxation indicative of the parties' larger visions for the United States?

The Republican Party platform aligned with their vision of more limited government, and the Democratic Party platform promoted a more active and centralized federal government.



**Excerpt from Acceptance Speech
Jimmy Carter, Democratic National Convention
August 14, 1980**

Context: In his acceptance speech, Jimmy Carter laid out the distinctions between his view of the future and Reagan's view, primarily by showing what he saw as the negative consequences of Reagan's proposals.



And I see a future of peace—a peace born of wisdom and based on a fairness toward all countries of the world, a peace guaranteed both by American military strength and by American moral strength as well.

That is the future I want for all people, a future of confidence and hope and a good life. It's the future America must choose, and with your help and with your commitment, it is the future America will choose.

But there is another possible future. In that other future I see despair—despair of millions who would struggle for equal opportunity and a better life and struggle alone. And I see surrender—the surrender of our energy future to the merchants of oil, the surrender of our economic future to a bizarre program of massive tax cuts for the rich, service cuts for the poor, and massive inflation for everyone. And I see risk—the risk of international confrontation, the risk of an uncontrollable, unaffordable, and unwinnable nuclear arms race.

No one, Democrat or Republican either, consciously seeks such a future, and I do not claim that my opponent does. But I do question the disturbing commitments and policies already made by him and by those with him who have now captured control of the Republican Party. . . .

The only way to build a better future is to start with the realities of the present. But while we Democrats grapple with the real challenges of a real world, others talk about a world of tinsel and make-believe.

Let's look for a moment at their make-believe world.

In their fantasy America, inner-city people and farm workers and laborers do not exist. Women, like children, are to be seen but not heard. The problems of working women are simply ignored. The elderly do not need Medicare. The young do not need more help in getting a better education. Workers do not require the guarantee of a healthy and a safe place to work. In their fantasy world, all the complex global changes of the world since World War II have never happened. In their fantasy America, all problems have simple solutions—simple and wrong.

. . .

The path of fantasy leads to irresponsibility. The path of reality leads to hope and peace. The two paths could not be more different, nor could the futures to which they lead. Let's take a hard look at the consequences of our choice.

Student Name:

Class Period:

Date:

Questions for Excerpt from Acceptance Speech

1. How did Carter describe his vision for the future of the United States? Why might this vision appeal to voters in 1980?
2. President Carter warned of another possible future for the United States. What did that future look like and how did he suggest that the United States might meet that fate under a Republican-controlled government?
3. Carter drew a distinction between the “real world” and what he described as “a world of tinsel and make-believe.” What realities of life did Carter argue Reagan was ignoring in this “make-believe” world?
4. Reagan won the election of 1980 in a landslide. He carried all but six states and won 489 electoral votes. What might be some reasons so many Americans rejected Carter’s critique of Reagan’s conservative philosophy?

Questions for Excerpt from Acceptance Speech

1. How did Carter describe his vision for the future of the United States? Why might this vision appeal to voters in 1980?

Carter argued for a future of peace built on wisdom and fairness, on both military and moral strength.

Student must make a claim and support it with evidence.

2. President Carter warned of another possible future for the United States. What did that future look like and how did he suggest that the United States might meet that fate under a Republican controlled government?

Carter argued that the alternate future is one of despair, surrender, and risk. He argued that proposals already offered by the Republicans would turn the United States in that direction.

3. Carter drew a distinction between the “real world” and what he described as “a world of tinsel and make-believe.” What realities of life did Carter argue Reagan was ignoring in this “make-believe” world?

Student should summarize what Carter described in the seventh paragraph of the excerpt beginning with “in their fantasy America.”

4. Reagan won the election of 1980 in a landslide. He carried all but six states and won 489 electoral votes. What might be some reasons why so many Americans rejected Carter’s critique of Reagan’s conservative philosophy?

Student should make a claim and support it with evidence from the text. Answers could make use of not only this speech but also Reagan speeches included in this lesson plan.



**Excerpt from "A Strategy for Peace in the '80s"
Ronald Reagan
October 19, 1980**

Context: While Reagan argued for limiting spending in many areas of government, he lobbied for increased military spending to keep the U.S. military ahead of the Soviet military. In this speech, he made the case for how military strength can ensure peace.



Let us base our decisions about peace and security on the facts, on what we need to know and not on what we are told we must fear.

There can be no doubt about what is the major issue in this campaign concerning the question of peace.

. . .

Whatever else history may say about my candidacy. I hope it will be recorded that I appealed to our best hopes, not our worst fears, to our confidence rather than our doubts, to the facts, and not to fantasies.

And these three—hope, confidence, and facts—are at the heart of my vision of peace.

We have heard the phrase "peace through strength" so often, its meaning has become blurred through overuse.

The time has come for America to recall once more the basic truths behind the familiar words.

Peace is made by the fact of strength—economic, military, and strategic.

Peace is lost when such strength disappears or—just as bad—is seen by an adversary as disappearing.

We must build peace upon strength. There is no other way. And the cold, hard fact of the matter is that our economic, military, and strategic strength under President Carter is eroding.

Only if we are strong will peace be strong.

Student Name:

Class Period:

Date:

Questions for "A Strategy for Peace in the '80s"

1. How did Reagan define his policy of "peace through strength"? How did he say this policy differed from those of previous administrations?
2. What ongoing international issues was Reagan likely referring to when invoking his "peace through strength" policy?
3. What did Reagan hope that history might say about his candidacy? Why do you think Reagan would want to be remembered in this way?
4. According to Reagan, how was peace made and how did he suggest that it disappeared? Do you agree with this policy? Explain.

ANSWER KEY

Questions for "A Strategy for Peace in the '80s"

1. How did Reagan define his policy of "peace through strength"? How did he say this policy differed from those of previous administrations?

Reagan said that "peace is made by the fact of strength,"—specifically, economic, military, and strategic strength.

He said this policy differed from those of previous administrations because they had used the phrase so much that it no longer had meaning. He said he would make the United States strong, not just say that the United States is strong.

2. What ongoing international issues is Reagan likely referring to when invoking his "peace through strength" policy?

Reagan was likely referencing the ongoing Cold War tensions.

3. What did Reagan hope that history might say about his candidacy? Why do you think Reagan would want to be remembered in this way?

Reagan said that he hoped he would be remembered positively rather than negatively: for hope, not fear; for confidence, not doubt; for fact, not fantasy.

Student must state a claim and support it with evidence.

4. According to Reagan, how was peace made and how did he suggest that it disappeared? Do you agree with this policy? Explain.

Peace is made through strength and lost through weakness.

Student must state a claim and support it with evidence.



**Excerpt from First Inaugural Address
Ronald Reagan
January 20, 1981**

Context: Reagan's simple explanations of conservative values and public dissatisfaction with the previous administration helped him win the election. He laid out the conservative view of a more limited government in this inaugural address.



. . . These United States are confronted with an economic affliction of great proportions. We suffer from the longest and one of the worst sustained inflations in our national history. It distorts our economic decisions, penalizes thrift, and crushes the struggling young and the fixed-income elderly alike. It threatens to shatter the lives of millions of our people.

. . .

In this present crisis, government is not the solution to our problem; government *is* the problem.

From time to time we've been tempted to believe that society has become too complex to be managed by self-rule, that government by an elite group is superior to government for, by, and of the people. Well, if no one among us is capable of governing himself, then who among us has the capacity to govern someone else? . . .

We hear much of special interest groups. Well, our concern must be for a special interest group that has been too long neglected. It knows no sectional boundaries or ethnic and racial divisions, and it crosses political party lines. It is made up of men and women who raise our food, patrol our streets, man our mines and factories, teach our children, keep our homes, and heal us when we're sick—professionals, industrialists, shopkeepers, clerks, cabbies, and truckdrivers. They are, in short, "We the people," this breed called Americans.

Well, this administration's objective will be a healthy, vigorous, growing economy that provides equal opportunities for all Americans with no barriers born of bigotry or discrimination. Putting America back to work means putting all Americans back to work. Ending inflation means freeing all Americans from the terror of runaway living costs. With the idealism and fair play which are the core of our system and our strength, we can have a strong and prosperous America, at peace with itself and the world.

. . .

It is my intention to curb the size and influence of the Federal establishment. . . . it's not my intention to do away with government. It is rather to make it work—work with us, not over us; to stand by our side, not ride on our back. Government can and must provide opportunity, not smother it; foster productivity, not stifle it.

. . .

In the days ahead I will propose removing the roadblocks that have slowed our economy and reduced productivity. Steps will be taken aimed at restoring the balance between the various levels of government. Progress may be slow, measured in inches and feet, not miles, but we will progress. It is time to reawaken this industrial giant, to get government back within its means, and to lighten our punitive tax burden. And these will be our first priorities, and on these principles there will be no compromise.

. . .

As for the enemies of freedom, those who are potential adversaries, they will be reminded that peace is the highest aspiration of the American people. We will negotiate for it, sacrifice for it; we will not surrender for it, now or ever.

Our forbearance should never be misunderstood. Our reluctance for conflict should not be misjudged as a failure of will. When action is required to preserve our national security, we will act. We will maintain sufficient strength to prevail if need be, knowing that if we do so we have the best chance of never having to use that strength.

Above all, we must realize that no arsenal or no weapon in the arsenals of the world is so formidable as the will and moral courage of free men and women. It is a weapon our adversaries in today's world do not have. It is a weapon that we as Americans do have. Let that be understood by those who practice terrorism and prey upon their neighbors.

Student Name:

Class Period:

Date:

Questions for Excerpt from First Inaugural Address

1. When Reagan proclaimed that “government *is* the problem,” what did he mean? Cite evidence from his speech to support your answer.
2. According to Reagan, which “too long neglected” special interest group really mattered to American society? Why do you think Reagan claimed this group mattered the most?
3. Reagan argued that all Americans were included in his goal to improve the economy. What values “at the core of our system” did Reagan believe would be reinforced by including all citizens, and how would including all citizens be achieved?
4. What did Reagan argue is “the highest aspiration of the American people”? According to the speech, what is required to achieve that aspiration?

ANSWER KEY

Questions for Excerpt from First Inaugural Address

1. When Reagan proclaimed that “government *is* the problem,” what did he mean? Cite evidence from his speech to support your answer.

Reagan meant that government had gotten too big and was stopping people from being able to control their own lives.

Student can cite evidence from the second, fifth, and sixth paragraphs.

2. According to Reagan, which “too long neglected” special interest group really mattered to American society? Why do you think Reagan claimed this group mattered the most?

Reagan said that “we the people,” the average citizens of the United States, were the “too long neglected” special interest group.

Student must make a claim and support it with evidence from the text.

3. Reagan argued that all Americans were included in his goal to improve the economy. What values “at the core of our system” did Reagan believe would be reinforced by including all citizens, and how would including all citizens be achieved?

The values of idealism and fair play would be reinforced by including all citizens. This would be achieved by putting all Americans back to work and ending inflation for all Americans.

4. What did Reagan argue is “the highest aspiration of the American people”? According to the speech, what was required to achieve that aspiration?

Peace is the highest aspiration of the American people. Sufficient strength to defeat any nation that challenged American peace was needed to achieve it.

“I think this is called a trickle-down turkey”
Bill Sanders
November 24, 1982

Context: “Reaganomics” had four main pillars: tax cuts, deregulation, decreased domestic spending, and reduction of inflation. Career political cartoonist Bill Sanders illustrated a response to this economic theory, also known as “trickle-down economics.”



“I think this is called a trickle-down turkey!”

Student Name:

Class Period:

Date:

Questions for “I think this is called a trickle-down turkey”

1. Consider the placement of people in the cartoon. Why might cartoonist Bill Sanders have arranged the represented groups this way? What is implied by this arrangement?
2. What do you think the turkey represents?
3. How does the traditional Thanksgiving image used here play on the Reagan/Bush 1980 campaign slogan of “Let’s Make America Great Again”? Why do you think the Pilgrim imagery might be effective? Explain.
4. The figure carving the turkey is most likely meant to represent Ronald Reagan. In what way(s) does the allocation of turkey serve as a critique of “Reaganomics”?

ANSWER KEY

Questions for “I think this is called a trickle-down turkey”

1. Consider the placement of people in the cartoon. Why might cartoonist Bill Sanders have arranged the represented groups this way? What is implied by this arrangement?

Student must demonstrate close reading skills and answer questions with evidence from the image. Answers should indicate what the people’s placement says about what they do and don’t have, as well as how they are interacting with each other.

2. What do you think the turkey represents?

Student should make a claim and support their answer with evidence from the cartoon.

3. How does the traditional “Thanksgiving” image used here play on the Reagan/Bush 1980 campaign slogan of “Let’s Make America Great Again”? Why do you think the Pilgrim imagery might be effective? Explain.

Student should make a claim and support their answer with evidence from the cartoon.

Answers should point to the stories and myths of the founding of the United States, including its founding principles.

4. The figure carving the turkey is most likely meant to represent Ronald Reagan. In what way(s) does the allocation of turkey serve as a critique of “Reaganomics”?

The figure carving the turkey is offering the largest pieces of the turkey to the largest people in the cartoon, likely suggesting that Reaganomics would only benefit those people who already had everything they needed.