The President, the Press, and the Public in U.S. History

Jason Harshman, PhD
Division of Education Programs, National Endowment for the Humanities

Thanks for joining! We will start at the top of the hour.
The NEH and NHD: Partners for History Education
"He shall from time to time give to Congress information of the State of the Union and recommend to their Consideration such measures as he shall judge necessary and expedient."

— Article II, Section 3 of the U.S. Constitution
“Gentlemen of the Congress:

In pursuance of my constitutional duty to "give to the Congress information of the state of the Union," I take the liberty of addressing you on several matters which ought, as it seems to me, particularly to engage the attention of your honorable bodies, as of all who study the welfare and progress of the Nation.

I shall ask your indulgence if I venture to depart in some degree from the usual custom of setting before you in formal review the many matters which have engaged the attention and called for the action of the several departments of the Government or which look to them for early treatment in the future, because the list is long, very long, and would suffer in the abbreviation to which I should have to subject it. I shall submit to you the reports of the heads of the several departments, in which these subjects are set forth in careful detail, and beg that they may receive the thoughtful attention of your committees and of all Members of the Congress who may have the leisure to study them. Their obvious importance, as constituting the very substance of the business of the Government, makes comment and emphasis on my part unnecessary.”
Zoom Poll Question #1

What skills can be developed when analyzing a speech?
Please type your response in the Zoom question box (not chat).
Woodrow Wilson
December 2, 1913: First State of the Union Address

"Gentlemen of the Congress:

In pursuance of my constitutional duty to "give to the Congress information of the state of the Union," I take the liberty of addressing you on several matters which ought, as it seems to me, particularly to engage the attention of your honorable bodies, as of all who study the welfare and progress of the Nation.

I shall ask your indulgence if I venture to depart in some degree from the usual custom of setting before you in formal review the many matters which have engaged the attention and called for the action of the several departments of the Government or which look to them for early treatment in the future, because the list is long, very long, and would suffer in the abbreviation to which I should have to subject it. I shall submit to you the reports of the heads of the several departments, in which these subjects are set forth in careful detail, and beg that they may receive the thoughtful attention of your committees and of all Members of the Congress who may have the leisure to study them. Their obvious importance, as constituting the very substance of the business of the Government, makes comment and emphasis on my part unnecessary."
Woodrow Wilson
December 2, 1913: First State of the Union Address

“We have come now to the sober second thought. The scales of heedlessness have fallen from our eyes. We have made up our minds to square every process of our national life again with the standards we so proudly set up at the beginning and have always carried at our hearts. Our work is a work of restoration.

We have itemized with some degree of particularity the things that ought to be altered and here are some of the chief items: A tariff which cuts us off from our proper part in the commerce of the world, violates the just principles of taxation, and makes the Government a facile instrument in the hand of private interests; a banking and currency system based upon the necessity of the Government to sell its bonds fifty years ago and perfectly adapted to concentrating cash and restricting credits; an industrial system which, take it on all its sides, financial as well as administrative, holds capital in leading strings, restricts the liberties and limits the opportunities of labor, and exploits without renewing or conserving the natural resources of the country; a body of agricultural activities never yet given the efficiency of great business undertakings or served as it should be through the instrumentality of science taken directly to the farm, or afforded the facilities of credit best suited to its practical needs; watercourses undeveloped, waste places unreclaimed, forests untended, fast disappearing without plan or prospect of renewal, unregarded waste heaps at every mine. We have studied as perhaps no other nation has the most effective means of production, but we have not studied cost or economy as we should either as organizers of industry, as statesmen, or as individuals.”
Zoom Poll Question #2

What inquiry questions can be designed based on this excerpt of President Wilson’s 1913 State of the Union address?

Please type your response in the Zoom question box (not chat).
Woodrow Wilson
December 2, 1913: First State of the Union Address

“We have come now to the sober second thought. The scales of heedlessness have fallen from our eyes. We have made up our minds to square every process of our national life again with the standards we so proudly set up at the beginning and have always carried at our hearts. Our work is a work of restoration.

We have itemized with some degree of particularity the things that ought to be altered and here are some of the chief items: A tariff which cuts us off from our proper part in the commerce of the world, violates the just principles of taxation, and makes the Government a facile instrument in the hand of private interests; a banking and currency system based upon the necessity of the Government to sell its bonds fifty years ago and perfectly adapted to concentrating cash and restricting credits; an industrial system which, take it on all its sides, financial as well as administrative, holds capital in leading strings, restricts the liberties and limits the opportunities of labor, and exploits without renewing or conserving the natural resources of the country; a body of agricultural activities never yet given the efficiency of great business undertakings or served as it should be through the instrumentality of science taken directly to the farm, or afforded the facilities of credit best suited to its practical needs; watercourses undeveloped, waste places unreclaimed, forests untended, fast disappearing without plan or prospect of renewal, unregarded waste heaps at every mine. We have studied as perhaps no other nation has the most effective means of production, but we have not studied cost or economy as we should either as organizers of industry, as statesmen, or as individuals.”
The SOTU in History and Civics Courses

• Compare policy proposals to previous administration(s)
• Short & long-term evaluations
• Contemporary connections
• To what extent did these proposals change the U.S.?

• Analyze & evaluate the first/next 100 days
• Which department and/or agency oversees the program or policy?
• How are states and cities affected by such proposals?
• What are the social conditions of these policies?
State of the _______

• State of the State Address
• State of the Town Address

• State of the City Address
• Responses to a State of the Union

Classroom Connections:
• Contact the Governor’s Office
• A Q&A with the Mayor, Town Supervisor, or County Executive
• Respond to a State of the ______ Address
Zoom Poll Question #3

• How has your preferred means for accessing news changed in the past 5-10 years?

Choose all that apply:

A. No change.
B. Print → Digital newspapers
C. Television news → A variety of online news sources
D. Radio and/or television → Curated social media account
E. Late night television/comedians (i.e. The Daily Show, Last Week Tonight, etc.)
F. A preferred cable news station → Comparing cable news coverage
G. Others
The President, the Press, & the People

• 1921: President Warren G. Harding hired professional speechwriter Judson Welliver and began to hold public press conferences twice a week.

• 1923-1929: President Calvin Coolidge was the first president to use radio to speak directly to the citizens of the nation, broadcasting monthly programs.

• 1929: President Herbert Hoover formally established the position of the press secretary, hiring George Akerson to the position.

• 1933: On March 6, 1933, First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt became the first First Lady to hold an official press conference.
The President, the Press, & the People

- **1945:** President Harry Truman proposed a major West Wing expansion that would add a studio and auditorium for press briefings.

- **1955:** President Dwight D. Eisenhower’s Press Secretary James C. Hagerty permitted radio, television, and newspaper equipment to record coverage of news conferences.

- **1969:** The White House Office of Communications was established.

- **1969-1970:** The Creation of the James S. Brady Press Briefing Room.

- **1995:** Press Secretary Mike McCurry started the practice of televising the daily press briefings.
Zoom Poll Question #4

How have changes in technology affected how presidents communicate with the public and how the public communicates with a president?

Please type your response in the Zoom question box (not chat).
Addressing the Nation
When, Where, & How Presidents Address the Public
Zoom Poll Question #5

How do you develop media literacy skills when studying history? Choose all that apply:

A. Analyze Short videos made for classrooms (i.e. Crash Course, Khan Academy, etc.)
B. Analyze films and news coverage
C. Analyze photographs
D. Analyze audio sources (i.e. speeches, podcasts, etc.)
E. Create digital visual and/or audio projects
F. Use digital tools for public presentations and/or civic engagement
G. Others

Source: International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions.
Critical Media Analysis

• What learning outcomes regarding content and skills are we teaching toward when students analyze video and audio texts?

• What roles do viewers play in perpetuating and/or what are the viewer’s responsibilities for minimizing the spread of false information?

• What are the counter arguments to the narrative(s) presented?

• To what extent does who writes, directs, and produces a text matter to the perspectives presented in the news report?

• How does the producer or reporter use symbolism to convey meaning?
Chronicling America: History's First Draft

Guiding Questions

- How were events covered by the press when they happened?
- How has media and media technology changed over time?
- Are there limitations to the First Amendment clause regarding freedom of the press?
- How do consumers of information ensure they are receiving facts and the truth about the world?

Chronicling and Picturing America

Using Chronicling America

Searching Chronicling America

Diverse Perspectives and Chronicling America

Lesson Plans with Chronicling America
Demonstrations of Learning

• Select one issue
  • Works for a history and civics course

• Select three mediums/platforms of communication
  • How will a speech differ from a TV or Youtube message?
  • Is a newspaper OpEd compared to a podcast episode or social media campaign a better approach?

• Consider the audience for the message and the medium
  • What is the intent?
  • Who are you trying to persuade?
“From Time to Time”: Presidents and Communicating with the Public

Subjects & Topic:
A More Perfect Union
History & Social Studies
Civics
U.S. History

Grade: 6-12

Guiding Questions

Why do Presidents deliver a State of the Union speech?

How has technology changed the ways in which Presidents communicate with the American public?

What are the formal and informal ways in which Presidents communicate with the American public?

How has the American public influenced the ways in which U.S. Presidents communicate with them?
Driving excellence in humanities education

A More Perfect Union
History and Civics Materials for the nation's 250th Anniversary

American Heroes
Learn about transformative figures in American history

https://edsitement.neh.gov/
Facebook & Twitter: @EDSITEment
jharshman@neh.gov
Ranked “Best for History” in 2019 by Scholastic Education.
Feedback and Verification:
https://Tinyurl.com/NHDwebinars