



Menu of Classroom Activities President Obama's Address to Students Across America (Grades 7-12)

Produced by Teaching Ambassador Fellows, U.S. Department of Education
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Before the Speech

- Conduct a “quick write” or “think/pair/share” activity with students. *(In the latter activity, students spend a few minutes thinking and writing about the question. Next, each student is paired with another student to discuss. Finally, the students share their ideas with the class as a whole).* Teachers may choose to ask the following questions:
 - What ideas do we associate with the words “responsibility,” “persistence,” and “goals?”
 - How would we define each term?Teachers then may choose to create a web diagram of student ideas for each of the words.
- Have students participate in a “quick write” or brainstorming activity. Teachers may ask students:
 - What are your strengths?
 - What do you think makes you successful as a student and as a person?
- Teachers may engage students in short readings. Teachers may post in large print around the classroom notable quotes excerpted from President Obama's speeches on education. Teachers might ask students to think alone, compare ideas with a partner, or share their thoughts with the class. Teachers could ask students to think about the following:
 - What are our interpretations of these excerpts?
 - Based on these excerpts, what can we infer that the president believes is important in order to be educationally successful?
- Create a “concept web.” Teachers may ask students to think of the following:
 - Why does President Obama want to speak with us today?
 - How will he inspire us?
 - How will he challenge us?
 - What might he say?
 - Do you remember any other historic moments when the president spoke to the nation?
 - What was the impact?After brainstorming answers to these questions, students could create a “cause-and-effect” graphic organizer.

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During the Speech

- Teachers might conduct a “listening with purpose” exercise based on the following ideas: personal responsibility, goals, and persistence. Teachers might ask pairs of students to create a word bank at the top of a notes page that has been divided into two columns. On the right-hand side, students could take notes (trying to capture direct quotations or main ideas) while President Obama talks about personal responsibility, goals, or persistence. At the end of the speech, students could write the corresponding terms from the word bank in the left-hand column, to increase retention and deepen their understanding of an important aspect of the speech.
- Teachers might conduct a “listening with purpose” exercise based on the themes of inspiration and challenges. Using a similar double-column notes page as the one described above, teachers could focus students on quotations that either propose a specific challenge to them or that inspire them in some meaningful way. Students could do this activity individually, in pairs, or in groups.

Transition/Quick Review

- Teachers could ask students to look over their notes and collaborate in pairs or small groups. Teachers might circulate and ask students questions, such as:
 - What more could we add to our notes?
 - What are the most important words in the speech?
 - What title would you give the speech?
 - What is the thesis of the speech?

After the Speech

Guided Discussion:

- What resonated with you from President Obama's speech? What lines or phrases do you remember?
- Whom is President Obama addressing? How do you know? Describe his audience.
- We heard President Obama mention the importance of personal responsibility. In your life, who exemplifies this kind of responsibility? How? Give examples.
- How are the individuals in this classroom similar? How is each student different?
- Suppose President Obama were to give another speech about being educationally successful. To whom would he speak? Why? What would the president say?
- What are the three most important words in the speech? Rank them.
- Is President Obama inspiring you to do anything? Is he challenging you to do anything?
- What do you believe are the challenges of your generation?
- How can you be a part of addressing these challenges?

Video Project:

- Teachers could encourage students to participate in the U.S. Department of Education's “I Am What I Learn” video contest. On September 8, the Department of Education will invite students age 13 and older to submit a video no longer than two minutes in length, explaining why education is important and how education will help them achieve their dreams. Teachers are welcome to incorporate the same or a similar video project into a classroom assignment. More details will be released via www.ed.gov.

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Transition/Quick Review

- Teachers could introduce goal-setting activities in the following way to make the most of extension activities:

“When you set a goal, you envision a target that you are going to reach over time. Goals are best when they are “Challenging,” “Attainable,” and “Needed” (CAN). For example, a good goal might be: ‘I want to boost my average grade by one letter grade this year so I can show colleges that I am prepared.’ But, every good goal also needs steps that guide the way. These steps keep you on track toward achieving your goal. For example, my first step might be improving in all of my subjects by one letter grade. My second step might be completing 100-percent of my homework in all of my classes during the first week of school. My third step might be taking an extra hour to study for all of my tests during each marking period. My fourth step might be attending a tutoring session or getting an adult to help me whenever I do not understand something. My last step might be the most important: asking an adult in my life to check on me often to make sure that I am completing each of my steps. Your steps should add up to your goal. If they don’t, that’s okay; we fix them until they do!

Let’s hear another example of an academic goal for the year and decide what steps would help to achieve that goal...

Now I want you to write your personal academic goal for this year and the steps that you will take to achieve it. We can revise our steps each marking period to make sure we are on track.”

Extension of the Speech

Teachers could extend learning by having students:

- Create decorated goals and steps on material that is the size of an index card. The index cards could be formatted as an inviting graphic organizer with a space for the goal at the top and several steps in the remaining space. Cards could be hung in the classroom to create a culture of goal setting, persistence, and success, and for the purpose of periodic review. (See the “Example Handout” section.)
- Create posters of their goals. Posters could be formatted in quadrants, puzzle pieces, or trails marked as steps. These also could be hung around the room, to be reviewed periodically and to create a classroom culture of goal setting and for the purpose of periodic review.
- Interview and share their goals with one another and the class, establishing community support for their goals.
- Create incentives or contests for achieving their personal goals.
- Write about goals and the steps to achieve them in a variety of genres such as poems, songs, or personal essays.
- Create artistic representations of goals and the steps to achieve them.

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Example Handout

(Please see below.)

