



Newsletter for English Teachers

About the USA – Virtual Classroom

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Inauguration

When Barack Obama takes the Oath of Office January 20, he will be continuing a tradition dating back to George Washington.

[Official Inauguration web site](#)

Inaugural Poetry

Three times in U.S. history, poetry has been read at presidential swearing in ceremonies. Robert Frost read his poetry for John F. Kennedy in 1961. Bill Clinton asked Maya Angelou to read her work for his 1993 inauguration. In 1997 Clinton again asked a poet, Miller Williams, to read for the inauguration. Elizabeth Alexander, a poet, essayist, playwright, and a professor at Yale University, was selected to compose and read an original work at the inauguration of President-elect Barack Obama on January 20. She said she will compose the poem by casting an eye back. She will deliver her poem after the inaugural address.

Links NYT Article: [The Intersection of Poetry and Politics](#)
Elizabeth Alexander's [Homepage](#)
Printable Versions of Elizabeth Alexander's [Poems](#)
TeacherVision: [Inaugural Poetry](#)

[Inauguration Celebrates Continuity of American Democracy](#) When Barack Obama takes the oath of office on January 20, 2009, it will mark the 56th time that a U.S. president has been sworn in for a four-year term since 1789, when George Washington first took the same oath. Many inaugural events have been added during the past 220 years, but the steps that the president-elect follows to take the constitutionally mandated oath of office, the central event of the inauguration, are essentially unchanged. The oath will be administered at the U.S. Capitol, in a ceremony on the west front of the building, overlooking the National Mall, as it has been since 1801 when Thomas Jefferson was sworn in there. (America.gov)

New Administration

Roughly two weeks before his inauguration, Barack Obama has already taken numerous steps to prepare for his presidency. The President-elect has filled nearly all of the major posts in his new administration. The new staff of the White House will take up their duties on January 20. However, the 15 Cabinet members and four other Cabinet-level officials (the U.N. ambassador, E.P.A. administrator, budget chief and trade representative) remain subject to Senate confirmation.

Top priorities for the new president will be the economy and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. But there are many other important domestic and international concerns. Immediately following his election, Obama began naming and meeting with advisers who will help guide him on these tough issues. ([America.gov](#))

Books by President-elect Barack Obama

Dreams from My Father: A Story of Race and Inheritance. Obama wrote this account of his coming of age as a child of a white American mother and black Kenyan father when he was president of the Harvard Law Review.

The Audacity of Hope: Thoughts on Reclaiming the American Dream. Based on themes he presented in a speech at the Democratic National Convention in 2004, this book offers Obama's views on faith and values and his vision of the future of America.



(© AP Image/America.gov)

Photo Gallery: [Historical Inaugurations](#)

The New Team

- [Change.gov: Office of the President-Elect](#)
- [America.gov: Transition](#)
- [White House Transition page](#)
- America.gov: [The Future Cabinet](#)
- [President-elect's Cabinet Diverse](#) - Among those selected to serve are two Republicans.
- NYT: The New Team - [Find profiles](#)



Barack Obama, elected the 44th President of the U.S., has lived a truly American life, and has opened a new chapter in American politics. [This publication](#) tells the story of his life, describes how he captured the presidency, and portrays his vision for the future.

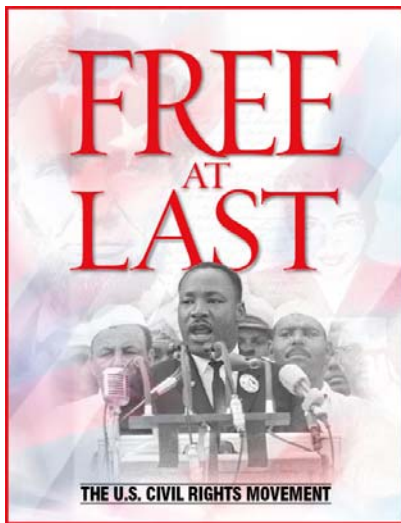
The first teacher to get back to us with a short message to classroom@usembassy.de will receive a set of 20 print copies of the publication for classroom use.

Inauguration 2009

- The [Presidential Inaugural Committee](#)
- [Joint Congressional Committee on Inaugural Ceremonies](#): responsible for Inaugural activities at the U.S. Capitol
- Inauguration: [Facts and Firsts](#)

Send us a short essay describing how you spent election night and win copies of President-elect Barack Obama's books. We will choose from all entries and send books to 5 lucky winners.

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(©America.gov)

Free At Last - The U.S. Civil Rights Movement

(Bureau of International Information Programs,
U.S. Department of State. 72 pages)

A book that recounts the centuries-long African-American struggle to attain the full measure of civil rights long guaranteed to other Americans.

Links

- The History.com: [Save Our History - Voices of Civil Rights](#)
- [The Martin Luther King Jr. Research and Education Institute](#)
- University of California: [Speech Archive](#) (incl. an audio recording of "I Have a Dream" speech)
- National Archives: [Martin Luther King Jr.](#)
- [The King Center](#)
- Stanford University: [The Martin Luther King Jr. Research and Education Institute](#)
- Stanford University: [King Encyclopedia](#)
- King Center: [Sources on MLK and Nonviolence](#)

MLK on Nonviolence

World peace through nonviolent means is neither absurd nor unattainable. All other methods have failed. Thus we must begin anew. Nonviolence is a good starting point. Those of us who believe in this method can be voices of reason, sanity, and understanding amid the voices of violence, hatred, and emotion. We can very well set a mood of peace out of which a system of peace can be built.

Source: [The Power of Non-violence](#)

Primary Source Questions (History.com)

1. Why do you think MLK decided to reference the Constitution and Declaration of Independence in this speech?
2. What do you think Dr. King means when he says that African Americans have been given a check marked "insufficient funds"? What does this metaphor reveal about inequality in 1963?
3. Dr. King references a "sacred obligation" in this paragraph. What do you think this obligation is, in his view? How could that obligation be achieved?
4. Why do you think Dr. King's "I Have a Dream" speech is remembered as one of the most significant speeches in U.S. history?

Martin Luther King, Jr.

On January 19, Americans will observe [Martin Luther King, Jr. Day](#), an annual federal holiday that commemorates the life and work of the American civil rights leader. Recipient of the 1964 Nobel Peace Prize, Martin Luther King, Jr. advocated for social change through nonviolent action.

As "**Free At Last**" went into press, Barack Obama, the son of a black man from Kenya and a white woman from Kansas, has been elected President of the United States. In a campaign speech on race in America, Obama said that

the answer to the slavery question was already embedded within our Constitution — a Constitution that had at its very core the ideal of equal citizenship under the law; a Constitution that promised its people liberty, and justice, and a union that could be and should be perfected over time.

And, as the President-elect told the nation on the night of his electoral triumph:

If there is anyone out there who still doubts that America is a place where all things are possible; who still wonders if the dream of our founders is alive in our time; who still questions the power of our democracy, tonight is your answer.

Obama's victory is one measure of the nation's progress. Another measure, surely the most important of all, is the emergence, not least among the younger Americans who will build the nation's future, of a broad and deep consensus that the shameful histories of slavery, segregation, and disadvantage must be relegated to the past.

The Civil Rights Digital Library

Partner organizations including The New Georgia Encyclopedia, the Walter J. Brown Media Archives and Peabody Awards Collection at the University of Georgia, and the Institute of Museum and Library Services have joined forces to create the very impressive [Civil Rights Digital Library](#) (CRDL). The intent of the CRDL is to promote an "enhanced understanding of the Movement by helping users discover primary sources and other educational materials from libraries, archives, museums, public broadcasters, and others on a national scale." Visitors can browse through the materials by place, person, event, or topic, such as "Community Organizing", "White Resistance", "Economic Justice", and "Voting Rights". Visitors can also browse the materials by contributing institution or media type. There is some truly interesting material here, including oral histories, archival footage, and still photographs.

Links [Lesson plans](#) * [Slide shows](#) * [Study guides](#) * [Teaching guides](#) * [Timelines \(chronologies\)](#) * [Worksheets](#)

Overall, it is a site that will be valuable to historians and teachers, and anyone with an interest in learning about the civil rights movement.

I Have a Dream by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

"In a sense we have come to our nation's capital to cash a check. When the architects of our republic wrote the magnificent words of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, they were signing a promissory note to which every American was to fall heir. This note was a promise that all men would be guaranteed the inalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

It is obvious today that America has defaulted on this promissory note insofar as her citizens of color are concerned. Instead of honoring this sacred obligation, America has given the Negro people a bad check which has come back marked "insufficient funds." But we refuse to believe that the bank of justice is bankrupt. ...So we have come to cash this check — a check that will give us upon demand the riches of freedom and the security of justice." (© The Estate of Martin Luther King, Jr.)

Literature: David Jerome Salinger

On January 1, J. D. Salinger turned 90. There probably wasn't a party, and if there was his readers will never know.

[Still Paging Mr. Salinger](#). NYT, Dec. 30, 2008, Charles McGrath: "For more than 50 years Mr. Salinger has lived in seclusion in the small town of Cornish, N.H. For a while it used to be a journalistic sport for newspapers and magazines to send reporters up to Cornish in hopes of a sighting, or at least a quotation from a garrulous local, but Mr. Salinger hasn't been photographed in decades now and the neighbors have all clammed up."

Biography Resource Center: J. D. Salinger

J. D. Salinger remains well known for a single novel: *The Catcher in the Rye*, which was hailed as "brilliant" upon its publication in 1951. While several of the short stories Salinger also wrote and published in popular magazines during the 1950s were eventually collected in book form, *The Catcher in the Rye* that has kept his name a familiar one, particularly among the many young readers who have found in the novel's teen protagonist, Holden Caulfield, an attitude of rebellion against the world of "phoniness" that serves as a model for their own rejection of adult values and mores. While Salinger's novel reaches teen readers on one level, it also holds an appeal to adult readers who are aware of its complexity. The subject of considerable critical scrutiny in the years since its publication, *The Catcher in the Rye* has earned comparisons to *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* by Mark Twain, as well as to F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*. Remarking on the coming-of-age themes that Salinger consistently explored throughout his brief publishing career, novelist Norman Mailer remarked in his *Advertisements for Myself* that Salinger was "the greatest mind to ever stay in prep school."

Salinger was born in New York City in 1919 and [...] grew up in Upper Manhattan. In 1932, when Salinger was thirteen, his father enrolled him at Manhattan's McBurney School. Unfortunately, Salinger's absence at every school function except meals, as well as his status as a loner, made his first year less than successful, and he flunked out. Two years later he found himself at Valley Forge Military Academy near Wayne, Pennsylvania. Attending Valley Forge for two years, Salinger impressed his fellow students with his sharp, sarcastic wit, his tendency to break the rules whenever possible, and his talent as a writer. During his second year he became editor of the school's yearbook, and for graduation penned for the school a poetic tribute that would later be treasured by the Valley Forge staff and set to music for annual performances. Salinger graduated from Valley Forge in 1936, but his school experience there would haunt him, becoming the foundation for *Catcher in the Rye*. [...]"

(Source: *Authors and Artists for Young Adults*, v36, Gale Group, 2000.

Please ask your [IRC](#) for a copy of the fulltext article.)



J.D. Salinger (© Gale)

Links

- WebEnglishTeacher.com: [J. D. Salinger - Lesson plans for The Catcher in the Rye](#)

CliffsNotes:

- [About The Catcher in the Rye](#)
- [Historical Setting of The Catcher in the Rye](#)
- [The Book's Reception and Reputation](#)

BookRags: [J.D. Salinger's The Catcher in the Rye Book Notes](#)

- "Near the end of *The Catcher in the Rye*, Holden Caulfield imagines moving out West and pretending he's a deaf-mute. He wants to avoid "goddam stupid useless conversations with anybody. If anybody wanted to tell me something, they'd have to write it on a piece of paper and shove it over to me." Anyone who knows the barest details of J.D. Salinger's life will feel a little shiver of recognition when reading this quote. After a promising start as a story writer for magazines, and with four slim, though wildly popular, works of fiction published, the young Salinger left NY City and moved to a house in Cornish, NH. Within a year, he'd built a high fence around the yard, hung up a bunch of No Trespassing signs, stopped giving interviews, and has never since published another book or short story. Up until his willful disappearance from the literary world in the mid-1960s, Salinger was one of America's most promising young writers. [...]"

Introducing: Interesting Websites for Your Classroom

[USA Learns](#) is a free website from the U.S. Department of Education that helps people learn to speak and write English. The Web site, launched in December 2008 is not a perfect substitute for an abundance of amply funded, not-overcrowded English as a Second Language classes. But it's a good start. People can now cozy up to a library computer and get hours of valuable training in the practical language of taxes, government, health, parenthood, and other useful subjects. It sounds simple, useful, and long overdue.

[Shmoop](#) provides study materials for selected literature, poetry, and U.S. history topics. Titles and subjects include sections for summaries, study questions, website links, and related material. The website launched in late 2008 and is in beta testing stage; see the "Coming Soon" tab for planned subjects and a place to request topics for coverage on the site. Website "content is written primarily by Ph.D. and Masters students from top universities."

[Thinkfinity](#) offers over 55,000 resources (student materials, lesson plans, interactive tools; reference materials and web pages are accessible and searchable from this website. Content partners include: National Endowment for the Humanities, National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, International Reading Association, Smithsonian National Museum of American History and National Geographic Society.



Please see the entry on *The Catcher in the Rye*:





Climbers cross the Denali National Park and Preserve in Alaska. (©AP Images/America.gov)

Links

- [Alaska - Official State Homepage](#)
- [State of Alaska: Alaska Kids](#)
- About the USA: [Alaska](#)
- National Geographic: [Alaska](#)
- Library of Congress: [Explore the States](#)
- The Internet Library: [Stately Knowledge](#)
- [State Tourist Office](#)
- [Student Information on Alaska](#)

Teacher Resources

- Pro Teachers: [Lessons by State: Alaska](#)
- NYT Learning Network: [This Land is Your Land? This Land is My Land!](#) Mapping the History of Territory Acquisition in the United States. Students will research the many territory acquisitions in United States history and create an annotated map that tells the history of U.S. expansion. (Lesson Plan, (Grades 6-8; 9-12))

Tracking the Transition

One of the best ways to follow news about the new administration is to subscribe to the [feed](#) for [Politico 44: A Living Diary of the Obama Presidency](#). Like most other unofficial news sources, Politico 44 reports on names being floated and on those who turn down offers. Personnel news is mixed with other transition news, but if there is personnel news to report, there is a good chance of finding it here.

POLITICO
[Politico: Multimedia](#)

America.gov

[Photo Gallery: Life After the Presidency](#)

Former presidents have rebuilt homes, helped the sick and served as conflict mediators. Some even moved to other roles in U.S. government, including two who served in Congress and another who became chief justice of the Supreme Court.

Find more Photo Galleries [HERE](#).



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About the USA is a digital collection of background resources on American society, culture, and political processes. In addition to featuring selected websites, it provides access to documents in full text format (E-Texts) on topics ranging from the history of German-American relations, government and politics to travel, holidays and sports.

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