



Newsletter for English Teachers About the USA – Virtual Classroom

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New Administration: The Presidential Agenda

President Obama urged Americans on February 24 "to see the economic crisis as reason to raise [their] ambitions, calling for expensive new efforts to address energy, health care and education even as he warned that government bailouts have not come to an end." ([NYT article](#), Feb. 25, 2009)

In his [address](#) to Congress, President Obama exuded confidence and clearly criticized mistakes made in the past. "Now is the time to act boldly and wisely – to not only revive this economy, but to build a new foundation for lasting prosperity. Now is the time to jumpstart job creation, re-start lending, and invest in areas like energy, health care, and education that will grow our economy, even as we make hard choices to bring our deficit down. That is what my economic agenda is designed to do, and that's what I'd like to talk to you about tonight. [...]"

Links President's [economic agenda](#)
President's [agenda on energy & the environment](#)
Presidents' [agenda on health care](#) (Source: White House)

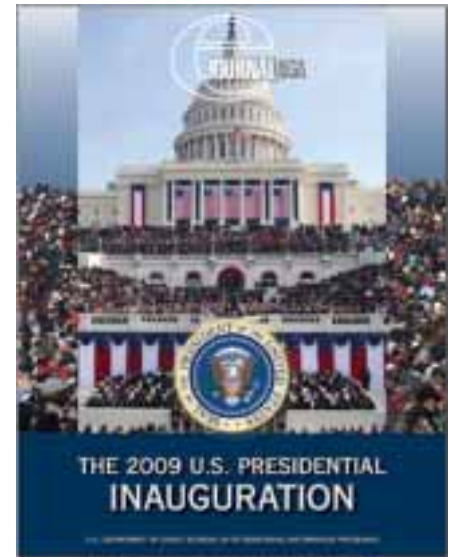
Lesson Plans by the New York Times Learning Network

- [A Plan for Recovery](#): Understanding the Basics of the Current Stimulus Plan. In this lesson, students examine the "who, what, where, when, why and how" of the proposed stimulus plan for the U.S. economy; they then write their own proposal outlining how stimulus funds might benefit their community. (Grades 6-8, 9-12, Feb. 9, 2009)
- [Promises and Priorities](#): Exploring Possibilities for President Obama's First 100 Days. Students complete a "SWOT" (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) analysis as they consider priorities for President Obama's first 100 days in office. Then, students look to history to see what this president might learn from past presidents' early days in office. Finally, students chart the progress of the first 100 days of the Obama presidency by updating events as they occur on a class timeline. (Grades 6-12, [companion lesson](#) Grades 3-5, Jan. 23, 2009)
- [Role Model?](#): Defining Michelle Obama's Role as First Lady - Students consider the public's interest in Michelle Obama, what she represents and how she may use her role as first lady to address and shape important issues. (Grades 6-12, Jan. 22, 2009)

Broad Support for President Obama

"President Obama is benefiting from remarkably high levels of optimism and confidence among Americans about his leadership, providing him with substantial political clout as he confronts the nation's economic challenges [...], according to the latest New York Times/CBS News poll." ([NYT article](#), Feb. 23, 2009)

"In the [latest survey](#) by the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press Americans were asked what one word best describes their impression of President Barack Obama. A similar question was asked in September 2008. The public's impression of Obama has changed substantially since the fall. More Americans are now using words such as intelligent (the most frequently used one-word descriptor), honest, confident and smart, and fewer are using words like inexperienced, young, new and change [...]."



(© AP Image/America.gov)

eJournal USA: [The 2009 U.S. Presidential Inauguration](#) - Includes text of the President's Inaugural Address, short biographies of the president and vice president and reports of the celebration in Washington and around the world.

Politics and Popular Culture

[How the Movies Made a President](#). Manohla Dargis and A. O. Scott, New York Times, Jan. 18, 2009: Evolving cinematic roles have prepared America to have a black man in charge. "Barack Obama's victory in November demonstrated, to the surprise of many Americans and much of the world, that we were ready to see a black man as president. Of course, we had seen several black presidents already, not in the real White House but in the virtual America of movies."

In Focus

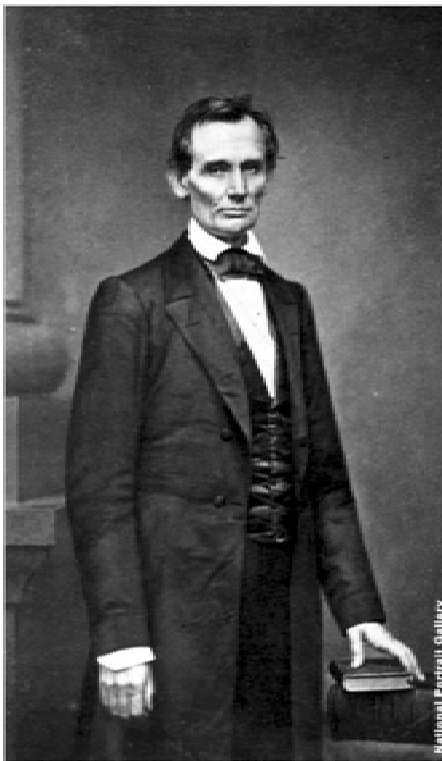
- [Transcript of the Inaugural Address \(German\)](#)
- [White House](#)
- America.gov: [The 2009 U.S. Presidential Inauguration](#)
- America.gov: [The new Cabinet](#)
- America.gov: [A profile of the 111th Congress](#)

Publications

- [Barack Obama: 44th President of the U.S.](#)
- [President Obama in His Own Words](#)
- [U.S. Presidential Transitions](#) (eJournal USA)

Multimedia

- [Witnessing History - Inauguration 2009](#) (Video)
- [A Day of Celebration](#) (Photo Gallery)



Abraham Lincoln © America.gov

Abraham Lincoln (1809-1865) is widely regarded as one of the greatest U.S. presidents and is perhaps the most admired and compelling figure in American history. Studied by generations of schoolchildren, Civil War enthusiasts and historians, Lincoln remains a brilliant enigma, as much of a riddle today as he was to his contemporaries. [America.gov Article](#)

Links

- National Portrait Gallery: [One Life: The Mask of Lincoln](#) - exhibition offers rare photographs and other objects, including two life masks
- National Museum of American History exhibition celebrating the 200th anniversary of Abraham Lincoln's birth - ["Abraham Lincoln: An Extraordinary Life"](#)
- National Museum of American History exhibition in its new Albert H. Small Documents Gallery - ["America's New Birth of Freedom"](#) The Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum in Springfield, Ill., has organized the exhibit, which includes a collection of 10 Lincoln documents, including a copy of the Emancipation Proclamation, which declared the freedom of slaves in the rebellious confederate states.
- [Educational resources from Smithsonian's History Explorer/ Other Smithsonian resources on Lincoln](#)
- [Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Commission](#)

Online Education Conference

[Online Education Conference on Abraham Lincoln](#)

In February 2009, the Smithsonian launched the first in a series of three Online Education Conferences. In each conference, teachers and students across the country interact with Smithsonian experts. All sessions have been archived for viewing. One session featured Harry Rubenstein, curator at the National Museum of American History, discussing his work on the new exhibition and publication, *Abraham Lincoln: An Extraordinary Life*.

Abraham Lincoln (1809-1865)

In commemoration of the bicentennial of Abraham Lincoln's birth in 1809, we decided to devote a page to the 16th President of the United States. We hope the information listed will help you and your students to explore the life and times of one of the United States' extraordinary presidents.

Article

"The Short and Simple Annals of the Poor": Abraham Lincoln's Childhood by John Fladhammer

"On January 20, 2009, Barack Obama took the oath of office as 44th President of the United States with his hand on the Bible that Abraham Lincoln used for his inauguration. Did the President pay tribute to an earlier adopted son of Illinois who rose from oblivion to win the nomination of his party and the election to the presidency? Did the President celebrate the memory of the man who ended slavery? Did Obama use the "bully pulpit" of his presidency to remind Americans that he, like Lincoln, is taking office in a time of crisis?

All of this may be true, but it doesn't entirely explain the 44th president's fascination with Lincoln." [Full Article \(PDF\)](#) John Fladhammer is U.S. citizen and lives in Hamburg, Germany. He is assistant lecturer at the University of Hamburg and teaches English at the Amerikazentrum Hamburg. He is the author of "The Civil War", Diesterweg 1999. [Contact](#)

Publication

America.gov: [Abraham Lincoln: A Legacy of Freedom](#). This new anthology describes Lincoln's life and career and explains in clear and engaging prose his achievements.

"As the United States endured its greatest crisis, this self-educated common man supplied the leadership and the moral force that bound Americans together and carried them to victory. His vision spanned diplomacy and military strategy, political thought and elemental justice for all Americans --- including the African-American slaves he emancipated. The essays gathered here introduce readers to this "best and most widely acclaimed of all Americans."

President Obama: Abraham Lincoln "Made My Own Story Possible"

"President Obama said he feels "a special gratitude to this singular figure who in so many ways made my own story possible and in so many ways made America's story possible." [...] Obama long has admired Lincoln and has read many of the former president's writings. [...] In a 2005 writing, Obama said Lincoln's biography, his "rise from poverty, his ultimate mastery of language and law, his capacity to overcome personal loss and remain determined in the face of repeated defeat ... reminded me of a larger, fundamental element of American life — the enduring belief that we can constantly remake ourselves to fit our larger dreams." [...] [Article](#)

Article

[Lincoln's Memo to Obama](#). R.C. White, *Wilson Quarterly*, Winter 2009, online ed.: "Nearly 150 years after his assassination Lincoln continues to captivate us because he eludes our simple definitions and final judgments. [...] Pundits always want to apply the conservative/ liberal grid to politicians, but these political labels could not define Lincoln, nor can they confine Obama." A distinguished Lincoln biographer imagines what advice the 16th president would offer the 44th as he takes office.

Documentary

Lincolns letzter Tag - Zum 200. Geburtstag von Abraham Lincoln ein Film über sein Leben und seine Ermordung: "Wenige Wochen nach der Amtseinführung von Barack Obama feiert Amerika den 200. Geburtstag von Abraham Lincoln. Kein Mensch verkörpert den „American Dream“ mehr als Abraham Lincoln. Seine Vision von der Einheit der Vereinigten Staaten in Freiheit und ohne Sklaverei machen ihn und seine Ideale bis heute unsterblich. Der Mann und seine Werte sind Vorbild bis heute. Das Doku-Drama in zwei Teilen erzählt die schicksalhafte Begegnung von Abraham Lincoln mit seinem Mörder John Wilkes Booth, einem fanatischen Südstaatler und berühmten Schauspieler, der das Attentat auf den Präsidenten im Ford Theater in Washington wie ein Shakespeare-Drama plante und ausführte." **18. März 2009 ab 21.00 Uhr auf ARTE**

"Education [is]... the most important subject which we as a people can be engaged in."

Abraham Lincoln, March 9, 1832, First Political Announcement

Literature: Toni Morrison

When the [New York Times](#) asked Barack Obama to provide a list of books and writers that were significant to him, he included Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon* and writings by Abraham Lincoln. Being great fans of Ms. Morrison's literary work ourselves and in light of African-American History Month we would like to introduce the author's latest novel to you.

For the last 40 years, Toni Morrison has chronicled the lives of African-Americans in her fiction. For her new novel, "A Mercy," the author follows the lives of four women on a farm in upstate New York in the late 17th century after the male head of the household falls ill and dies of malaria.

In the novel, Toni Morrison examines the intersections of race and geography, memory and storytelling. The great question at the center of the novel is: what is identity?

Random House Introduction to [A Mercy](#)

"In the 1680s the slave trade was still in its infancy. In the Americas, virulent religious and class divisions, prejudice and oppression were rife, providing the fertile soil in which slavery and race hatred were planted and took root.

Jacob is an Anglo-Dutch trader and adventurer, with a small holding in the harsh north. Despite his distaste for dealing in "flesh," he takes a small slave girl in part payment for a bad debt from a plantation owner in Catholic Maryland. This is Florens, "with the hands of a slave and the feet of a Portuguese lady." Florens looks for love, first from Lina, an older servant woman at her new master's house, but later from a handsome blacksmith, an African, never enslaved. There are other voices: Lina, whose tribe was decimated by smallpox; their mistress, Rebekka, herself a victim of religious intolerance back in England; Sorrow, a strange girl who's spent her early years at sea; and finally the devastating voice of Florens' mother. These are all men and women inventing themselves in the wilderness.

A Mercy reveals what lies beneath the surface of slavery. But at its heart it is the ambivalent, disturbing story of a mother who casts off her daughter in order to save her, and of a daughter who may never exorcise that abandonment. Acts of mercy may have unforeseen consequences."

Read the [First Chapter of 'A Mercy'](#) (Source: New York Times)

Reviews of A Mercy

- [Dreamy Wilderness](#). The New Yorker, John Updike, Nov. 3, 2008: Book review of Toni Morrison's *A Mercy*. "Toni Morrison has a habit of plunging into the narrative before the reader has a clue to what's going on."
- [Original Sins](#). NYTimes Book Review, David Gates, Nov. 28, 2008: "A Mercy, reveals her, once more, as a conscious inheritor of America's pastoral tradition, even as she implicitly criticizes it."

Interview with the Author

- [Toni Morrison discusses](#) the historical significance of the presidential election and explains her new novel, *A Mercy*. PBS, Nov. 19, 2008.

Article

Toni Morrison's "award-winning novels chronicle small-town African-American life, employing "an artistic vision that encompasses both a private and a national heritage," to quote Time magazine contributor Angela Wigan. She has proved herself to be a gifted teller of stories in which troubled characters seek to find themselves and their cultural heritage in a society that warps or impedes such essential growth.

Morrison's artistry has attracted critical acclaim as well as commercial success; Dictionary of Literary Biography contributor Susan L. Blake called the author "an anomaly in two respects" because "she is a black writer who has achieved national prominence and popularity, and she is a popular writer who is taken seriously." Indeed, Morrison has won several of literature's most prestigious citations, including the 1977 National Book Critics Circle Award for *Song of Solomon*, the 1988 Pulitzer Prize for *Beloved*, and the 1993 Nobel Prize for Literature, the first African American to be named a laureate. [...]" [Source](#): "Toni Morrison." Reproduced in *Biography Resource Center*. Gale, 2009.

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

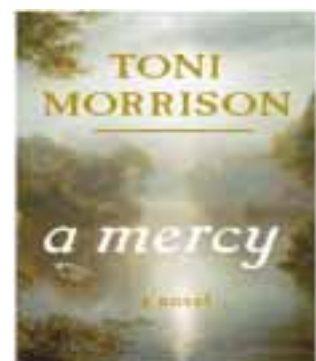


Toni Morrison (©) [Library of Congress](#)

"Don't be afraid. My telling can't hurt you in spite of what I have done and I promise to lie quietly in the dark — weeping perhaps or occasionally seeing the blood once more — but I will never again unfold my limbs to rise up and bare teeth. I explain. You can think what I tell you a confession, if you like, but one full of curiosities familiar only in dreams and during those moments when a dog's profile plays in the steam of a kettle. Or when a corn-husk doll sitting on a shelf is soon splaying in the corner of a room and the wicked of how it got there is plain. Stranger things happen all the time everywhere. You know. I know you know." (*A Mercy*, page 1)

Links

- New York Times: [Toni Morrison](#)
- eNotes: [Toni Morrison Study Guides](#)
- SparkNotes: [Beloved](#) | [The Bluest Eye](#) | [Jazz](#) | [Song of Solomon](#) | [Sula](#)
- Books and Writers: [Toni Morrison](#)
- [Toni Morrison – The Nobel Prize in Literature 1993](#)
- [The Toni Morrison Society](#), official author society of the American Literature Association



Send us a short paragraph on your favorite Toni Morrison novel and receive a copy of **A Mercy**. We will choose from all entries and send books to 3 lucky winners.

classroom@usembassy.de



Landmark Exhibit on Race Asks “Are We So Different?” - Interactive Web site helps foster important conversations on race

Is race real or a recent human invention? Is race about biology or culture? Who is “white”? These and similar questions are addressed by [RACE: Are We So Different?](#), a much-praised traveling exhibit and related Web site that look at the history of the idea of race, the science of human variation, and the experience of living with race and racism. *RACE: Are We So Different?* was developed with \$4 million in funding from the Ford Foundation, the National Science Foundation & the American Anthropological Association (AAA) with the aim of changing the way Americans think about race.



[First 100 Days](#) will follow President Obama's initiatives and policy directions. We'll look at new presidential orders, policies on the economy, alternative energy and foreign affairs, and his use of new media. We'll review the new president's progress and governing style, take a look at the challenges of governing the U.S., and keep you informed about the fun moments as well.

Share your thoughts on the president's job.

In Focus: National African-American History Month 2009

National African-American History Month celebrates the contributions that African-Americans have made to American history in their struggles for freedom and equality and aims to deepen the understanding of the history of the United States.

A Proclamation by the President of the United States of America: “The history of African Americans is unique and rich, and one that has helped to define what it means to be an American. Arriving on ships on the shores of North America more than 300 years ago, recognized more as possessions than people, African Americans have come to know the freedoms fought for in establishing the United States and gained through the use of our founding principles of freedom of speech, freedom of the press, the right to assembly, and due process of law. [...]”

Facts for Features – African-American History Month 2009

40.7 million: The estimated population of black residents in the U.S., including those of more than one race. They made up 13.5 percent of the total U.S. population. (Census Bureau: [Population estimates](#), July 2007)

Links

- America.gov: [Diversity](#)
- About the USA: [U.S. Society - African Americans](#)
- USA.gov: [African American History and Culture](#)
- BpB/Institute for Cultural Diplomacy: [Black History Month Germany](#)
- Washington Post: [Being A Black Man](#) – The series explores what it means to be a black man in today's society.

Newsletter

For additional information on African-American history and culture, please see [this newsletter](#) compiled by the Information Resource Center of the U.S. Embassy in Budapest.

Lesson Plan

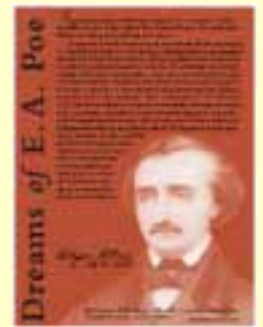
[Family Matters](#) - Exploring What Diversity Within America's First Family Means for America. Students will write a family history modeled after a history of the Obama family and then explore how their history reflects larger American themes. (NYT Learning Network, Jan. 26)

America.gov

Dreams of Edgar Allan Poe

A special online publication in [HTML](#) and [PDF](#) versions marking the poet's 200th birthday.

Dreams of Edgar Allan Poe honors a giant of American literature. An essay by acclaimed novelist and critic Diane Johnson explores Poe's life and career. Excerpts from audio dramatizations bring 6 classic Poe stories to life. This special web publication is suitable



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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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