

Lesson Plan: State of the Union 2018

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Featured resource

KQED's The Lowdown: [Six Big Themes that Trump Will Likely Cover in His First State of the Union Address](#)



President George W. Bush's 2003 State of the Union address. Susan Sterner/Wikimedia

Opening quick write prompt:

Think of an issue that's important to you. Do you think President Trump will mention this issue in his State of the Union address on Jan. 30? Why or why not? If so, what do you think Trump will say about your issue? If not, why don't you think he will mention this issue in his speech?

A quick write allows students to write down their thoughts before discussing the opening question in order to increase participation and make the discussion more accessible to English Language Learners.

Objective

- Students will analyze six issues that are likely to come up in President Trump's first State of the Union address, along with controversies surrounding this year's speech.
- Students will write arguments in response to one of the issues or another relevant issue and support the argument with evidence.

Essential Question and Lesson Context

What is the significance of the State of the Union address? What issues is President Trump likely to talk about in his first State of the Union speech? What topics do you think he should address?

President Trump is scheduled to give his first State of the Union address on Jan. 30, 2018. The Constitution requires that presidents give periodic reports to Congress. For much of our nation's history, this came in the form of a written report. In 1913, Woodrow Wilson revived the practice of a speech before Congress, and every president since has followed suit. The speech typically highlights a president's accomplishments and looks ahead to the future. This year, Trump is expected to take credit for the record-high stock market, the low unemployment rate and recent tax reform legislation passed by Congress in December. This lesson provides an overview of six likely topics of this year's State of the Union and invites students to consider their own opinions of these issues.

Key vocabulary

Pre-teach key vocabulary before students do the reading, especially if you have English Language Learners. After going over the simple definition, consider providing a visual aid or having students draw one. More ideas for how to pre-teach vocabulary can be found [here](#).

Word	Simple definition
boycott (v.)	To refuse to buy, use or participate in something as a protest <i>A few Congressmen and women are planning to boycott President Trump's State of the Union address to protest his policies on immigration and other issues.</i>
domestic policy (n.)	Laws and policies related to the United States (or a person's own country) <i>The State of the Union address often focuses on domestic policy because many presidents like to highlight their success at home.</i>
foreign policy (n.)	Laws and policies related to foreign countries <i>President Trump will likely talk about curbing the nuclear threat from North Korea as well as other concerns about foreign policy.</i>
overhaul (v.)	To change something completely, usually in order to improve it <i>The new tax reform plan overhauls the current corporate tax rate and gives corporations a big tax cut.</i>
tension (n.)	A state of unfriendliness or anger between two groups <i>Tensions between the United States and North Korea increased when North Korea tested a ballistic missile that experts believe can reach the United States.</i>

Investigate

- Discuss the quick-write prompt to see which issues students are thinking about and how they think those issues will be addressed during the State of the Union speech. (**Note:** If needed, reinforce classroom norms around respectful discussion. [Here](#) are ideas for creating a safe space to discuss difficult subjects.)
- Based on the discussion, put the issues students mentioned into categories (Example: DACA would in the immigration category. North Korea would go under foreign policy, etc.)
- **Explain:** The State of the Union is one of the most-watched political events of the year. The president gives a speech that usually highlights accomplishments and talks about the future. After the speech, someone from the opposing party (in this case a Democrat) gives a response to the speech. This will be Trump's first State of the Union address. In addition to being a big political event, it's also a good time to review important issues. While it's hard to predict what Trump will do or say, he is expected to mention several key issues during speech.
- As a class, read the first part of [The Lowdown post](#). Discuss the controversies surrounding this year's speech. If needed, provide further background on the speech itself for students who may not have seen a state of the union address before. [This video from the Washington Post](#) provides a quick background on the protocol, seating chart and other general information.

- Individually or in small groups, students explore the interactive graphic, which takes a look at six issues Trump is expected talk about on Jan. 30. Students can read about all six issues on the interactive OR choose 2-3 issues they are most interested in and read only those sections.
- **Check for understanding after reading the Lowdown:** What did you learn about this year’s State of the Union? Are you interested in watch the speech live? Why or why not? What did you discover about an issue that was surprising or unexpected?
- **Transition to the Make and Share:** Tell students they will have a chance to share their thoughts in the comments section of The Lowdown or in a video response on [Flipgrid](#), a free video discussion platform. To comment on The Lowdown, students must sign in to [Disqus](#).
 - To sign in to [Disqus](#), click the “Comments” button at the bottom of the post.
 - Click the blue “Get Started” button in the gray “Welcome to Disqus” box.
 - Students will need to enter a username. We recommend first name, last initial.
 - After signing in for the first time, students must verify their email address before commenting. A verification email will appear in their inbox once they sign in to Disqus.

Make and share

- Individually or in small groups, students post in the comments section or on our [State of the Union Flipgrid](#).
 - Responses should be supported by evidence from [The Lowdown post](#).
 - Encourage students to reply to other comments after posting their response. Remind them to use evidence to support their claims and respectful language when responding.
- Students can create their own response or use the following questions as a starting point:
 - **Choose an issue. If you were giving the State of the Union speech, what would you say about this issue?** Be sure to support your idea with evidence to convince your audience using what you learned in the Lowdown or other sources.

Assessment/reflection

- Students reflect on what they have learned either through a class discussion or in writing:
 - What have you learned about the upcoming State of the Union speech and key issues that may be mentioned?
 - What was it like to post your responses publically and reply to other posts? What did you learn from other students? What do you hope they learned from you? What will you do the next time you post a comment in response to The Lowdown?

[Circle chats](#), small-group discussions and [think-pair-share](#) provide a safer space for students to practice speaking and listening, and also boost participation during whole-class discussions.

Extension/homework

Watch the speech live! Assign students to watch the State of the Union address on Jan. 30 (9 pm ET/6 pm PT). They should listen to what the president says about their chosen topic and come to class prepared to share what they learned. They can also play [SOTU Bingo](#) as they watch!

SOTU break-a-thon: Students throughout the country will be participating in State of the Union break-a-thons during and after the speech. These events are part of the [22x20 campaign](#) led by The Lamp. The name refers to the 22 million teens eligible to vote in the next presidential election. Your students can join the break-a-thons online by posting on social media using the hashtags **#SOTU18** and **#22x20**.

Your own state of the union: How would you students define the “state of the union?” What ideas do they have for steering the nation? Students write their own “state of the union” speech and share on our [State of the Union Flipgrid](#).

Write/speak locally: Students share their own state of the union speeches or turn their opinion about any of the issues into a letter, short speech or presentation, then research ways to make their voice heard in their community. (Example: Speaking during the public comment section of a city council meeting, posting on an online forum, etc.) For a list of how to contact local officials in your area, check out [KQED Learning’s Local Election Toolkit](#).

Common Core standards

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.1	Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.7	Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W1	Write arguments to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence.