

WOODROW WILSON

P R E S I D E N T

Activity: Wilson and the Executive Branch

Topic

Leadership and Influence in the Executive Branch of Government.

Goal

To examine and discuss the history of the executive branch, Wilson's role in changing how presidents influence legislation and world politics, and the role of individuals in shaping history.

Objectives

1. Students will use the timeline provided to examine the significant moments during Wilson's eight years in office and make comparisons to other presidential terms.
2. Students will identify and discuss ways that Wilson played a role in influencing legislative change and establishing the modern presidency.
3. Students will identify characteristics of leadership and discuss evidence of Wilson's ability to motivate for change.

Background Information

The role of Chief Executive Officer for the United States Government has changed in the 225-year history of the United States. Previous to Wilson, Presidents usually exercised a limited amount of involvement in legislation and policy guidance. Believing in a more hands-on approach, Wilson helped to translate the role of President into an active participant in legislative reform, negotiating for positive change and social progress. Unlike most Presidents who preceded him, Wilson came to the office with a reform plan, "The New Freedom." He re-established the tradition of personally addressing Congress and actively pursued support for his ideas and goals. Wilson's leadership helped to establish what we now call the Modern Presidency, where the Chief Executive has an active role in the drafting, debating and passing of congressional legislation and the creation of foreign policy. The Woodrow Wilson Timeline, contained in this Study Guide, offers detailed information regarding legislative activities during the Wilson Presidency, 1913-1921, and will help in researching and discussing issues of the changing role of the Executive Branch.

Teaching Suggestions

Some topic ideas for how to use the Woodrow Wilson timeline in your classroom include:

- Compare Wilson's achievements to other presidents. Determine the differences and what the political climate/personality was that caused those differences.
- Examine the changes in the role of the executive branch of government from Washington's time to the present.
- Discuss the significance of Wilson's role in the establishment of the modern presidency.
- Identify the characteristics of a good leader and the ability to motivate for change.

Some possible discussion questions include:

1. How did Wilson's presidency differ from presidents before him and how does it compare to more recent presidents?
2. Why did Wilson find it important to reinstate the tradition of personally addressing Congress on important national issues?
3. What is the definition of a modern presidency and how has the role of the executive branch of the federal government changed?
4. History is filled with individuals who have exhibited the qualities of leadership. Can you name these qualities as Wilson and other historical figures exhibited them?
5. Wilson was able to achieve many accomplishments during his presidency. What were the major reasons this might have been possible?