

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

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Before the Speech:

- Quick Write or Think/Pair/Share (*Students spend a few minutes Thinking and writing about the question; Paired with another student to discuss, then Sharing their ideas with the class as a whole*). What do we associate with the words responsibility, persistence, and goals? How would we define each term? A teacher might create a web of student ideas for each of the words.
- Quick Write or Brainstorm: What are your strengths? At what are you successful as a person/student? What makes you successful at these efforts? List at least three things you are successful at and why you feel successful with these tasks.
- Short readings. Notable quotes excerpted (and posted in large print on board) from President Obama's speeches about education. Teacher might ask students to think alone, compare ideas with a partner, and share their collaborations with the class (Think/Pair/Share) about the following: What are our interpretations of these excerpts? Based on these excerpts, what can we infer the President believes is important to be successful educationally?
- Brainstorm or Concept Web: Why does President Obama want to speak with us today? How will he inspire us? How will he challenge us? What might he say?
- Brainstorm or Concept Web: What other historic moments do you remember when the President spoke to the nation? What was the impact? Students could create a Cause/Effect graphic organizer.

During the Speech:

- Listening with a purpose: personal responsibility, goals, persistence. Teachers might ask pairs of students to create a word bank from the web of any one of the terms (personal responsibility, goals, or persistence) at the top of a double-column style notes page. On the right-hand side, students could take notes while President Obama talks about personal responsibility, or goals, or persistence, trying to capture direct quotations. At the end of the speech, students could then 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.
- Listening with a purpose: Inspiration and Challenges. Using a similar double-column style notes page as the one above, the teacher could focus students on quotations that either propose a specific challenge to them or inspire them in some meaningful way. Students could do this individually, in pairs or groups.

Transition/Quick Review: Teachers could ask students to look over the notes and collaborate in pairs or small groups. What more could we add to our notes? Teachers might circulate and ask students questions such as: What are the most important words in the speech? What title would you give it? What's the thesis?

After the Speech:

Guided Discussion:

- What resonated with you from President Obama’s speech? What lines/phrases do you remember?
- Who 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 personal responsibility? How? Give examples.
- How are we as individuals and as a class similar? Different?
- Suppose President Obama were to give another speech about being educationally successful. Who could he speak to next? Who should be his next audience? Why? What would he say?
- What are the three most important words in the speech? Rank them. What title would you give this speech? What’s the thesis?
- What is President Obama inspiring you to do? What is he challenging you to do?
- 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 Department of Education’s “I Am What I Learn” video contest. On September 8th the Department will invite K-12 students to submit a video no longer than 2 min, explaining why education is important and how their education will help them achieve their dreams. Teachers are welcome to incorporate the same or a similar video project into an assignment. More details will be released via www.ed.gov.

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

“When you set a goal, you envision a target 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 I’m 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, to improve by a letter grade in all subjects for each report card. My second step: to complete 100% of my homework for all my classes the first week of school. My third step: to study an extra hour for all my tests each marking period. My fourth step: to attend tutoring or get an adult to help me whenever I don’t understand something. My last step might be the most important: to ask an adult in my life to check on me often, to make sure I’m reaching 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 add up!

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

Now I want you to write your own personal academic goal for this year and steps 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 can extend learning by having students

- Create decorated goals and steps on index card sized material. 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 room to create classroom culture of goal setting, persistence and success, and for the purpose of periodic review. (See “Example Handouts”).
- Create posters of their goals. Posters could be formatted in quadrants or puzzle pieces or trails marked as steps. These could also 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 their goals and steps in a variety of genres, i.e. poems, songs, personal essays.
- Create artistic representations of their goals and steps.

Example Handouts

