K-2 EDITION · CLASSROOM

1892

Grover Cleveland vs Benjamin Harrison

A 20-minute lesson on the 1892 U.S. presidential election. Includes lesson plan, student worksheet, answer key, and discussion prompts.

ERA Gilded Age	ELECTORAL VOTES 444 total
WINNER Grover Cleveland (Democratic) · 277 EV	RUNNER-UP Benjamin Harrison (Republican) · 145 EV
KEY ISSUE Gold standard vs. free silver; agrarian distress; labor unrest	TURNOUT 75.8%

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1892

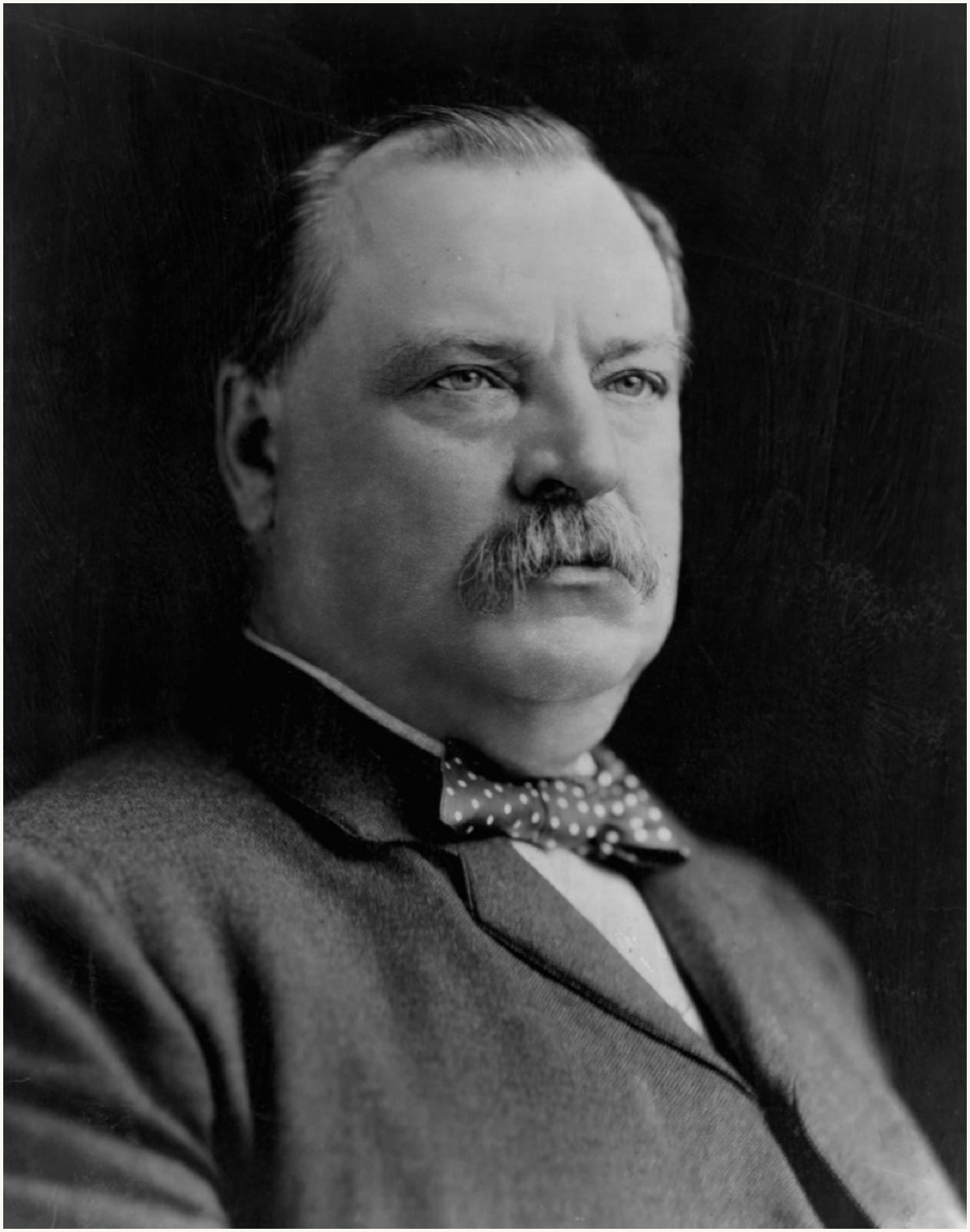
After Benjamin Harrison won the White House in 1888, things did not go well for Republicans. Congress passed the McKinley Tariff in 1890 - raising taxes on goods coming from other countries. Prices went up. Voters were angry. In the 1890 midterm elections, Republicans lost 86 seats in the House of Representatives - one of the worst losses in U.S. history.

Now it was time for the 1892 presidential election. The Democrats picked Grover Cleveland again. Cleveland had been the 22nd president from 1885 to 1889. He had lost to Harrison in 1888 even though he got more popular votes. Now Cleveland wanted his old job back.

The Republicans renominated President Harrison. But the Republicans were divided. Many Republicans wanted James G. Blaine - the famous "plumed knight" - to be the nominee instead. Blaine had been Secretary of State under Harrison, but he resigned in June 1892 just before the convention. The convention still picked Harrison.

Look at the picture. That is Grover Cleveland - the man who would soon be both the 22nd AND the 24th president.

A new political party also got involved in 1892. It was called



Grover Cleveland, the 22nd AND 24th U.S. president. He is the only president to serve two non-consecutive terms - elected 1884, defeated 1888, elected again 1892.

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Let's talk about the story

1.

Who became the 24th U.S. president after the 1892 election?

2.

What was the People's Party (Populists) and what did they want?

3.

Why is Cleveland's 1892 victory historically unique?

Warm-up (5 min)

In 1892 a man who had been president before came back and won AGAIN! Grover Cleveland is the only president in U.S. history who served two terms that were not in a row.

Answer key

1.

Grover Cleveland. He won 277 electoral votes to Harrison's 145 and Weaver's 22. Cleveland won the popular vote by 380,810 votes - the first decisive Democratic margin since 1856.

Cleveland is the only president to serve two non-consecutive terms (until Trump won in 2024).

2.

The People's Party (Populists) was a new political party founded in 1892 to help farmers and workers. They wanted: (1) free silver - coin silver alongside gold to expand the money supply and raise prices on farm products; (2) federal regulation of railroads to stop monopoly pricing; (3) an income tax to shift taxation from tariffs (which fell on consumers) to wealth; (4) direct election of U.S. senators (instead of by state legislatures); (5) an 8-hour workday; (6) the secret ballot. Their 1892 candidate James B. Weaver of Iowa won 22 electoral votes - 6 states (Kansas, Colorado, Idaho, Nevada, North Dakota, Oregon). This was the first time since the Civil War that a third party won any electoral votes. The Populists would later merge with the Democratic Party in 1896 around William Jennings Bryan.

AP students should know the Populist platform.

3.

Cleveland's 1892 victory is historically unique because he is the only U.S. president to serve two non-consecutive terms - 22nd president (1885-89) and 24th president (1893-97). Most presidents who lose re-election never come back. The reasons: (1) Losing re-election typically signals the candidate's coalition has collapsed. (2) Party leaders typically want a fresh candidate. (3) The losing president usually retires from politics. Cleveland's comeback was possible because: (1) The Republican coalition collapsed after the unpopular McKinley Tariff of 1890 - Democrats gained 86 House seats. (2) Cleveland's personal reputation for honesty had survived his first term. (3) Democrats believed he could win the swing states again. (4) The Populist Party split Republican support in the West, helping Democrats. Donald Trump joined Cleveland in 2025 by winning 2024 after losing 2020 - the second time this has happened in U.S. history.

Cleveland is the structural template for "comeback president."