1900

William McKinley vs William Jennings Bryan

A 75-minute lesson on the 1900 U.S. presidential election. Includes lesson plan, background reading with primary source, student worksheet, answer key, and discussion prompts.

ERA Progressive Era	ELECTORAL VOTES 447 total
WINNER William McKinley (Republican) · 292 EV	RUNNER-UP William Jennings Bryan (Democratic) · 155 EV
KEY ISSUE Imperialism and the Philippine-American War; prosperity and the gold standard	TURNOUT 73.7%

CONTENTS

1. Cover + overview
2. Lesson plan (instructor, 75 min)
3. Background: key terms + primary source
4. Student worksheet (7 questions)
5. Answer key + discussion prompts

1900: William McKinley vs William Jennings Bryan

Standards alignment

NCSS · D2.His.4.9-12 (chronological reasoning) · D2.His.14.9-12 (causation in U.S. history). CCSS · CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.2 (key ideas/details in primary sources).

Materials

One copy of the student worksheet per student. Optional: the 1900 map at theamericanvote.com/elections/-1900 projected, or printed as a handout.

Timing

5 min	**Warm-up**	Identify two structural conditions in 1900 America that would make foreign policy a major presidential election issue for the first time. For each, identify the specific 1898-1900 development most responsible.
15 min	**Reading + vocab**	The 1900 election was the 29th U.S. presidential election. It produced William McKinley's 292-155 electoral-vote victory over William Jennings Bryan - a rematch of the 1896 election. The 1900 result confirmed and expanded the 1896 realignment: McKinley's 292-155 EV margin (137 EV) was larger than his 1896 margin (271-176, 95 EV). The election's structural significance was the confirmation of the Republican-dominant alignment and the elevation of Theodore Roosevelt to the vice presidency - leading to his assumption of the presidency after McKinley's September 1901 assassination. The political conditions had been transformed by the 1898 Spanish-American War and the subsequent Philippine-American War. The war had begun on April 25, 1898 after the February 15, 1898 explosion of the USS Maine in Havana harbor (killed 266 sailors; cause never definitively established but blamed on Spain by U.S. press). McKinley had requested a war declaration after Spain refused U.S. demands for Cuban independence. The war was short and decisively American: Dewey's May 1, 1898 destruction of the Spanish Pacific fleet at Manila Bay; the U.S. Army landing in Cuba in June 1898; Spanish surrender in July. The December 10, 1898 Treaty of Paris gave the U.S. the Philippines, Puerto Rico, and Guam; Cuba became formally independent but under heavy U.S. influence (the 1901 Platt Amendment gave the U.S. continued intervention rights). The Philippines acquisition was deeply controversial. The Philippine-American War began in February 1899 when Filipino independence fighters (led by Emilio Aguinaldo) refused to accept U.S. colonization. The war would last until 1902 (and beyond in the Moro province until 1913) and would kill approximately 4,200 American soldiers and at least 200,000 Filipino civilians (some estimates as high as 1 million Filipino

deaths including from disease and famine). The brutality of U.S. counterinsurgency tactics produced an Anti-Imperialist League that included Mark Twain, Andrew Carnegie, Samuel Gompers, Jane Addams, William James, and former Republican president Benjamin Harrison.

The Republican National Convention met in Philadelphia on June 19-21, 1900 and renominated McKinley on the first ballot. McKinley's first vice president, Garret Hobart, had died November 21, 1899. Theodore Roosevelt - the 41-year-old governor of New York and famous Rough Rider Colonel - was the convention's choice for vice president. Roosevelt had been pushed by New York Republican boss Thomas Platt, who wanted Roosevelt out of New York governance. Mark Hanna's famous warning: "Don't any of you realize that there's only one life between this madman and the White House?"

The Democratic National Convention met in Kansas City on July 4-6, 1900 and renominated Bryan by acclamation. Adlai E. Stevenson I of Illinois was the vice presidential candidate. The Democratic platform endorsed free silver (still), tariff reduction, an income tax, and anti-imperialism.

The campaign's primary issues were: (1) The Republican prosperity argument - "Four years more of the full dinner pail." (2) Imperialism vs anti-imperialism. Bryan made the Philippines' fate the central moral question. He argued that U.S. colonization violated the Declaration of Independence's principle of government by consent of the governed.

The 1900 campaign was less innovative than 1896. McKinley delegated active campaigning to Theodore Roosevelt, who toured 21,209 miles by train and gave 673 speeches in 24 states - exceeding even Bryan's 1896 mileage. Republican fundraising in 1900 was approximately $2.5 million; Bryan's campaign raised approximately $350,000.

McKinley won 292 electoral votes to Bryan's 155. McKinley carried 28 states; Bryan carried 17 states. The popular vote: McKinley 7,228,864 (51.6%); Bryan 6,370,932 (45.5%); Woolley 209,004 (Prohibition, 1.5%); Debs 87,945 (Social Democratic, 0.6% - first Eugene V. Debs candidacy); Barker 50,989 (Populist, 0.4%). McKinley-Bryan popular-vote margin: 861,495 - larger than 1896. McKinley's 137-EV margin was larger than his 1896 95-EV margin.

The geographic pattern showed Republican consolidation. Compared to 1896, McKinley gained Kansas, Nebraska, South Dakota, Wyoming, Utah, and Washington from Bryan's 1896 coalition. The 1896 Western/Mountain Bryan coalition had partially collapsed. Bryan retained the Solid South + 3 Border States + 4 Mountain states (Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada). The 1900 map demonstrated that the 1896 realignment had hardened into a stable Republican-dominant alignment.

McKinley was inaugurated to a second term on March 4, 1901. He delivered his second inaugural address emphasizing prosperity, expansion, and constitutional governance. Six months later, on September 6, 1901, McKinley was shot at the Pan-American Exposition in Buffalo, New York by anarchist Leon Czolgosz. McKinley died on September 14, 1901. Czolgosz was tried, convicted, and executed October 29, 1901.

Theodore Roosevelt was hiking on Mount Marcy in the Adirondack Mountains when news of McKinley's death reached him. He rushed to Buffalo and took the oath of office on September 14, 1901 at the home of Ansley Wilcox. Roosevelt was 42 years old - the youngest U.S. president in history. Mark Hanna's reported reaction: "Now look! That damned cowboy is President of the United States!"

Roosevelt's presidency (1901-09) transformed American politics. The Square Deal agenda: trust-busting (Northern Securities 1902, Standard Oil 1906 leading to 1911 breakup); federal regulation (Hepburn Act 1906, Pure Food and Drug Act 1906, Meat Inspection Act 1906); conservation (150 million acres of national forests, U.S. Forest Service 1905, 5 new national parks); foreign policy (Panama Canal 1903, Roosevelt Corollary 1904, Russo-Japanese War mediation 1905). Roosevelt won the 1904 election (336-140 EV over Alton B. Parker) and declined to run again in 1908. The 1900 election's retrospective significance was the production of Roosevelt's succession that inaugurated the Progressive Era.

The 1900-1908 Roosevelt presidency was structurally important for the 20th-century U.S. federal government. Roosevelt established: (1) The federal government's active role in regulating corporate behavior. (2) The federal government's active role in conservation and natural resources. (3) The federal government's active role in foreign policy - the Roosevelt Corollary (December 1904) declared U.S. responsibility for maintaining order in the Western Hemisphere. (4) The presidency as the dominant political-policy actor (rather than Congress). The transformation would be deepened by William Howard Taft (1909-13) and especially Woodrow Wilson (1913-21). Then review the Key Terms on the background page so students share vocabulary before the primary-source work.

15 min	**Primary source**	Read the excerpt aloud once. Students annotate individually (3 min), then pair-share on worksheet questions 6 and 7 (5 min).
15 min	**Discussion**	Small groups (3–4). Pick one of the three prompts at the back of this packet (or assign one). Each group reports back two sentences.
20 min	**Assessment**	Student worksheet. Seven questions, mixed format (5 about the reading, 2 about the primary source). Answer key in the instructor section at the back.
5 min	**Closure**	One-sentence exit ticket — see Closure section below.

Closure

One-sentence exit ticket: "What is one thing the 1900 election tells you about the Progressive Era that the textbook didn't?"

Background

Before the worksheet, review the key terms below and then read the primary source carefully. The two source-analysis questions on the worksheet (questions 6 and 7) ask you to quote from the excerpt.

Key terms

Theodore Roosevelt

McKinley's 1900 running mate and the 26th U.S. president (1901-09). Rough Rider colonel in Cuba 1898, NY governor 1899-1900. Became president at age 42 after McKinley's assassination - youngest U.S. president in history.

Spanish-American War

The April-August 1898 war between the U.S. and Spain. Treaty of Paris (December 1898) gave U.S. the Philippines, Puerto Rico, and Guam.

Anti-Imperialist League

The 1898-1920 American organization opposing U.S. colonization. Members included Mark Twain, Andrew Carnegie, Samuel Gompers, Jane Addams, William James, former Republican president Benjamin Harrison.

Square Deal

Theodore Roosevelt's 1901-09 progressive policy agenda. Trust-busting, federal regulation, conservation, foreign policy expansion.

Full dinner pail

McKinley's 1900 campaign slogan: "Four years more of the full dinner pail."

Philippine-American War

The February 1899-1902 war between U.S. forces and Filipino independence fighters led by Emilio Aguinaldo. Killed ~4,200 American soldiers and at least 200,000 Filipino civilians.

Leon Czolgosz

The anarchist who assassinated President McKinley on September 6, 1901 at the Pan-American Exposition in Buffalo, New York. McKinley died September 14, 1901.

Second Inaugural Address

WILLIAM MCKINLEY, MARCH 4, 1901

McKinley took the oath at the East Portico of the U.S. Capitol on March 4, 1901 - his second term following the 1900 rematch victory over Bryan. The address defended the Spanish-American War acquisitions and the federal government's constitutional authority to administer overseas territories. Six months later, McKinley would be assassinated; this address was his final political testament.

> *"No one can think that even now our work in respect to these new territories is finished. Some people lecturing on the lessons of the Spanish War, have entirely missed its meaning. There is the very real lesson of national obligation, and of the necessities of national strength. We are not advised which way our duty leads. The path of duty is plain. We must adopt for them our highest standards of government. We must instruct, develop, protect. We must continue our progress in extension of the principles of free government, of self-government, of representative government, of constitutional government, until they shall stand on a higher and broader plane than ever before. Our country shall be even greater than our fathers dreamed of."*

McKinley, "Second Inaugural Address" (Washington, DC, March 4, 1901). Public domain.

The 1900 Election

Read the background page (key terms and primary source), then answer the seven questions below. Questions 6 and 7 ask you to quote from the primary source.

QUESTION 1 · MULTIPLE-CHOICE

How many electoral votes did William McKinley win in 1900?

( ) A. 271
( ) B. 276
( ) C. 292
( ) D. 305

QUESTION 2 · MULTIPLE-CHOICE

How old was Theodore Roosevelt when he became president?

( ) A. 38
( ) B. 42
( ) C. 47
( ) D. 53

QUESTION 3 · SHORT-ANSWER

Why did Mark Hanna call Roosevelt "this madman" and warn against his vice presidential nomination?

QUESTION 4 · SHORT-ANSWER

How did the Philippine-American War affect the 1900 U.S. election?

QUESTION 5 · SHORT-ANSWER

McKinley says in his 1901 inaugural that "we must instruct, develop, protect" the Spanish-acquired territories. What political philosophy does this articulate?

SOURCE ANALYSIS — QUESTIONS 6 AND 7 REFERENCE THE PRIMARY SOURCE ON THE BACKGROUND PAGE.

QUESTION 6 · SHORT-ANSWER

Explain how Roosevelt's succession transformed the Republican Party's economic-policy framework.

QUESTION 7 · MAP-READ

On the 1900 election map, identify McKinley's 28 states and Bryan's 17 states. How did the 1900 map compare to 1896?

Answer key

QUESTION 1

292. McKinley 292; Bryan 155.

McKinley's 137-EV margin was larger than his 1896 margin.

QUESTION 2

42. Roosevelt was 42 years old at his September 14, 1901 oath - the youngest U.S. president in history.

AP students should know Roosevelt's age.

QUESTION 3

Mark Hanna called Roosevelt "this madman" because of three specific concerns: (1) Roosevelt's reform record threatened the established Republican economic-policy framework Hanna had built around financial-industrial capital. Roosevelt had pursued anti-trust and anti-corruption measures as New York governor; he had attacked Republican machine politics. (2) Roosevelt's personality was unpredictable - 41 years old, energetic, willing to challenge entrenched interests. (3) The vice presidency was historically associated with succession - 7 of the prior 24 U.S. presidents had succeeded from the vice presidency. Hanna correctly assessed that Roosevelt as VP would mean Roosevelt as potential President. Hanna's warning at the convention: "Don't any of you realize that there's only one life between this madman and the White House?" The warning was prescient.

AP students should be able to articulate Hanna's concerns.

QUESTION 4

The Philippine-American War affected the 1900 election in three ways: (1) It produced the Anti-Imperialist League as an organized political force. (2) It gave Bryan a moral framework for opposing McKinley. (3) It produced atrocity reports - the "water cure" torture, concentration camps, civilian massacres - that mobilized urban Northern educated voters against Republican policy. But the war did NOT produce significant electoral movement compared to 1896. Three reasons: (a) The war was successful from a U.S. perspective. (b) Anti-imperialism was philosophically appealing but did not connect with ordinary voter concerns about prosperity. (c) Bryan's anti-imperialist position was inconsistent with his free-silver position. Anti-imperialism mobilized intellectuals but did not realign the 1896 coalition.

AP students should be able to articulate both impact and limitation.

QUESTION 5

McKinley's "we must instruct, develop, protect" articulates the philosophy of American imperial civilizing-mission. Core elements: (1) The U.S. has a duty to administer the Spanish-acquired territories rather than grant them immediate independence. (2) The duty involves "instruction" - teaching the territories self-government - and "development" - economic and infrastructure modernization. (3) The eventual goal is "extension of the principles of free government" - but the U.S. must direct this process. (4) The U.S. mission elevates American national identity: "Our country shall be even greater than our fathers dreamed of." The philosophy was a version of the late 19th-century imperial civilizing-mission ideology shared by European powers. It treated non-Western populations as not yet ready for self-government. The philosophy would be challenged by Filipino independence fighters and U.S. anti-imperialists; it would gradually erode through the 1934 Tydings-McDuffie Act (Philippine independence by 1946) and decolonization globally after World War II.

AP students should be able to articulate the imperial civilizing-mission ideology.

QUESTION 6

Roosevelt's succession transformed the Republican Party's economic-policy framework in four ways: (1) He launched the federal trust-busting tradition. Northern Securities (1902) was the first major Roosevelt antitrust case; the 1904 Supreme Court ruling against Northern Securities established federal authority to break up monopolies. The 1906 Standard Oil case led to the 1911 Supreme Court breakup of Standard Oil. (2) He expanded federal regulation of corporate behavior. The Hepburn Act 1906 strengthened the ICC's railroad-rate authority; the Pure Food and Drug Act 1906 and Meat Inspection Act 1906 established federal food/drug regulation. (3) He inaugurated federal conservation. 150 million acres of national forests; the U.S. Forest Service 1905; 5 new national parks. (4) He established the federal government's active foreign-policy role. The Panama Canal acquisition 1903; the Roosevelt Corollary 1904 declared U.S. responsibility for maintaining order in the Western Hemisphere. The cumulative effect: Roosevelt moved the Republican Party away from Hanna's industrial-financial orthodoxy toward Progressive reform - the structural transformation that would split the party in 1912 (Taft vs. Roosevelt's Bull Moose Progressive Party).

AP students should be able to articulate the Republican Party transformation.

QUESTION 7

McKinley states: 28 states - the entire Northeast (Maine to Maryland); the Midwest (Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin, Iowa, Minnesota, North Dakota, plus newly Kansas, Nebraska, South Dakota); plus California, Oregon, Washington, Wyoming, Utah, and West Virginia. Bryan states: 17 states - the Solid South (11 former Confederate states); 3 Border States (Kentucky, Tennessee, Missouri); plus Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada. Compared to 1896: McKinley expanded from 23 to 28 states (gained 5 states - Kansas, Nebraska, South Dakota, Wyoming, Utah, Washington from Bryan's 1896 coalition). Bryan contracted from 22 to 17 states. The 1900 map demonstrated structural Republican consolidation: states that had been competitive in 1896 (the Mountain West) had now moved into the Republican coalition. The 1896 realignment had hardened.

AP students should be able to articulate the consolidation.

Discussion prompts

1. The 1900 election's structural significance was largely retrospective - the Roosevelt vice-presidential selection that produced his September 1901 succession. Identify three structural reasons the Republican Party chose Roosevelt as VP in 1900 and assess whether the choice was politically rational given what Republicans knew at the time.

2. Bryan made anti-imperialism the central moral issue of his 1900 campaign. Identify three specific reasons the issue did not produce significant electoral movement compared to 1896 and assess what this reveals about U.S. foreign-policy politics.