K-2 EDITION · CLASSROOM

1900

William McKinley vs William Jennings Bryan

A 20-minute lesson on the 1900 U.S. presidential election. Includes lesson plan, 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
2. Story (with a picture)
3. Three questions
4. Teacher notes

1900

After William McKinley won in 1896, good things happened for the country. Factories opened. People got jobs. The depression of 1893 ended. McKinley's slogan in 1900 was "Four years more of the full dinner pail" - meaning four more years of prosperity.

But something else happened too. In 1898, the U.S. fought a short war with Spain. The U.S. won and got the Philippines, Puerto Rico, Guam, and helped Cuba become independent. Some Americans were proud the U.S. had become a world power. Others worried the U.S. was becoming an empire.

The Republicans renominated President McKinley in 1900. But McKinley's first vice president, Garret Hobart, had died in November 1899. The Republicans needed a new running mate. They picked Theodore Roose[illegible] popular governor of New York. Roosevelt had be[illegible] Dakotas, a war hero in Cuba, and a police com[illegible] only 41 years old and full of energy.



Look at the picture. Tha[illegible]sevelt - the man who would soon become the[illegible]nt in U.S. history.

Theodore Roosevelt, McKinley's 1900 running mate. Roosevelt became the 26th president on September 14, 1901 after McKinley's assassination - the youngest president in U.S. history at age 42.
WIKIMEDIA COMMONS - PUBLIC DOMAIN PRE-1930 PORTRAIT PHOTOGRAPH

The Democrats picked William Jennings Bryan again - the man who had lost to McKinley in 1896. Bryan was 40 years old. He

Let's talk about the story

1.

Who became the 26th U.S. president after McKinley's assassination?

2.

What was the Spanish-American War of 1898 and what did the U.S. gain from it?

3.

Why is McKinley's 1900 victory historically important even though he was assassinated shortly after?

Warm-up (5 min)

In 1900 President McKinley ran for re-election. His running mate was a young, energetic former cowboy and war hero named Theodore Roosevelt. They beat Bryan again. But six months later, McKinley was shot - and Theodore Roosevelt became the 26th president at age 42.

Answer key

1.

Theodore Roosevelt. He was McKinley's vice president. He became president on September 14, 1901 after McKinley died from a gunshot wound by anarchist Leon Czolgosz. Roosevelt was 42 years old - the youngest U.S. president in history.

Roosevelt's succession marked the start of the Progressive Era.

2.

The Spanish-American War was the April-August 1898 war between the U.S. and Spain. The war was caused by the explosion of the USS Maine in Havana harbor (February 1898) and U.S. sympathy for Cuban independence from Spain. The U.S. won decisively in just 10 weeks. The Treaty of Paris (December 1898) gave the U.S. three Spanish colonies: (1) the Philippines (in southeast Asia); (2) Puerto Rico (in the Caribbean); (3) Guam (in the Pacific). Cuba became independent but under heavy U.S. influence (the Platt Amendment gave the U.S. continued rights). The war transformed the U.S. into a global colonial power - holding overseas territories with non-white populations. This raised questions about whether the U.S. was becoming an "empire" - questions Bryan raised during the 1900 campaign.

The Spanish-American War was a transformative moment in U.S. foreign policy.

3.

McKinley's 1900 victory is historically important even though he was assassinated shortly after for three reasons: (1) It confirmed the 1896 realignment - McKinley's 292-155 EV margin was larger than his 1896 margin (271-176), demonstrating that the Republican-dominant alignment was structural and sustainable. (2) It put Theodore Roosevelt one heartbeat from the presidency. Roosevelt became the 26th president after McKinley's September 1901 assassination and would govern as a Progressive reformer until 1909 - transforming American politics. (3) The 1900 election produced the first U.S. presidential election dominated by foreign policy issues (imperialism, the Philippines). The pattern would continue in the 20th century. (4) McKinley's slogan "Four years more of the full dinner pail" became a template for later prosperity-focused presidential campaigns.

AP students should be able to articulate the historical significance.