CLASSROOM EDITION · GRADES 9 — 12

1932

Franklin D. Roosevelt vs Herbert Hoover

A 75-minute lesson on the 1932 U.S. presidential election. Includes lesson plan, background reading with primary source, student worksheet, answer key, and discussion prompts.

ERA New Deal Coalition	ELECTORAL VOTES 531 total
WINNER Franklin D. Roosevelt (Democratic) · 472 EV	RUNNER-UP Herbert Hoover (Republican) · 59 EV
KEY ISSUE Great Depression; unemployment; New Deal relief, recovery, and reform	TURNOUT 56.9%

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

1932: Franklin D. Roosevelt vs Herbert Hoover

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 1932 map at theamericanvote.com/elections/-1932 projected, or printed as a handout.

Timing

5 min	**Warm-up**	Before reading: list two policies you would expect a presidential candidate to propose during the worst economic crisis in a country's history. Then identify which voters you think would be most receptive to each.
15 min	**Reading + vocab**	The 1932 election was a referendum on the Great Depression. Unemployment had reached roughly 25 percent; banks were failing; Hoovervilles dotted the country. Franklin D. Roosevelt, the Democratic governor of New York, defeated incumbent President Herbert Hoover by 472 electoral votes to 59 — at the time, the largest electoral margin for a Democrat in history. Roosevelt promised a New Deal, framed in deliberately vague terms during the campaign so as to coalition a broad set of distressed groups: industrial workers, Southern farmers, urban ethnic voters, African Americans (still mostly voting Republican but moving), and Western progressives. The election began a 36-year period in which Democrats won seven of nine presidential races and a realignment of which party Americans associated with active government. 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 1932 election tells you about the New Deal Coalition 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

Great Depression
The 1929–1939 economic collapse that began with the U.S. stock market crash and reached roughly 25 percent unemployment by 1932.

New Deal
FDR's 1933–1938 federal program of relief (jobs), recovery (industrial codes, farm prices), and reform (Social Security, banking regulation, securities law).

Bonus Army
WWI veterans who camped in Washington in summer 1932 demanding early payment of promised bonuses. Federal troops cleared them, deeply damaging Hoover politically.

Bank panic
A wave of depositor runs that closes solvent banks because they cannot meet simultaneous withdrawals. By March 1933, ~9,000 U.S. banks had failed.

Hooverville
A shantytown of unemployed people, sarcastically named for President Hoover. By 1932 they had appeared on the outskirts of most large U.S. cities.

Realignment
A long-term shift in which demographic groups support which party. 1932–1936 broke a 70-year Republican majority and built FDR's New Deal coalition.

First Inaugural Address (opening)

FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT, MARCH 4, 1933

Roosevelt took office at the deepest point of the Depression. Bank runs had closed institutions in 32 of 48 states; ~25 percent of the labor force was unemployed. The inaugural was broadcast live by radio to roughly 60 million Americans.

> *"This is preeminently the time to speak the truth, the whole truth, frankly and boldly. Nor need we shrink from honestly facing conditions in our country today. This great Nation will endure as it has endured, will revive and will prosper. So, first of all, let me assert my firm belief that the only thing we have to fear is fear itself—nameless, unreasoning, unjustified terror which paralyzes needed efforts to convert retreat into advance."*

Roosevelt, "First Inaugural Address" (Washington, DC, March 4, 1933). Public domain.

The 1932 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 Franklin D. Roosevelt receive in 1932?

( ) A. 303
( ) B. 404
( ) C. 472
( ) D. 525

QUESTION 2 · SHORT-ANSWER

List two groups that became cornerstone members of the New Deal coalition in 1932 or shortly afterward, and one issue each cared about.

QUESTION 3 · MULTIPLE-CHOICE

Approximately what percentage of the U.S. labor force was unemployed at the time of the 1932 election?

( ) A. 9 percent
( ) B. 15 percent
( ) C. 25 percent
( ) D. 40 percent

QUESTION 4 · SHORT-ANSWER

Briefly explain why incumbent President Herbert Hoover was so politically vulnerable in 1932. Cite at least two specific factors.

QUESTION 5 · MAP-READ

On the 1932 state map, identify which six states Hoover managed to carry. What region do they share, and what does that reveal about the floor of the Republican coalition?

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

QUESTION 6 · SHORT-ANSWER

Identify the exact phrase in the excerpt where Roosevelt names what Americans should fear. Quote it verbatim.

QUESTION 7 · SHORT-ANSWER

Roosevelt reframes the Depression as primarily a psychological problem ("fear itself"). Explain in two sentences why this framing was politically useful in March 1933 and what kind of federal response it set up.

Answer key

QUESTION 1

472

Roosevelt won 472 electoral votes to Hoover's 59. He carried 42 of 48 states and won the popular vote 57.4 to 39.7 percent.

QUESTION 2

Accept two of: industrial labor (union recognition, wages), Southern whites (agricultural prices, federal jobs programs), urban ethnic voters (relief, immigration), African Americans (federal employment, anti-lynching efforts — though full Black party realignment to Democrats took until 1936–1948), Western farmers (commodity prices, public power).

Roosevelt's coalition was assembled out of regional and economic groups, each with its own grievance against the Depression. The coalition held in modified form through 1968.

QUESTION 3

25 percent

BLS reconstructed estimates put 1932–1933 unemployment around 23–25 percent. Some industrial cities exceeded 50 percent unemployment among adult men.

QUESTION 4

Accept any two: the 1929 stock market crash on his watch; rising unemployment to ~25 percent; the Bonus Army eviction by federal troops in summer 1932; widespread bank failures; the Smoot-Hawley tariff worsening the global slump; the perception that Hoover believed direct federal relief was constitutionally inappropriate.

No incumbent had faced this scale of distress. Hoover did intervene with public works and the RFC, but voters perceived these as too small and too late.

QUESTION 5

Hoover carried only Connecticut, Delaware, Maine, New Hampshire, Pennsylvania, and Vermont — all in the Northeast.

These six states represented the residual Republican Yankee-Protestant base. Pennsylvania's presence reflected its industrial Republican machine; Vermont and Maine would be the only two Hoover states still Republican in 1936.

QUESTION 6

Accept: "the only thing we have to fear is fear itself" — or any verbatim variant including "nameless, unreasoning, unjustified terror which paralyzes needed efforts to convert retreat into advance."

The opening line became the single most-quoted phrase of any 20th-century inaugural. The fuller sentence about "nameless, unreasoning, unjustified terror" is what Roosevelt actually delivered.

QUESTION 7

Accept any of: (1) reframing the crisis as psychological set up an argument for rapid federal action (if Americans believed banks were safe, they would stop running on them); (2) it positioned Roosevelt to ask Congress for emergency executive powers (he did, within days); (3) it implicitly criticized Hoover's "patience" framing and made bold experimentation appear necessary rather than reckless.

Within 100 days FDR pushed through the Emergency Banking Act, Glass-Steagall reforms, the CCC, the AAA, and the TVA. The rhetorical groundwork was laid in this opening.

Discussion prompts

1. Roosevelt's campaign rhetoric was deliberately vague about specific New Deal policies. Identify one advantage and one risk of that strategy, and assess whether it was the right choice in 1932.

2. Hoover argued that recovery required patience and traditional remedies; Roosevelt argued for immediate, experimental federal action. Which approach matches your instincts during a crisis, and what evidence from later cycles supports your view?

3. The 1932 election began a long Democratic dominance. Identify two structural reasons (beyond personality) that the Republican coalition lost its previous majority, and one Republican strategy that might have prevented it.