1944

Franklin D. Roosevelt vs Thomas E. Dewey

A 50-minute lesson on the 1944 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) · 432 EV	RUNNER-UP Thomas E. Dewey (Republican) · 99 EV
KEY ISSUE World War II leadership; postwar planning; soldiers' voting rights	TURNOUT 55.9%

CONTENTS

1. Cover
2. Lesson plan (50 min)
3. Background: key terms + source
4. Worksheet (6 questions)
5. Answer key

1944: Franklin D. Roosevelt vs Thomas E. Dewey

Standards alignment

NCSS · D2.His.4.6-8 (chronological reasoning) · D2.His.14.6-8 (causation). CCSS · CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.2 (central ideas in primary sources).

Timing

5 min	**Warm-up**	List two structural conditions in 1944 America that would produce a fourth-term Roosevelt candidacy. For each identify the specific WWII development most responsible.
15 min	**Reading + vocab**	1944 election was 40th U.S. presidential election. Produced FDR's 432-99 electoral-vote victory over Republican Thomas Dewey - FDR's unprecedented fourth presidential election victory. FDR was first U.S. president to serve more than two terms. Election structurally shaped by WWII (approaching Allied victory but not yet over) and FDR's declining health (concealed from voters). WWII context November 1944: U.S. had been at war 35 months. ~12 million Americans in military service. ~250,000 American military deaths by November 1944 (reached 405,399 by war end). June 6, 1944 D-Day invasion of Normandy had begun Allied liberation of Western Europe. August 25, 1944 liberation of Paris. October 1944 Battle of Leyte Gulf broke Japanese naval power. December 16, 1944 Battle of the Bulge would briefly threaten Allied advances. FDR's health had deteriorated dramatically. President since March 4, 1933 - over 11 and a half years. Paralyzed by polio since 1921. By 1944: hypertension (blood pressure 200/110); congestive heart failure; arteriosclerosis; chronic bronchitis from cigarette smoking. Personal physician Admiral Ross McIntire publicly downplayed; actual diagnosing physician Dr. Howard Bruenn knew FDR was dying. Voters did not know extent of illness. Democratic National Convention Chicago July 19-21, 1944 renominated FDR by acclamation. Structural question was VP. Henry A. Wallace (VP 1941-45) had been controversial Progressive Republican. Conservative Democratic wing (Southern segregationists led by Sen Walter F. George of Georgia; party chair Robert E. Hannegan; Treasury Secretary Henry Morgenthau Jr.) strongly opposed Wallace. 1944 nomination would effectively determine next president. FDR sent letter June 6, 1944 saying would "personally vote for" Wallace but would not "dictate to the convention." Convention chose between Wallace, James Byrnes of South Carolina (FDR's "assistant president"), and Harry Truman of Missouri (chair of Truman Committee investigating WWII defense contracts). Wallace unacceptable to Southern conservatives; Byrnes unacceptable to Northern liberals + African Americans because

of segregationist record. Truman emerged as compromise - Missouri senator with moderate political reputation. Nominated on second ballot. Compromise structurally consequential: determined post-FDR presidency.

Republican National Convention Chicago June 26-28, 1944 nominated NY Governor Thomas Dewey on first ballot. Dewey 42 - youngest major-party nominee since Bryan 1896. Famous racket-busting prosecutor in NYC during 1930s (took down Lucky Luciano 1936, broke Murder Inc. murder-for-hire ring). DA of NY County 1937-41. Elected NY Governor 1942 (first Republican NY governor in 20 years). Confident, organized, disciplined but personally stiff - "groom on the wedding cake" joke followed him through 1944 and 1948 campaigns. Governor John Bricker of Ohio (conservative isolationist) VP. Republican platform supported continued WWII prosecution; opposed New Deal expansion; supported tax reduction.

Campaign focused on FDR's wartime leadership and health. Dewey: FDR too long in office; New Deal excessive bureaucracy; health suspect; younger leadership needed. FDR: wartime continuity essential; "change horses in midstream"; experienced leadership navigating war toward Allied victory.

Fala speech September 23, 1944 to International Brotherhood of Teamsters in Washington. Republicans had spread rumor FDR accidentally left his Scottie dog Fala in Aleutian Islands during Pacific tour, then sent Navy destroyer to retrieve at taxpayer expense ($2-$20M Republican estimates). FDR: "These Republican leaders have not been content with attacks on me, or my wife, or on my sons. No, not content with that, they now include my little dog, Fala... his Scotch soul was furious." Speech demonstrated FDR's political skills remained sharp despite declining health. Forced Dewey defensive about Fala claim.

FDR's October 21, 1944 NY campaign tour rode in open car through heavy rain for four hours to demonstrate vigor. Health remained structural issue.

FDR won 432 EV; Dewey 99. FDR carried 36 states; Dewey 12. Popular vote: FDR 25,612,916 (53.4%); Dewey 22,017,929 (45.9%); Thomas (Socialist) 79,017 (0.2%); Watson (Prohibition) 74,758 (0.2%); minor candidates. FDR-Dewey popular margin: 3,594,987 - smallest of FDR's four victories.

Geographic pattern: Dewey strength in rural Midwest, Plains, New England. Dewey carried Colorado, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Maine, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, Vermont, Wisconsin, Wyoming. FDR's 36 states: Solid South + Mid-Atlantic + most of Midwest + Mountain West + West Coast + most of New England.

FDR inaugurated 4th term January 20, 1945 - brief outdoor ceremony on South Portico of White House (wartime austerity replaced traditional East Portico Capitol ceremony). Inaugural ~6 minutes - one of shortest in U.S. history.

FDR's 4th-term agenda: wartime prosecution and post-war planning. February 4-11, 1945 Yalta Conference (FDR + Churchill + Stalin) addressed post-war international organization, German occupation, Soviet entry into Pacific war, Polish boundary and government. Yalta agreements controversial: critics argued FDR too accommodating to Stalin; defenders argued agreements reflected structural military reality of Soviet control over Eastern Europe.

FDR died April 12, 1945 at Warm Springs Georgia from cerebral hemorrhage. Had been president 12 years 31 days. VP Harry Truman sworn in as 33rd president that evening. Truman would: (1) Authorize August 6 + 9, 1945 Hiroshima and Nagasaki atomic bombings ending WWII. (2) Lead post-war reconstruction. (3) Articulate Truman Doctrine March 1947. (4) Sign Marshall Plan April 1948 ($13B European economic reconstruction). (5) Sign NATO Treaty April 1949. (6) Win 1948 election in famous upset over Dewey. (7) Lead U.S. through Korean War 1950-53.

Germany surrendered May 8, 1945 (V-E Day) - 26 days after FDR's death. Japan surrendered September 2, 1945 (V-J Day) - after August 6 Hiroshima and August 9 Nagasaki bombings. Cold War would begin within weeks of WWII's end with structural disagreement between U.S. and Soviet Union over Eastern Europe and Germany.

1944 election's structural significance threefold: (1) FDR became only U.S. president to serve more than two terms - feat not repeated due to 1951 22nd Amendment. (2) 1944 VP selection (Truman over Wallace and Byrnes) was structurally consequential because it determined post-FDR presidency. (3) FDR's 1944-45 wartime leadership (Yalta, Manhattan Project, UN founding planning) shaped post-war international order.

10 min	**Primary source**	Read aloud once. Annotate individually. Quick pair-share on the source-analysis question.
10 min	**Discussion**	Small groups (3–4). Pick one prompt; report back two sentences.
10 min	**Worksheet**	Six questions: 2 multiple-choice, 3 short-answer, 1 map-read.

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

Thomas Dewey

NY Governor (1943-55) and 1944 Republican presidential nominee (also 1948). Former NYC racket-busting prosecutor; took down Lucky Luciano 1936. 42 years old in 1944 - youngest major-party nominee since Bryan 1896. Famous "groom on the wedding cake" appearance.

Harry S. Truman

33rd U.S. president (1945-53). Missouri senator (1935-45). Chair of Truman Committee. FDR's 1944 VP. Succeeded April 12, 1945.

Fala speech

FDR's September 23, 1944 address to Teamsters Union. Mocked Republican claims about Scottie dog Fala. Demonstrated FDR's political skills despite declining health.

D-Day

June 6, 1944 Allied invasion of Normandy. 156,000 American, British, Canadian troops. ~4,400 Allied dead. Began Allied liberation of Western Europe.

Yalta Conference

February 4-11, 1945 wartime conference at Yalta, Crimea between FDR, Churchill, Stalin.

V-E Day

May 8, 1945 Victory in Europe Day. Germany surrendered May 7 at Reims; ratified May 8 at Berlin. 26 days after FDR's April 12, 1945 death. Truman's 27th day as president.

V-J Day

September 2, 1945 Victory over Japan Day. Japan surrendered aboard USS Missouri in Tokyo Bay. Followed August 6 Hiroshima + August 9 Nagasaki atomic bombings + August 15 Japanese Emperor Hirohito's radio address accepting Allied surrender terms.

Fala Speech (Address to International Brotherhood of Teamsters)

FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT, SEPTEMBER 23, 1944

FDR delivered this address to the International Brotherhood of Teamsters at the Statler Hotel in Washington, DC on September 23, 1944 - approximately six weeks before Election Day. The speech was FDR's formal acceptance of the AFL Teamsters endorsement and his most extended campaign appearance of 1944. The "Fala" passage was the most politically devastating moment - turning Republican attacks on him into a self-deprecating defense that demonstrated his political skills remained sharp. Republican attacks had claimed FDR had accidentally left his Scottie dog Fala in the Aleutian Islands during a Pacific tour and then sent a Navy destroyer to retrieve the dog at taxpayer expense. FDR's humorous response forced Dewey to defensively respond about the Fala claim - making Dewey appear humorless and petty. The speech is widely cited as one of the most politically effective campaign moments of the 20th century.

> *"These Republican leaders have not been content with attacks on me, or my wife, or on my sons. No, not content with that, they now include my little dog, Fala. Well, of course, I don't resent attacks, and my family don't resent attacks, but Fala does resent them. You know, Fala is Scotch, and being a Scottie, as soon as he learned that the Republican fiction writers in Congress and out had concocted a story that I had left him behind on an Aleutian Island and had sent a destroyer back to find him - at a cost to the taxpayers of two or three or eight or twenty million dollars - his Scotch soul was furious. He has not been the same dog since. I am accustomed to hearing malicious falsehoods about myself - such as that old, worm-eaten chestnut that I have represented myself as indispensable. But I think I have a right to resent, to object to libelous statements about my dog."*

Roosevelt, "Address to International Brotherhood of Teamsters" (Washington, DC, September 23, 1944). Public domain.

The 1944 Election

Read the background page, then answer the six questions below.

QUESTION 1 · MULTIPLE-CHOICE

How many electoral votes did FDR win in 1944?

( ) A. 419
( ) B. 432
( ) C. 449
( ) D. 472

QUESTION 2 · MULTIPLE-CHOICE

When did FDR die?

( ) A. January 20, 1945
( ) B. April 12, 1945
( ) C. May 8, 1945
( ) D. September 2, 1945

QUESTION 3 · SHORT-ANSWER

Why was the 1944 VP selection (Truman over Wallace and Byrnes) structurally consequential?

QUESTION 4 · SHORT-ANSWER

FDR's Fala speech says "I think I have a right to resent, to object to libelous statements about my dog." What is the rhetorical strategy of this passage?

QUESTION 5 · SHORT-ANSWER

How did FDR's declining health affect the 1944 campaign?

QUESTION 6 · MAP-READ

On the 1944 election map, identify FDR's 36 states and Dewey's 12 states (CO, IN, IA, KS, ME, NE, ND, OH, SD, VT, WI, WY). What does the geographic pattern reveal?

Answer key

QUESTION 1

432. FDR 432; Dewey 99.

AP students should know the 432-99 split.

QUESTION 2

April 12, 1945. FDR died at Warm Springs, Georgia of cerebral hemorrhage. Had been president 12 years 31 days. VP Truman sworn in that evening as 33rd president.

AP students should know the April 12, 1945 date.

QUESTION 3

The 1944 VP selection was structurally consequential because it determined the post-FDR presidency. FDR's health was declining; physicians knew he was dying. 1944 VP would likely become president. Three structural reasons Truman emerged as compromise: (1) Wallace (incumbent VP) too liberal for conservative Democratic wing - Southern segregationists opposed him on civil rights; conservative Democrats on economic redistribution. (2) Byrnes (SC, FDR's "assistant president") too segregationist for Northern liberals + African Americans. (3) Truman was acceptable to both wings: Missouri senator (Border State) with moderate reputation; chair of Truman Committee investigating WWII defense contracts (earned bipartisan respect). The selection was most consequential VP selection in U.S. history: Truman became president, authorized atomic bombings, articulated Truman Doctrine, signed Marshall Plan + NATO Treaty, led Korean War.

AP students should be able to articulate the structural significance.

QUESTION 4

FDR's Fala passage uses three rhetorical strategies: (1) Humor and self-deprecation - by treating the dog as a victim of partisan attacks, FDR makes the Republican attacks appear petty and ridiculous. The "Scotch soul was furious" line invites laughter rather than anger. (2) Indirect dignity assertion - "I am accustomed to hearing malicious falsehoods about myself" + "I have a right to resent, to object to libelous statements about my dog" - FDR positions himself as personally tolerant of attacks but rightfully defensive about disproportionate, petty smears. (3) Political jujitsu - turning Republican attacks back on Republicans. The Republican Fala accusation appears so ridiculous that Republicans become the targets of mockery. The combined effect: FDR appears mature, confident, and politically skilled; Dewey appears petty and humorless when responding. The speech is widely cited as a masterpiece of campaign rhetoric. Subsequent campaign analysts would treat the Fala speech as a model for handling personal attacks: treat them with humor; do not give them more attention than they deserve; turn the attacker's petty character into the story.

AP students should be able to articulate the rhetorical strategy.

QUESTION 5

FDR's declining health affected the 1944 campaign in four ways: (1) Limited campaign appearances. FDR's campaign tour was structurally restricted - only a few major appearances. The October 21, 1944 NY tour (riding in open car through four-hour rain to demonstrate vigor) was the major exception. (2) Created a structural Republican attack opportunity. Dewey's campaign focused on FDR's fitness and age (62) compared to Dewey (42). The "tired old man" framing was politically dangerous. (3) Health concealment. FDR's personal physician Admiral Ross McIntire publicly downplayed his health; actual diagnosing physician Dr. Howard Bruenn knew FDR was dying. Voters did not know the extent of illness. The concealment was structurally controversial - critics argued voters had a right to know; defenders argued wartime political stability required concealment. (4) Increased VP significance. Because FDR was likely to die in office, the 1944 VP nomination became effectively a presidential nomination. The Democratic Convention's choice between Wallace, Byrnes, and Truman was the most consequential VP selection in U.S. history. Truman emerged as the compromise candidate and became the 33rd U.S. president after FDR's April 12, 1945 death - 82 days into his fourth term.

AP students should be able to articulate the health's impact.

QUESTION 6

FDR states (36): Solid South + Border States + Mid-Atlantic + most of Old Northwest (except IN, OH, WI) + most of Mountain West (except CO, WY) + West Coast + most of New England (except ME, VT) + Plains states (except IA, KS, NE, ND, SD). Dewey states (12): Colorado, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Maine, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, Vermont, Wisconsin, Wyoming. Geographic pattern reveals: (1) Dewey strength in rural Midwest, Plains, and conservative New England - similar to 1940 Willkie geography but slightly improved. (2) FDR's 1944 coalition was geographically comprehensive but the smallest of his four victories. (3) The 1944 map shows the structural rural-Midwestern Republican counter-base that would persist. (4) The Solid South remained Democratic - FDR's wartime leadership and economic policies offset any concerns. (5) The 1944 result demonstrated that even with a declining FDR, the wartime continuity argument was structurally compelling.

AP students should be able to articulate the geographic pattern.