1944

Franklin D. Roosevelt vs Thomas E. Dewey

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

1944: Franklin D. Roosevelt vs Thomas E. Dewey

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 1944 map at theamericanvote.com/elections/-1944 projected, or printed as a handout.

Timing

5 min	**Warm-up**	Identify 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 EV 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) and FDR's declining health (concealed from voters). WWII context November 1944: U.S. at war 35 months. ~12 million Americans in service. ~250,000 American military deaths by November 1944 (reached 405,399 by war end). June 6, 1944 D-Day. August 25, 1944 Paris liberated. October 1944 Battle of Leyte Gulf. December 16, 1944 Battle of the Bulge would briefly threaten Allied advances. FDR's health deteriorated dramatically. President since March 4, 1933 - over 11 and a half years. Paralyzed by polio since 1921. By 1944: hypertension; congestive heart failure; arteriosclerosis; chronic bronchitis. Personal physician Admiral Ross McIntire publicly downplayed; actual diagnosing physician Dr. Howard Bruenn knew FDR was dying. Democratic National Convention Chicago July 19-21, 1944 renominated FDR by acclamation. Structural question was VP. Henry A. Wallace (incumbent VP 1941-45) controversial. Conservative Democratic wing (Southern segregationists led by Sen Walter F. George; party chair Robert E. Hannegan; Treasury Secretary Henry Morgenthau Jr.) opposed Wallace. 1944 VP would effectively determine next president. Convention chose between Wallace, James Byrnes of SC, Harry Truman of MO. Truman emerged as compromise - 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. Former NYC racket-busting prosecutor. NY Governor 1942-55. "Groom on the wedding cake" appearance. John Bricker (OH, conservative isolationist) VP.

Campaign focused on FDR's wartime leadership and health. Fala speech September 23, 1944 - FDR mocked Republican claims about Scottie dog Fala. Demonstrated FDR's political skills remained sharp.

FDR won 432 EV; Dewey 99. FDR carried 36 states; Dewey 12 (CO, IN, IA, KS, ME, NE, ND, OH, SD, VT, WI, WY). 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%). FDR-Dewey margin: 3,594,987.

FDR inaugurated 4th term January 20, 1945. February 4-11, 1945 Yalta Conference (FDR + Churchill + Stalin). Yalta agreements addressed post-war international organization, German occupation, Soviet entry into Pacific war, Polish boundary.

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

Germany surrendered May 8, 1945 (V-E Day). Japan surrendered September 2, 1945 (V-J Day) after August 6 Hiroshima + August 9 Nagasaki atomic bombings + August 15 Hirohito's radio address.

1944 election's structural significance: (1) FDR only U.S. president to serve more than two terms. (2) 1944 VP selection determined post-FDR presidency. (3) FDR's 1944-45 wartime leadership shaped post-war order.

Truman 1945-53 transformations: (1) August 6 + 9, 1945 atomic bombings ending WWII. (2) United Nations founding San Francisco June 1945. (3) March 1947 Truman Doctrine (containment of Communism). (4) April 1948 Marshall Plan ($13B European reconstruction). (5) April 1949 NATO Treaty. (6) July 26, 1948 Executive Order 9981 desegregating armed forces. (7) Korean War 1950-53. The Truman presidency operationalized the Cold War framework that would dominate U.S. foreign policy until 1989.

The 1944-45 transition from FDR to Truman is widely analyzed as one of the most consequential leadership transitions in U.S. history. FDR had been a transformational president for 12 years. Truman was a Missouri senator with limited foreign-policy experience and no preparation for the atomic-bomb decision. Yet Truman would navigate the WWII end, the early Cold War, and the Korean War with substantial competence. The structural lesson: the U.S. presidency can absorb major leadership transitions through institutional continuity even when the new president has limited

		prior preparation. The 1944 election can be analyzed retrospectively as the structural transition between FDR's 1933-45 Democratic dominance and the post-1945 Cold War U.S. internationalist alignment. The transition was: (1) From wartime domestic mobilization to post-war Cold War governance. (2) From FDR's personal political leadership to institutional presidential authority. (3) From New Deal coalition to Truman-era Democratic Party that would face the 1948 Dixiecrat revolt and 1968 coalition breakdown. (4) From WWII allied cooperation with the Soviet Union to Cold War confrontation. 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 1944 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

Thomas Dewey
NY Governor (1943-55) and 1944 Republican presidential nominee (also 1948). 42 in 1944 - youngest since Bryan 1896.

Fala speech
FDR's September 23, 1944 address to Teamsters Union mocking Republican claims about Scottie dog Fala.

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

V-J Day
September 2, 1945 Victory over Japan Day.

Harry S. Truman
33rd U.S. president (1945-53). Missouri senator. FDR's 1944 VP. Succeeded April 12, 1945.

D-Day
June 6, 1944 Allied invasion of Normandy. 156,000 troops. Operation Overlord commanded by Eisenhower.

V-E Day
May 8, 1945 Victory in Europe Day. 26 days after FDR's death.

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. 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.

> *"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 (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 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 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?

QUESTION 5 · SHORT-ANSWER

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

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

QUESTION 6 · SHORT-ANSWER

Truman became 33rd president 82 days into FDR's fourth term. Identify three structural transformations Truman's 1945-53 presidency produced.

QUESTION 7 · MAP-READ

On the 1944 election map, identify FDR's 36 states and Dewey's 12 states. 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.

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 too liberal for conservative Democratic wing. (2) Byrnes too segregationist for Northern liberals + African Americans. (3) Truman acceptable to both wings - Missouri senator, moderate, chair of Truman Committee. The selection was most consequential VP selection in U.S. history.

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 - treating the dog as a victim of partisan attacks makes Republican attacks appear petty. The "Scotch soul was furious" line invites laughter. (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 but rightfully defensive about disproportionate, petty smears. (3) Political jujitsu - turning Republican attacks back on Republicans. The combined effect: FDR appears mature, confident, politically skilled; Dewey appears petty when responding. Widely cited as a masterpiece of campaign rhetoric.

AP students should be able to articulate the strategy.

QUESTION 5

FDR's declining health affected the 1944 campaign in four ways: (1) Limited campaign appearances. The October 21, 1944 NY tour (riding in open car through four-hour rain) was the major exception. (2) Created Republican attack opportunity. Dewey's campaign focused on FDR's fitness vs younger leadership. (3) Health concealment. Personal physician downplayed; actual diagnosis kept secret. Voters did not know extent of illness. (4) Increased VP significance. Because FDR was likely to die in office, the 1944 VP nomination became effectively a presidential nomination. Truman emerged as compromise and became 33rd president after FDR's April 12, 1945 death.

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

QUESTION 6

Three structural transformations Truman's 1945-53 presidency produced: (1) End of WWII. August 6 Hiroshima atomic bombing; August 9 Nagasaki atomic bombing; August 15 Hirohito's radio surrender; September 2, 1945 V-J Day Japan formal surrender aboard USS Missouri in Tokyo Bay. The atomic-bomb decision was structurally controversial: defenders argued it saved hundreds of thousands of American and Japanese lives by preventing an invasion; critics argued Japan was already preparing to surrender. (2) Cold War framework. March 1947 Truman Doctrine (Greece + Turkey aid against Communist insurgency; articulated U.S. commitment to "support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures"). April 1948 Marshall Plan ($13B European economic reconstruction). April 1949 NATO Treaty (Atlantic mutual-defense alliance). The Cold War framework would dominate U.S. foreign policy until 1989. (3) Civil rights initiatives. July 26, 1948 Executive Order 9981 desegregated U.S. armed forces. The order was structurally consequential: it preceded the 1954 Brown v. Board of Education decision by 6 years and the 1964 Civil Rights Act by 16 years. The order produced the 1948 Dixiecrat revolt (Strom Thurmond's third-party run carried 4 Southern states with 39 EV). Additional Truman achievements: 1947 Taft-Hartley Act (over his veto); 1948 Berlin Airlift; 1950-53 Korean War; 1947 National Security Act (Department of Defense, CIA, NSC).

AP students should be able to articulate multiple Truman transformations.

QUESTION 7

FDR states (36): Solid South + Border States + Mid-Atlantic + most of Midwest + Mountain West + West Coast + most of New England. Dewey states (12): rural Midwest, Plains, conservative New England. Geographic pattern reveals: (1) Dewey strength in rural Midwest, Plains, and conservative New England - similar to 1940 Willkie. (2) FDR's 1944 coalition was geographically comprehensive but smallest of his four victories. (3) The rural-Midwestern Republican counter-base would persist. (4) Solid South remained Democratic.

AP students should be able to articulate the pattern.

Discussion prompts

1. FDR's 1944 VP selection (Truman over Wallace and Byrnes) was structurally consequential because it determined the post-FDR presidency. Identify three structural reasons Truman emerged as the compromise candidate.

2. FDR concealed his declining health during the 1944 campaign. Identify three structural reasons U.S. politics generally tolerates presidential health concealment and assess whether the practice is structurally justified.