1980

Ronald Reagan vs Jimmy Carter

A 20-minute lesson on the 1980 U.S. presidential election. Includes lesson plan, student worksheet, answer key, and discussion prompts.

ERA Cold War Realignment	ELECTORAL VOTES 538 total
WINNER Ronald Reagan (Republican) · 489 EV	RUNNER-UP Jimmy Carter (Democratic) · 49 EV
KEY ISSUE Iranian hostage crisis; stagflation; energy crisis; Reagan's conservative revolution	TURNOUT 54.2%

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1980

By 1980, many Americans were unhappy. The cost of buying food and gas was going up fast every month. People called this inflation. Workers in factories were losing their jobs. American hostages were being held in a country called Iran. The president at the time was Jimmy Carter, a Democrat. Many Americans thought Carter was not strong enough to fix these problems.

Ronald Reagan was the Republican who ran against Carter. Look at his picture. Reagan was 69 years old when he ran - older than any other person who had ever tried to be president. But he was full of energy. He was good at giving speeches. People liked him because he made them feel hopeful about America again.

Reagan said that the government was too big. He said taxes were too high. He said the army needed to be stronger. His campaign slogan was: "Let's Make America Great Again."

When voters made their choice, Reagan won by a huge amount. He took 44 of the 50 states. He became the 40th president on January 20, 1981. On the same day, Iran finally let the American hostages go home.

As president, Reagan cut taxes. He spent a lot of money on a



Ronald Reagan, the 40th U.S. president. He took office in January 1981 after winning the 1980 election by a large margin.
WHITE HOUSE PRESS OFFICE, VIA WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

Let's talk about the story

1.

Who won the 1980 presidential election? Say his name out loud.

2.

What is inflation? Use one sentence in your own words.

3.

Name one promise Ronald Reagan made during the 1980 campaign.

Warm-up (5 min)

Look at the man in the picture. His name is Ronald Reagan. Before he was a politician, he was an actor in movies! In 1980 he ran for president.

Answer key

1.

Ronald Reagan won. He became the 40th president of the United States. He started his job on January 20, 1981.

Reagan defeated Jimmy Carter in a landslide (489 electoral votes to 49). He was the oldest person ever elected president at the time.

2.

Inflation is when prices of things go up over time. For example, if a loaf of bread costs $1 this year and $1.20 next year, that is inflation.

Inflation is one of the easiest economic concepts to teach K-2. Any simple price-rises-over-time framing earns credit.

3.

Accept any: he promised to cut taxes; he promised a stronger military; he promised to make the government smaller; he promised to get the American hostages home; he promised to make America great again. Award credit for any specific Reagan promise.

Reagan ran on a tight set of promises he repeated again and again. Any one shows the child grasped the campaign message.