2008

Barack Obama vs John McCain

A 20-minute lesson on the 2008 U.S. presidential election. Includes lesson plan, student worksheet, answer key, and discussion prompts.

ERA Modern Polarization	ELECTORAL VOTES 538 total
WINNER Barack Obama (Democratic) · 365 EV	RUNNER-UP John McCain (Republican) · 173 EV
KEY ISSUE 2008 financial crisis; Iraq War; healthcare reform; historic racial barrier	TURNOUT 61.6%

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2008

In the year 2008, two big things were happening in America at the same time. The first was a giant problem with money. Banks across the country were running out of money. Some banks closed forever. People lost their jobs. Many families lost their homes. The grown-ups called this the financial crisis. It was the worst money problem since the Great Depression, a long time before.

The second big thing was that two people were running to be the next president. One was John McCain, an older senator who had been a Navy pilot and a prisoner of war. The other was Barack Obama, a senator from Illinois. Look at his picture. Barack Obama was something nobody had ever been before: a Black man running for president from one of the two big parties.

Obama was a great speaker. His most famous saying was three short words: "Yes we can." He used those words in many speeches. People hung signs with those words in their windows. Barack Obama also used the Internet better than anyone had used it in an election before. Millions of people gave small amounts of money to his campaign on their computers.

When voters made their choices in November, Barack Obama won by a lot. He became the 44th president of the United States. When he walked onto the stage in Chicago that night, the crowd cried.



Barack Obama, the 44th U.S. president. He took office in January 2009 and was the first Black American ever elected to the office.
PETE SOUZA, WHITE HOUSE PRESS OFFICE

Let's talk about the story

1.

Who became the 44th president of the United States in 2009?

2.

What was the big problem with money that was happening when Obama ran for president?

3.

Why was Barack Obama's win in 2008 so important in American history?

Warm-up (5 min)

Look at the man in the picture. His name is Barack Obama. He was the first Black man ever elected to be the president of the United States. That happened in 2008.

Answer key

1.

Barack Obama became the 44th president. He started his job on January 20, 2009.

Obama defeated John McCain by 365 electoral votes to 173.

2.

The 2008 financial crisis. Banks across the country were running out of money. Some banks closed forever. Many people lost their jobs and their homes. It was the worst financial problem since the Great Depression in the 1930s.

The 2008 crisis was triggered by the collapse of the housing market and the failure of investment bank Lehman Brothers in September 2008.

3.

Barack Obama was the first Black American ever elected president. For most of American history, Black Americans had been denied basic rights. Obama's election was a moment many people thought they would never see in their lifetime.

Obama's 2008 victory came 143 years after the end of slavery and 43 years after the 1965 Voting Rights Act. The historical weight of the moment is appropriate to acknowledge at K-2 level.