



William Howard Taft | Lesson Plan

How did William Howard Taft contribute to the American legal system and uphold the Constitution as both President and Chief Justice?

Students will understand William Howard Taft's unique contributions to American history, including his role as both President and Chief Justice, his commitment to upholding the Constitution, and his impact on the judiciary and executive branches of government.

Learning Objectives:

- Identify key life events and achievements of William Howard Taft.
- Explain how Taft contributed to the American legal system as President and Chief Justice.
- Analyze Taft's commitment to the Constitution and how it shaped his decisions in office.
- Evaluate Taft's legacy in both the executive and judicial branches of government.

Key Vocabulary:

- **Constitution:** The supreme law of the United States, outlining the structure of government and basic rights.
- **Chief Justice:** The head of the United States Supreme Court, responsible for overseeing court decisions.
- **Progressive:** A person advocating for new ideas and more government intervention, often at odds with constitutional limits.
- **Trust:** A large business or monopoly that controls a significant portion of an industry, often leading to unfair practices.
- **Monopoly:** A situation where a single company dominates the market, limiting competition.

Educational Standards: CCRA.R.1, CCRA.W.2, CCRA.W.4, CCRA.SL.1, CCRA.SL.4

Academic Subject Areas: U.S. Presidents, Judicial Branch, Constitutional Law

What You'll Need

- Video: *Guess or Mess: William Howard Taft* (Watch [Here](#))
- Worksheet: *Guess or Mess: William Howard Taft* (Click [Here](#))
- PragerU Kids biographical book: *William Howard Taft* (Download [Here](#))
- Large paper or poster board for each group, along with markers

Lesson Plan: Read and Discuss (60 minutes)

Introduction to Taft: (5 minutes)



1. Begin with a brief discussion about U.S. presidents and the qualities that make a great leader. Ask students if they know any presidents who also played a major role in the judicial system.
2. Display the *William Howard Taft* digital book using an electronic device. Briefly highlight Taft's significance as the only person to serve as both President and Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. Show images from the digital book to give a visual overview of his life and achievements.

Taft History Huddle: (25 minutes)

1. Read the "Meet William Howard Taft" section on page 2 together as a class, with the teacher leading this page to model fluent reading and set the tone for the lesson.
2. After completing the teacher-led reading, explain that students will now explore other key aspects of Taft's life in small groups.
3. Split the class into small groups and assign each group a different section of the digital book to explore:
 - Group 1: Young William, Early Career (pages 3-4)
 - Group 2: Philippine Governor, Rise to Power, President (pages 5-6)
 - Group 3: 1912 Presidential Election, Baseball Fan, Retirement, Chief Justice (pages 7-8)
 - Group 4: The Taft Dynasty, Legacy (page 9)
4. Allow time for each group to read their assigned section, taking turns reading aloud. As students read, they should discuss the main ideas.
5. Provide each group with a large piece of paper or a poster board and markers to write down key points and any interesting facts or quotes they find.
6. Allow each group one to two minutes to present their findings to the class. After each presentation, provide time for classmates to ask questions and discuss the content.

Worksheet Workshop: (15 minutes)

1. Hand out individual copies of the worksheet to each student. Explain how to fill out each section of the worksheet with these instructions:
2. Timeline: Students should select key dates and events mentioned throughout the digital book. The following are recommendations, but the teacher and students can use many other dates mentioned in the book:
 - 1857 - Birth of William Howard Taft
 - 1890 - U.S. Solicitor General
 - 1901-1903 - Governor of the Philippines
 - 1909-1913 - Presidency of William Howard Taft
 - 1921 - Appointed Chief Justice of the Supreme Court
 - 1930 - Death of Taft
3. Interesting Quote: Have students choose a meaningful quote from the book to fill in the quote section on their worksheet.

4. **Interesting Fact:** Ask students to select an interesting fact about William Howard Taft that stood out to them and write it in the space provided.
5. **Vocabulary Builder:** Instruct students to choose a word from the Glossary on page 10 that they find interesting and use it in a sentence that conveys its meaning.
6. **Multiple Choice:** Explain that students should complete the multiple-choice section of the worksheet individually. (Note: The multiple-choice section corresponds to the PragerU Kids episode about William Howard Taft and can also be used to play along while watching. See “Extension Activity” below.)

Reflection Round-Up: (10 minutes)

1. Briefly summarize the key points covered about William Howard Taft, focusing on his life, presidency, and legacy.
2. **Think-Pair-Share:** Ask students to recall one fact about William Howard Taft and share it with a partner. Encourage them to discuss why that fact was significant.
3. Give each student a sticky note or index card and ask them to answer one of these three sample reflection questions:
 - What did you find most interesting about William Howard Taft?
 - How do you think his dual roles as President and Chief Justice impacted the United States?
 - Can you think of a modern issue that relates to something Taft dealt with?
4. **Bonus Activities:** If time allows, allow students to complete the puzzle on page 2 by finding hidden letters throughout the book. They can also explore and engage with the other interactive activities included in the book.

Extension Activity: (20 minutes)

Guess or Mess Trivia Show: After the lesson, students can participate in a trivia challenge based on the William Howard Taft episode—direct students to the multiple-choice section of the worksheet. Students can compete to see who can answer the trivia questions correctly.

Don't have time for a full lesson? Quick Activity (30 minutes)

Read the *William Howard Taft* book together as a class, with students taking turns reading aloud. Then, watch the PragerU Kids video and play along with the trivia questions.