Teacher Guide

MEDIA MOMENT MINI: Presidential Succession

Time Needed: 1 Class Period

Lesson Objectives: The student will be able to...

- Recall the order and purpose for the presidential line of succession
- Define satire
- Analyze a story for characteristics of satire
- Distinguish satire from news

Materials:
- Student worksheets
- Student internet access -OR- a classroom computer and projector with internet access
- Preselected satirical analysis item (optional)

Handouts:
- Starter Activity (1/2 page; class set)
- Reading (2 pages; class set)
- Activity (1 page; class set)

Step by Step

☐ ANTICIPATE the lesson by having students complete the “Who Succeeds?” half-sheet starter activity. Invite students to share their plan and reasoning. Tell students the Constitution and Congress organized a presidential line of succession to avoid confusion in situations like this one.

☐ DISTRIBUTE the reading to the class.

☐ READ Side A with the class, pausing to discuss. Alternatively, have students read in groups or independently.

☐ PROJECT the Succession List*. Cover the questions at the bottom from view. Orally check for comprehension by posing each question to the class.

☐ TRANSITION to Side B.

☐ TELL students that Side B will teach them about satire and how to distinguish satire from news.

☐ READ Side B with the class, pausing to discuss. To enrich this lesson, you may choose to use a class computer and projector or interactive whiteboard to demonstrate each step as students read about satire.

NEWS LITERACY ACTIVITY (INDIVIDUAL OR WHOLE CLASS)

☐ SELECT an item students can evaluate for satire or allow students to choose their own.

☐ ARRANGE for student online access.

☐ DISTRIBUTE the Suspect Satire activity page to the class.

☐ ASSIGN students to complete the activity independently or in pairs. Alternatively, complete the activity with the whole class using a class computer and projector or interactive whiteboard.

☐ CLOSE by asking students to share the findings of their investigation with the class.

*Optional Extension: Assign students to research the people on the Succession List. Research points to consider: Eligibility (age, citizenship status, residency); Would this person make a good leader (prior experience and performance)?; Would this person’s ideas be similar to or very different from the president they’d succeed (political ideology, party affiliation, congressional voting record, and past actions)? Require students to support their conclusions and beliefs with evidence from their research.

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Who Succeeds? Talk about bad timing. You just found out that your school’s principal is stepping down, effective immediately! Your school has no idea what to do. Who takes over? Who should succeed?? Create a succession plan for the school that answers the questions below.

- Who steps in for the principal?
- Does this person become your new permanent principal? Why or why not?
- If that person is not available to step in, who should make everyday decisions for the school? What qualifies that person to take charge?
- Could the school function without a replacement for principal? Why or why not?

Principal Succession Plan:
Presidential Line of Succession

1. The Vice President
2. Speaker of the House of Representatives
3. President pro tempore of the Senate
4. Secretary of State
5. Secretary of the Treasury
6. Secretary of Defense
7. Attorney General
8. Secretary of the Interior
9. Secretary of Agriculture
10. Secretary of Commerce
11. Secretary of Labor
12. Secretary of Health and Human Services
13. Secretary of Housing and Urban Development
14. Secretary of Transportation
15. Secretary of Energy
16. Secretary of Education
17. Secretary of Veterans Affairs
18. Secretary of Homeland Security

Check for Understanding (Cover questions from view. Pose each question to the class.):

1. After the Speaker of the House, who succeeds to the presidency? In what branch of government can this person be found?
2. How could a person not listed here succeed to the presidency?
3. Why do the Speaker of the House of Representatives and the president pro tempore of the Senate succeed to the presidency before the president's Secretary of State?
4. Why is the Secretary of Labor eleventh on the list?
Succession for One Thousand!

What happens in the office of the president if something, well, should happen to the president? Sickness, instability, resignation, impeachment... zombie apocalypse?? Okay, maybe not a zombie apocalypse, but, seriously, what happens if our chief leader is permanently unable to serve? If you’re thinking the vice president steps in and steps up, you’re right. But then who becomes vice president? And what happens if there’s no vice president to step in? Succession. It’s a simple ten-letter word, but there are actually 18 positions that chart out who’s next in the presidential line of succession.

Presidential Plan B

Article I, Section II of the Constitution says that if the president is removed from office, dies, or is unable to perform his duties that the powers and responsibilities of his office fall to the vice president. But there was something the Constitution didn’t make clear: Was the vice president supposed to stay “vice president” and just carry out the responsibilities of the president until a new one was elected, or did the vice president become the new “president”? In 1841, Vice President John Tyler took the clause to mean that the permanent absence of the president meant he got the president’s duties, title, and salary, too! He was the first vice president to succeed to the presidency and set a distinct precedent for succession.

In the Event of...

So if the vice president becomes president, who becomes vice president? The Constitution didn’t script that part out. In fact, until the late 1900s, whenever a vice president succeeded to the presidency, the office of the vice president remained empty, sometimes for years. When Vice President Lyndon B. Johnson succeeded as president after President John F. Kennedy’s assassination in 1963, the vice president’s office was vacant for nearly two years. Right around that time, Congress began to think about adding a new amendment to the Constitution. The 25th Amendment allows the president—with Congress’ approval—to appoint a new vice president if the office is empty. The vice presidential appointment has only been used twice, back to back no less! In 1973, President Richard M. Nixon’s vice president, Spiro Agnew, resigned. Nixon appointed Gerald Ford as his replacement. In 1974, President Nixon resigned; Gerald Ford succeeded, and appointed Nelson Rockefeller vice president.

Qualifying!

We’ve never needed to use the presidential line of succession past the vice president, but an awful lot of thought has gone into who should be next. The 1947 Presidential Succession Act says that after the vice president, the Speaker of the House and the Senate president pro tempore step up, in that order. The Act reversed a law that listed the cabinet members as next in line. Why? Because cabinet members are appointed and therefore not elected officials. Should the list ever go past the Senate president pro tempore, cabinet members come next in the same order in which their offices were first created.

When a presidential candidate chooses his or her running mate, the vice presidential candidate has to meet the same constitutional qualifications as the president—be a natural born citizen, age 35 or older, and a U.S. resident for 14 years. Anyone who succeeds to the presidency must meet those requirements too, regardless of their position in line.
Serious or Satire?

Presidential succession isn’t very common. Of the 45 presidents who have served in the Oval Office only nine have succeeded to that role. If you come across a news story that suggests that the current president might be unable to perform his or her duties and that a vice president or other official may be stepping into that role, read it carefully. Sometimes articles like this simply share someone’s opinion, and sometimes they’re satirical stories. Satire uses humor, sarcasm, ridicule, exaggeration, irony, or similar techniques to criticize or comment on current events, society, or shared experiences. The internet is full of satirical websites, and there are satirical television and news programs, too.

A satirical news story may look like a real news story, but it’s not. It may talk about a real event, but most of what it says about that event will be fiction not truth. Remember, satire is meant to poke fun; it’s not meant to fool you! So how do you recognize satire? The same way you recognize misinformation. Do a little digging and use your gut.

The New Yorker published an article with the headline “Pence Really Thought He’d be President by Now.” The article reported that in an interview with Fox News about President Trump’s first 100 days in office, Vice President Mike Pence said he only ran as vice president because he expected he’d be president within a few weeks.

A headline will give you a huge clue if you’re trying to decide if a story is satire or trusted news. Satirical news story headlines are usually a little ridiculous and a little funny. Try this one: “Vice President Doodling ‘President Mike Pence’ In Margin Of Afternoon Intelligence Briefing” (The Babylon Bee, 12/1/17). The word “doodling” helps give this headline its unreal and humorous feel. The New Yorker headline may be a little harder, but it’s highly unusual for a vice president to openly admit that he or she expects to replace the president in the middle of a term!

If you can’t tell from the headline if a story is satire, keep reading. The article itself won’t normally sound like the news you’re used to reading. It may seem entertaining, a little over the top, or make you chuckle. The New Yorker article is poking fun at the coverage and scrutiny surrounding President Trump’s first 100 days in office.

Satire doesn’t try very hard to hide the fact that it’s satire. A lot of times you’ll see the word “satire” in plain sight. Poke around the webpage a little. The New Yorker article has a hyperlink above the headline that clearly states: “Satire from the Borowitz Report.” You can click on it, and when you do, it will say, “Not the news.”

But if the article or site you’re looking at doesn’t make it quite that obvious, try visiting the website’s About page for more information. The New Yorker’s About page will tell you, “The New Yorker is a weekly magazine offering a signature mix of reporting and commentary on politics [...] along with fiction, poetry, humor, and cartoons.” Humor is a key word that not everything in The New Yorker should be considered real news.
A. Suspect Satire? Find an article about the President, one of his or her potential successors, or a current political event that you suspect might be satirical news. Answer the questions below to decide if the article is serious news or just poking fun through satire.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Steps:</th>
<th>Answer</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Write the homepage address where you found the article.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Write the story’s headline. Underline any words that make the headline seem ridiculous, unreal, or a little humorous.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Read the article. In comparison to other news you’ve read, did the story feel overly entertaining, unrealistic, or funny? Make a list of words, phrases, or quotes from the article to support your answer.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Does the article’s webpage say anything that leads you to believe this article is satire? If so, what?</td>
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<td>5. Visit the website’s About page. What pieces of evidence support that this website may be a publisher of satirical news?</td>
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6. By now, you should have a pretty good idea about whether your article is serious or satire. Is it:  

- Poking fun  
- Being sarcastic  
- Making a ridiculous comparison  
- Trusted news (not satire)

7. If the article is satire, how easily could someone have been fooled by this story? Summarize what might make someone think this is real and what clues indicate that it is not real.  

8. If the article is not satire, how easily could someone spot that this story is trusted journalism?
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8. Secretary of the Interior
9. Secretary of Agriculture
10. Secretary of Commerce
11. Secretary of Labor
12. Secretary of Health and Human Services
13. Secretary of Housing and Urban Development
14. Secretary of Transportation
15. Secretary of Energy
16. Secretary of Education
17. Secretary of Veterans Affairs
18. Secretary of Homeland Security

Check for Understanding (Cover questions from view. Pose each question to the class.):

1. After the Speaker of the House, who succeeds to the presidency? In what branch of government can this person be found?
   
   *The president pro tempore of the Senate succeeds. This position is located in the legislative branch.*

2. How could a person not listed here succeed to the presidency?
   
   *The 25th Amendment allows the president—with Congress’ approval—to appoint a new vice president when the office is empty.*

3. Why do the Speaker of the House of Representatives and the president pro tempore of the Senate succeed to the presidency before the president’s Secretary of State?
   
   *Because these positions are elected and cabinet positions are appointed.*

4. Why is the Secretary of Labor eleventh on the list?
   
   *Cabinet members are listed in the order in which their offices were first created.*