

Using NewsHour Extra Feature Stories

STORY

Obama Team Starts to Take Shape, May Include One-time Rival Hillary Clinton

11/25/08

http://www.pbs.org/newshour/extra/features/us/july-dec08/cabinet_11-25.html

Estimated Time: One 45-minute class period with possible extension

Student Worksheet (reading comprehension and discussion questions without answers)

PROCEDURE

1. WARM UP

Use initiating questions to introduce the topic and find out how much your students know.

2. MAIN ACTIVITY

Have students read NewsHour Extra's feature story and answer the reading comprehension and discussion questions on the student handout.

3. DISCUSSION

Use discussion questions to encourage students to think about how the issues outlined in the story affect their lives and express and debate different opinions.

INITIATING QUESTIONS

- 1. What is the president's Cabinet? Who is in President George Bush's Cabinet?**
- 2. What is President-elect Barack Obama doing between now and when he takes office January 20, 2009?**
- 3. Do you think Barack Obama should appoint his former rival for the Democratic nomination, Hillary Clinton, to a top spot in his administration?**

READING COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS – **Student Worksheet**

- 1. Why did President-elect Barack Obama hold a series of press conferences to introduce his economic team?**

ANSWER

With more people losing their jobs, plummeting stock prices and further declines in the housing market, President-elect Barack Obama held a series of press conferences this week to show that his administration will "hit the ground running."

- 2. Who is Timothy Geithner?**

ANSWER

For the important position of Treasury Secretary, Mr. Obama nominated Timothy Geithner, president of the Federal Reserve Bank in New York.

- 3. What are the pros and cons of hiring staff who worked in the Clinton White House?**

ANSWER

Many of the top posts are being filled by people who were in the Clinton White House from 1992 to 2000, and while the choices have been widely praised, some experts point out that mistakes were made during that period.

"They're very competent people, very experienced people, but at the same time that experience means they've been to some extent implicated in the problems that got us here," Dean Baker of the Center for Economic and Policy Research said on the NewsHour.

"I mean, taking Larry Summers as one example, he was a supporter of the financial deregulation that, you know, helped to fuel the housing bubble. I should point out he also didn't think that financial asset bubbles like the stock bubble and housing bubble were a big problem," Baker said.

But conservative New York Times columnist David Brooks is impressed by the new president's choices.

"Every other president has had a coterie of people around them from the time they were governor or something else that they bring to town either from Arkansas or Texas or wherever. Obama, because he's so new and inexperienced, doesn't have that coterie. So he really is not picking cronies. He really is picking people who are indisputably qualified," Brooks said on the NewsHour.

4. Why are analysts surprised by Obama's choice of Hillary Clinton for Secretary of State?

ANSWER

Meanwhile, a New York Times report states that Mr. Obama has chosen Sen. Hillary Clinton as Secretary of State, the chief envoy to other countries and lead adviser on foreign policy issues.

While analysts such as Brooks say Clinton would make a very good head of the State Department, the move is attracting strong attention because the two often had heated debates over foreign policy during the Democratic primaries.

He often criticized her for supporting the Iraq War and she called his proposal to meet with the leaders of Iran and Venezuela "naïve."

5. What is one way Obama might be like President Abraham Lincoln?

ANSWER

The reports of Clinton as a possible Cabinet pick created a flurry of speculation that the president-elect is using lessons inspired by a past president that Mr. Obama often cites as a role model: Abraham Lincoln.

In a recent CBS interview, the president-elect said he's been spending a lot of time reading up on Lincoln, and that he was finishing reading Doris Kearns Goodwin's 2005 book "Team of Rivals."

That book tells the story of how Lincoln, after a hard fought, often-bitter campaign, chose for his cabinet some of the very men who had battled so hard to win the presidency themselves—in part as a way of controlling them, but also to learn from their differing perspectives.

6. How might Obama be like Franklin Delano Roosevelt?

ANSWER

"There's a new book out about FDR's first 100 days and what you see in FDR that I hope my team can – emulate, is not always getting it right, but projecting a sense of confidence, and a willingness to try things. And experiment in order to get people working again," he said.

In his first 100 days in office, FDR introduced 15 major pieces of legislation and created dozens of federal programs called "the alphabet agencies" such as the NRA, the WPA, the CCC, the PWA -- all part of what he called the New Deal.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (more research might be needed)

- 1. Do you think President-elect Obama should emulate Abraham Lincoln or Franklin Delano Roosevelt? Explain your answer.**
- 2. Do you think Hillary Clinton would be a good Secretary of State? Why or why not?**
- 3. How do you think President Obama's approach to the economy will be different than President Bush's?**
- 4. MAKE A TIME CAPSULE: Write down your predictions for what President Obama will do in his first 100 days. Put the predictions in a box and seal it until May 1, 2009. Then open the box and see how close you were!**

Extension Activity

Have students write a 300-500 word essay on this topic providing clear examples. Send your completed editorial to NewsHour Extra (extra@newshour.org). Exceptional essays might be published on our Web site.