



YALE NATIONAL INITIATIVE

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Curriculum Units by Fellows of the National Initiative
2012 Volume III: The American Presidency

Could YOU be President?: Explaining and Exploring Presidential Possibility through Autobiography

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Historically, African-Americans are one of the least represented voting classes in America. This unit aims to enfranchise and grant tangibility to the lives of black students in urban areas. By illustrating for students the meager means from which several of our nation's leaders have come, they will hopefully feel that they too can become participatory in our country's democracy.

In showing students that all presidents do not come from backgrounds of means, wealth, education, or even positive family lives, students may be more apt to willingly engage in the systems of their government. While a mass of literature seems to exist on this topic, the three autobiographies isolated in this unit (Lincoln, Clinton, and Obama) provide the best breadth for students in a high-needs school as the initial lives of all three place themselves in relative poverty, minimal paternal influence and the ability of each person to motivate and pull oneself up from obscurity. In other words, these are the prototypical "rags-to-riches" narratives. This creates a space of correlation and empathy for urban students to reinforce the exploration that anyone from any circumstance can navigate their way into the office of the presidency.

(Developed for Enrichment Literature, grade 9; recommended for English, Enrichment/Elective Literature, and U. S. History, grades 9-12; and ELA, grades 6-8)

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