

The Obama Inauguration

On Tuesday, Barack Obama will be inaugurated as our president.

BASIC

Our nation's capital is getting ready to host a very big party. **What city is the U.S. capital?** (*Washington, D.C.*) **Can you find Washington, D.C., on a map of the United States?** Millions of people are expected to come to Washington to see this historic event. At noon on Jan. 20th, Barack Obama will officially become the United States president in a special ceremony called the inauguration. At the inauguration he will take the oath of office. **Do you know what an oath is?** (*A promise.*) Here you see the words of the oath. Every president promises to obey the rules of the Constitution.

GENERAL

Washington, D.C. is preparing to host a big party with millions of guests. **What is the occasion?** (*The swearing-in of the new president.*) **Why is this such a historic event?** (*Barack Obama is the first African American president.*) Up to 4 million people were predicted to be in Washington for the event on January 20th. Obama said he wanted his inauguration to be open to all Americans, not just the rich and powerful. **Would you like to see this event in person?**

The ceremony of swearing in a new president is called the inauguration. Every president takes the oath of office when he is sworn in, and here you see the words to that oath. The oath is a promise that the president will do everything he can to obey and protect the Constitution. All presidents

ADVANCED

The nation's capital has been preparing for up to 4 million visitors to attend the historic inauguration of Barack Obama, which would be a record-setting crowd. **What makes this such a historic event? Would you like to see it in person? Why or why not?**

The actual inauguration takes place at noon on Jan. 20th, but inaugural events began on the 18th, and continue for four nights of celebration, including more than 10 inaugural balls. Planners are calling the inauguration "the most open and accessible" in history. **Why do you think they wanted it that way?**

The most important event is the swearing-in, which takes place on the grounds of the Capitol. Those with tickets to the inauguration can watch it from the National Mall. Obama will recite the oath of office shown here. All presidents except Franklin Pierce

Barack Obama will swear his oath on the same Bible used by Abraham

Lincoln when he took the oath of office. Right after the president takes the oath, the U.S. Army Band plays something called "ruffles and flourishes," with bugles and drums. Ruffles and flourishes are only played for very important people. Then the band will play a song that is always used to introduce the president at big events: "Hail to the Chief." **Do you plan to watch any of the inauguration?** NEXT

except one, Franklin Pierce, have taken the oath on a Bible, although this is not a requirement. Barack Obama will take the oath on the same Bible that Abraham Lincoln used when he was sworn into office in 1861. **Why do you think Obama chose to use this Bible to take his oath?** Every inauguration has a theme, and this one's theme is celebrating the 200th anniversary of Lincoln's birth.

After the president is sworn in, the U.S. Army Band will play something called "ruffles and flourishes" on drums and bugles. Then the band will play the song reserved only for the president of the United States. **Do you know what it is called?** (*"Hail to the Chief."*) **Why do you think there are so many traditions surrounding the inauguration of a new president?** NEXT

have taken the oath on a Bible, although this is not a requirement. Most presidents swear the oath on a Bible of historical significance. **Who knows what Bible Obama is using?** (*The one that was used for Abraham Lincoln's inauguration.*) This is in keeping with the theme of this inauguration, which is "A New Birth of Freedom," celebrating the 200th anniversary of Lincoln's birth. **Why do you think this was chosen as the theme?**

Every step of the inaugural ceremony is laden with tradition. Nearly all presidents add "so help me God" after their oath, which is followed by the playing of four "ruffles and flourishes" by the U.S. Army Band on drums and bugles. The band then plays "Hail to the Chief" before the firing of a 21-gun salute. **Why do you think there is so much pomp and ceremony surrounding the inauguration?** NEXT



The Obama Inauguration (cont'd)

There is a long history of inaugural ceremonies in the United States.

BASIC

The picture on the left shows the decorations for the very first inauguration of our nation's first president, in 1789. **Who was the first president?** (*George Washington.*) That event took place in New York City, because that's where Congress met at that time. The photo on the right shows the inauguration of President John F. Kennedy in 1961. He was the first president to have a poet read a poem at his inauguration. Poet Robert Frost couldn't read the poem he brought with him because of the glare from the sun on the snow. So instead he recited one

of his poems he knew by heart. Every president gives a speech after his inauguration. President Kennedy famously said in his speech, "ask not what your country can do for you – ask what you can do for your country." **What do you think this means? What kind of speech do you think Barack Obama will give on his inauguration?** NEXT



GENERAL

The picture on the left shows some of the decorations for the inauguration of the first U.S. president, George Washington. **Who knows when he was elected?** (*1789.*) That inauguration was held in New York City, which at the time was the U.S. capital. The first inauguration was held on April 30th, 1789. For more than 100 years after that, inaugurations were held on March 4th. This gave members of the Electoral College almost four months after Election Day to make their votes for president. It also gave the new president plenty of time to make the long trip to the capital, in the times before air travel or even railroads. In 1937, Congress passed the 20th Amendment, changing the inauguration date to January 20th. Today, some people think there should be even less

of a delay between Election Day and the inauguration. **Do you agree or disagree? Why?**

The other picture here shows a more recent inauguration ceremony, of John F. Kennedy in 1961. Kennedy was the first president to include the reading of a poem at his inauguration. Poet Robert Frost had written a poem for the occasion, but couldn't read it because of the sun's glare off the snow. So instead Frost recited another of his poems by heart. African American poet Elizabeth Alexander will read a poem at the Obama inauguration, and she will be only the fourth poet ever to be part of an inauguration. She is writing a special poem for the occasion. **What kind of poem would you write for the inauguration of Barack Obama?** NEXT

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The illustration on the left shows the preparations for George Washington's inauguration in 1789. Washington took the oath of office on the balcony of Federal Hall in New York, which was then the site of the nation's capital. It was Washington who first ended the oath with "so help me God," which is now tradition. Until 1937, the inaugural date was March 4th, giving presidents ample time to make the journey to the capital in the era before air travel or even railroad travel. The 20th Amendment moved the date to Jan. 20th. This year particularly, many people have said that the date should be moved up sooner, to lessen the effects of the transition of power in a time of crisis. **Do you agree or disagree? Why?**

Robert Frost was to read a newly written poem, but he was unable to read it because of the sun's glare on the snow. Instead, he recited his poem "The Gift Outright" from memory. **Do you know this poem?** African American poet Elizabeth Alexander will become just the fourth poet to take part in an inauguration, and the first since 1997, when she reads a poem written for Obama's inauguration.

There is a long tradition of presidents giving formal inaugural speeches detailing their presidential agendas. Kennedy famously said, "ask not what your country can do for you – ask what you can do for your country." **What kind of agenda do you think President Obama will lay out in his speech?** NEXT

The photo on the right shows John F. Kennedy's inauguration in 1961. His was the first inauguration to include a poet.

The Obama Inauguration (cont'd)

What's on President Obama's agenda?

BASIC

Once the inauguration is over, President Obama will have a lot of hard work to do. Very few presidents have had to take office with as many problems to deal with as Obama has. **What do you think the biggest of those problems are?** Some of them are listed here. An "agenda" is a list of things that need to be done. At the top of the list is the economy. Obama wants to spend billions of dollars to help American people and businesses, but he may have a tough time getting it passed in Congress. Obama will also have to deal with two wars that U.S.

troops are fighting, in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Obama promised during the campaign to invest a lot of money in something called "infrastructure." This means things like roads, bridges, and other things that need repairing all over the country. **What other things do you think should be on President Obama's agenda? What do you think his biggest challenges will be as president? What kind of a president do you think he will be?** END



GENERAL

Once all of the inaugural celebrations are over, President Obama will have a lot of hard work ahead of him. Few presidents have taken office with as many serious problems to deal with as Obama has. **What do you think the biggest of these problems is?** Here you see just a few of the big items on President Obama's agenda. Right now, the most urgent item on the agenda is the economy. **What do you know about the state of the U.S. economy right now?** Most economic experts say the economy is in a recession. Unemployment has risen, and many people are worried that they might lose their jobs. Many businesses are failing or are at risk of failing. Obama says he wants the U.S. government to spend hundreds of billions of dollars to help stimulate the economy. Part of that money could

be for tax cuts, and part of it could be on different programs to help people economically. But the new president will have to get his plan passed in Congress first. **Do you think it will be difficult to get Congress to agree on an economic plan? Why or why not?**

President Obama also takes control of the U.S. military while it is involved in two wars. **Where are they?** (*Iraq and Afghanistan.*) Obama has said he wants to take more troops out of Iraq, and put more troops into Afghanistan. During the campaign, Obama promised to spend a lot of money on "infrastructure," which means things like roads and bridges that are used by many people and are in need of repair. **What do you think should be at the top of President Obama's agenda? Why?** END

ADVANCED

Once all the speeches and inaugural balls have ended, President Obama will be faced with one of the toughest situations faced by any incoming president. The economy is entering its biggest downturn since the Great Depression. Unemployment numbers have risen sharply, and the possible collapse of the U.S. auto industry has threatened to add to the crisis. Obama proposes spending nearly \$800 billion on an economic stimulus package, dwarfing last year's \$170 billion economic bailout. **What kind of federal spending, if any, do you think could help the U.S. economy?** Part of Obama's plan includes tax cuts for businesses and middle income Americans. It also includes investment in jobs programs, alternative energy programs, education and health care.

During the campaign, Obama promised to reform health care to allow people to enroll in a government health care program if they chose to. He also promised to invest heavily in infrastructure in all 50 states.

In terms of foreign policy, President Obama takes office at a time when military operations in Iraq are winding down. But the process of rebuilding Iraq is a fragile one, and will no doubt be difficult. Obama says that he wants to move more troops from Iraq to Afghanistan, where the U.S. is still fighting al Qaeda. And the peace process in the Middle East has been shaken by Israel's military operations in Gaza recently. **How do you think this will affect President Obama's foreign policy? Do you think President Obama will be able to successfully carry out his agenda? Why or why not?** END