

American Government & Politics: A Christian Worldview.
The Presidential Power Audit (15–20 Minutes)

TEACHER INSTRUCTIONS

Goal

Students analyze and rate a list of powers the U.S. Constitution grants the President and evaluate whether the common term “The Most Powerful Man on Earth” fits the bill.

Instructions

1. Have students complete the handout, then discuss in pairs or groups of three (give students 8–10 minutes to complete this part, maybe longer if they’re having lively discussions!).
2. Review the powers/rankings as a class; ask for volunteers.

Presidential Powers rated/ranked:

The President shall be Commander in Chief of the Army and Navy of the United States....

...[H]e shall have Power to Grant Reprieves and Pardons for Offenses against the United States, except in Cases of Impeachment.

He shall have Power, by and with the Advice and Consent of the Senate, to make Treaties, provided two thirds of the Senators present concur....

[H]e shall nominate, and by and with the Advice and Consent of the Senate, shall appoint Ambassadors, other public Ministers and Consuls, Judges of the supreme Court, and all other Officers of the United States....

He shall from time to time give to the Congress Information of the State of the Union, and recommend to their Consideration such Measures as he shall judge necessary and expedient....

[H]e shall receive Ambassadors and other public Ministers....

[H]e shall take Care that the Laws be faithfully executed....

Every Bill which shall have passed the House of Representatives and the Senate, shall, before it become a Law, be presented to the President....[I]f he approve he shall sign it, but if not he shall return it....[Then the House] shall...proceed to reconsider it. If after such Reconsideration two thirds of that House shall agree to pass the Bill...and if approved by two thirds of [the Senate], it shall become a Law.

Debrief/Discussion

Power	Limitation	Power	Limitation
Commander in Chief	Congress declares war and funds the military	Pardons	Only federal crimes; can’t stop impeachment
Make treaties	2/3 of Senate must approve	Ambassadors	Senate approval required
State of the Union	Just a speech	Receive ambassadors	Ceremonial duty
Execute laws	Laws Congress passes	Sign/veto bills	Congress can override with a 2/3 majority

1. Ask students: “What is your take on this list of powers of the President?” ***Students should notice that this list is primarily an executor of laws, with little actual positive powers.***
2. If someone called the President “the most powerful man on earth,” would that description match the powers listed in the Constitution? ***AWV, but students should see that it does not.***
3. When a President says he will do this and that when he gets elected, how should Americans see him if he goes outside his written list of powers? ***AWV, but that person should be seen as a lawbreaker!***

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Rank the following presidential powers on a scale of 1 to 5 (5 = Very Powerful, 4 = Moderately Powerful, 3 = Somewhat Powerful, 2 = Weak, 1 = Barely A Power at All)

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___ ...[H]e shall have Power to Grant Reprieves and Pardons for Offenses against the United States, except in Cases of Impeachment.

___ He shall have Power, by and with the Advice and Consent of the Senate, to make Treaties, provided two thirds of the Senators present concur....

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Now, write one of these letters/labels by each above power:

S – Shared with another branch

N – Mostly a negative power (it stops something, rather than does something)

L – Limited by the Constitution

I – Independent (the President can mostly do it alone)

Finally, rank by number the powers (summed up below) from most powerful (1) to least powerful (8).

___ Commander in Chief

___ Grant pardons for federal crimes

___ Make treaties with foreign nations

___ Appoint ambassadors and justices

___ Give State of the Union addresses

___ Receive ambassadors and ministers

___ Make sure federal laws are carried out

___ Sign or veto bills passed by Congress