

American Government & Politics: A Christian Worldview.
Presidential Veto Challenge (20–25 Minutes)

TEACHER INSTRUCTIONS

Goal

This activity shows students several famous presidential vetoes in history (not the same ones in the book) and puts them into the role of a U.S. President who must veto several unconstitutional bills presented by Congress, explaining why in brief veto messages.

Instructions

1. Suggestion: Print the handout front to back, and tell students not to turn over the sheet yet!
2. Have students volunteer to read the veto message excerpts on the front side of the handout.
3. Tell students to turn over the handout, and read the instructions together.
4. Give students 15 minutes to answer these questions individually (more or less, of course, based on your classroom time).
5. Ask for volunteer answers.

Suggested Key

***Note:** Answers should reflect a commitment to limited government and Constitutional adherence. Students should focus on the lack of enumerated powers (Article I, Section 8) and the protection of the Bill of Rights.*

1. **Veto Statement 1 Example:** “I veto this bill for its blatant violation of the First Amendment (for religious schools) and the Tenth Amendment. Education is a power reserved to the States and the people, not the Federal Government.”
2. **Veto Statement 2 Example:** “This bill is a clear violation of the Fourth Amendment, which guarantees the right of the people to be secure against unreasonable searches. A warrant issued upon probable cause is not optional. I cannot authorize the surveillance of citizens or the silencing of speech based on algorithmic suspicion, as this treats the Constitution as obsolete.”
3. **Veto Statement 3 Example:** “I must veto this act, as it fundamentally contradicts the Fifth Amendment’s protection of private property and the Takings Clause. The federal government possesses no authority to seize lawfully held land or nullify private contracts to facilitate social engineering. Such actions are an attack on the bedrock of American prosperity and individual ownership rights.”

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Presidential Veto Challenge

Famous U.S. Presidential Vetoes

George Washington (1792) – First Apportionment Act. Washington was the first to use the veto, blocking a bill that increased the number of Representatives because it favored certain states and contradicted the constitutional requirement for apportionment:

“It did not appear that the number of representatives in each state...would be as nearly as possible conformable to the Constitution.”

Ulysses S. Grant (1873) – Inflation Bill. Grant blocked a bill that would have increased the supply of paper money, choosing to defend a more sound (and constitutional) money standard.

“The expansion of the currency...would be certain to result in...a permanent contraction of the real purchasing power of the dollar.”

Dwight D. Eisenhower (1959) – Public Works Appropriation Bill. Eisenhower vetoed this bill to curb what he viewed as “pork-barrel” spending that would contribute to federal debt.

“The bill...contains many starts of projects...which would involve...expenditures in future years of hundreds of millions of dollars.”

James Monroe (1822) – Cumberland Road Bill. Monroe vetoed this bill to fund repairs on the National Road, stating that the federal government lacked the authority to build internal improvements without a constitutional amendment.

“A power to establish turnpikes with gates and tolls...is not among the powers granted to Congress by the Constitution.”

John Tyler (1844) – River and Harbor Bill. In a move that enraged his own party, Tyler vetoed spending on internal improvements, maintaining that federal funds should not be used for local, localized projects.

“I cannot consent to charge the national treasury with the cost of local improvements, in which the states immediately interested can alone participate.”

Calvin Coolidge (1927) – McNary-Haugen Farm Relief Bill. Coolidge twice vetoed this bill, which sought to regulate agricultural prices, viewing it as unconstitutional government price-fixing that would distort the market.

“Government price-fixing...is a device which has often been tried before in the history of the world...it has always resulted in failure.”

Ronald Reagan (1987) – Clean Water Act. Reagan vetoed this massive authorization for water projects, arguing the cost was unjustifiable and represented a return to excessive federal spending.

“The bill is...filled with wasteful and unnecessary...projects [that] would bust the budget.”

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Presidential Veto Challenge

You are the President of the United States. Congress has passed three bills that you believe violate the limited scope of our Constitution. You have 15 minutes to review these excerpts, identify the constitutional breach, and write a firm, formal veto message for each. Refer to the Constitution if possible in your veto statements!

Bill #1: The Federal Education Uniformity Act (excerpt): “The federal government hereby establishes a standardized, national history, English, and civics curriculum that all educational institutions in the United States must follow. This mandate applies to every public school, private religious school, and homeschool household in the nation. Any institution that fails to teach this mandatory curriculum shall be immediately closed by federal order.”

Your Veto Statement (50–60 words):

Bill #2: The Digital Privacy Oversight & Surveillance Act (excerpt): “To ensure national security, the executive branch is authorized to monitor all private digital communications, including personal emails and private social media messages, without a judicial warrant. Any citizens identified by the algorithm as exhibiting ‘anti-governmental sentiment’ shall have their digital presence suspended indefinitely to prevent the spread of domestic misinformation.”

Your Veto Statement (50–60 words):

Bill #3: The National Property Redistribution Act (excerpt): “In the interest of equity, the federal government shall seize all privately held timber and mineral rights on private land holdings exceeding 500 acres. These resources will be nationalized and redistributed to city-based groups selected by the federal government. This will promote economic equality, and it cancels all previous original land ownership documents.”

Your Veto Statement (50–60 words):