

THE WHITE HOUSE HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

Classroom: Grades 9-12

Presidential Transitions: "The Torch is Passed"

Activity - Transitional Traditions

The Constitution specifies the date of the inauguration and language of the oath the president must take but mandates no other conditions of the transfer of power. Nevertheless, over the years, many traditions have been established, strengthening the concept of continuity. Since 1963, an act of Congress has provided a \$900,000 budget for the "orderly transfer of a President and the inauguration of a new president."

Choose a president since 1900 about whom you would like to know more. Using biographical or Internet sources, find out as much about his inauguration as you can. Imagine that you are writing for the Style or Life section of a major newspaper, and it is your job to describe this important day. (Read this section of your own newspaper to understand its tone.) Include a timetable of the day's events, but also provide details that will add interest to your article. If possible, use a computer graphics package to set up a newspaper layout, complete with photographic copies. Working in a group of five students, read your newspaper articles aloud. After all have read, make a list of presidential inaugural traditions, and share them with the whole class. Perhaps your teacher will consider posting the newspaper articles, and the list of traditions, as part of a bulletin board display.

For discussion: What is the value of traditions in making the transfer of presidential power easier? Have you or any of your friends been invited to attend inaugural events? Did you feel a part of a "grand party"? It has been said that our national traditions (these and others) are like cultural glue—bonding disparate elements of the country together. Do you agree?