

Bringing History to Life

Hold an Inaugural Ball

You and your students are no doubt caught up in the presidential election. But before you know it, that long process will come to an end. Why not start planning to celebrate the way the new President will—with an inaugural ball? These tried-and-true tips for a successful event are from Joyce Gerber, who teaches gifted fifth-graders at the Emerson School in Ann Arbor, Michigan.

NOTE: For related activities, please go to www.scholastic.com/juniorscholastic.

To enhance my students' interest in presidential elections and inaugurations, we culminate our study of the topic with an inaugural ball. We hold it in our school's gym one evening in late January, from 6 p.m. to 9 p.m. Why not arrange one for your class?

Here are some suggestions for holding your own inaugural ball, based on what I have done with my students in the past.

PREPARATIONS

1. Gather a small group of parents willing to help plan and execute the ball, including decorations and dinner.
2. Coordinate with your school's music teacher to help students learn the waltz and some patriotic songs. Student musicians may perform during the dinner portion of the evening: strolling musicians or a piano and violin duo are great entertainment.
3. Get your kids excited! Have them plan to dress up as a particular President or First Lady in U.S. history. (Two of my students have come as FDR—wheelchairs and all.)

4. Our parent committee jazzes up the school gym with bunting, U.S. flags, red, white, and blue balloons, and other Americana. The kids decorate the gym with signs and posters borrowed from local theater groups and the VFW.
5. Keep the dinner simple. Ours is typically pasta, salad, bread, cheese and crackers, fruit, and chocolate-chip cookies. Attending families pay \$5 per person, and a local Italian restaurant helps provide the meal in exchange for free advertising on our invitations.

THE MAIN EVENT

Besides the dinner, our inaugural balls have included the following:

1. Presidential Trivia game: Our State Senator (given a few months' notice) agreed to attend the ball and serve as moderator. Her presence added excitement to the evening. Each student (conferring with a parent) who gave a correct answer was given a small paper U.S. flag. At the end of the game, the student-parent



Joyce Gerber

PHOTO COURTESY OF JOYCE GERBER

- pair with the most flags was awarded a prize (*example*: a book about the Presidents).
2. "Who Am I?" quiz: Students read aloud brief reports that provided hints (but no names) about various Presidents. After audience members had a chance to guess, the students revealed the Presidents' identities.
3. A sing-along of patriotic songs, such as "This Land Is Your Land," "America the Beautiful," and "You're a Grand Old Flag" to close the festivities.

LASTING MEMORIES

In the past, we have called our local newspaper to invite a reporter to attend the ball, and the next day's edition included an article with photos. It was great publicity for our school—and a real thrill for the kids.

Best of all, the event will show your students (and their parents!) the importance of participating in government. Enjoy—and best of luck with your celebration.