

“The History of the Presidential Debates”

Directions: This Listening Guide provides comprehension and analysis questions for each of the three stories in this month’s episode. You can use all three parts or isolate a single guide for students.

PART 1: THE ROLE OF THE MODERATOR



1. In what year was a third party candidate featured in the debates for the first and only time?

2. What are the responsibilities of the Commission on Presidential Debates?

3. What did PBS journalist Jim Lehrer feel was the mark of a debate moderator having failed?

4. Despite the fact that Candy Crowley’s fact-check in the 2012 debate favored President Barack Obama over Mitt Romney in public perception, how could it be suggested that both candidates were correct?

5. What has been the opinion of Joe Biden on the idea of fact-checking during debates? What has been the opinion of President Donald Trump’s supporters?

EXTENSION QUESTION

What do you feel should be the responsibility of moderators during presidential debates? Should they solely focus on maintaining the agreed-upon rules? Should they fact-check? Something else?

PART 2: THE DEBATES THAT WEREN'T: THE MISSING 16 YEARS



1. What event (that never happened) inspired Arnold Schwarzenegger to register as a Republican?

2. What were some of the factors that led to no televised presidential debate taking place in 1968?

3. What change was made to the debates in 1976 that meant only the major party candidates would appear in televised debates?

EXTENSION QUESTION

We learned that before 1976, any presidential debate that would air on television required an invitation to all candidates running for president regardless of party affiliation or polling numbers. What criteria, if any, do you think should be in place in order for a candidate to attend a presidential debate?

PART 3: FAMOUS MOMENTS IN TELEVISED DEBATES



1. What happened unexpectedly during the last six minutes of the first debate between President Gerald Ford and Jimmy Carter? How did the candidates respond?

2. What infamous gaffe (mistake) did President Ford make during the 1976 debate?

3. How did President Ronald Reagan turn the tables on questions about his age during the 1984 debate?

4. What were some of the noticeable differences in how the candidates presented themselves during the first Nixon vs. Kennedy televised debate?

5. Why was Michael Dukakis' response to the moderator's problematic question in the 1988 debate perceived negatively?

EXTENSION QUESTION

Presidential debates are most often remembered for infamous moments in which a candidate made a mistake, gave a strange answer, or otherwise did something awkward. If debates are meant to show the policy differences between candidates, what changes would you recommend to place more emphasis on what the candidates will do when elected rather than emphasizing style/performance on television?