

Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum
PresidentLincoln.org

Create a Classroom Cabinet

Grade Level: 4–6

Illinois Learning Standards:

14B, Stage F; 14 B, Stage G; 14 B, Stage H; 14A, Stage I

Objectives:

- Understand the function of the Executive Branch of government
- Comprehend the purpose of cabinet advisors to the president
- Gain an understanding of the origins of the presidential cabinet

Materials Needed:

Chalkboard
Index cards
Paper, pens, pencils
Table, desks, chairs
Two classroom cabinet charts, provided in this lesson

Background:

When the thirteen original colonies declared themselves independent from Great Britain, they created a new government based on a loose confederation of states held together by the Articles of Confederation. Under the Articles, the states retained much of their autonomy and the federal government, powerless to enforce any laws, was unable to govern effectively. As the weaknesses of the Articles became apparent, they were replaced by the U.S. Constitution in 1787.

Under the Constitution, the federal government was divided into three separate branches: Executive, Judicial, and Legislative. Each division was given powers that would balance one another. The Constitution does not directly refer to cabinet advisors, but Article II, Section 2, briefly states that “he [the president] may require the Opinion, in writing, of the principal Officer in each of the executive Departments, upon any subject relating to the Duties of their respective Offices.”

Appointed by the president, cabinet members must be confirmed by the Senate before they are able to assume their duties of enforcing and administering federal laws written by Congress. Once appointed, cabinet members, who advise the president on issues of national concern, do not serve for any set length of time and may be replaced at any time by the president. Each cabinet member serves as the expert on issues related to his/her particular area of responsibility and, as the leader of that department, sets priorities and establishes goals and budgets. Although there are no legal or Constitutional requirements for the position, cabinet members may be impeached just like any other

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federal officer. Cabinet members may not be members of Congress or hold any other elected office. The president and his cabinet meet on a regular basis, typically once a week, except in times of crisis, when meetings become more frequent.

George Washington, our country's first president, designated the first cabinet and set the precedent by filling the posts of secretaries of State, Treasury, War, and Attorney General.

By the time Abraham Lincoln became president in 1861 the cabinet had expanded to include three new executive officers—Secretary of the Navy, Postmaster General, and Secretary of the Interior. In addition, The Smithsonian Institution had become an executive agency without cabinet status. Another such agency—the Department of Agriculture—was created the following year. Lincoln presided over a cabinet of seven people. Today there are fifteen cabinet level executive departments and twenty-two cabinet members.

Activity Procedure:

- Discuss cabinet positions as described on the cabinet chart included in this activity.
- Discuss the job responsibilities. What does this department do? What services does it provide? How has the cabinet expanded over time? How does the cabinet member assist the president? Can students recall historic or modern-day issues that have called upon particular cabinet members to oversee a resolution?
- Discuss qualifications needed to be an effective cabinet member. As students provide information, write criteria on blackboard.
- Determine the types of classroom assistance required by teacher. What classroom cabinet positions would help a classroom/school operate smoothly?
- Create job descriptions based on needs of the classroom. Add them to the Create a Classroom Cabinet Chart. Classroom teacher will assume role of president.
- Divide class into five groups, each group will represent a cabinet department selected by the class.
- Students not serving as cabinet members will assume role of the Senate in the Legislative Branch of government and hold mock confirmation hearings.
- Class should develop ten interview questions.
- Members of the cabinet departments will sit in front of the class and answer two questions each.

Extension:

- Using the illustration of the Lincoln cabinet included in this lesson, fill in the year that each cabinet member took over his respective department under President Lincoln.
- Compare and contrast the Lincoln and Obama cabinets using the diagrams included in this lesson plan. What departments are missing? What departments have been added?
- Divide students into groups and have them research one cabinet position that is missing or has been added. Why were the new posts added? Why were some posts eliminated? What was occurring in the country that created a reason for the new posts?
- Hold a class discussion on why a cabinet position is either missing or has been added.

Additional Resources:

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/administration/cabinet>

<http://www.mrlincolnwhitehouse.org/inside.asp?ID=9&subjectID>

21st-Century Cabinet Chart

Secretary of State	Represents America in working with foreign governments and advises on foreign affairs.
Secretary of the Treasury	Advises on economic issues and oversees the collection of taxes and the printing of money.
Secretary of Defense	Works with civilian and military advisers to formulate American military policies and oversees the armed forces.
Attorney General	Chief law enforcement officer of the United States.
Secretary of the Interior	Protects and provides access to our natural and cultural heritage and manages public lands and minerals, national parks, national wildlife refuges, and water resources.
Secretary of Agriculture	Ensures a healthy food supply and provides support to farmers.
Secretary of Commerce	Encourages, serves, and promotes international trade, economic growth, and technological advancement.
Secretary of Labor	Oversees the interests of American workers by improving working conditions and advancing opportunities.
Secretary of Health and Human Services	Protects the health of all Americans and provides essential human services for those least able to help themselves.
Secretary of Housing and Development	Oversees housing needs and focuses on improving and developing communities.
Secretary of Transportation	Establishes and oversees America's transportation system including highway planning, development, and construction; urban mass transit; railroads; aviation; and the safety of waterways, ports, highways, and oil and gas pipelines.
Secretary of Energy	Advances the national, economic, and energy security of the United States and promotes scientific and technological innovations.
Secretary of Education	Ensures equal access to education and promotes educational excellence. Sets guidelines and provides leadership.
Secretary of Veterans Affairs	Administers programs to benefit veterans and members of their families.
Secretary of Homeland Security	Works to prevent terrorist attacks in America and reduce vulnerability to terrorism, and minimize the damage from potential attacks and natural disasters.

Create Your Own Classroom Cabinet

Secretary of State	
Secretary of the Treasury	
Secretary of Defense	
Attorney General	
Secretary of the Interior	
Secretary of Agriculture	
Secretary of Commerce	
Secretary of Labor	
Secretary of Health and Human Services	
Secretary of Housing and Development	
Secretary of Transportation	
Secretary of Energy	
Secretary of Education	
Secretary of Veterans Affairs	
Secretary of Homeland Security	

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Fill in the year that each cabinet member took over their respective department under President Lincoln

1861 1862 1863 1864 1865

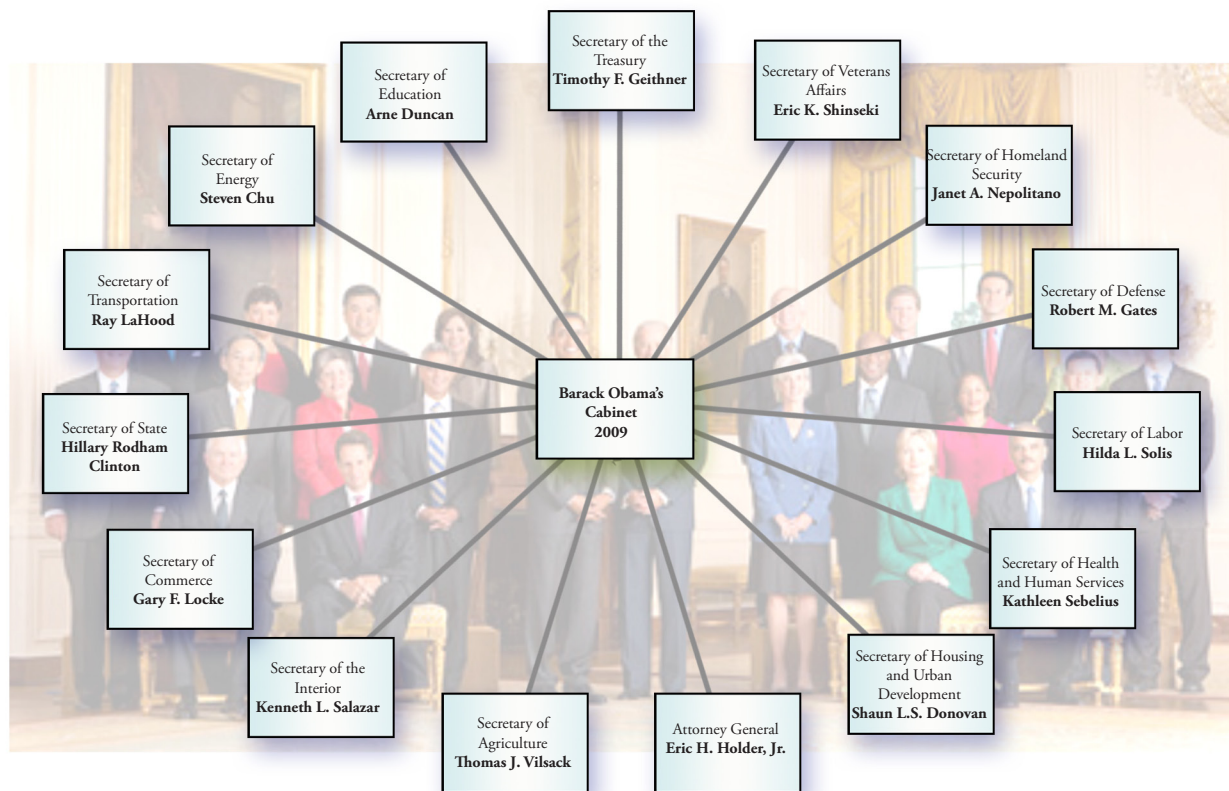
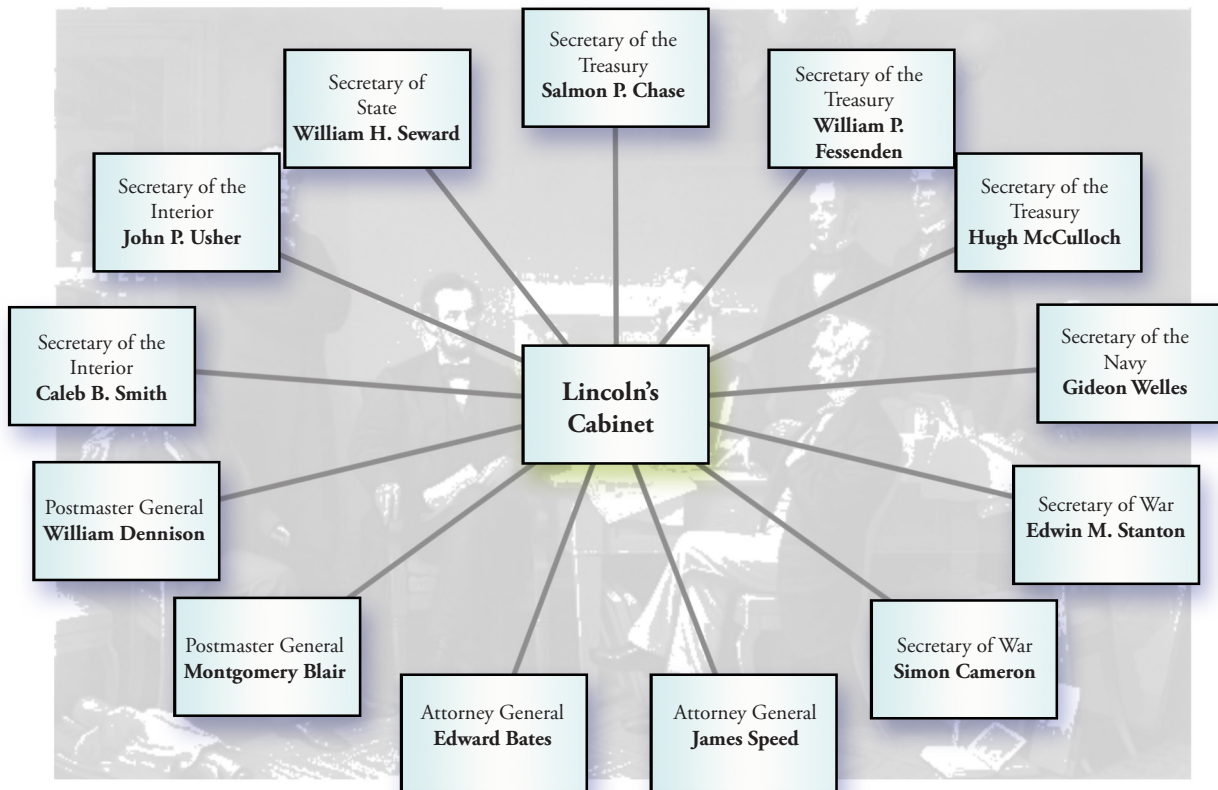


Photo: Pete Souza <http://www.whitehouse.gov/administration/>