

Name _____

Date _____

FDR's First Inaugural Address - Answer Key

Use the text to answer each question below.

1. When Franklin Delano Roosevelt was elected the 32nd President of the United States, he was stepping into a difficult situation. After three years of economic Depression, 13 million Americans were out of work, and countless banks had gone out of business. Expectations were high for the new administration to improve the country's dire economic situation. Americans were hopeful change was coming. But between the election and Roosevelt's inauguration, the economy took a turn for the worse, with 4,000 banks shutting down and 32 states declaring "bank holidays" to prevent customers from withdrawing all of their money. This led to dire consequences for the economy as many Americans suddenly found themselves unable to make any purchases. This set the stage for FDR's first inaugural address, where it seemed the entire country was holding their breath, waiting to hear what the incoming President planned to do.

Which of the following words best describes the state of the American economy shortly before FDR's first inaugural address?

A. Prosperous



B.

Unstable

The American economy at this time would be best described as "unstable" due to the high unemployment rate, rapid shutdown of thousands of banks, and bank customers being unable to access their cash.

C. Random

D. Hopeful

2. The most famous line from FDR's first inaugural address is "The only thing we have to fear is fear itself." What has become one of the most well-known phrases in American history appears early in the speech, setting the tone for the full address. Read the opening lines of Roosevelt's speech below. I am certain that my fellow Americans expect that on my induction into the Presidency I will address them with a candor and a decision which the present situation of our people impel. This is preeminently the time to speak the truth, the whole truth, frankly and boldly. Nor need we shrink from honestly facing conditions in our country today. This great Nation will endure as it has endured, will revive and will prosper. So, first of all, let me assert my firm belief that the only thing we have to fear is fear itself—nameless, unreasoning, unjustified terror which paralyzes needed efforts to convert retreat into advance. In every dark hour of our national life a leadership of frankness and vigor has met with that understanding and support of the people themselves which is essential to victory. I am convinced that you will again give that support to leadership in these critical days.

Which of the following is the best interpretation of FDR's "fear itself" line?

- A. The threat of America's political enemies is much lower than the threat of domestic strife.
- B. America's greatness comes from its citizens' collective belief in liberty.
- ☒ C. America's problems will be solved if they're faced boldly and confidently.
Roosevelt is suggesting that America's problems are manageable—but only if Americans can rally together while avoiding unwarranted fear.
- D. Fear will make the United States appear weak in global politics, so it is important to resist it.

3. Roosevelt won the 1932 presidential election in a landslide, or a victory by a very wide margin, over the incumbent, Herbert Hoover. In his address, Roosevelt acknowledged that the landslide is a sign of the American people's desire for an improved quality of life. In the conclusion of his speech, the new president said, "We face the arduous days that lie before us in the warm courage of national unity... [The American people] have made me the present instrument of their wishes. In the spirit of the gift I take it."

What is the best way to summarize the final few lines of FDR's first inaugural address?

- A. It is important that we hold the previous administration accountable for their failure to fix the economy.
- B. In order to improve the economy, unemployed Americans have to be willing to take the jobs that are available to them.
- C. It will be a long time before the economy is back to its former prosperity, and there is no guarantee that we can accomplish restoration.
- ☒ D. Our biggest strength in these difficult times will be unity, and I humbly accept the opportunity to lead us out of this troubled time.
- FDR is deliberate in referring to his election as a "gift" from the American people. He recognizes that national unity is a vital part of economic recovery, and that he is gracious to be trusted with leading the charge.*