

BIG NEWS

AMERICAN DEMOCRACY UNDER ATTACK



An angry mob fights with police officers as protesters forced their way into the Capitol

DONALD Trump had his Twitter and Facebook accounts suspended last week, after supporters of the US president stormed the Capitol Building (the US parliament) in Washington DC, leading to five deaths. The president's online posts have been blamed for starting the riot.



President Trump giving a speech before the assault on the Capitol

President Trump was accused of encouraging the angry mob. He gave a speech to a crowd of his supporters near the White House, just a short walk from the Capitol. During the speech, Mr Trump repeated his false claims about the election being stolen from him, and urged people to “stop the steal”.

The invasion of the Capitol started soon after Mr Trump's vice president, Mike Pence, started the session to officially approve the result of the election. Many in the crowd were angry with the vice president, and some were chanting that they should “Hang Mike Pence”. Some set up a noose outside the Capitol.

Letting their guard down

The police who were meant to guard the Capitol were heavily criticised for their poor preparation and lack of resistance. One even posed for a picture with protesters – he has since been suspended from duty. Many critics said that Black Lives Matter supporters were treated much more harshly at protests throughout 2020.

Opponents of President Trump, including some in his own party, were due to begin the impeachment process [accused of committing a crime in office] this week. Mr Trump is due to leave his job this month anyway, so some people think an impeachment trial is pointless, but some of his opponents say it would help to block him from running for president again in four years' time.

Losing control

The protest overshadowed an enormous bit of good news for the incoming president, Joe Biden. In the US state of Georgia, two people from his Democratic Party were voted into the Senate (the upper house of the US Congress, which is sort of like our House of Lords. The House of Representatives is the lower house, like our House of Commons). This means that Mr Biden's party will have control of the Senate and he will have much more freedom to run the country how he wants.



A Trump supporter waves his flag after breaking into the Capitol

It also means that President Trump has become the first US president since Herbert Hoover in 1932 to lose an election and control of both houses of Congress in the same term.

It was only after the invasion of Congress that Mr Trump finally conceded defeat in the election. He also said that he wouldn't attend the inauguration ceremony (where Joe Biden takes up the job) on 20 January.

How free should speech be?

The decisions of Twitter and Facebook to block President Trump have started a big debate about free speech. Many people have accused the big tech companies of bias against Mr Trump and his supporters, and say that other world leaders have posted worse things online.



Capitol police officers point their guns at the mob trying to break in

Lots of people who think Twitter is biased signed up to Parler, an alternative social media site that says it defends free speech. However, Parler has been accused of hosting all kinds of violent and offensive content, so Apple and Google have removed it from their app stores. Amazon have now stopped hosting Parler's site on its servers.

GLOSSARY

bias — an inclination towards or against something without just cause and which you allow to influence your judgement



Questions on: Big News: ‘American Democracy Under Attack’

Part A: Find and explain the facts

A1. Which three of the following statements are TRUE? Tick the box next to each true statement.

Supporters of the US president stormed the Capitol Building in Washington DC last week.	<input type="checkbox"/>
In a speech to a crowd of his supporters near the White House, Trump told them not to protest.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Police were guarding the Capitol Building and they were well prepared for the attack.	<input type="checkbox"/>
The invasion of the Capitol started soon after Mr Trump’s vice president, Mike Pence, started the session to officially approve the result of the election.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Five people died during the protest.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Joe Biden’s inauguration ceremony takes place on 30 January.	<input type="checkbox"/>

A2. What did Trump say during his speech to the crowd of his supporters?

A3. What is meant by the “impeachment process”?

A4. Define the following terms:

- The Senate
- The House of Representatives

A5. What is Parler?

Part B: Deduce and infer information

B1. Mike Pence is Donald Trump’s vice president, so why were Trump’s supporters directing their unacceptable chants and anger at him?

B2. Why have the police guarding the Capitol been heavily criticised?

B3. Opponents of President Trump were due to begin the impeachment process this week. What are the main arguments for and against an impeachment trial for Trump?

FOR	AGAINST

B4. Why is it significant that in the US state of Georgia, two people from Joe Biden’s Democratic Party have been voted into the Senate?

B5. Why have Twitter and Facebook blocked President Trump?

Part C: Analyse the writing and presentation

C1. Comment on the use of language in the subheading, “Letting their guard down”.

C2. Look at the structure of the report. Suggest why the section about free speech is at the end of the article.

Part D: Discussion task

“Donald Trump should not have been banned from social media.”

Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Justify your view.

GLOSSARY

bias — an inclination towards or against something without just cause and which you allow to influence your judgement



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Teacher Answers

AIM OF THE NEWS COMPREHENSIONS: News reports are unique non-fiction texts. Being real, they naturally engage students, and with the range of topics that are covered, help to develop pupils’ knowledge and understanding of the wider world outside the classroom. The reports are ideal for short, focused comprehension or discussion activities. Along with the opportunity to find fascinating facts and appreciate the opinions of those involved, there is plenty to be inferred and deduced to understand in more depth what is being reported. Like authors, journalists play with language, so news ‘stories’ are rich nuggets of text to investigate and provide the opportunity for literacy programmes.

TEACHER ANSWER GUIDE: The teacher answers are intended to provide a guide to the reading skill each question is practising. Suggestions are given for a starting point for responses that students would be expected to give at the start of KS3. Further suggestions then give fuller, more developed responses that students will work towards by the end of KS3, in preparation for the non-fiction elements of GCSE English language.

Part A

A1. Which three of the following statements are TRUE? Tick the box next to each true statement.

READING SKILL — Find and explain information

Possible answer

Expected response

Supporters of the US president stormed the Capitol Building in Washington DC last week.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
In a speech to a crowd of his supporters near the White House, Trump told them not to protest.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Police were guarding the Capitol Building and they were well prepared for the attack.	<input type="checkbox"/>
The invasion of the Capitol started soon after Mr Trump’s vice president, Mike Pence, started the session to officially approve the result of the election.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Five people died during the protest.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Joe Biden’s inauguration ceremony takes place on 30 January.	<input type="checkbox"/>

A2. What did Trump say during his speech to the crowd of his supporters?

READING SKILL — Find and explain information

Possible answer

Starting point

- Trump repeated his false claims about the election being stolen from him.

Development

- He urged people to “stop the steal”.

A3. What is meant by the “impeachment process”?

READING SKILL — Find and explain information

Possible answer

Starting point

- The impeachment process is used when a government official is accused of committing a crime in office.

Development (some further research/discussion might be needed for this part of the answer)

- A trial is held and if the defendant is convicted, they are removed from office and disqualified from holding any federal (national government) office in future.

A4. Define the following terms:

- The Senate
- The House of Representatives

READING SKILL — Find and explain information

Possible answer

Starting point

- The Senate is the upper house of the US Congress and the House of Representatives is the lower house.

Development

- The Senate is a bit like our House of Lords and the House of Representatives is like our House of Commons.

A5. What is Parler?

READING SKILL — Find and explain information

Possible answer

Starting point

- Parler is an alternative social media site to Twitter and Facebook. It says that it defends free speech.

Development

- However, Parler has been accused of hosting all kinds of violent and offensive content. Consequently, Apple and Google have removed it from their app stores: Amazon have stopped hosting Parler’s site on its servers.

Part B

B1. Mike Pence is Donald Trump’s vice president, so why were Trump’s supporters directing their unacceptable chants and anger at him?

READING SKILL — Infer information and justify with evidence from the text

Possible answer

Starting point

- Trump’s supporters were angry with Mike Pence because he was overseeing the session to officially approve the result of the election, which Trump lost.

Development

- However, despite what the protesters might have thought, Pence’s role was only ceremonial. The new president’s term would have begun at noon on 20 January regardless of whether the losing side had formally conceded.

B2. Why have the police guarding the Capitol been heavily criticised?

READING SKILL — Infer information and justify with evidence from the text

Possible answer

Starting point

- The police who were meant to guard the Capitol have been heavily criticised for not being prepared for the attack and for their lack of resistance.

Development

- The police have been criticised for letting the protestors get as far as entering the Capitol building. This has led to the assertion that the police did not take the attack seriously enough and this criticism has been supported by a picture of a police officer posing for a picture with protesters. Indeed, many critics have said that Black Lives Matter supporters were treated much more harshly when they protested throughout 2020.

B3. Opponents of President Trump were due to begin the impeachment process this week. What are the main arguments for and against an impeachment trial for Trump?

READING SKILL — Infer information and justify with evidence from the text

Possible answer

Starting point

FOR	AGAINST
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • His online posts have been blamed for starting the riot in which five people died and this has brought his leadership into question. • Trump’s opponents, including some of his own party, feel that his refusal to concede his election loss and his seeming support of the protesters, threatens democracy in America. They feel that it is inadvisable to let him remain in power any longer. • If Trump loses an impeachment trial then it will prevent him from running for office again in four years’ time. His critics feel that this would be a good thing. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trump is due to leave his job at the end of this month anyway, so some people feel that an impeachment trial is pointless. • Pence argues that Trump’s opponents are playing political games in calling for an impeachment trial and that such a trial would inflame the situation.

B4. Why is it significant that in the US state of Georgia, two people from Joe Biden’s Democratic Party have been voted into the Senate?

READING SKILL — Infer information and justify with evidence from the text

Possible answer

Starting point

- It is significant because it means that Mr Biden’s party will have control of the Senate and he will have much more freedom to run the country how he wants.

Development

- Furthermore, it wasn’t until he lost control of Congress that Mr Trump finally conceded defeat in the election. He has become the first US president since Herbert Hoover in 1932 to lose an election and control of both houses of Congress in the same term.

B5. Why have Twitter and Facebook blocked President Trump?

READING SKILL — Infer information and justify with evidence from the text

Possible answer

Starting point

- Twitter and Facebook have blocked President Trump because of accusations that his posts incited his supporters to riot. They don't want to be associated with violent protests or to be seen to condone such behaviour.

Development

- However, some people think that these companies are biased against Mr Trump because other world leaders have posted worse things online.

Part C

C1. Comment on the use of language in the subheading, "Letting their guard down".

READING SKILL — Recognise effect of language choices

Possible answer

Starting point

- The subheading uses word play on "guard". Those that let their guard down stop being alert. In this case it is the guards who let their guard down!

Development

- Therefore, the use of wordplay highlights the criticism of the police guarding the Capitol because it is their job to be alert.

C2. Look at the structure of the report. Suggest why the section about free speech is at the end of the article.

READING SKILL — Identify benefits of text organisation and presentation

Possible answer

Starting point

- The section about free speech is not essential to an understanding of what happened when supporters of Donald Trump stormed the Capitol Building. Therefore, the information about who was involved, where it happened, what happened, when and how appears at the start of the report.

Development

- However, the issue of free speech is relevant because of the decision made by Twitter and Facebook to block Donald Trump's account due to the incident. Therefore, it is addressed at the end of the report for readers to think about and form their own personal views. It adds interest.

Part D – Discussion task

"Donald Trump should not have been banned from social media." Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Justify your view.

READING SKILL — Develop opinions and provide justifications for view points

Possible answer

FOR	AGAINST
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The decision to ban Donald Trump is unfair because other world leaders have posted much worse things online. It seems that these tech companies are just biased against Trump. • Banning Trump has shown the disturbing power of the tech companies. It will threaten free speech because who are they accountable to in the making of such decisions? Where will it end? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social media platforms should have to take responsibility for the content of their sites. Traditional publishers are not allowed to publish harmful content so it is right that social media sites should block Donald Trump if his posts are deemed harmful. • People are twisting the definition of free speech. It is right that people should be allowed to articulate their opinions and ideas. However, this does not mean that violent, offensive and illegal views and ideas should be given a platform. Donald Trump is a very influential man and he should be banned from social media if his posts are inappropriate and likely to incite riot. • Parler is a social media site which claims to defend free speech. However, it has been criticised for allowing violent and offensive content. This shows that social media sites do need to be regulated and if Trump has been banned as part of this process then the ban should stand.