

The Oval Office

Background:

The Oval Office is the working office space used only by the President of the United States. It is in the West Wing of the White House in Washington DC. It is called the Oval Office because of its shape, which was inspired by a ceremonial room used by George Washington. The three windows behind the president's desk are also inspired from George Washington's ceremonial room. In 1909, President William Howard Taft expanded the White House's West Wing and created the Oval Office. In 1929, while Herbert Hoover was president, a fire severely damaged the West Wing and the Oval Office. Hoover used this as opportunity to renovate it.

In 1933, Franklin Roosevelt commissioned another redesign and created the Oval Office as we know it today. Roosevelt added a ceiling medallion of the US presidential seal, bookcases set into niches in the walls, and easier access to the president's living quarters. The office has four doors. The east door opens to the Rose Garden. The west door leads to a private study and dining room. The northwest door opens to the main corridor of the West Wing and the northeast door opens to the office of the president's secretary.

Each president decorates the office how they like. They can choose things like the carpet, the furniture, and the artwork on the walls. This is not required. Many presidents choose to keep certain elements of the office from past presidents. For example, President Harry Truman was the first to have the presidential seal placed on the carpet. Since then, all presidents have had the presidential seal in their office carpet. The office can be quickly remodeled within a single day, depending on how many changes the new president wishes to make.

Materials Needed: Oval Office pictures, pencil, comparison worksheet

Procedure:

1. Discuss background information with the class
2. Observe and compare President Donald Trump's Oval Office with President Harry Truman's
3. Students may circle or highlight the differences and similarities they see or they may use one of the provided graphic organizers. Challenge them to see who can find the most.
 - 3a. If students wish to circle what they notice on the picture, have them label differences with a "D" and similarities with a "S".
4. Discuss similarities and differences with the class/group
5. Use answer key to expand the discussion on student observations

Assessment: comparison worksheet/pictures

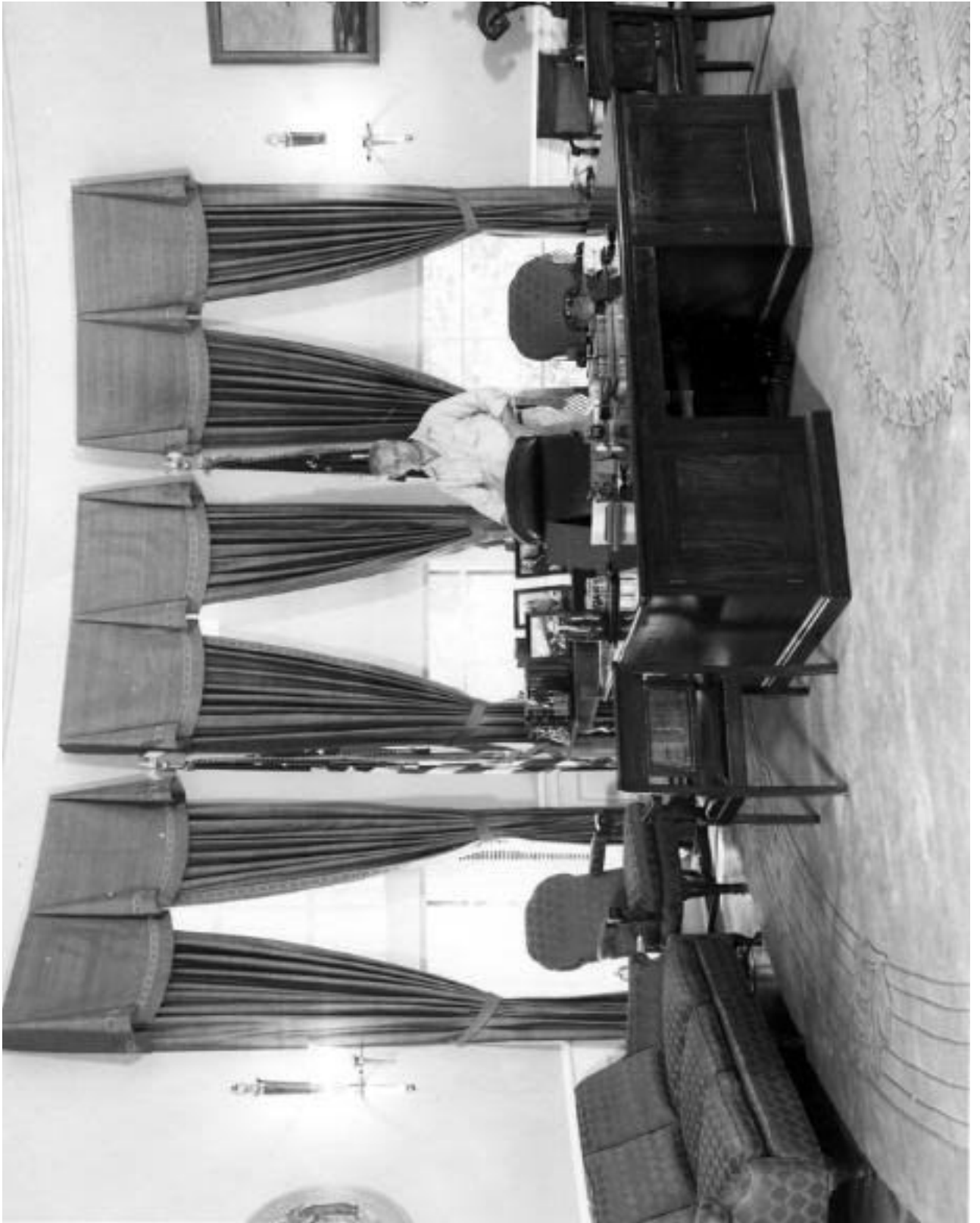
President Trump's Oval Office







President Harry Truman's Oval Office

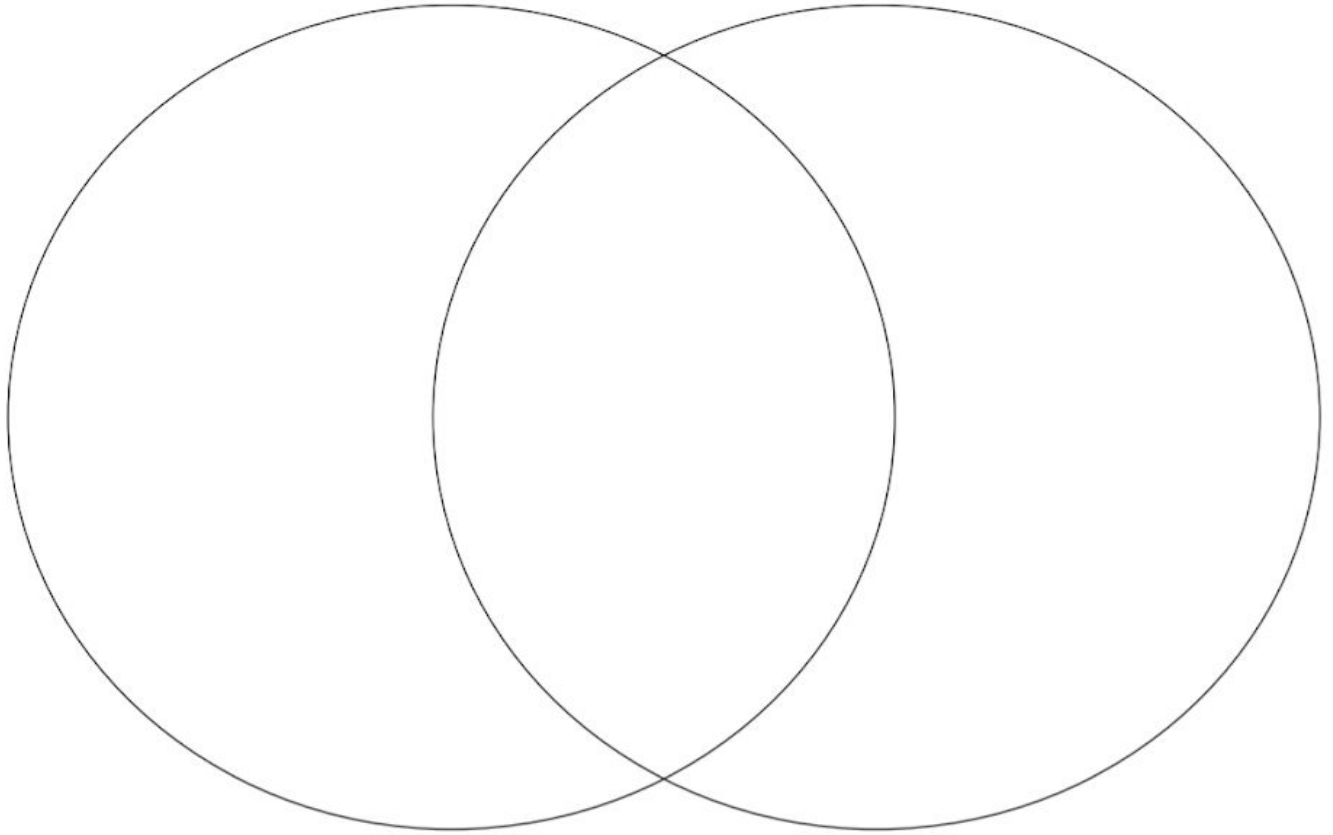






Truman	Both	Trump

Venn Diagram



Answer Key

Differences

1. Carpet – Truman's carpet is green. Trump's is a tan color.
2. Walls – Truman's walls are green. (Pictures of Trump's office show different wallpapers. The striped walls are leftover from President Obama's decoration of the office).
3. Drapes – Truman's are green. Trump's are yellow.
 - a. Truman's favorite color was green.
4. Furniture – Truman has no furniture in the middle of the room. Trump has couches. This was because the White House did not have a dedicated press briefing room until 1969. Truman needed to make room in his office for reporters during press conferences.
5. Desk – Truman's desk is very cluttered. This is because Truman frequently worked in the office. Trump prefers to work in the White House residence area instead.
6. Books – Truman has lots of books in his office because he loved to read. Since Trump does not spend as much time in his office, there are fewer personal items.
7. Artwork – Truman has artwork of planes in his office. Trump does not.
8. Globe – Truman has a globe sitting in front of the fireplace. Future president Dwight Eisenhower gave it to Truman as a gift.
9. Television – Truman has a television in his office. He was the first president to have one in the Oval Office.
10. Portraits behind desk – Truman has a portrait of Franklin Delano Roosevelt. Trump has a portrait of Thomas Jefferson.

Similarities

1. Desk – Both Truman and Trump used the same desk. The "Resolute Desk" was a gift from England's Queen Victoria in 1880.
2. George Washington portrait – Both Truman and Trump have portraits of George Washington above the fireplace, although, they are different portraits.
3. Flags behind desk