

BEYOND THE CHERRY TREE

STORIES OF THE PRESIDENTS

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Introduction



On the following pages are stories of each of America's presidents. Each story is divided into two parts. The first part is a story about the president's youth. This story will enable students to more easily identify with the person behind the pomp of the presidency. The second part is a biography covering the major events of the president's life and terms of office.

Students will read about a young John Adams neglecting his studies to go hunting, then lamenting that he'd "wasted his youth" as he returns to books. They will read inspiring stories of sickly youths like James Madison and Theodore Roosevelt overcoming their frailties to make great contributions to American life. They will read humorous tales about Jack Kennedy sitting on an anthill searching for blueberries and young Dwight Eisenhower doing battle with a giant goose.

The presidents came from log cabins and mansions. Young Franklin Roosevelt lived like a prince with his own sailboat, while newborn Millard Fillmore was laid in a box used to collect maple sugar sap because his parents couldn't afford a cradle.

Most of the presidents went to college, but Abraham Lincoln had just one year of regular school, Harry Truman couldn't afford college, and Andrew Johnson could barely read and write.

Some of the presidents like—John Kennedy and Ronald Reagan—were witty and charming, but Ben Harrison was called "cold as an iceberg" and Calvin Coolidge waged a lifelong battle against extreme shyness. At nineteen Warren Harding

owned a newspaper, and at sixteen Martin Van Buren summed up a case in court. But Andrew Johnson was a bound boy little better than a slave, and Grover Cleveland, at fifteen, was a clerk who had to wash up in a horse trough.

Most of the presidents studied law, but Grant, Taylor, and Eisenhower were soldiers. Reagan was an actor and Carter a peanut farmer. Most presidents came from Virginia, Ohio, and the Northeast, but Carter came from the red clay of Georgia and Bill Clinton from a town named Hope in Arkansas.

The American presidency has been an all-male, all-white, mostly northern European Protestant institution. But the stories point out how many first ladies played vital roles in the White House. Dolley Madison lingered at the White House to save important documents even as British soldiers advanced nearby. Edith Wilson may have been acting president during her husband's illness. Eleanor Roosevelt was the "eyes of the president" as she traveled throughout America during the Depression. Her insights led to many laws to alleviate the suffering of the nation.

As they read the stories, students will learn that all presidents had successes and failures. Some soared to greatness; others watched their presidencies end in disgrace, scandal, and lost dreams. All the presidents struggled and overcame challenges. All tried in their own way to do their duty as President of the United States. They deserve respect for taking on one of the world's most difficult jobs.

Each story is followed by review exercises and activities that students can complete on an individual basis. The Teacher's Guide (page 125) contains discussion questions and group activities suitable for the study of individual presidents. The General Activities section (page *vii*) gives instructions for activities that may be adapted for use with any president.

A reproducible outline map of the United States appears on page *ix*. You may wish to have students research the locations of various events in the stories and mark them on the map.

Presidential libraries are a good source of photographs and information relating to the presidents. Names, addresses, and telephone numbers of presidential libraries appear on page *x*.

General Activities



The activities in this section may be adapted for use with any of the stories of the presidents.

Instructions for Group Activities

DEBATES

Prepare a handout explaining Robert's Rules of Order. Tell students they will use the rules as they debate an issue relating to one of the presidents. Divide students into debate teams. Have the teams research the selected debate topic as a homework assignment and work on their arguments during class time. After the debate, encourage students to think of ways the two sides of the issue might be resolved by compromise, and to discuss the insights they have gained.

MOCK TRIALS

Have students conduct a mock trial of a president who appears to have done something wrong. Assign students to act as a judge, a jury, a committee for the prosecution, and a committee for the defense. Students should research the background of each accusation carefully before the trial.

TIME LINES

Divide the class into groups and have each group research one aspect of a president's life. One group might research his personal life before he became president, another his military career, another his political career, and another his personal life after leaving the presidency. With all groups using the same scale (e.g., 1 inch = 1 year), have each group prepare a time line, illustrated with either original drawings or with photocopied images from books or magazines. Mount the completed time lines on a bulletin board to present a complete picture of the president's life.

WOMEN IN HISTORY

Organize the class into teams to research famous and influential women who lived during various presidencies. Examples are Jane Addams, Eleanor Roosevelt, Frances Perkins, Jeanette Rankin, Abigail Adams, and Lucretia Mott. Based on their research, have each team select a woman who could have become president. Have the teams report to the class about what sort of a president their selected individual might have been.

MINORITIES IN HISTORY

Organize the class into teams to research individuals from minority groups who were prominent during various presidential administrations. Have each team select an individual who could have been president and report to the class about what sort of president that person might have been. Examples include Harriet Tubman, Frederick Douglass, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and Cesar Chavez.

CULMINATING GROUP ACTIVITY

Have students work in groups to create a time line showing the incumbencies of all the presidents. Make sure all groups use the same scale so that the different segments of the time line can be fitted together. A scale of 1 inch = 1 year will create a time line 18 feet long. Mount the completed time line so that it runs around the walls of the classroom.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL ACTIVITIES

1. Imagine that you want to be president. Research the requirements for becoming president, the steps you would have to take to be nominated, and what you would need to do to win the election. Present your findings on a chart.
2. Choose the three presidents who you think were the least effective leaders. Write why you made these choices.
3. Choose the individual who, in your opinion, was the best president to lead us in the last twenty years. Make a poster of that president that shows his major achievements.
4. There are four faces carved on Mount Rushmore in South Dakota—Washington, Jefferson, Lincoln, and Theodore Roosevelt. You have been chosen to select the fifth face. Find a picture of Mount Rushmore, photocopy it, and add your choice, either by drawing it in or pasting it on a picture.
5. On an outline map of the United States, show some of the important places in a specific president's life. Include birthplace, where president went to school, worked, and died.
6. Write a letter to the current president asking that a certain problem that is important to you be solved.
7. Prepare an outline for an essay on a president of your choice. Use these main heads:
 - I. Early life
 - II. Contributions during term of office
 - III. Overall impact of the presidencyUnder each main head, list three subheads, each containing at least two details.
8. After reading one of the stories of the presidents, write your own list of five questions and give them to a partner to answer.

GEORGE WASHINGTON



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George Washington was not yet a teenager when his father died. George leaned on his twenty-five-year-old half-brother, Lawrence, for support. Lawrence did all the things a father would have done. He taught George how to ride horses and feel at home in the forest.

George learned to read and write and do arithmetic from a private teacher. He didn't spend much time in regular school. As a student he often copied rules of behavior from books, which helped him become a better writer. Following is one of the rules as George wrote it in his exercise book: "Keep your fingers clean and

when foul wipe them on a Corner of your Table Napkin."

As a teenager, George had his first big adventure. He spent about thirty days in the Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia. One night he slept in a rough cabin with only a thin blanket to warm him. Worse yet, the blanket was filled with lice and fleas. Another time George almost burned up when the straw he was sleeping on caught fire. During his adventure, George swam his horse across a river filled with melting snow. He paddled his boat forty miles through rough waters and he shot wild turkeys for food. One day he even came face-to-face with a rattlesnake, but it didn't bite him.

His greatest adventure was meeting a group of Indian warriors. George was thrilled by the sounds of the Native American music they played—the drumming on deerskin-covered pots and the rattle of gourds filled with small pieces of lead. During this mountain adventure young George grew into adulthood in pioneer America.



George Washington was born in 1732 in Virginia. As a young man he was a surveyor. He measured the land so people would know where their properties began and ended.

When war broke out between the British and French, Washington fought bravely for the British. During one battle two horses

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were shot from under Washington and four bullets ripped into his uniform.

Washington married a young widow, Martha Custis. She had two children and Washington treated them as his own. The young family lived as farmers at Mount Vernon.

When the thirteen American colonies wanted their independence, Washington was chosen to lead their army. He had never led such an army before, but he was brave and hardworking. Everyone knew he would do his best.

The Revolutionary War was long and difficult. General Washington and his army were often cold and hungry. Washington shared the hard life of his troops and they respected him for that. Lady Washington, as his wife was called, joined his camp during the winters. She gave as much help as she could to the ragged and weary soldiers.

As the war went on, Washington learned how to win battles. He used the forest to make surprise attacks on the British. He built fine forts to defend his troops. After many battles, Washington led his army to victory. America became independent.

After the war Washington hoped to return to Mount Vernon and his family. But now his country needed him more than ever. He was asked to be America's first president.

Washington had to set up the new government. He could not look back to see what other presidents had done. He was doing it all for the first time. In a way,

Washington had to invent the new government and figure out what the laws really meant. As his wife, Martha Washington also had to become a model for all the presidential families to come.

Washington was not the smartest man in the government. Jefferson said this about him: "He was, indeed, in every sense of the words, a wise, a good, and a great man." Washington spent a lot of time thinking about a problem before he decided. He didn't have Jefferson's quick mind. But Washington always tried to do the right thing. He could have taken a lot of power for himself, but he didn't. When asked what he wanted to be called, he said simply, "Mister President."

Washington led his new country to find its place in the world. That's why he's called the "Father of His Country."

After two terms as president—from 1789 to 1797—Washington returned to Mount Vernon. He could have continued to be president, because he was very popular. But he felt he had done his job. Now it was time for someone else.

Washington said good-bye to the American people. He told them that they should love their country and put the good of the country first. He told them not to get involved in the problems of foreign countries.

Washington died in 1799. As he grew weaker he said softly, ". . . let me go off quietly. I cannot last long."

Name _____ Date _____

Recalling the Facts

Mister adventure lived against led

In the list below, find the word that fits in each sentence. Write the word in the blank. Exchange papers with a partner to check your answers.

1. In the Blue Ridge Mountains young Washington had a big _____ .
2. In his first war, Washington fought _____ the French.
3. Washington _____ at Mount Vernon.
4. Washington _____ the army in the Revolutionary War.
5. Washington wanted to be called _____ President.

Individual Activities

WASHINGTON IN THE WILDS: DIARY ENTRY

The text describes Washington's trip to the wilds of the Blue Ridge Mountains when he was sixteen. He kept a diary of that trip. Choose one incident from the text and write a paragraph about it as Washington might have written in his diary.

A SOLDIER IN THE REVOLUTION: A SKETCH

Washington's soldiers were often ragged, but in paintings like John Trumbull's *Washington and the Hessians* and William Mercer's *Battle of Princeton*, they are in colorful uniform. Find a picture that shows soldiers in Washington's army. Make a sketch of an individual soldier.

THE BETSY ROSS FLAG AND YOUR FLAG

Washington fought under the Betsy Ross flag. Working with a partner, design your own first American flag. You may use stars and stripes; red, white, and blue; or other colors and symbols. Be prepared to explain why you chose those colors and symbols.

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