

THE AMERICAN PRESIDENTS by Genevieve Madeline Ryan

MORE ABOUT THE AMERICAN PRESIDENTS

*America's president number one,
Founding Father Washington.*

George Washington, 1789-1797: Born in Virginia, Washington entered the army at a young age, first leading the Virginia militia in the French and Indian War and then acting as commander in chief of the troops that fought against the British in the Revolutionary War. Washington presided over the 1787 convention in Philadelphia that produced our Constitution. He was elected first President of the United States in 1789. He is thought to be the father of our nation.

*John Adams, second president,
The very first White House resident*

John Adams, 1797-1801: Adams was President Washington's vice president for two terms before he was elected president in 1797. The construction of the White House neared completion late in Adams's presidency so he and his wife, Abigail, lived in "The President's House" in Washington in its unfinished state for a short time. Adams also addressed the first joint session of Congress that took place in the Capitol on November 18, 1800.

*Thomas Jefferson, number three,
Doubled the size of our country.*

Thomas Jefferson, 1801-1809: During Jefferson's presidency, the U.S. bought 846,000 square miles of land west of the Mississippi River from Napoleon and the French. The Louisiana Purchase almost doubled the size of the nation. This new territory included what are now Arkansas, Colorado, Iowa, Kansas, Louisiana, Minnesota, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, North Dakota, Oklahoma, South Dakota, and Wyoming. The price tag was \$15 million.

*Then James Madison, number four,
Led us through the English war.*

James Madison, 1809-1817: During the War of 1812, with the U.S. fighting against the British, Madison became the first president to face gunfire and the only president to exercise authority as commander-in-chief in battle. In 1814, British troops invaded Washington, D.C. Madison was on the outskirts of the city with the troops; however they could not stop the enemy from entering the capital. The British troops burned the U.S. Capitol, the White House, and other important public buildings. The Treaty of Ghent formally ended the war in December 1814, but slow communications did not bring news of the treaty to Louisiana until after General Andrew Jackson's victory at the Battle of New Orleans on January 8, 1815.



*James Monroe is number five,
His Monroe Doctrine still survives.*

James Monroe, 1817-1825: During his presidency, James Monroe created the Monroe Doctrine, one of the most important statements of American foreign policy. He warned European nations not to interfere with the governments or the futures of peoples in North and South America. Monroe recognized independent countries in South America and did not want to see further European colonies created there.

*Another Adams, John Quincy,
Rose to the sixth presidency.*

John Quincy Adams, 1825-1829: John Quincy Adams was the oldest son of the second president, John Adams. His father's role as president inspired the younger Adams. He held almost all of the major public offices in the country, including serving as President Monroe's secretary of state, before he was elected president in 1825. After his presidency, Adams was elected to Congress.

*Seven, Andrew Jackson,
Was a frontier common man.*

Andrew Jackson, 1829-1837: Jackson was the first president who was associated with the American frontier, as he based his career in Tennessee, then considered the west. He was the first president born west of the Allegheny Mountains. He was a successful military leader during the War of 1812 and was an American hero for his victory against the British at the battle of New Orleans. He was nicknamed "Old Hickory" for his toughness.

*Number eight, Van Buren,
First president born an "American."*

Martin Van Buren, 1837-1841: Van Buren was the first president to be born a citizen of the United States. Van Buren was never a British subject as he was born in Kinderhook, New York in 1782 after America declared independence from Britain. He served as President Jackson's secretary of state and vice president before being elected president in 1837. After losing the election of 1840, Van Buren ran for president two more times but failed to win.

*Harrison, nine, passed away,
One month after Inaugural Day.*

William Henry Harrison, 1841: After catching cold at his inauguration, Harrison contracted pneumonia and died after only one month as president. A military hero before the presidency, Harrison served in the U.S. Army during the Indian Wars in the Northwest Territory, was a governor of the Indiana Territory, and represented Ohio in the U.S. Senate.



*President Tyler, number ten,
Ended the war with the Indians.*

John Tyler, 1841-1845: Tyler was the first vice president to succeed to the presidency after the death of a president. During Tyler's administration, the Second Seminole War in Florida came to an end in 1842. Battles over Florida territory between Native Americans and the United States began in 1815 and were not fully resolved until the end of the Third Seminole War in 1858.

*James K. Polk, eleven,
Looked to western expansion.*

James Polk, 1845-1849: During Polk's presidency, the United States almost doubled in size. Polk promised to make the territory of Texas part of the United States and did so in 1845. Polk also bargained with the British and gained land in Oregon. The United States went to war with Mexico over the annexation of Texas to take the territories of New Mexico and California under the terms of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo.

*Taylor, twelve, of the army,
Nicknamed "Rough and Ready."*

Zachary Taylor, 1849-1850: Taylor was a military man. He served in the U.S. Army during the War of 1812, the Seminole and Black Hawk Wars, and the Mexican American War. His leadership and success in the military earned him the nickname "Old Rough and Ready" and made him an American hero before he was elected president in 1849.

*Thirteen, Fillmore, in his eyes,
Best for all was a compromise.*

Millard Fillmore, 1850-1853: After President Taylor died, Vice President Millard Fillmore took office. As the nation expanded, there was much friction over whether or not slavery should be allowed in new states and territories acquired from the war with Mexico. Fillmore played a major role in completing the Compromise of 1850, which tried to solve these issues. The Compromise admitted California as a free state, and ended the slave trade in Washington, D.C. However, as part of the compromise, Congress enacted the Fugitive Slave Act to assist slave owners in the recovery of runaway slaves. There was hope that the Compromise of 1850 would hold off secession, but it would not end the slavery question and inspired the defiance of abolitionists.

*Fourteen, Franklin Pierce is here,
The Civil War is drawing near.*

Franklin Pierce, 1853-1857: Although the country hoped for peace after the Compromise of 1850, it was short-lived. More conflicts arose over slavery during the presidency of Franklin Pierce. President Pierce signed the Kansas-Nebraska Act in 1854, giving voters in new territories the right to decide whether they would allow slavery if their land became a state. In the town of Lawrence, pro-slavery and anti-slavery forces come to blows in 'bleeding Kansas.' Pierce could not resolve the growing conflicts between the free and slave states.



*James Buchanan, fifteen,
The one bach'lor we've ever seen.*

James Buchanan, 1857-1861: Buchanan is the only bachelor to be elected president of the United States. Although he was engaged at a young age, he never married. Buchanan was unable to keep the country from tearing apart over the issue of slavery. Within days of Buchanan's inauguration, the Supreme Court, in the Dred Scott decision, held that African Americans, imported to the United States and held as slaves or their descendants, could never be citizens of the United States. The boundaries set for slavery by the Missouri Compromise were ruled unconstitutional. By the end of his presidency, South Carolina and six other southern slave states had seceded from the United States and formed the Confederate States of America.

*Sixteen, Lincoln, "Honest Abe,"
Signed the law that freed the slaves.*

Abraham Lincoln, 1861-1865: President Lincoln attempted to bring the secessionist states back into the Union. At the beginning of the Civil War, he did not favor freeing the slaves. He thought that emancipation might be ruled unconstitutional and felt it would not have broad support. Eventually he saw it as a tool to help win the war and restore the Union. On January 1, 1863, he signed the Emancipation Proclamation. This executive order from the Commander in Chief was a military decision. It declared that slaves in the areas in rebellion would be freed. The law that abolished slavery throughout the United States is the 13th Amendment to the Constitution. While the 13th Amendment was drafted during Lincoln's presidency, it did not become law until after his assassination.

*Seventeen, Andrew Johnson,
Started Reconstruction.*

Andrew Johnson, 1865-1869: When President Lincoln was assassinated, his vice president, Andrew Johnson, took office. The Civil War ended in April 1865 and Johnson announced his plan for Reconstruction, those efforts to reunite the nation and restore the South. Johnson wanted to bring southern states back into the Union quickly and smoothly, but many members of Congress thought he was too lenient and wanted former Confederate states to receive harsh treatment or outright punishment. Congress succeeded in reducing Johnson's executive power, and the weakened president did not win the Democratic Party's nomination for 1868.

*Eighteen, Union General Grant,
Had led his troops with good judgment.*

Ulysses Grant, 1869-1877: Grant was a Civil War hero before he became president. President Lincoln trusted Grant's judgment and leadership skills and placed all U.S. forces under his command. When Grant became president, he continued Reconstruction in the South but during his two terms violence against blacks in the South increased. The early promises of a peaceful united nation – white and black – had failed to materialize. Grant was also challenged by an economic depression and scandal. One of his greatest successes after the Civil War was his book on his life in the military, *Personal Memoirs of U. S. Grant*.



*Nineteen, President R.B. Hayes,
Pursued the South in many ways.*

Rutherford Hayes, 1877-1881: President Hayes pledged to protect all citizens' rights and allow for state and local governments to rule themselves. It was difficult to do both in the former Confederate states. Hayes withdrew the last Union troops that had been overseeing Reconstruction in the South. He listened to black leaders and gave them important political jobs. For example, Frederick Douglass was appointed marshal of the District of Columbia. He fought for public education for African Americans. Some African Americans did win elected posts, and a great number voted in elections, but many of the leaders in the southern states were not sympathetic to former slaves.

*Garfield, number twenty,
Killed while in his presidency.*

James Garfield, 1881: Before he was elected president, Garfield was a successful major general in the Union Army and represented Ohio in the U.S. Congress. Garfield won the presidential election by only 10,000 votes. He served for six months before he was shot in a Washington train station by a deranged man who had been denied a government job. Garfield died a few months later.

*Chester Arthur, twenty- one,
Sought reform and got it done.*

Chester Arthur, 1881-1885: Following the assassination of President Garfield, Vice President Chester Arthur moved into the White House. In previous years, many government jobs had been given to people who were friends of those in power, whether or not they were qualified to do the job. Arthur, in fact, was a successful participant of this 'spoils' system in New York City. But as president he signed into law the Pendleton Civil Service Act. These reforms called for federal government jobs to be filled by those who had the proper experience for the appointment or passed an examination.

*Grover Cleveland, twenty- two,
Remember him 'cause he's not through.*

Grover Cleveland, 1885-1889: Grover Cleveland was the only president to serve two non-consecutive terms. He was also the only president to be married in the White House. In 1886, he wed Frances Folsom in the Blue Room. Cleveland was the first Democrat to win the White House after the Civil War. He pursued a policy barring special favors to any economic group. He vetoed many private pension bills to Civil War veterans whose claims were fraudulent. When Congress passed a popular bill granting pensions to veterans or their dependents for disabilities not caused by military service, Cleveland vetoed it. He was defeated in 1888 by Republican Benjamin Harrison.



*Twenty-three, Harrison, comes again,
It's William's grandson, Benjamin.*

Benjamin Harrison, 1889-1893: Benjamin Harrison was the grandson of former President William Henry Harrison (the ninth president). During his term, Harrison signed the Sherman Antitrust Act, which tried to protect trade and business. He also spoke out regularly for education and civil rights of African Americans.

*Grover Cleveland, twenty-four,
Ran for the White House, elected once more.*

Grover Cleveland, 1893-1897: Cleveland's major challenge of his second term was to deal with the Panic of 1893, which sparked an economic depression. He also used American military forces to end the Pullman strike in Chicago. This decision angered unions and members of his own party. However, his honesty and good character helped him survive the challenges of his second term.

*Here's McKinley, twenty-five,
The Twentieth Century had arrived.*

William McKinley, 1897-1901: William McKinley's presidency witnessed a new century and recognition of the growing global power of the United States brought on by a quick victory in the Spanish-American War. McKinley pressed for an "Open Door" policy in China, and during his term the United States annexed the Philippines, Puerto Rico, Guam, and Hawaii. At home, McKinley favored high tariffs to revive business and allowed mergers that resulted in powerful 'combinations.' McKinley was reelected for a second term but was assassinated in Buffalo, New York, at the Pan-American Exposition in 1901.

*Teddy Roosevelt, twenty-six,
"Speak softly and carry a big stick!"*

Theodore Roosevelt, 1901-1909: Theodore Roosevelt was a hero of the Spanish-American War, leading the "Rough Riders" to victory at the battle of San Juan Hill. After President McKinley's assassination, Roosevelt, at age 42, became the youngest president in American history. He opposed monopolies and worked to create an economy that was fair to business and the consumer. He also believed in the United States' active involvement in global politics. Roosevelt brokered the end of the Russo-Japanese War and pressed for the construction of the Panama Canal. His motto "speak softly and carry a big stick," became the nation's watchwords for its role in world events, using its military and economic might to back up diplomacy.

*Twenty-seven, Taft we see,
Biggest man in the presidency.*

William Taft, 1909-1913: President Taft is known for his size. He weighed more than 300 pounds. When Taft became president, many expected him to follow Theodore Roosevelt's policies, since he had served as his vice president and had TR's blessing as his successor. Taft was not aggressive on many issues important to TR, such as conservation. Roosevelt himself believed his former Vice President had "completely twisted around the policies I . . . acted upon." Taft believed in the force of law and was a more effective 'trust-buster' than Roosevelt. In 1912, Roosevelt came out of retirement to run as a third party candidate for president splitting the Republican Party and leading to the defeat of Taft and Roosevelt and a victory for Democrat Woodrow Wilson.



*Woodrow Wilson, twenty-eight,
Thought a League of Nations was great.*

Woodrow Wilson, 1913-21: Woodrow Wilson was president during World War I. The United States remained neutral until 1917, but Wilson asked Congress to declare war on Germany after their attempt to enlist Mexico as an ally and the start of unrestricted submarine warfare sinking any ships suspected of aiding the Allies. American troops brought greatly needed reinforcements to the Allies and a defeated Germany signed an armistice, or truce, in November 1918. Wilson drafted “Fourteen Points” to present at the peace conference in Versailles, France. He believed a lasting peace in Europe through the creation of a “League of Nations.” The League consisted of member nations that would discuss and solve global problems to prevent future world wars. However, Wilson was unable win Congressional approval.

*Twenty-nine, Harding, Post-World War One,
“Normalcy” promised to everyone.*

Warren Harding, 1921-23: Americans looked forward to peace and stability after the conclusion of World War I. Harding promised a return to “normalcy” a campaign appeal that won him the election by a landslide (the first presidential election in which women voted). He steered away from international entanglements. Albert Fall, one of Harding’s cabinet members, was jailed for taking bribes from an oil corporation, although Harding died of a heart attack before Congress began investigation of the Teapot Dome scandal.

*Calvin Coolidge, thirty,
Taught one and all frugality.*

Calvin Coolidge, 1923-1929: To be frugal is to be careful about your spending. Calvin Coolidge encouraged simple living and small (and limited) government. Hard work was the foundation of success, whether individual or corporate. Coolidge’s work ethic and honesty restored trust in the government after the Teapot Dome Scandal. Business expanded greatly during his presidency.

*Herbert Hoover, thirty-one,
Oh no! The Depression had begun.*

Herbert Hoover, 1929-1933: President Hoover served in the administrations of several presidents and helped with many humanitarian projects overseas before he was elected in 1929. Only a few months into his presidency, the stock market crashed and the United States was sent into a prolonged economic depression. Hoover was an efficiency expert who believed that a technical solution existed for every social and economic problem. Government was not the answer to such problems, but he tried to aid businesses, farmers, and the unemployed with loans and public works. Many Americans considered Hoover insensitive and cold towards those who were suffering and unfairly blamed him for the Great Depression.



*Franklin Roosevelt, thirty-two,
With his "New Deal" the country grew.*

Franklin Roosevelt, 1933-1945: A cousin of Theodore Roosevelt, Franklin Roosevelt was inspired by TR's presidency and became politically involved early in life. As president during the Great Depression, his New Deal programs employed millions, improved banking practices, and provided relief programs for farmers. After Japan attacked Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, he called on Congress to declare war. The military industries required to build weapons to fight the Axis Powers created jobs and helped pull the nation out of a depression. Roosevelt served longer than any president dying in April 1945 at the start of his fourth term. The federal government grew greatly during his administration, as did the reputation of the U.S. as a world leader.

*Harry Truman, thirty-three,
Won with atomic energy.*

Harry Truman, 1945-1953: When President Roosevelt died, Vice President Harry Truman began his presidency with a tough decision to make. Although the war in Europe ended soon after he became president, Japan had not quit fighting. Even though Truman knew nothing about the atomic bomb program before he was sworn in, he soon came to realize the awesome power of a weapon that might force Japan to surrender quickly. Atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, two major Japanese cities, convinced Emperor Hirohito to order a Japanese surrender and World War II was finally over.

*Eisenhower, thirty-four,
Commanded in the Second World War.*

Dwight Eisenhower, 1953-1961: Many military heroes in American history have served as president. Dwight Eisenhower was a distinguished general during World War II before elected president in 1953. He was the supreme commander of the Allied forces in Europe during World War II. As president, Eisenhower helped secure a truce between North and South Korea that ended the Korean War in 1953. He continued to pressure the Soviet Union to contain the spread of communism and launched the space race. On the domestic front, he ordered federal troops into Arkansas, to enforce desegregation of Little Rock's public schools in 1957.

*Thirty-five, John Kennedy,
Assassinated in sixty three.*

John Kennedy, 1961-63: President Kennedy's promise for a New Frontier was cut short by an assassin's bullet in Dallas, Texas, on November 22, 1963. Kennedy was the youngest man elected president. His plans for expanding civil rights, sending a man to the moon, containing communism and staying ahead in the nuclear arms race were taken up by presidents that followed him. Perhaps the biggest challenge President Kennedy faced was the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962. Although many feared nuclear war between the United States and the Soviet Union, a deal was struck and the Soviets agreed to remove their nuclear missiles from Cuba and the U.S. moved missiles stationed in Turkey.



*Thirty-six, Johnson, Lyndon B.,
He declared a “War on Poverty.”*

Lyndon Johnson, 1963-1969: After Kennedy’s assassination, Vice President Lyndon Johnson was sworn in as president. Johnson designed the “Great Society” legislation that included civil and voting rights, a war on poverty and health insurance programs for the poor and elderly. Despite these efforts, urban areas still remained centers of poverty and crime. Unrest in the nation also stemmed from the escalation of the Vietnam War.

*Thirty-seven, Nixon went far,
Opening China and the U.S.S.R.*

Richard Nixon, 1969-1974: In 1972, President Nixon visited China and the U.S.S.R. to improve relations between the United States and these two powerful communist nations. The trip to Beijing marked the first time an American president visited China. His meetings with Russian leader Leonid Brezhnev resulted in limiting the production of nuclear weapons. Nixon’s diplomatic achievements will always be weighed against the Watergate scandal, which led to his resignation in August 1974.

*Gerald R. Ford, thirty-eight,
Moved the nation forward past Watergate.*

Gerald Ford, 1974-1977: Gerald Ford became president in unusual circumstances. President Nixon resigned in August 1974 and Ford took office immediately and went to work healing the nation. Ford also pardoned Nixon for federal crimes he may have committed in the Watergate cover-up. The move was loudly criticized. He was convinced that it was vital to restore confidence in America’s elected leaders and move on. Ford also had to move the nation past Vietnam, after the last Americans left Saigon in April 1975. As Ford later stated, “the major problem was to restore integrity and confidence in the White House, which we did.”

*Thirty-nine, with all his might,
Carter fought for human rights.*

Jimmy Carter, 1977-1981: President Carter declared that the fight for human rights around the globe was at the heart of his foreign policy. He would not concentrate on containment of the Soviet Union’s influence but address the lack of freedoms everywhere. When the Soviets invaded Afghanistan that strategy became more difficult. He also helped Egypt and Israel forge a peace agreement in 1979. An energy crisis and soaring inflation were challenges at home.

*Reagan, forty, from the West,
Taught the world that freedom’s best.*

Ronald Reagan, 1981-1989: Ronald Reagan, former Hollywood actor and California governor, brought his optimistic outlook to the presidential election of 1980 and defeated Jimmy Carter in an electoral landslide. He supported an arms build up to confront the Soviet Union and encouraged anticommunist movements in Africa, Central America, and Asia., His shift from détente to a policy of peace through strength started the end of the Cold War. In domestic policy Reagan championed the lessening of federal government responsibility in solving social problems, reducing restrictions on business, and implementing tax cuts.



*Bush, forty-one, showed solid form,
Freed a nation in “Desert Storm.”*

George H. W. Bush, 1989-1993: In 1990, when Iraqi President Saddam Hussein invaded Middle East neighboring nation, Kuwait, and threatened Saudi Arabia, President Bush led the call for turning back the Iraqi army. After the United Nations imposed economic sanctions, President Bush announced “Operation Desert Storm,” the U.S. led international coalition of forces sent to the Persian Gulf. On January 17, 1991 the coalition forces launched an attack, driving back the Iraqi forces. Kuwait was freed.

*Forty-two, Bill Clinton,
President through the Millennium.*

Bill Clinton, 1993-2001: Bill Clinton was president during the Millennium, the turning of the calendar in 2000 to mark a new thousand-year period. President and Mrs. Clinton created the White House Millennium Council to create programs that would “honor the past and imagine the future.” This council worked with a variety of local, state, and federal groups to work on projects that celebrated American historical and cultural values. President Clinton also proposed a Millennium Fund of \$30 million – funded by Congress as the “Save America’s Treasures” program – to be used for preservation of many national landmarks and historic sites.

*George W. Bush, number forty-three,
Now he leads our country.*

George W. Bush, 2001-Present: When George W. Bush was sworn in as president in 2001, he became the first son of a president to be elected chief executive since father and son, John Adams and John Quincy Adams. After a controversial election in 2000 that involved recounts and a Supreme Court ruling, Bush was finally declared the victor by a margin of five electoral votes. He led the nation’s response to the terrorist attacks of September 11th. The Department of Homeland Security was created to combine efforts to protect Americans at home. In the “war on terror” American forces were sent to Afghanistan to destroy al Qaeda training sites and to Iraq to overthrow the dictatorship of Saddam Hussein.

