

# US Presidents

## 1 Rags to riches<sup>1</sup>: Abraham Lincoln

- a) *The life of the 16th President of the United States, Abraham Lincoln, is the classic 'rags to riches' story of a successful American. Read the text and make a timeline of Lincoln's life.*

Abraham Lincoln, the son of a poor farmer, was born in Kentucky, on February 12th 1809. When he was seven the family moved to Indiana; two years later his mother died. He later wrote about Indiana, "It was a wild region, with many bears and other wild animals still in the woods."

Because of the farm work he could not go to school very often, but his new step-mother taught him to love reading. In his own words: "Of course when I came of age I did not know much. Still somehow, I could read, write, and cipher<sup>2</sup> ... but that was all."

In March 1830 the Lincoln family moved to a new farm in Illinois. Abraham helped to work the land and put up fences, at the same time working in a store in New Salem, and later as a postmaster.

He went on reading and started to study law in his free time. He also became interested in politics. In 1834 Lincoln was elected to the Illinois State Legislature<sup>3</sup> where he argued that the role of government was to encourage business: they should start a national bank, he thought, and improve the country's transport system.

In 1836 he became a lawyer. The following year he moved to Springfield, the new state capital of Illinois.

In 1842 he married Mary Todd of Kentucky and 19 years later he became President of the United States. In the same year, Civil War broke out. The Southern Confederate<sup>4</sup> states, whose landowners wanted to continue as slave-owners, left the Union and fought the Northern states, where people believed that everyone should be free. Lincoln said of this situation: "A house divided against itself cannot stand. I believe this government cannot endure<sup>5</sup> permanently, half slave, half free."

On January 1, 1863, he said that all slaves were free, including those slaves in the Confederate states of the South. During the Civil War 620,000 soldiers were killed, and nobody knows how many civilians died. In November of that year Lincoln made a short speech at Gettysburg where many of the soldiers from the battle in July of that year were buried<sup>6</sup>. This speech has become famous as the 'Gettysburg Address'. In it, President Lincoln spoke of "government of the people, by the people, for the people".

Lincoln was re-elected as President in 1864. At the beginning of April 1865 the Civil War ended, but on Friday 14th April 1865 a man who wanted to help the South, shot Abraham Lincoln at a theatre in Washington. Lincoln died the next day.



Lincoln's childhood home in Kentucky

- b) *What other stories, films, TV programmes etc. do you know that tell a 'rags to riches' story? Compare the events in the story with the events of Abraham Lincoln's life.*

<sup>1</sup>rags to riches [ˌrægz tə ˈrɪtʃɪz] – vom Tellerwäscher zum Millionär • <sup>2</sup>to cipher [ˈsaɪfə] – (altmodisch für) rechnen •

<sup>3</sup>state legislature [steɪt ˈledʒɪslətʃə] – Staatsregierung in einem US-Staat • <sup>4</sup>confederate [kənˈfɛdrət] – verbündet •

<sup>5</sup>to endure [ɪnˈdjʊə] – (sich) halten • <sup>6</sup>to bury [ˈberi] – begraben

## 2 John F. Kennedy

The background of John F. Kennedy, 35th President of the US, was very different from Lincoln's early life. Read the grid and find the differences between their lives.

<b>Name</b>	John Fitzgerald Kennedy (JFK). Called Jack by friends and family
<b>Born</b>	May 29, 1917 in Brookline, near Boston, Massachusetts
<b>Parents</b>	Father: Joseph P. Kennedy, a successful businessman JFK's grandfather was a Boston politician, his great-grandfather was an Irish immigrant. Mother: Rose Kennedy (née Fitzgerald), daughter of the Mayor <sup>1</sup> of Boston Rose and Joseph P. Kennedy had nine children, JFK was the second.
<b>Homes</b>	Boston and summer home in Hyannis Port, Cape Cod
<b>Education</b>	Private school; Harvard: graduated June 1940
<b>Background</b>	Joseph P. Kennedy was US Ambassador <sup>2</sup> to Britain while JFK and older brother Joe were at Harvard.
<b>WWII service</b>	Joined the US Navy, injured <sup>3</sup> in South Pacific, 1943. (brother Joe killed in action 1944)
<b>Political career</b>	1946: Won seat in Congress as a Democrat: 6 years in House of Representatives 1952: Elected to Senate 1961: Became President. Youngest man and first Catholic to become US President Summer 1963: Wanted new Civil Rights law; on TV asked Americans to end racism. Visited West Berlin and saw the Berlin Wall
<b>Family</b>	1953: Married Jacqueline Bouvier. Children: Caroline 1953, John 1960
<b>Important statements</b>	"Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country." "One hundred years of delay <sup>4</sup> have passed since President Lincoln freed the slaves, yet [...] their grandsons, are not fully free." "All free men, wherever they may live, are citizens of Berlin, and, therefore, as a free man, I take pride in the words <i>Ich bin ein Berliner</i> ."
<b>Died</b>	November 1963: Shot in Dallas, Texas

<sup>1</sup>mayor [meə] – Bürgermeister • <sup>2</sup>ambassador [æm'bæsədə] – Gesandter, Diplomat • <sup>3</sup>injured ['ɪndʒəd] – verletzt • <sup>4</sup>delay [dɪ'leɪ] – Verzögerung

## 3 The 44th President

In exercises 1 and 2 you have seen two different ways of presenting a biography: as a narrative (story) and in table form. Choose one of these and write a short biography of the 44th President of the United States, Barack Obama. Use these facts and include any others you think important and any important statements he has made.

Born: Hawaii, August 4 1961	became president January 2009	mother Ann Dunham, from Kansas
father, Barack Obama from Kenya, studied in Hawaii. Died in Kenya 1982	grew up in Indonesia and then Hawaii with grandparents	studied in LA, NY, then law at Harvard
elected to Illinois State Senate 1996		
elected as a Senator for Illinois in 2004	has asked all Americans to volunteer to help others	married Michelle 1992; daughters: Malia (b.1998), Sasha (b. 2001).

## Lösungen

### Lösungsvorschläge Seite 1

**1**

a)

Abraham Lincoln (1809–1865, president  
1860–1865)

time line:

- 1809 born in Kentucky
- 1816 family moved to Indiana
- 1818 his mother died
- 1830 family moved to Illinois
- 1834 L. was elected to Illinois State Legislature
- 1836 L. became a lawyer
- 1837 L. moved to Springfield, Illinois
- 1842 L. married Mary Todd
- 1861 L. became President of the US; Civil War  
broke out
- 1863 L. declared all slaves free
- 1864 L. was re-elected President
- 1865 L. was shot

b)

Stories: Cinderella (*Aschenputtel*), Dick  
Whittington: poor boy, clever, worked hard,  
became popular Lord Mayor of London, *Frau  
Holle*, Aladdin; Films: *Slumdog Millionaire*, *Rocky*

### Lösungsvorschläge Seite 2

**2**

Lincoln: poor family, hard work, no background in  
politics; (anti-slavery)

Kennedy: rich family, good education, family  
background in politics; (improved race relations)

**3**

### Individuelle Schülerlösungen