

US Presidents

1 Rags¹ to riches: 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 for Lincoln.*

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."



Lincoln's childhood home in Kentucky

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 cipher² ... but that was all."

In March 1830 the Lincoln family moved to a new farm in Illinois. Abraham helped to clear 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 spare time. He also became interested in politics. In 1834 Lincoln was elected to the Illinois State Legislature³ where he argued that the role of federal government was to encourage business: they should start a national bank, he thought, and improve the country's transport system.

In 1836 he passed the examinations and 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 following year, Civil War broke out. The Southern Confederate⁴ states, whose land-owners 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 permanently⁵, half slave, half free."

On January 1, 1863, he declared 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. 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.

- 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.*

¹rags [rægz] – Lumpen; ²to cipher ['saɪfə] – (altmodisch für) rechnen; ³state legislature ['steɪt 'ledʒɪslətʃə] – Staatsregierung in einem US-Staat; ⁴Confederate [kən'fedərət] – Bündnis; ⁵to endure permanently [ɪn'dʒʊə 'pɜ:mənəntli] – (sich) ewig halten

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 table and find the differences between their lives.

Name	John Fitzgerald Kennedy (JFK). Called Jack by friends and family
Born	May 29, 1917 in Brookline, near Boston, Massachusetts
Parents	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 of Boston Rose and Joseph P. Kennedy had nine children, JFK was the second.
Homes	Boston and summer home in Hyannis Port, Cape Cod
Education	Private school; Harvard: graduated June 1940
Background	Joseph P. Kennedy was US Ambassador to Britain while JFK and elder brother Joe were at Harvard.
WWII service	Joined the US Navy, injured in South Pacific, 1943. (brother Joe killed in action 1944)
Political career	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
Family	1953: Married Jacqueline Bouvier. Children: Caroline 1953, John 1960
Important statements	"Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country". "One hundred years of delay 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> ."
Died	November 1963: Shot in Dallas, Texas

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

Ex.1

- a) Abraham Lincoln (1809-1865, president 1860-1865)
Poor family, mother died. Step-mother, no education
Worked hard, became a lawyer
President during Civil War. Declared all slaves free.
- b) Stories: Cinderella (*Aschenputtel*), Dick Whittington: poor boy, clever, worked hard, became popular Lord Mayor of London, *Frau Holle*, Aladdin; Films: Slumdog Millionaire, Rocky; TV: Rags to riches

Lösungsvorschläge Seite 2

Ex.2

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

Kennedy: well-off family, good education, family background in politics; improved race relations

Ex. 3

Individuelle Schülerlösungen