Powerful American presidents

George Washington: February 22, 1732 - December 14, 1799

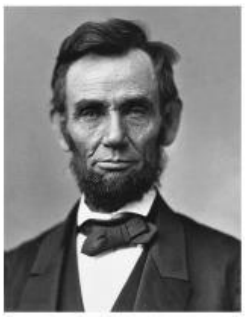
George Washington, the first president of the United States, was born on February 22, 1732, in the British-ruled colony of Virginia.

During his 20s, he fought as a soldier in the French and Indian War, Great Britain's fight with France over the Ohio River Valley territory. After the war, Washington returned to Virginia to work as a farmer. Virginians elected Washington to their colonial government, when he was 26.

As a government official, Washington spoke out against unfair laws, such as high taxes, during Great Britain's rule. In 1774 and 1775, he was one of Virginia's representatives at the First and Second Continental Congresses, a group of representatives from the 13 colonies that would eventually become the United States. The Second Congress helped future third president, Thomas Jefferson, write the Declaration of Independence in July 1776, proclaiming that the 13 colonies were now independent states, no longer under British rule. An army was formed to oppose the British, and Washington was selected to lead it.

As the nation's first president, Washington set the example for other presidents. He worked out how the nation would negotiate treaties with other countries. Washington arranged in his will for slaves to be freed by the time of his wife's death. After his death, he was praised as being "first in war, first in peace, and first in the hearts of his countrymen."

Abraham Lincoln: February 12, 1809 – April 15, 1865



Abraham Lincoln was born in 1809 in a log cabin in Kentucky, United States.

In 1831, he moved to Illinois and worked as a surveyor, storekeeper and postmaster while he studied to be a lawyer. He was elected President in 1860 but was disliked by many people. He remained unpopular for the entire five years of his presidency.

In the southern United States, many slaves were kept by landowners to dig soil, plant crops and look after the animals. Slaves would also do the cleaning and the cooking. Lincoln did not agree with slavery which resulted in 11 southern states leaving the Union and becoming independent. Civil war then started between the Union (north states who did not support the slavery) and the Confederacy (south states who supported it). In 1865, the Union states were victorious under the leadership of Lincoln. After the war had ended, he tried hard to bring the two opposing sides together.

On 14th April, 1865, Abraham Lincoln was shot while watching a play at Ford's Theatre in Washington DC. He was shot by a man called John Wilkes Booth who supported the southern states. Lincoln died of his injuries the next day.

LIVEWORKSHEETS

John F. Kennedy: May 29, 1917 – November 22, 1963

John F. Kennedy, the second oldest of nine children, was born in Brookline, Massachusetts, on May 29, 1917. Kennedy grew up to be athletic and competitive, playing football for Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

In 1943 he became a war hero, when a Japanese warship destroyed a boat Kennedy commanded while serving in the U.S. Navy during World War II. Kennedy swam with the surviving crew members to safety several miles away, carrying one injured sailor by pulling the man's life jacket strap by his teeth.

The Cold War—a period of tensions mostly between the United States and the former Soviet Union, now called Russia—dominated much of Kennedy's presidency. Another issue Kennedy dealt with during his presidency was civil rights, or the idea that all U.S. citizens should have the same basic rights regardless of the color of their skin, and their religion. Kennedy wanted to pass more laws that would guarantee equal rights for all citizens.

Kennedy had only been president for a little less than three years when he was assassinated on November 22, 1963, while touring Dallas, Texas, in a presidential motorcade. Gunman Lee Harvey Oswald was charged with the death but died before he could be put on trial.

Read the texts and answer the questions:

1. Who was the first American president?
a) George Washington
b) Abraham Lincoln
c) John F. Kennedy

2. Which president helped to write the Declaration of Independence as a member of the Second Congress?
a) George Washington
b) Abraham Lincoln
c) John F. Kennedy

3. Which president won the Civil war that ended slavery?
a) George Washington
b) Abraham Lincoln
c) John F. Kennedy

4. Which president became a hero in the World War II?
a) George Washington
b) Abraham Lincoln
c) John F. Kennedy

5. Which president had been working as a lawyer and not as a soldier before his presidency?
a) George Washington
b) Abraham Lincoln
c) John F. Kennedy

6. Which two presidents were assassinated?
a) Washington and Lincoln
b) Lincoln and Kennedy
c) Washington and Kennedy

LIVEWORKSHEETS