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**SPECIAL**

*Three of Our Presidents*

Nanci Bell

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# Flight 1

# George Washington

1732-1799

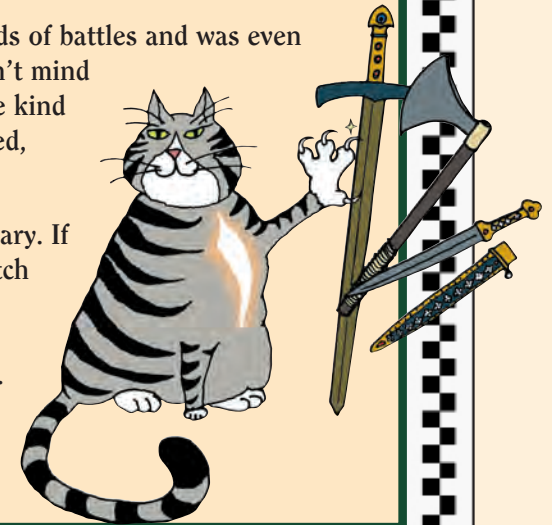


*Washington Crossing the Delaware*, by Emanuel Leutze, 1851

**T**his new Flight is about one of the men who created the United States. We call these men Founding Fathers. George Washington was probably the tallest, at six feet tall. Imagine a guy that big riding on a horse! Must have been a big horse.

George fought in the French and Indian Wars in loads of battles and was even a captive for a time of the French. That's brave! I don't mind a small war with the dog down the street, but not the kind of war he was in! He kept a diary, and it was published, making George pretty famous in the Colonies.

War is never pretty but sometimes it becomes necessary. If I go to war again, no sword or other weapon can match these claws. But George had to fight with practically no real weapons! I guess he and his men wanted independence and were willing to fight and die for it. Luckily, we enjoy that independence today. Well, I do, except that I can't fill my own food bowl.



## 1

Born on his family's large farm at the edge of the Virginia woods, George Washington learned early to be strong, and this served him well later as the first president of the United States. With his father often away, young George worked in the fields and tended to the animals. When his chores were done he was free to go ride his horse, an escape he loved all his life. But George was just 11 when his father died, and he became the man of the house. He quit his studies and worked from dawn to dusk.

1. Do you think George got his chores done quickly? Why or why not?
2. Why do you think George had to work in the fields?
3. Do you think George had a lot of work to do, or a little? Explain.
4. Do you think George had much time to play or ride his horse after his father died? Why or why not?
5. Why do you think George quit his studies when his father died?

## 2

By the time he was 14, George yearned for adventure. He argued with his mom about joining the British Navy. Still grieving his father's death, his mom would not allow him to go. At 15, the frustrated boy taught himself how to map land and survive in the dense woodlands he lived in. His hard work and attention to detail helped him learn these skills. As soon as he was twenty-one he joined the colonial militia. The British signed up the tall, determined young man as war brewed with the French colonies further inland from the English colonies.

1. Why do you think George wanted to join the British Navy at 14?
2. Why do you think George's mother did not want him to join the Navy?
3. Do you think George's mother was happy when he joined the militia? Why or why not?
4. Do you think George would have learned to map and survive in the dense woodlands if he had joined the Navy? Explain.
5. Do you think George's skills as a woodsman helped him fight the French colonists? Why or why not?



## 3

Hardworking Washington rose in rank to officer quickly in the colonies' militia. He made up for his lack of proper training by poring over books about famous battles and strategy late each night in his tent. He soon gained fame for his courage in the French and Indian War. He once had two horses shot from under him during one battle. Later that day he found bullet fragments in his hair and holes in his coat and hat, but he was unharmed. But the King of England issued a Royal Decree that stated that men like George, a colonist, could not be ranked higher than "Captain." For Washington, this would mean a step down. In protest, he resigned and returned to his farm at Mt. Vernon.

1. Why do you think George rose in rank to officer quickly?
2. Why do you think George read books about battles and strategy?
3. How do you think George's courage made him famous?
4. Do you think George was safe during the French and Indian War, or in danger? Explain.
5. How do you think George felt when the King of England decreed that colonists could not be ranked higher than Captain?

## 4

Washington still felt a sense of duty to serve, so he joined the Virginia Congress. In 1775 folks in the colonies chafed at the many taxes demanded by King George III of England, and some spoke of war. George fanned the flames of "revolution fever" with his strong speeches in favor of a free and self-ruling country. When the colonies finally chose to go to war, they picked him to lead their new Continental Army. The British Red Coats were the most powerful army in the world, and Washington had to face them with a rag-tag army of farmers and laborers. His men were poorly armed, and often lacked enough food to eat or coats to keep them warm. But Washington worked tirelessly to train his men and keep their spirits up even when he had his own doubts. He turned his men into a well-trained army.

1. Why do you think people chafed at the taxes demanded by King George III?
2. Why do you think some of the colonists spoke of war?
3. Why do you think George gave speeches in favor of a free and self-ruling country?
4. Why do you think the colonists only had a "rag-tag army of farmers"? Why didn't they have a professional army?
5. Why do you think Washington worked to train his men and keep their spirits up?







(clockwise from left) Young Washington, by Charles Wilson Peale, 1779; political cartoon by Benjamin Franklin, showing the colonies as parts of a snake; Washington at the Continental Congress, by Junius Brutus Stearns; Washington after his second term as president, by Rembrandt Peale, 1795



5 Having helped the rebels win the war for freedom from England, Washington hoped to retire back to his farm and family. But his officers wanted to make him the new king. George was horrified at the thought—he had fought the very idea of a king!—but he knew that the small nation would need a strong leader. He listened to men from the newly-unified states as they argued about how to run the new country. But when he spoke up, everyone else fell silent. When it came time to choose a wise, respected man to be the first president, all votes went to George. The battle-hardened veteran accepted, served for eight years, and then retired to Mt. Vernon a hero.

1. Why do you think George wanted to retire back to his farm after the war?
2. How do you think George felt about becoming the king of the United States?
3. Why do you think that everyone fell silent when George spoke up?
4. Why do you think people wanted George to be the first president?
5. Why do you think George thought the new nation needed a strong leader?



### Ivan says—

After fighting in so many wars, I guess old George was pretty good at managing difficult people and stuff. You need that kind of experience to be in government. I tried to form a government in the neighborhood, but the other animals seemed to be like George...in that they don't want there to be a king, which would of course be me. Bah! What do they know?

So George was an important part of forming the new country of the United States of America, both on the battlefield and in peace. The idea was that a president was just one of the guys, just a dude, elected by the people, and not ruling over everyone else absolutely. This was a new idea, different from hundreds of years of tradition back in countries like England and France.

Your next Flight is about another guy who changed things in a big way: Abraham Lincoln. In his way, he had just as big an impact on the United States.









## Flight 2

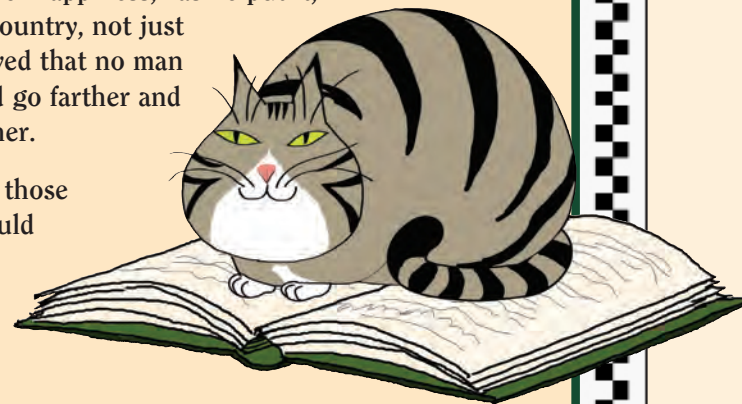
# Abraham Lincoln

1809-1865

**T**his new Flight tells the story of Abraham Lincoln, the 16th president of the United States. He believed in certain things so much that he took the country into war—against itself! Abe was a man of big ideas, and he read all the time, even as a kid out in the wild frontier.

Abe opposed slavery, which was a horrific but big business in the South. Abe said that the U.S. Constitution, which guaranteed “inalienable rights, among which are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness,” as he put it, applied to every single person in the country, not just the ones who weren’t slaves. He believed that no man could own another. I agree, and would go farther and say that no man should own a cat, either.

Abe was a big thinker, having read all those books. He knew about so much, he could write amazing speeches using all kinds of words. I don’t get reading, personally. I do understand laying on a warm book.



*The Republican Court in the Days of Lincoln*, by Peter Rothermel, 1867

**1** Abraham Lincoln was born in a log cabin on a small farm in wild Kentucky. By the time he was eight, the tall boy was strong enough to chop wood with his ax. Abe learned to read, write, and do math in a one-room schoolhouse nearby. Abe also helped his father on the farm. He plowed the fields, cut large stacks of firewood, and split dry logs into fence rails with his ax. The boy grew to be lanky young man with thick black hair and wiry arms, muscled from hard work. Abe was as smart as he was strong. He often read beside the fireplace, late into the night, learning more than his school could teach him.

1. Why do you think Abe Lincon was strong?
2. Why do you think Abe helped his father on the farm? Why not go out and play instead?
3. Do you think there were a lot of kids in Abe's school, or only a few? Explain.
4. Why do you think Abe read by the fireplace late at night? Why not read in his room?
5. How do you think Abe's family felt about him reading so much?

**2** As a young man, Lincoln worked in a small village store, where he made friends quickly. Abe had a knack for telling funny stories, and people would crowd around the store to hear him talk. One traveling lawyer, a man named Stuart, took a liking to Abe. He offered to let Abe borrow his law books to study. After two years of hard work and late nights of reading, Lincoln earned his license to practice law. When Stuart offered him a job as a lawyer in Springfield, Illinois, Abe took it. He packed everything he owned into the saddlebags of his horse and rode off to a new life. In Springfield, Lincoln met and fell in love with a woman named Mary Todd. The two married, and bought a small house with a stable for Abe's horse and cow.

1. What do you think was one reason why Abe made friends quickly?
2. Why do you think Stuart might have taken an interest in Abe?
3. Why do you think Abe studied the law books late at night? Why not during the day?
4. Do you think that Abe owned a lot of things when he moved to Springfield, or only a few? How do you know?
5. Why do you think the story said that Abe 'rode off to a new life'?





## 3

As a traveling lawyer, Lincoln rode his horse from town to town, trying cases in different courts. He enjoyed stopping along the way at inns and crowded taverns to chat with the local people. On his long, quiet rides through the farmlands, Abe thought carefully about his cases. By the time he got to court, he could give clear, strong arguments that even a simple farmer would understand. By 1854, Lincoln was known as one of the best lawyers in Illinois. That year, the state's Senator, Stephen Douglas, proposed the Kansas-Nebraska Act. This bill would make it legal to own slaves in lands farther north than past laws had allowed. Abe thought the practice of slavery was wrong. He vowed to fight Douglas's Act.

1. Why do you think the cases were in different towns? Why not all in one town?
2. Do you think Abe's long rides from town to town helped him win his legal cases? Explain.
3. Why do you think Abe was known as one of the best lawyers in Illinois?
4. Do you think it was important that Abe could make clear arguments that even a farmer could understand? Why or why not?
5. How do you think Abe felt when he heard about the proposed Kansas-Nebraska Act?

## 4

Lincoln began to give fiery speeches as he traveled. He railed against slavery, his high, blaring voice reaching all the way to the back of the large crowds. At the age of 49, Lincoln challenged Douglas to a series of public debates. Over two months, the men met in different cities to argue in front of the people. Folks rode in from all over the state to hear them. The men stood on a high stage, and newspaper reporters pushed to the front to shout questions up at them. Douglas was a short man, with a low, rasping voice that grew weak as the debates wore on. He claimed that people should get to choose whether or not to own slaves. But Lincoln loudly argued that in the Land of the Free, all people should be free. More often than not, it was Lincoln who won the people's cheers.

1. What do you think the story means by 'fiery' speeches?
2. Why do you think Abe began to make speeches against slavery?
3. Why do you think Abe challenged Douglas to debates?
4. Why do you think people rode in from all over the state to listen to the men debate?
5. Do you think Douglas thought people should be allowed to choose whether to *be* slaves? Explain.





(clockwise from left) Lincoln as a young man, photographed in 1857; drawing of Lincoln giving speech; the Lincoln-Douglas debate, by Robert Root; slaves waiting for sale by Eyre Crow, 1861



ABRAHAM LINCOLN LEAVING ILLINOIS.

**5** The Lincoln-Douglas debates made Abe famous across the nation. Many people in the North thought he should lead the country, and in 1860, he was elected President. Many in the South were scared he would revoke their right to own slaves. Within months, seven Southern states tried to break apart from the United States of America, but Lincoln vowed to keep the country whole. He called for Northern men to join the Union army, and thousands lined up in front of every army depot, ready to fight for him. Lincoln loved his nation and he would do whatever it took to save it.

1. Why do you think the debates made Abe famous across the nation?
2. Why do you think people thought Abe should lead the country?
3. Why do you think people in the South were afraid that Lincoln would revoke their right to own slaves?
4. Why do you think the Southern states tried to break apart from the United States?
5. Why do you think Lincoln vowed to keep the country whole? What might have happened if he did not?



### Ivan says—

Abe certainly was a smart guy, and he had to carry a lot of responsibility as a president, especially at that point in history. Change can be hard for people, especially when they know they're wrong deep down in their pointy little hearts.

When Abe was feeling really stressed, he liked to tinker. He enjoyed gadgets, and new machines were being created all around him. Steam locomotives, cameras, typewriters, sewing machines, telegraphs, bicycles...the list goes on. Abe used to take things apart to see how they worked. He even invented a few things of his own, though none made him rich. I'm a smart cat. I could come up with lots of inventions if I wanted to, but that would infringe on the 12-20 hours of sleep I need each day, not to mention the many times I need to eat.









## Flight 3

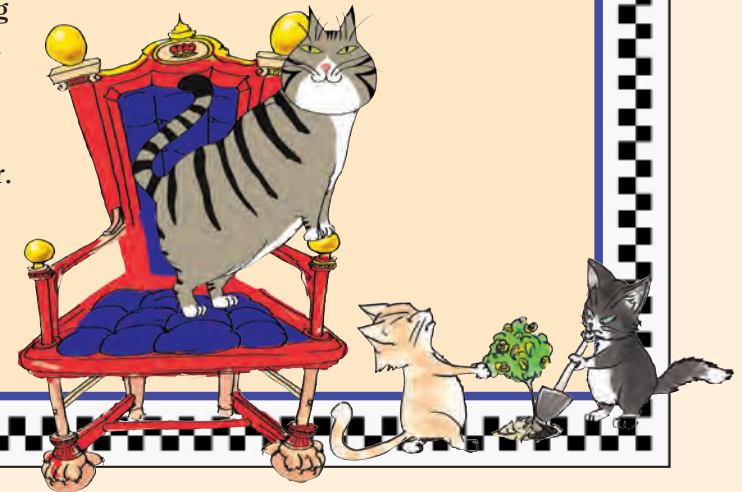
# Father Abraham

1809-1865

**T**his new Flight focuses on the most difficult part of Abraham Lincoln's presidency: the Civil War years. Any war is terrible, but this war was between the North and South of the United States, so families were set against their own relatives and states were fighting with states. It was an awful time in United States history.

Not only was the war about the federal government's power over the individual states, it was about abolishing the horrible practice of slavery. People had strong opinions, and Abe had to deal with them like squabbling children. He also had to keep his troops inspired and fighting for the cause. For those reasons and more, he became known as Father Abraham.

I never thought about being a father. I could be a pretty cool dad. I'd just let the little kitties run around tormenting the neighborhood dog and digging up rosebushes next door.



*The Peacemakers*, by George P.A. Healy, 1868, depicts from left General-in-Chief Ulysses S. Grant, Major General William Tecumseh Sherman, Abraham Lincoln, and Rear Admiral David Dixon Porter

## 1

When Abraham Lincoln was elected President, seven Southern states seceded—that is, tried to break off from the United States. Fearing that Lincoln would take away their right to own slaves, other states soon followed. Lincoln vowed to keep the Union together, and a few months after he took office the Civil War began. The war between the North and South was brutal and bloody, and sometimes pitted families against each other. To keep up morale, Abe gave many inspiring speeches. But the war weighed heavily on his mind. He spent many long hours consoling the wives and mothers of fallen men, and visiting the wounded in army hospitals.

1. Why do you think the Southern states feared Lincoln would take away their right to own slaves?
2. Why do you think Lincoln wanted to keep the Union together? Why not let the southern states secede?
3. Why do you think the Civil War pitted family against family?
4. Why do you think the war weighed heavily on Abe's mind?
5. How do you think the wounded men felt when Abe visited them in army hospitals?

## 2

As the Civil War raged on, the troops began to doubt the Union was worth dying for. In the fall of 1862, the Union army barely won one of the bloodiest battles of the war. A few days after the battle, Lincoln issued “the Emancipation Proclamation.” This bold statement declared that any slaves held in rebel states “are, and henceforward shall be, free.” Crowds cheered at the news in cities across the North. The Union troops now knew they were fighting to end slavery, a cause they believed in. With their spirits raised, the weary men fought on.

1. Why do you think the troops started to doubt the Union was worth dying for?
2. Why do you think Lincoln freed the slaves in rebel states?
3. Do you think the people in the North were happy about the Emancipation Proclamation, or sad? Explain.
4. How do you think people in the South felt about the Emancipation Proclamation?
5. Why do you think the Emancipation Proclamation raised the spirits of the Northern troops?



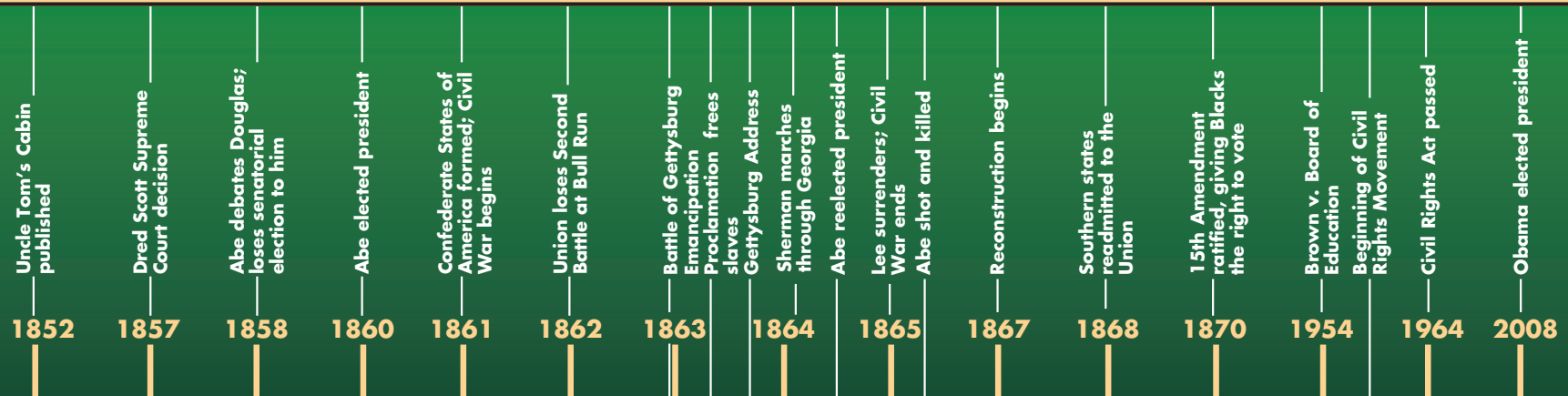


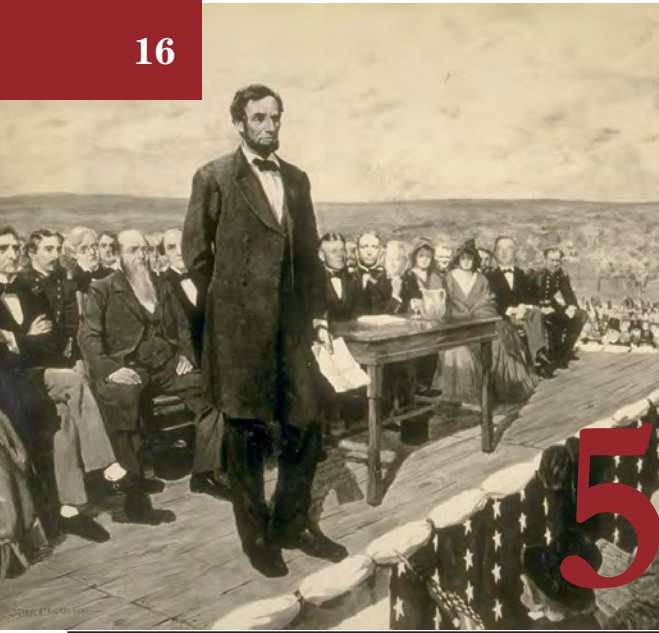
**3** In the fall of 1863, people gathered in a grassy meadow near Gettysburg. Five months earlier, a fierce three-day battle left more than 50,000 dead or wounded, and folks had come to mourn the soldiers buried there. Lincoln came to show his support, and was asked to speak. A hush fell on the crowd as the solemn man stepped up on a wooden platform. He only spoke for two minutes, but his words brought tears to many eyes. He reminded them that the troops fought not just to save the Union or free the slaves, but to preserve all democracy. The crowd was awed by this Gettysburg Address.

1. Why do you think people came to mourn the soldiers at Gettysburg?
2. Do you think only the families of the soldiers buried there came to Gettysburg? Why or why not?
3. Why do you think Lincoln came to show his support?
4. Why do you think Lincoln was solemn when he stepped onto the platform to speak?
5. Why do you think Lincoln's words brought tears to people's eyes?

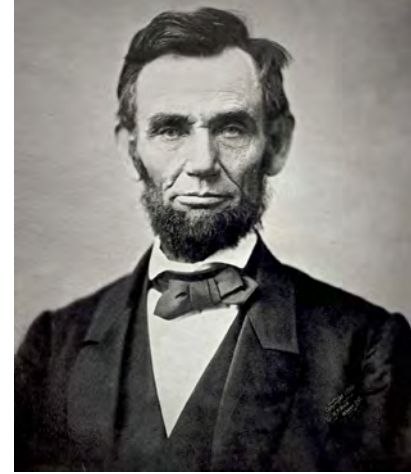
**4** The years of war were hard on President Lincoln. He hardly slept and often didn't eat. He grew thin, with deep wrinkles on his face from all his worries. Still, the strained man tried to ease the minds and hearts of those around him. Many took to calling him 'Father Abraham.' When the rebels finally laid down their guns, Lincoln urged both sides to be forgiving. To join the divided country, he told the people they had to heal the wounds of war, with "malice toward none...charity for all."

1. Why do you think President Lincoln grew so thin?
2. Why do you think the story describes Lincoln as 'strained'?
3. Why do you think people called him 'Father Abraham'?
4. Do you think people would have forgiven each other after the war, if Lincoln had not urged them to? Explain.
5. What might have happened if people did not forgive each other after the war?





(clockwise from left) Lincoln at Gettysburg, by Fletcher Cranson; Lincoln, November, 1863; *The Last Hours of Lincoln*, by Alonzo Chappel; *First Reading of the Emancipation Proclamation*, Francis Bicknell Carpenter, 1864



5

Less than a week after the war's end, Abe took his wife to see a play at Ford's Theatre. They sat in the president's box seats, in a balcony high above the stage. When the gas lamps dimmed for the show, John Wilkes Booth, an actor, snuck up behind them. Booth, who supported the South, aimed a small pistol at the back of Abe's head and fired. As Mary Todd screamed, Booth leapt from the box to the stage. He broke his leg, but still managed to flee on horseback. Friends carried Lincoln to a nearby house and rushed to get a doctor. When Abe died the next morning, the whole nation wept with his widow.

1. Why do you think the Lincolns went to a play?
2. Why do you think John Wilkes Booth *snuck* up behind Abe? Why not make a lot of noise?
3. Why do you think John Wilkes Booth shot Lincoln?
4. Why do you think Booth jumped to the stage? Why not leave the way he came in?
5. How do you think people felt when they heard the news that Abe had died?





### Ivan says—

Abe was one of the best, leaving a rich legacy. What might he have accomplished if he hadn't been assassinated? No one will ever know. The types of injustice in the world when he was president make me angry and sad at the same time. I hate when that happens.

Well, now that you know about Lincoln, read about President Barack Obama. His father was from Africa. Obama would not have had a chance to be elected without all the work Abe Lincoln, along with a lot of other people, did. Compare and contrast these two fine gentlemen, and you'll see lots of interesting things.

Meanwhile, I am going to take a long walk. That sets me right. Then I don't have to think about how much better off you humans would be if you were cats instead.









# Barack Obama

1961 - Present

**T**his new Flight tells the story of the first black U.S president. It took over 140 years, since the end of the Civil War and slavery, for this momentous event. I think Lincoln would have cheered. Obama faced long odds of being elected at first. But finally the country was ready...or at least a majority of voters were!

Change is slow in societies, especially a large nation like the U.S. It takes a lot of people doing little things to do big things. It takes education, voting, marching and protesting, and exercising those rights guaranteed to you under the Constitution. That you can change things is what makes this country great.

Now, if you really want great, you need to elect a cat. We know the important things in life: napping, eating, napping, sneaking around outside, napping, being petted and scratched, and napping. These are policies I think everyone could get behind.

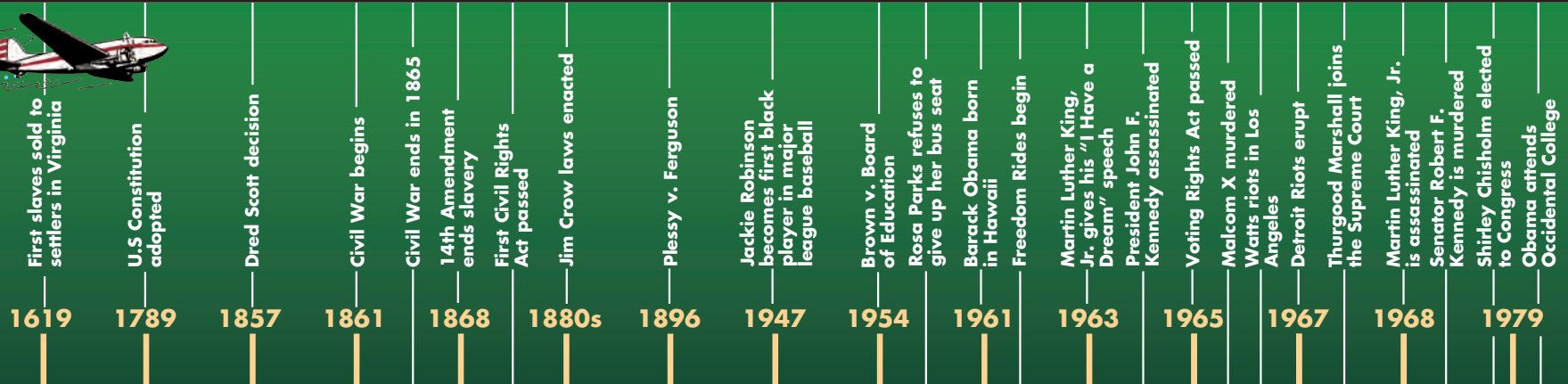


**1** Barack Obama became the first black man to become President of the United States. His journey to the White House was unusual, beginning with his unique childhood. Barack was born in Hawaii in 1961. His mother was a white woman from Kansas and his father a black man from Kenya. At the time, interracial marriages were rare. The couple split up a few months after Barack's birth. Soon his father went back to Africa. After that, Barack saw his father only once when he was ten.

1. What do you think is the main idea of the story?
2. Do you think Obama was excited to be the first black President of the U.S.? Why or why not?
3. Why do you think the story calls Obama's childhood unique?
4. Why do you think interracial marriages were rare when Obama was born?
5. How do you think Obama felt, only seeing his father once, when he was ten? Explain.

**2** When Barack was a young boy his mother married an Indonesian man. Soon they moved far away to live in Jakarta. There, young Barack went to Indonesian-language schools for a few years. His mother also homeschooled him in the evenings, in English. He was the son of a Caucasian woman and an African man, living in Asia. Because of this he often felt out of place. When he was ten, he went to live with his grandparents in Hawaii.

1. Why do you think Obama and his family moved to Jakarta, Indonesia?
2. Why do you think Obama's mother homeschooled him in English in the evenings?
3. Why do you think Obama felt "out of place" living in Asia?
4. Do you think there were many children with black fathers and white mothers at Obama's school in Jakarta? Why or why not?
5. Why do you think Obama went to live with his grandparents in Hawaii?





## 3

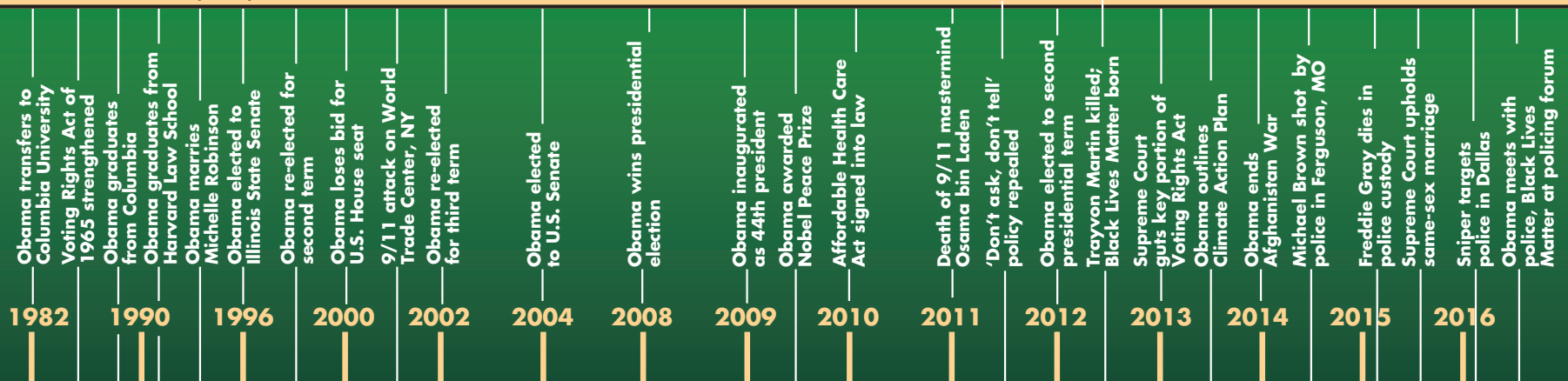
Barack did well in school and later attended college in New York City. After he graduated, he worked in Chicago helping poor people. He helped set up programs to tutor kids who wanted to go to college and train people looking for jobs. He made speeches urging people to vote. Then he went back to school to become a lawyer. He did so well at Harvard Law School that he was elected the first black editor of the law review.

1. Why do you think Obama did well in school?
2. Why do you think Obama tried to help poor people? Why not help rich people?
3. Why do you think Obama set up programs for kids who needed tutors?
4. Why do you think Obama urged people to vote?
5. Do you think Obama was proud to be the first black editor of Harvard's law review? Why or why not?

## 4

Before long Obama was elected to the State Senate in Illinois. From there he went to the U.S. Senate. Within months, he was asked to give an important speech. Obama's speech was so powerful that he became well known overnight. A few years later, Barack Obama chose to run for President. He traveled the country, talking to people and shaking thousands of hands along the way. His speeches made people pay attention. After more than a year on the campaign trail, he won the election.

1. How do you think Obama got elected to the Illinois state senate?
2. Why do you think Obama was asked to give an important speech?
3. Do you think Obama was good at giving speeches? Why or why not?
4. How do you think people felt when they heard this "powerful" speech? Explain.
5. Why do you think Obama shook thousands of hands?





*(clockwise from left)* President Barack Obama, first official portrait, 2009; Obama taking Oath of Office with wife Michelle, 2009; in the Oval Office at the White House; with Supreme Court, including Justice Sonia Sotomayor, one of two justices he appointed.



Obama was sworn in as President in January of 2008 before over a million people. Among the guests who sat near the front were civil rights leaders. These men and women had marched for the rights of people of color in the 1950's and 1960's. When they were young, black people did not have the same rights as whites. They could not drink from the same fountains as whites, play the same sports, or sit in the same sections in restaurants. Now they were witnessing a black man become President. Many of them wept.

1. Why do you think thousands of people watched Obama get sworn in as President?
2. Why do you think some of the leaders of the civil rights movement got to sit near the front?
3. Do you think Obama could have won the election if not for the civil rights movement? Why or why not?
4. Why do you think black people did not have the same rights as whites?
5. Why do you think many of the civil rights leaders wept?





### Ivan says—

So we close out our special packet on presidents with our 44th one. We only allow two terms, or eight years, to a president—another amendment to the Constitution—so Obama can't run again. Letting a feller serve term after term would be too much like the all-powerful kings our Founding Fathers were rebelling against!

Imagine the dedication and hard work it takes to get all the way to president! Try to picture the stress of that job! One president, Harry Truman, had a plaque on his desk that said, "The buck stops here!" But the top boss has the top pressure, too!

Some people are happy with a president when he is done, some aren't. But no one can deny that Obama did his fair share of good. I like getting new presidents so often. I like variety. That's why I have a fully stocked pantry of different flavors of cat food.

