

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

## **President Harry Truman**

Harry Truman was born on May 8, 1884 in Lamar, Missouri. Truman did not have a middle name; his middle name was simply the letter S. Both of Truman's grandfathers had names beginning with the letter S and his parents did not want to pick one grandfather over the other. In 1890 the family moved to Independence, Missouri where Truman and his younger brother and sister attended school.

Truman had very poor eyesight and he had to wear glasses with thick lenses. He did not play any active games for fear of breaking his glasses, which were very expensive. Instead, Truman loved to read and he especially enjoyed history books. He also liked to play the piano and even considered becoming a professional pianist.

Right after graduating from high school his parents suffered severe financial problems and Truman went to work first as a bank clerk and then as a bookkeeper. He could not afford to attend college so he tried to get an appointment to West Point. However, his poor eyesight kept him from being accepted. He joined the Missouri National Guard in 1905. Finally, in 1906 Truman worked on his grandmother's farm and he stayed there for eleven years.

The United States entered World War I in 1917 and Truman's National Guard Unit was called to France. Truman left military service with the rank of major. When he returned home from the war, at age thirty-five Truman married Elizabeth Wallace, better known as Bess. They lived in Independence, Missouri where Truman opened a clothing store with a friend. When times became tough in 1922, the store was forced to close.

Knowing that Truman needed a job, in 1922 Jim Pendergast asked Truman to run for county office. Officials who ran a county in Missouri were called judges. Unfortunately, Pendergast was the leader of a powerful political machine. A political machine was a group of people who controlled local politics and could even get elections won by illegal means. For example, ballots would be cast for people who had died. In 1926 Truman was elected to be presiding judge, a step up. Then in 1934 Pendergast asked Truman to run for U.S. Senate. Truman won the senate seat and moved his family to Washington, D.C. at the age of fifty. In 1940 Truman won re-election to his senate seat.

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### **President Harry Truman (Cont'd)**

In 1940 World War II was being fought in Europe. The United States was spending huge sums of money to build ships, tanks, planes and other equipment needed to fight the war. Senator Truman headed a committee in charge of finding fraud and waste in the defense spending. Due to his efforts in cutting unnecessary spending for the war, Truman was held in high regard. He was so well regarded that President Franklin Roosevelt asked Truman to run as his Vice President for Roosevelt's fourth term as President in the 1944 election.

Roosevelt won the election but since he had been in poor health, he died eighty-two days after beginning his fourth term. Vice President Truman became President on April 12, 1945. World War II in Europe was coming to a close. The German forces surrendered in May, 1945 but the United States was still fighting with the Japanese. Meanwhile, by this time U.S. researchers had developed the atomic bomb, the most powerful bomb ever made up to that time.

President Truman gave the order to bomb the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in Japan with atomic bombs as a way to end World War II. Tens of thousands of people died from the bombings and thousands more died later from the effects of the radiation from the bombs. Truman looked at the cost in American and Japanese lives if the fighting continued and felt that dropping the bombs would result in fewer deaths overall.

After World War II ended the Soviet Union did not allow free elections in the countries it controlled. The Soviet Union became an "Iron Curtain" covering Eastern Europe. About this time, Germany was divided into East Germany, controlled by the Soviet Union, and West Germany which was a free country. The former capital of Germany, the city of Berlin, was in East Germany. Berlin was also divided into East Berlin and West Berlin.

In 1949 the U.S. joined with nine European countries, Canada and Iceland to form the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). This alliance said that an attack on one of the countries would be considered an attack on all of them. The Korean War started while Truman was President.

Truman did not run again for President but instead retired to his home in Independence, Missouri. He died in 1972.

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### President Harry Truman Questions

Circle the correct answer.

1. What did Harry Truman like to do as a young boy?
  - a. Play sports
  - b. Read history books
  - c. Work on the farm
  
2. During World War I Harry Truman
  - a. Fought in France
  - b. Worked on the farm
  - c. Was a bank clerk
  
3. During World War II Harry Truman was a U.S. Senator who
  - a. Opposed the war
  - b. Was part of political machine
  - c. Headed a committee to cut unnecessary defense spending
  
4. Harry Truman was Franklin Roosevelt's Vice President for Roosevelt's
  - a. Second term
  - b. Third term
  - c. Fourth term
  
5. To end World War II Harry Truman used atomic bombs on cities in
  - a. Germany
  - b. Japan
  - c. France
  
6. Bombs were dropped on
  - a. Hiroshima
  - b. Nagasaki
  - c. Both a. and b. above
  
7. The term "Iron Curtain" refers to the Soviet Union's rule over
  - a. Eastern Europe
  - b. Japan
  - c. The United States
  
8. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) includes the United States, Canada, Iceland and
  - a. Germany
  - b. Nine European countries
  - c. The Soviet Union

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## President Harry Truman Answers

### Multiple Choice

1. b.
2. a.
3. c.
4. c.
5. b.
6. c.
7. a.
8. b.