

Name _____

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President John Kennedy

John Kennedy was elected in 1960 at the age of 43, the youngest U.S. president. It's interesting that he took over the presidency from Dwight Eisenhower who at age 70 was the oldest president of the U.S. up until that time. Kennedy was born on May 29, 1917 in Brookline, Massachusetts and was the first president to be born in the 1900s.

John Kennedy grew up in a large family. He had one older brother, two younger brothers Robert and Teddy plus five younger sisters. His older brother Jack was killed during World War II and his younger brothers both became U.S. Senators. His brother Robert then became Attorney General in Kennedy's cabinet and was assassinated in 1968. Ted Kennedy is still an important U.S. Senator.

The Kennedy's were a wealthy and influential family. They owned an estate in Hyannis Port on Cape Cod in Massachusetts that became famous once Kennedy was President and spent his vacation time there. Kennedy attended an elite private school, Choate, in Connecticut and then went to Harvard University in 1936. Kennedy wanted to play football but he was much smaller physically than the other football players. Unfortunately, he received a severe back injury while playing football that would cause him significant pain for the rest of his life.

Kennedy's father was appointed as the U.S. Ambassador to Great Britain in 1937. The Kennedy family moved to England and John Kennedy would visit there during school breaks. When John was a junior, he worked for his father in England. In September, 1939 World War II started and England and France declared war against Germany. Kennedy studied the circumstances leading up to the start of the war and this was the topic of his senior paper at Harvard. He later published this as a book called *While England Slept* which became a best seller.

After college, Kennedy enlisted in the U.S. Naval Reserve and was called to active duty. He served on a patrol boat called PT-109 in the Solomon Islands of the South Pacific. The boat was rammed by a Japanese destroyer. Kennedy received a Purple Heart award. Due to injuries from the accident that worsened his already bad back, he was sent home from the war.

Kennedy's father had wanted his oldest son Joe to enter politics but he was killed in the war so the senior Kennedy convinced John to enter politics instead.

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President John Kennedy (Cont'd)

John Kennedy successfully ran for the U.S. House of Representatives from Massachusetts in 1946. In 1952 and again in 1958 he successfully ran for the U.S. Senate and his political career was doing well. In 1951 he met Jacqueline Bouvier and they married in 1953 when he was thirty-six and she was twenty-four. Two of their three children survived and the country delighted in pictures of Caroline and John Jr. playing at the White House.

In 1960 John Kennedy ran against Richard Nixon for president. Many people were concerned about his religion as Kennedy was a Catholic. This was one of the closest elections in American history but John Kennedy won. Nixon ran again for president in 1968 and won.

During Kennedy's term in office the Cold War with Russia and Communism was an important issue. Fidel Castro was the leader of Communist Cuba, an island just ninety miles from the coast of Florida. Kennedy authorized an invasion of Cuba to remove Castro from power but the invasion attempt failed. Later Kennedy kept the Russians from increasing their influence in Cuba by isolating the island with a blockade. In 1961 the Russians successfully sent an astronaut into space. Kennedy requested that Congress spend the money necessary for Americans to be successful in space which led to the first American space flights and today's space program.

John Kennedy and his brother Robert were champions of the civil rights movement to give equal rights to black citizens. By executive order, Kennedy established the Committee on Equal Employment Opportunity. He also ended discrimination in renting out housing units owned or operated by the government. Kennedy sent a broad-ranged civil rights bill to Congress which did not pass.

On November 22, 1963 Kennedy and his wife were riding in an open limousine in a parade in Dallas, Texas. Kennedy was shot to death by bullets that came from the Texas School Book Depository building. Police arrested Lee Harvey Oswald for the shooting but he never had a trial. While Oswald was being transferred to another jail he was shot to death by Jack Ruby. In 1964 the Warren Commission, headed by the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court Earl Warren, issued its findings that Oswald was the assassin and that he acted alone. People speculate to this day about the circumstances surrounding Kennedy's assassination.

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President John Kennedy Questions

Circle the correct answer.

1. John Kennedy is the
 - a. Youngest president
 - b. Oldest president
 - c. Neither the youngest nor oldest president

2. John Kennedy suffered his entire adult life with
 - a. Embarrassment because of his size
 - b. Concern for his religion
 - c. Painful back injury

3. Just after graduating from Harvard John Kennedy became famous for
 - a. Being a U.S. Representative
 - b. Being a U.S. Senator
 - c. Writing a best-selling book

4. John Kennedy authorized the invasion of what Communist country?
 - a. Russia
 - b. Cuba
 - c. England

5. John Kennedy was in favor of
 - a. The U.S. space program
 - b. Nixon being president
 - c. Castro ruling Cuba

6. John Kennedy promoted civil rights by
 - a. Establishing the Committee on Equal Employment Opportunity
 - b. Ending discrimination in federal housing
 - c. Both a. and b. above

7. John Kennedy was assassinated in
 - a. Hyannis Port, Massachusetts
 - b. Dallas, Texas
 - c. Washington, D.C.

8. John Kennedy's assassination was investigated by
 - a. The Committee on Equal Employment Opportunity
 - b. The Warren Commission
 - c. The Texas School Book Depository

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President John Kennedy Answers

Multiple Choice

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