



Harry S. Truman



Teaching Guide

SEGMENT 1, WEBISODE 13

Please note: Each segment in this Webisode has its own Teaching Guide



Segment Overview



Let's Discuss

Many Americans underestimated Harry S. Truman. He was plain spoken, forthright, and unaffected in his manner. His bluntness and lack of pretense led many Americans to believe that he was a simple, ordinary man. But this impression belied his keen analytical mind, extraordinary intellect, command of history, and courageous decisiveness.

Truman became president in the final days of World War II, when the United States emerged as the greatest power on earth. During his time as president, Truman ordered the first atomic bomb attack and presided over the end of the war and the conversion of the economy from wartime to peacetime. He led the nation through the beginning, dark days of the Cold War and the emergence of McCarthyism and the Red Scare. He formally recognized the state of Israel and ordered the desegregation of the United States armed forces. As president from 1945 to 1953, Truman made decisions that drove American domestic and foreign policy for the next half century. Ordinary he was not.

Teacher Directions

1. Define a *trait* as a special distinguishing characteristic of someone's personality.
2. Invite the students to share some of their own personality traits.
3. Introduce President Harry S. Truman and ask the students to list some of his traits, such as courage and honesty.
4. Explain the Student Sheet: *Words to Live By*. After the teams have matched Truman's sayings, ask them: What additional traits are evident in Truman's words?

Note to the Teacher: The following are Truman's correctly matched sayings.

- *Men make history. History does not make the man.*
- *If a man can't stand the heat, he ought to stay out of the kitchen.*
- *Not all readers become leaders, but all leaders must be readers.*
- *You try to make the right decisions, sleep on it, and then forget about it.*
- *A true heart, a strong mind, and a great deal of courage and I think a man will get through the world.*
- *(My father) raised my brother and myself to put honor above profit.*
- *Do your duty and history will do you justice.*

Let's Discuss, Cont.



History Sleuth

- *I never give them hell. I just tell the truth and they think it's hell.*
- *I have found the best way to give advice to your children is to find out what they want and then advise them to do it.*
- *There is nothing new except the history you do not know.*
- *Children nowadays have too many gadgets to fool with and not enough chores.*
- *I always tell students that it is what you learn after you know it all that counts.*

Teacher Directions

1. Ask the students what they think the expression "The buck stops here" means.
2. Explain to the students.

The sign "The Buck Stops Here" on President Harry S. Truman's desk in his White House office was made in the Federal Reformatory at El Reno, Oklahoma, and given to Truman as a gift. The saying "the buck stops here" comes from the slang expression "pass the buck" that means passing responsibility on to someone else. For example, if it's your job to take out the garbage, and you convince your sister to do it, then you "passed the buck." Suppose you threw a baseball to a friend and the ball smashed a window. If you blamed your friend because he didn't catch the ball, then you "passed the buck."

On more than one occasion President Truman mentioned his desk sign in public statements. For example, in a speech at the National War College on December 19, 1952, President Truman said, "You know, it's easy for the Monday morning quarterback to say what the coach should have done, after the game is over. But when the decision is up before you—and on my desk I have a motto which says The Buck Stops Here—the decision has to be made."

In his farewell address to the American people given in January 1953, President Truman said, "The President—whoever he is—has to decide. He can't pass the buck to anybody. No one else can do the deciding for him. That's his job."

3. After the students hear or read the above information, discuss it with the class. Ask the students: What difficult decisions might a president have to make?
4. Students work in small teams to find examples of important decisions President Truman made and decide:
 - Why was the decision difficult?
 - Did the public agree with Truman's decision at the time? Why or why not?

History Sleuth, Cont.

5. Students sleuth through information and documents on this website or others listed in So You Want to Learn More, especially the Truman Library and Museum Web Site, library books, Book 10, *All the People*, of Joy Hakim's *A History of US*, or other sources for information about Truman's important, difficult decisions.
6. Some events for the students to consider include the decision to drop the atomic bomb, Berlin Airlift, desegregation of the Armed Forces, election campaign of 1948, the Potsdam Conference, Truman Doctrine, Marshall Plan, Holocaust, recognition of Israel, Korean War, and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), among others.

Teacher Directions

1. Explain to the students.

Two signs sat on President Truman's desk in his white House office. One said, "The Buck Stops Here." The other was a quote by Mark Twain, "Always do right. This will gratify some people and astonish the rest."

2. Discuss the following with the students.

Suppose President Truman's signs sit on your school desk.

3. Students think about and then discuss.

What decisions do you make in school each day? How does the buck stop with you? Is it hard to take responsibility? Why? How do you know what is right? Is it hard to "always do right?" Why? Do others always agree with what you do or say? Why or why not?

Teacher Directions

1. Distribute the Student Sheet: *A Plan for Freedom*.
2. Help the students understand President Truman's reasons for the Marshall Plan by discussing the following questions with the class.
 - How much aid was given through the Marshall Plan?
 - Who received the money and for what was the money used?
 - In the quotation, what reasons did Marshall give for providing this aid?
 - According to Secretary Marshall, what would happen if the aid was not given?
 - How did providing aid move the world toward freedom?



What do you
Think?



Moving Toward
Freedom

3. Students read the biography of George C. Marshall at this web site and discuss how the Marshall Plan provided an alternative to totalitarianism and gave Europe's countries the economic strength by which they might choose freedom.

4. Explain the following scenario to the students.

Imagine that your team members are White House speechwriters. Truman wants the American people to understand the threat of worldwide communism to freedom. He wants Americans to understand his plan called the Marshall Plan to help nations stay free.

Your team must write a speech for Truman that explains his plan and how it moves the people of Europe and America toward freedom. You know many Americans oppose Truman's plan, especially those who want Japan and Germany to pay for the horrible war that took so many lives and caused such loss to the American people.

Speechwriters need accurate information. Use the Student Sheet: *A Plan for Freedom* to review Truman's plans in Marshall's quotation. For addition information, read about Truman and the Marshall Plan in *Book 10, All the People* of Joy Hakim's *A History of US* or visit the Harry S. Truman Library and Museum at <http://www.trumanlibrary.org/>. As you read, decide what information to share with the American people. Be sure to take accurate and complete notes so that your team can write a good speech for President Truman—and keep your jobs as speechwriters!

5. Students share their speeches with the class.

Teacher Directions

Use the following activities with your students.

Writing/Library — Eleanor Roosevelt and Bess Truman defined their roles as first lady differently. Eleanor Roosevelt was constantly in the public eye and enthusiastically assisted her husband and supported his policies. Bess Truman preferred to remain private and quietly discuss political issues with her husband. Students investigate the styles and contributions of Eleanor Roosevelt and Bess Truman and decide which of these two styles they would use and why.

Technology/Library — Students use the American Experience web site to vote on the three issues that were part of the 1948 presidential campaign: how to deal with a shortage in housing, should we offer foreign aid to Greece and Turkey, and how much should America do to rebuild Europe after World War II. After casting their ballots on this interactive web site, students find out which 1948 presidential candidate held the same views and get the results of the actual election.



Connections

A Plan for Freedom

In a speech at Harvard University on June 5, 1947, Secretary of State Marshall explained the reasons for the Marshall Plan. The plan provided aid to war-torn Europe so that countries damaged by the Second World War would not fall to communism but choose democracy and freedom. Between 1948 and 1951, sixteen nations received more than thirteen billion dollars with which to improve agricultural and industrial production, and to rebuild housing, medical, and transportation facilities.

In his speech Secretary Marshall said,

What will happen if we do not provide adequate funds and commodities for subsistence and reconstruction abroad? This, I think, is hardly questionable; what if adequate help from the United States is not forthcoming, many of our allies in the late war . . . will be obliged in the months to come to cease imports of food and reconstruction material. Should this happen, human want, economic collapse, political crisis, collapse of democratic institutions, growth of extremism, and perhaps loss of independence would in many countries quickly follow. Our hopes for peace and prosperity would quickly vanish. We would live in unprecedented isolation. We would live in growing poverty. We would live in growing fear.





Words to Live By



Directions: The following Truman sayings are scrambled. Put the sayings together correctly. What do they tell you about Truman's traits?

Men make history.	oo many gadgets to fool with and not nough chores
If a man can't stand the heat,	he history you do not know.
Not all readers become leaders,	leep on it, and then forget about it.
You try to make the right decisions,	just tell the truth and they think it's ell.
A true heart, a strong mind, and a great deal of courage	fter you know it all that counts.
(My father) raised my brother and myself	istory does not make the man.
Do your duty	he ought to stay out of the kitchen.
I never give them hell.	nd I think a man will get through the world.
I have found the best way to give advic to your children is	nd history will do you justice.
There is nothing new except	ut all leaders must be readers.
Children nowadays have	o put honor above profit.
I always tell students that it is what you learn	o find out what they want and then dvise them to do it.