



We the People: The Citizen and the Constitution is a nationally acclaimed civic education program for upper elementary, secondary, and post-secondary school students that focuses on the history and principles of the U.S. Constitution and Bill of Rights. We the People is a program of the Center for Civic Education, whose mission is to promote an enlightened and responsible citizenry committed to democratic principles and actively engaged in the practice of democracy in the United States and other countries.

The one-hundredth birthday of Ronald Reagan, America's fortieth president, was February 6, 2011. This centennial is a suitable occasion for teaching and learning about Ronald Reagan's contribution to America's constitutional, political, and civic tradition. Thus, the Center for Civic Education and the Ronald Reagan Presidential Foundation have collaborated to produce this lesson. The lesson challenges students to reflect on principles at the core of civic education in the United States, such as constitutional government, the rule of law, popular sovereignty, individual rights to liberty, and responsible citizenship. These principles pervaded the political writings, speeches, and actions of Ronald Reagan. They anchored his leadership of America during two presidential terms, 1981–1989. And they are a lasting legacy to the American people.

RONALD REAGAN OUR FORTIETH PRESIDENT



RONALD REAGAN (1911–2004)

Fortieth president of the United States

"No, democracy is not a fragile flower. Still it needs cultivating. If the rest of this century is to witness the gradual growth of freedom and democratic ideals, we must take actions to assist the campaign for democracy."

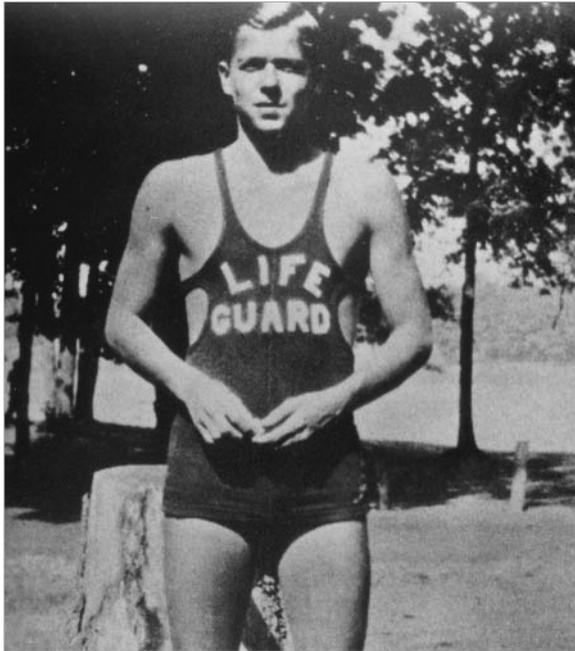
ADDRESS TO MEMBERS OF THE
BRITISH PARLIAMENT, JUNE 8, 1982

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON

This lesson tells the story of Ronald Reagan's rise from a small town in Illinois to the highest political office in the United States: the presidency. It also examines his political principles. The lesson focuses on Ronald Reagan's leadership as president.

When you have completed this lesson, you should be able to

- describe how Ronald Reagan developed the qualities of a leader as a young man;
- explain Ronald Reagan's rise to the presidency of the United States;
- describe how Ronald Reagan showed leadership as president;
- explain what it takes to be a leader as president;
- understand Ronald Reagan's legacy to the nation.



► *How did Ronald Reagan show leadership as a young man?*

TERMS TO KNOW

- Cold War
- communism
- compassion
- Great Communicator
- leader
- legacy
- morale
- nuclear weapons
- peace through strength
- taxes
- values

RONALD REAGAN

Ronald Reagan, the fortieth president of the United States, is remembered as one of America's most popular and admired presidents. During his eight years

in office (1981–89), President Reagan's uplifting message of patriotism made Americans feel proud of their country. His policies promoted liberty around the world and helped lead to the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War.

But where did Ronald Reagan's ideas come from? What influenced his ideas about government and freedom? How did a boy from a small town in Illinois become our nation's president? In this lesson you will learn answers to these questions.

FROM HEARTLAND TO HOLLYWOOD

Ronald Wilson Reagan was born in the small Illinois town of Tampico on February 6, 1911. He was the second son of Jack and Nelle Reagan. In 1920, the Reagans settled down in Dixon, a town not far from Tampico.

In Dixon, Ronald Reagan's mother encouraged him to participate with her in church readings and plays. His shyness disappeared as he discovered a natural talent for public speaking and acting. Nelle Reagan also taught her son important **values**. These values shaped his character and guided his decisions.

Ronald Reagan began to develop into a **leader** during his four years at Dixon High School. He was a varsity football

player and captain of the swim team. He improved his public speaking ability by participating in student plays. He became a political leader in his school by becoming president of the student council.

Ronald Reagan worked during the summer as a lifeguard. He was an extraordinary lifesaver, demonstrating courage, self-sacrifice, and **compassion**. He remembered: “One of the proudest statistics of my life is seventy-seven—the number of people I saved during those seven summers.”

values Things that are important to a person.

leader A person who people listen to and follow.

compassion Sensitivity to the needs of others.

After attending high school in Dixon, he studied at Eureka College, where he was elected president of the student body. He performed in more than a dozen plays.

Among his many interests, Ronald Reagan enjoyed acting most of all and hoped someday to have a career in the movies.



► *How did Ronald Reagan serve his country during World War II?*

After his graduation from college, he moved to Iowa, where he began a career in radio as a sports broadcaster. But he never gave up his dream of becoming a movie star.

In the spring of 1937, Ronald Reagan visited Hollywood. He took a screen test at the Warner Brothers movie studio and won a contract. This launched a movie-acting career that lasted until 1964.

America’s entry into World War II interrupted Ronald Reagan’s career in Hollywood. As a captain in the United States Army Air Corps, he produced

training films to prepare soldiers for combat. After the war, Ronald Reagan returned to acting in the movies.

RONALD REAGAN ENTERS POLITICS

In the 1950s, Ronald Reagan turned to television. He also became intensely interested in politics. He accepted many invitations to make speeches about political issues and policies.

Ronald Reagan was asked to become the host of a television show called General Electric Theater. He toured the country visiting General Electric factories and making speeches. He told people that he thought the government had become too big. **Taxes** were too high, he said.

taxes Money that people and businesses pay to the government. This money pays for things the government does, like build roads and operate schools.

Great Communicator Ronald Reagan was called the “Great Communicator” because of his ability to reach the people with his powerful words. He had a talent for making inspiring speeches. He spoke clearly and directly. Ronald Reagan was good at explaining his ideas.

He was afraid that high taxes and big government were taking away people’s freedom.

Ronald Reagan’s ideas inspired many people. He became known as the **Great Communicator** because of the power of his speeches. People across the country got to know him. He was on the road to the presidency.

RISE TO THE PRESIDENCY

Ronald Reagan believed that government was too big and too powerful. He thought that businesses would work better if the government had less control over their decisions. He also thought that lower taxes would help businesses grow. He argued that this would create more jobs and more wealth for Americans. Ronald Reagan believed strongly in freedom. He wanted people to make their own choices about what is or is not good for them.

Ronald Reagan believed that if the government had too much power, the people would lose their freedom. In 1964, he gave a speech called “A Time for Choosing.” In this speech, he criticized the growing size of government. He also said that communism should be opposed more strongly than it had been. He would pursue these same themes throughout his career.



- ▶ *How did Ronald Reagan gain the support of the American public and attract national attention?*

Republicans were happy about the speech. They had discovered an exciting new leader.

The people of California elected Ronald Reagan governor in 1966. They elected him again in 1970. While governor, he became popular among Republicans in every part of America.

In 1976 he challenged President Gerald Ford for the Republican nomination for president. He did not win the nomination, but he became a leader within the Republican Party.

Ronald Reagan decided to pursue the presidency again in 1980. He won the Republican nomination for president and went on to defeat President Jimmy Carter in the election.

He was sworn in as the fortieth president of the United States on January 20, 1981, at the age of sixty-nine.

RONALD REAGAN AS PRESIDENT

When Ronald Reagan became president, he wanted to reduce the size of government, reduce taxes, take a strong stand against communism around the world, and renew American patriotism. These ideas influenced his actions during his presidency. He found many smart and talented people to help him accomplish his goals. He also worked with members of Congress.

Many Americans felt threatened by a communist country called the Soviet Union. Soviet leaders wanted to spread communism to all parts of the world. They would use military power, if necessary, to achieve their goal. For more than thirty years, the United States and the Soviet Union competed against each other in what was called

Cold War The global struggle between democracy, led by the United States, and communism, which was promoted by the Soviet Union. It was called the Cold War because both sides rarely fought against each other in direct combat.

nuclear weapons Bombs and missiles that are so powerful they can destroy entire cities.



► *What was the idea of “peace through strength?”*

the **Cold War**. Both sides built up their militaries. Each side tried to gain the advantage. Both countries had many **nuclear weapons**. This created a dangerous situation in the world. People did not feel safe. They felt that war could break out at any minute.

Ronald Reagan thought that the Soviet Union was the greatest danger to the United States. But he believed that the United States would win the Cold War because it was a free nation. He also thought that in order to remain free, the United States would need to have a strong military. This was called **peace through strength**.

The Soviet Union was not a free nation. Its system of government was called **communism**. This meant that the government controlled everything, and even owned most of the property

in the country. The people of the Soviet Union were not free. The government told the people what to do and how to live. They could not speak out against the government.

peace through strength The idea that in order to remain free, the United States would need to have a strong military.

communism Under communism, the government owns the nation’s land, factories, farms, and businesses. In the Soviet Union, the Communist Party totally controlled the government and the people. No one was allowed to oppose its rule. The people were not free to make important choices about the way they lived or how they were governed.





► *How did Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev work together to reduce the risk of war?*

People who tried were arrested and sent to prison.

During President Reagan's two terms in office, the United States spent large amounts of money to increase the size and strength of America's armed forces. National defense was very important to President Reagan. He wanted to challenge the Soviet Union. And he believed that America needed military power in order to win.

President Reagan thought that the Soviet Union was not as strong as it appeared to be. And he predicted that the Soviet Union would collapse if it were challenged by America.

So, he increased the size of America's military and dared the Soviets to match it. The president expected that the Soviet Union would run out of money.

President Reagan was right: the Soviet Union could not keep up with America's military spending. The Soviet Union began to decline and its influence grew weaker.

Early in President Reagan's second term, Mikhail Gorbachev became the leader of the Soviet Union. The two leaders met a number of times.

President Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev agreed that the United States and the Soviet Union should get rid of thousands of their nuclear weapons. This agreement made it much less likely that a world war would happen.

Meanwhile, people in places under Soviet control, like Central and Eastern Europe, did not want to live under the control of communist governments. They demanded their freedom. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, they took to the streets to protest their governments. The Soviet-backed governments fell apart. This brought freedom, democracy, and the end of Soviet control.

The revolt against communism in Central and Eastern Europe led to protests and reforms in the Soviet Union, too. But the Soviet system was falling apart as the people demanded more freedom.

The Cold War ended in December of 1991 when the Soviet Union was dissolved. President Reagan had been out of office for two years, but his prediction had come true. The Soviet Union had collapsed.

LEGACY OF RONALD REAGAN

President Reagan's second term ended in January 1989. He was proud of his accomplishments. He said, "America is respected again in the world and looked to for leadership."

Ronald Reagan's determination to spread democracy and freedom raised American **morale** and promoted liberty around the world.

More than twenty-two years after the end of his presidency, Ronald Reagan still matters very much to Americans. In his farewell address, he said, "We meant to change a nation, and instead, we changed a world."

legacy Something passed down to future generations.

morale The state of mind of a person or group, often expressed in either cheerfulness or sadness.

RONALD REAGAN AS A LEADER

Ronald Reagan served as governor of California and president of the United States. In this activity, you will ask yourself whether Ronald Reagan had the qualities of a leader.

Work with a partner or in small groups. Read the list of the qualities of a leader below. After each quality of a leader, write down how Ronald Reagan showed that he did or did not have these qualities. Use a dictionary to look up any words you do not know.

QUALITIES OF A LEADER

Communicator Speaks effectively to the public. Reassures, persuades, and inspires people.

Organizer Picks good people to help him. Works as the leader of a team.

Skillful Politician Works well with others. Compromises to gain support for his or her policies.

Visionary Has a clear sense of direction. Guided by a set of goals.

Clear Thinker Can see the heart of problems. Knows what to do to solve problems.

Compassionate Can identify with other human beings—their hopes and dreams, as well as their problems and challenges. Sensitive to the needs of others.

REVIEWING AND USING THE LESSON

- 1 What experiences in Ronald Reagan's life were most important in preparing him to become president of the United States?
- 2 In your own words, describe the Cold War. Why were Americans so concerned about the Cold War at the time it was happening?
- 3 What were President Reagan's plans for ending the Cold War? What were his reasons for these plans?
- 4 What events led to the end of the Cold War?
- 5 Do you agree that Ronald Reagan's presidency changed the world? Why or why not?
- 6 In your opinion, what is the legacy of Ronald Reagan? How will he be remembered?
- 7 What are your goals for the future? What skills will you need to develop to achieve these goals?

CRITICAL THINKING EXERCISES

Critical thinking exercises for this lesson can be found at www.civiced.org/reagan. These exercises develop intellectual and participatory skills and offer an opportunity to assess students' capacity to develop and defend an argument and to support it with evidence.

WEBSITES

www.civiced.org/reagan

Visit www.civiced.org/reagan to access resources that will enrich your study of Ronald Reagan and the Constitution.

www.reaganfoundation.org

The Ronald Reagan Presidential Foundation is the sole non-profit, nonpartisan organization dedicated to the preservation and promotion of the legacy of Ronald Reagan and his timeless principles of individual liberty, economic opportunity, global democracy, and national pride.

www.reagancentennial.com

The Ronald Reagan Centennial Celebration is a historic, year-long celebration to commemorate the one-hundredth anniversary of Ronald Reagan's birth on February 6, 2011. The Ronald Reagan Presidential Foundation has planned a worldwide Centennial Celebration to pay tribute to the legacy of the fortieth president through public outreach and education.

www.ReaganLibrary.gov

Administered by the National Archives and Records Administration, the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library & Museum has served thousands of researchers and millions of visitors since its opening in 1991.

CREDITS

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This supplemental lesson commemorating the centennial of Ronald Reagan's birth was made possible by a grant from The J. Willard and Alice S. Marriott Foundation.

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"Ronald Reagan as a Leader" was adapted from Fred I. Greenstein, "The Person of the President, Leadership, and Greatness" in *The Executive Branch*. Joel D. Aberbach and Mark A. Peterson eds. *Institutions of American Democracy Series* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2005) 218–239.



Ronald Reagan Centennial Celebration



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