1944

Franklin D. Roosevelt vs Thomas E. Dewey

A 20-minute lesson on the 1944 U.S. presidential election. Includes lesson plan, student worksheet, answer key, and discussion prompts.

ERA New Deal Coalition	ELECTORAL VOTES 531 total
WINNER Franklin D. Roosevelt (Democratic) · 432 EV	RUNNER-UP Thomas E. Dewey (Republican) · 99 EV
KEY ISSUE World War II leadership; postwar planning; soldiers' voting rights	TURNOUT 55.9%

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1944

November 1944 - WWII was being won. June 6, 1944 D-Day invasion of Normandy began Allied liberation of Western Europe. Soviet army advancing on Germany from East. U.S. Marines and Army island-hopping toward Japan. But war was not over. Germany would surrender May 1945. Japan would surrender September 1945 after atomic bombs.

FDR was sick. He had been president since March 1933 - 11 and a half years. Polio (1921) had paralyzed his legs. Years of cigarette smoking damaged his lungs. By 1944 his blood pressure was dangerously high. Doctors knew he was dying but kept it secret. Voters did not know how sick he was.

Democrats nominated FDR for fourth term. Big question: who would be VP? Henry Wallace (VP 1941-45) was too liberal for Southern Democrats. Conservative Democrats wanted James Byrnes of South Carolina but Byrnes was too segregationist for Northern liberals. Democrats compromised on Senator Harry Truman of Missouri - friendly, plainspoken, acceptable to both wings of party.

Look at picture. That FDR - the man who would die just three

months into his fourth term.

Republicans nominated Thomas Dewey - 42-year-old governor of New York. Dewey had been a famous racket-busting prosecutor in NYC during 1930s. Took down mobster Lucky Luciano 1936. Was Republican nominee 1944 + would be again 1948. Dewey was confident, organized, but stiff. People said: "How can you vote for a man who looks like the groom on the wedding cake?"

Campaign focused on FDR's wartime leadership. Dewey attacked New Deal as too costly and FDR as too tired for another term. FDR campaigned little due to health. His "Fala speech" September 23, 1944 mocked Republican charge that he had sent destroyer to retrieve his Scottie dog Fala from Aleutians: "Republican leaders have not been content with attacks on me, or my wife, or on my sons. No, not content with that, they now include my little dog, Fala."

Election Day November 7, 1944: FDR won 432 EV vs Dewey 99. Popular vote 53.4% vs 45.9%. FDR became first president to win four terms.

FDR died April 12, 1945 - just 82 days into fourth term - from cerebral hemorrhage at Warm Springs, Georgia. Truman became 33rd president that evening.



Franklin D. Roosevelt, 32nd U.S. president. He won a fourth term in 1944 but died five months later.
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Let's talk about the story

1.

How many terms did FDR win as president?

2.

Who became president when FDR died April 12, 1945?

3.

What was D-Day?

Warm-up (5 min)

In 1944 WWII was raging. FDR ran for FOURTH term - no U.S. president had ever done this. Even FDR was sick. He died five months after election. Vice President Harry Truman became president.

Answer key

1.

Four. FDR won four presidential elections: 1932, 1936, 1940, 1944. He is the only U.S. president to serve more than two terms. His 12-year presidency (March 4, 1933 - April 12, 1945) is the longest in U.S. history. After FDR's death, the 22nd Amendment (ratified 1951) made the two-term limit constitutional.

AP students should know FDR's four terms.

2.

Harry S. Truman. The 33rd U.S. president (1945-53). Missouri senator (1935-45) who had been FDR's VP since January 20, 1945 - just 82 days before FDR's death on April 12, 1945 at Warm Springs, Georgia. Truman: (1) Made the August 1945 decision to drop atomic bombs on Hiroshima (August 6) and Nagasaki (August 9), ending WWII. (2) Articulated the Truman Doctrine March 1947 (containment of Communism). (3) Signed the Marshall Plan April 1948. (4) Signed the NATO Treaty April 1949. (5) Won the 1948 election in a famous upset over Dewey. (6) Led the U.S. through the Korean War 1950-53.

AP students should know Truman's succession.

3.

D-Day was the June 6, 1944 Allied invasion of Normandy, France. The largest seaborne invasion in history. 156,000 American, British, Canadian, and other Allied troops landed on five beaches code-named Utah, Omaha, Gold, Juno, and Sword. Operation Overlord (the codename for the full invasion plan) was commanded by U.S. General Dwight D. Eisenhower (who would later be elected president 1952). About 4,400 Allied soldiers died on D-Day; about 10,000 total Allied casualties (dead, wounded, missing). The German defense was led by Field Marshal Erwin Rommel. D-Day began the Allied liberation of Western Europe from German occupation. Paris was liberated August 25, 1944. Germany surrendered May 8, 1945. The D-Day operation is widely cited as one of the most important military operations in history.

AP students should know D-Day.