1952

Dwight D. Eisenhower vs Adlai Stevenson II

A 20-minute lesson on the 1952 U.S. presidential election. Includes lesson plan, student worksheet, answer key, and discussion prompts.

ERA New Deal Coalition	ELECTORAL VOTES 531 total
WINNER Dwight D. Eisenhower (Republican) · 442 EV	RUNNER-UP Adlai Stevenson II (Democratic) · 89 EV
KEY ISSUE Korean War; communist threat (McCarthyism); corruption in Truman administration	TURNOUT 62.3%

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1952

Truman had decided not to run in 1952. The Korean War was stalemated. McCarthy was making wild Communist accusations. Truman approval was 22%. Truman quietly recruited Eisenhower to run.

Dwight D. Eisenhower was 62 years old. He had been Supreme Allied Commander in Europe during WWII - the highest American military command. He had organized D-Day. He had been Army Chief of Staff 1945-48. He had been president of Columbia University 1948-50. He had been first NATO Supreme Allied Commander Europe 1950-52. Both Democrats and Republicans had begged him to run for president. Eisenhower had refused.

But in January 1952 Senator Henry Cabot Lodge Jr. of Massachusetts entered Eisenhower in New Hampshire Republican primary. Eisenhower won. By June 1952 he had returned to U.S. from NATO. Republican convention Chicago July 7-11, 1952 nominated him over isolationist Senator Robert Taft of Ohio. Senator Richard Nixon of California (39 years old, anti-Communist crusader) VP.

Look at picture. That Dwight Eisenhower - first Republican president since Hoover 1929-33.

Democrats picked Adlai Stevenson II - 52-year-old governor of Illinois. Stevenson was educated at Princeton, Harvard, Northwestern. Brilliant orator. Reluctant candidate - did not initially want nomination. Democrats drafted him at Chicago convention July 21-26, 1952.

Campaign slogan "I Like Ike" was simple, friendly, irresistible. Eisenhower's grandfatherly warmth was politically powerful after 20 years of Democratic presidents.

September 23, 1952 famous "Checkers speech" - Nixon defended himself from accusations of secret political fund. Nixon emotional speech on TV defended his honor. Mentioned his daughters' Cocker Spaniel "Checkers" - "regardless of what they say about it, we're gonna keep it." Speech saved his place on Republican ticket.

Election Day November 4, 1952: Eisenhower 442 EV vs Stevenson 89. Popular vote 55.2% vs 44.3%. Eisenhower carried 39 states. First Republican president since 1928 (Hoover 1928 election).

Eisenhower would serve 1953-61. End Korean War. Build Interstate Highway System. Send federal troops to Little Rock 1957 to enforce school desegregation. Warn against "military-industrial



Dwight D. Eisenhower, the 34th U.S. president. He was a famous WWII general who organized the D-Day invasion before entering politics.

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Let's talk about the story

1.

Who became the 34th U.S. president after the 1952 election?

2.

What was Eisenhower famous for before he ran for president?

3.

What was the Checkers speech?

Warm-up (5 min)

In 1952 the most famous American general ran for president. Dwight Eisenhower had commanded Allied forces in WWII Europe. He had organized D-Day invasion June 6, 1944. His campaign slogan was simple: "I Like Ike."

Answer key

1.

Dwight D. Eisenhower. He won 442 electoral votes to Adlai Stevenson's 89. Popular vote 55.2% to 44.3%. Eisenhower was the first Republican president since Herbert Hoover (1929-33) - ending 20 years of Democratic presidents (FDR 1933-45, Truman 1945-53). Eisenhower served 1953-61 and was re-elected in 1956 with 457-73 EV.

AP students should know the 442-89 Eisenhower victory.

2.

Eisenhower was famous as a WWII general. He had been Supreme Allied Commander in Europe during WWII (1943-45) - the highest American military command. He organized the June 6, 1944 D-Day invasion of Normandy that began the Allied liberation of Western Europe. After WWII he was Army Chief of Staff (1945-48), president of Columbia University (1948-50), and first NATO Supreme Allied Commander Europe (1950-52). Both Democrats and Republicans had begged him to run for president throughout the late 1940s. He had refused until January 1952, when Senator Henry Cabot Lodge Jr. of Massachusetts entered him in the New Hampshire Republican primary. Eisenhower won the primary and decided to seek the Republican nomination. The Republican convention in Chicago July 7-11, 1952 nominated him over isolationist Senator Robert Taft of Ohio.

AP students should know Eisenhower's military background.

3.

The Checkers speech was Vice presidential candidate Richard Nixon's September 23, 1952 televised address. Nixon was facing accusations that wealthy California businessmen had created an $18,000 political fund for his personal use - allegations that threatened his place on the Republican ticket. Eisenhower had not yet decided whether to keep Nixon on the ticket. Nixon delivered a 30-minute emotional address from a studio in Los Angeles, broadcast on television to ~60 million viewers and on radio to additional millions. Nixon defended his honor by listing his modest personal finances: his wife Pat's "respectable Republican cloth coat" (not a fur coat); his $80 monthly mortgage on a house in Whittier, California; his debts. He mentioned that one Texas businessman had sent his daughters Tricia (6) and Julie (4) a Cocker Spaniel puppy: "regardless of what they say about it, we're gonna keep it" - because Tricia had named the dog "Checkers" and loved it. The speech was politically masterful. Eisenhower kept Nixon on the ticket. The Checkers speech demonstrated the power of television in politics and is widely cited as the first major political use of television to overcome a scandal.

AP students should know the Checkers speech.