

## The American election: a two-horse race every four years.



# VOTE

The United States Presidential Election comes around in the same year as the Olympics and it shares some similarities: contestants get knocked out, they need a great deal of stamina to finish and the winner takes all.



Yes, it's that year again – if it divides by four then you know it's a US Presidential Election year. And it's usually a two-horse race between the Democratic and the Republican candidates. But there are other candidates, too, but the media doesn't really pay them much attention.

The whole process kicks off 18 months before the actual election, in the spring of the preceding year, when candidates announce their intention to run. During this year, there are plenty of intra-party meetings: the Primaries and the Caucuses when party members debate the strengths and weaknesses of the various candidates. (What's the difference between the Primaries and the Caucuses? A Primary is a state-level meeting – and used in 34 States - and a Caucus is a local-level meeting and used in 16 States.) So at the end of that year there are still several contenders.

From January to June of election year, the contenders all battle it out to become one of the last two nominees. The parties within each State hold the Primaries and Caucuses elections – and this time the parties in each state vote for their preferred candidate. In the late summer, party conventions take place where the two or three preferred candidates for each party are finally whittled down to just one. And after the convention (when everyone is starting to feel pretty exhausted), the party candidates spend the next three months battling it out with their opposing number – the Democrat against the Republican - in order to secure votes for the General Election on the first Tuesday (after the first Monday) in November. Sounds like a mix of a marathon and a boxing match.

Election Day arrives and the voters go to their polling stations and cast their ballots – but the results of the election are not yet official, because there is another factor in the US electoral system: the Electoral College. Each state has a number of electors, 538 in total from across the USA, who meet at the end of November or beginning of December. The electors' vote reflects the winner in their home state. So it is only when the number of votes cast in the Electoral College reaches 270 (more than half of the 538) that the winner is officially known.

The Electoral College is a throwback to the nation's founding fathers who wanted the election to be a compromise between the popular vote – from the

people – and the vote of Congress. Although the Electoral College almost always reflects the popular vote, this does not always happen. Think back to 2000 when Al Gore, who won the popular vote, lost to George W Bush, who got more votes from the Electoral College.

What of those other presidential candidates that we don't hear much about? There have been candidates from the Green Party, the Libertarian Party, the Constitution Party, the Reform Party and the Party for Socialism and Liberation. And what do American voters do if they don't like any of the candidates on the list? They have a space to write in another name – 'write in' candidates can even include Mickey Mouse or Donald Duck. Or voters can even vote for themselves.

So remember, if you're watching Olympic sporting competitions on the television, you know that only a few months later another set of competitors will be slugging it out on the American political stage.

If you'd like to read more about the US Presidential Election, then click [here](#).

And if you would like to use *US presidents* as a topic in your lesson, then we have provided you with an activity at A2 level. You'll find it in the following **Teacher's notes** and on the **Worksheet**.

### Teacher's notes

#### US Presidents' Quiz (Level A2 and above, 20+ mins)

- Make a copy of **US Presidents' quiz**, one quiz with 10 questions for each student.
- On the board write: *Jefferson, 3, Roosevelt, 35*, and ask students what connects the numbers and names. (Jefferson was 3rd president of the USA and Roosevelt was 32nd president.)
- Explain that students are going to do a quiz about US presidents.
- Hand out the **Worksheet**, one to each student.
- Give students five to ten minutes to complete the quiz. Circulate and, if necessary, help with translations.
- Tell students to check answers with a partner.
- Check answers together in class.
- Tell students to work in pairs and think of one or two more questions about US presidents. They could check information on their smartphones if necessary.
- In turn, each pair asks the rest of the class their questions.

#### Key:

1. President of the United States.
2. 21 years old. (Frances Cleveland married Grover Cleveland, 22nd President in 1886.)
3. 44th
4. Yes, James Buchanan, 15th president (1857 – 1861).
5. Theodore Roosevelt - he went to Panama in 1906.
6. 4 (Abraham Lincoln 1865, James Garfield 1881, William McKinley 1901, John F Kennedy 1963).
7. Richard Nixon in August 1974.
8. Ronald Reagan.
9. George W Bush ran the Houston Marathon in 3 hours, 44 minutes and 52 seconds on January 24, 1993. (Before he was president!)
10. Bill Clinton.

## Worksheet

### US Presidents' Quiz

1. What does POTUS stand for?
2. How old was the youngest first lady?
3. George Washington was the first president; what number president is Barack Obama?
4. Has there ever been a bachelor president?
5. Who was the first US president to travel outside America on official business?
6. How many presidents have been assassinated?
7. Who is the only US president to resign from the position?
8. Who was a Hollywood actor before he became president?
9. Who was the first president to run a marathon?
10. Which ex-president has first two names William Jefferson?

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