

Name _____ Date _____

The Presidential Election

"I'll Be the President"

Learn more about this topic! Each section gives more detail on one of the lyrics from the song. Read each section, and then respond by answering the question or taking notes on key ideas.

1. The Constitution lays out a number of requirements for the office of president. The president must be at least 35 years old. The president must have been born in the United States and have been a permanent resident of the United States for at least fourteen years. The Twelfth Amendment extends these requirements to the vice president. The youngest elected president so far was John F. Kennedy, at 43. Although it's not a constitutional requirement, most presidents have taken part in public service before becoming president—either through elected office or in the military.

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President Barack Obama (L) and Governor Mitt Romney (R)

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The two major political parties in the United States are the Democrats and Republicans. There are always other candidates from smaller parties, but none has ever won the election. In the 2016 election, former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton ran as the Democratic candidate. The Republican candidate was Donald Trump. Libertarian candidate Gary Johnson and Green Party candidate Jill Stein were also on the ballot in enough states to, in theory, win the vote.

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Democrat William M. Tweed, a.k.a. "Boss" Tweed, played a major role in 19th century New York politics.

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During primary elections, each party picks which candidate it will put on the ballot in the general election. For much of the 20th century, party bosses made

these decisions. In the 1970s, parties made the process more democratic. Many states started using primaries. Now, the candidates send delegates to conventions. These are multi-day conferences where party members solidify their platform, defining the laws and issues they will fight for if they win. Conventions are also where parties formally nominate their candidates for president.

4. In order to get votes in the primary elections, candidates campaign. During a campaign, they set themselves apart from the other candidates in their parties. They also debate against other candidates in the party. This is a chance to showcase the differences in their approaches to current political issues. And, luckily for candidates, states stagger their primaries and caucuses so that they do not fall on one single day.

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Every politician wants to seem nice to babies.

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Primary elections narrow the number of candidates to one per party. This is

done so that in the general election in the fall, voters are choosing between candidates who have the support of their parties. In 2016, Hillary Clinton and Bernie Sanders competed for the Democratic nomination, which Clinton ultimately won. There were many candidates for the Republican nomination, including Marco Rubio and Ted Cruz. Donald Trump ultimately won the nomination.

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6. Originally, the candidate with the highest number of votes in the general election became president. The runner-up became vice president. When this system was designed, the US did not yet have political parties. So the system did not plan for the fact that a president and vice president from different parties would rarely be able to agree. This happened in the 1796 election. Federalist John Adams became president with Democratic-Republican Thomas Jefferson as his vice president. Eight years later, in 1804, the Twelfth Amendment changed the process. Now, presidents and vice presidents run for election together, as running mates.

Notes

7. Leading up to the general election in November, there are debates throughout October. Typically, there are a few debates between the presidential candidates and one between the vice presidential candidates. Only candidates polling at 15% or above participate in the debates. The parties agree on the rules and format of the debates. During the actual debate, candidates have the opportunity to present their positions on different policies and sometimes answer questions from potential voters. Recent debates have featured questions from Facebook, YouTube and Twitter.

Notes

8. Campaigning is expensive, and candidates are constantly trying to raise more money. Fundraising can determine a candidate's success. Candidates are required to report their finances to the Federal Election Commission. Candidates receive funding from individuals and special interest groups. In 2010, the Supreme Court ruled that financial contributions made to campaigns by non-profit organizations, independent of the candidate, are free speech. This means that the government cannot limit those contributions. This created Super-PACs, organizations that can raise unlimited amounts of money for a candidate or an issue. Individuals contributions, however, are still restricted. In the 2016 presidential election, individuals could not donate more than \$2,700 in each election.

Notes

9. Many states have a history of voting for one party or another. For example, California tends to vote Democrat. Texas tends to vote Republican. When campaigning, candidates often won't focus on these states because they can already predict if the state will or won't vote for them. Instead, campaigns target swing states, or states that might vote either way. Colorado, Florida, Michigan, Iowa, North Carolina and Pennsylvania were swing states in the 2016 presidential election.

Notes

10. Candidates would campaign in all 50 states if a popular vote decided the presidency, but it does not. The United States actually uses a different method called the Electoral College. Votes in the Electoral College are divided up by state. Each state gets a different number of votes, based on its population. A candidate needs at least 270 electoral votes to win. If you win at least 270 electoral votes, you can win the election even if you don't win the popular vote. Sound wild? In the 2000 election, George W. Bush won the presidency despite Al Gore winning the popular vote. This was the first instance of the winning candidate losing the popular vote since the 1800s and only the fourth instance in US history.

Notes

11. The popular vote does not decide the presidential election; the Electoral College does. The Electoral College is made up of 538 electors. They vote based on the outcome of the popular vote in their state. This is a controversial method. It makes it possible for the winner of the popular vote to lose the election, like Al Gore did in 2000. Supporters of the Electoral College argue that it is fairer. It makes sure politicians don't ignore smaller states and rural areas. Critics point out that the results of the electoral vote and the popular vote sometimes don't match up. They argue that candidates focus on swing states to win their electoral votes instead of addressing the majority of voters in the nation.

Notes

12. According to Twelfth Amendment, the House of Representatives votes for president if the electoral vote does not produce a majority. This has only happened twice, in 1801 and 1825. In 1800, Thomas Jefferson and Aaron Burr tied for president. The House of Representatives broke the tie, giving Jefferson the presidency and Burr the vice-presidency. At that time, the runner-up served as vice president. In 1825, no candidate had a majority of votes. So the House again had to break the deadlock. The House voted for John Quincy Adams, even though Andrew Jackson won the popular vote. According to the Twelfth Amendment, if the House is deadlocked, the outgoing vice president acts as president until they can reach a decision.

Notes

13. Until formally inaugurated on January 20, the winning candidate is not yet president. They are instead the president-elect, and the president who will step down is informally referred to as a "lame duck." On Inauguration Day, the president-elect and vice-president-elect are sworn in, taking the oath of office. This is text in the Constitution that is administered by the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. The president then gives their inaugural address.

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