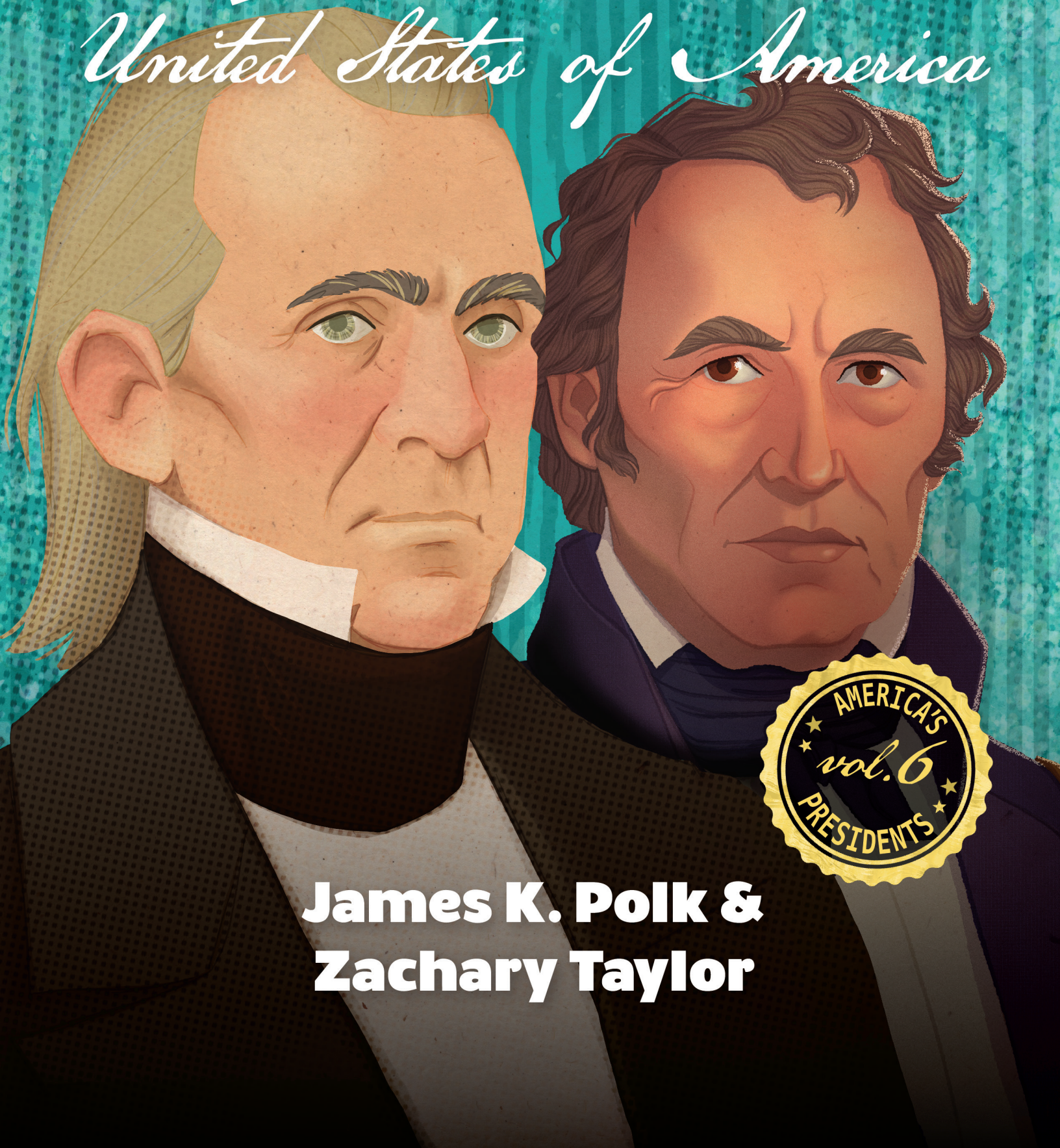


presidents of the *United States of America*



**James K. Polk &
Zachary Taylor**



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presidents of the *United States of America*

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James K. Polk



"I was the 11th President, and I expanded America all the way to the Pacific Ocean."





In this book, you'll learn all sorts of facts about James K. Polk's amazing life and accomplishments. But there's still one last thing we need to know about him.

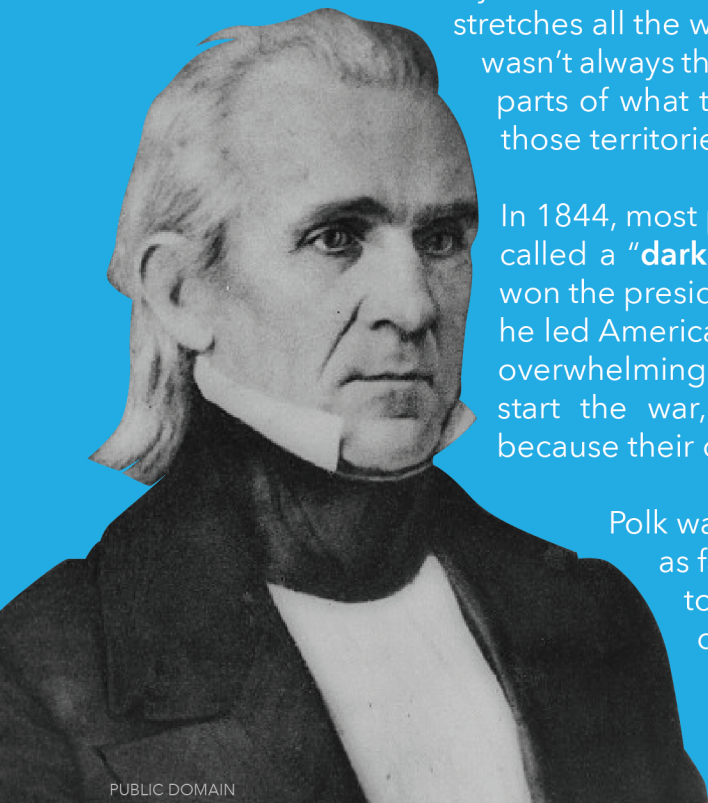
When Polk was President, a young congressman attacked him for starting the Mexican-American War. That congressman would one day become President, and we need to find out just who he was. You can help us uncover the answer! Hidden in the text are bolded letters. Read this book carefully to find them and fill the letters into the blanks below in the order they appear.

Once you've solved this puzzle, you'll be a true PragerU Kids presidential historian!

Meet James K. Polk

When you look at a map of the United States, you'll see that the country stretches all the way from the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific Ocean. This wasn't always the case—there was a time when other countries owned parts of what today is the USA. Polk played a big role in acquiring those territories and expanding America across the continent.

Polk was a very hardworking president. Even though he isn't as famous as other presidents, he is considered by many to be one of the most important. Few presidents have done more to transform America into a major world power than James K. Polk.





Young James

James K. Polk was born on November 2, 1795, in Pineville, North Carolina. He came from a **b**ig family and was the oldest of ten children. His father Samuel was a hardworking farmer from North Carolina. His mother, Jane, raised James and his siblings, teaching them the importance of a strong work ethic and discipline. When James was 11, he and his family moved to the new **frontier** state of Tennessee where there was plenty of land to build farms. They traveled almost 500 miles by wagon to get **there**. The trip was worth it: Samuel became a successful farmer and eventually owned thousands of acres of land and many slaves. He also got involved in local politics. While eating dinner, young James often heard his father discuss the major issues of the day with guests.

Unfortunately, **J**ames spent much of his childhood sick in bed, which made it difficult for him to attend school. He once had very painful surgery to remove gallstones from his body. Fortunately, he recovered. His mother taught him at home and also hired several tutors for him. James overcame his illnesses and did well in **h**is studies, especially in reading, writing, and math.



PUBLIC DOMAIN

Interesting Facts

- He and his wife Sarah never had any children.
- He was a member of the Democratic Party.
- He is considered the first “dark horse” candidate to win the presidency.
- He is the first president to be elected under the age of 50.
- He is the only **Speaker of the House** (as of 2023) to serve as President of the United States.
- He and his **Cabinet** are depicted in the first photograph ever taken inside the White House.
- He is the first president to serve a full term and refuse to run for re-election.
- He is the first president to die under the age of 60. This made him the first president to die before one of his parents died.
- He only lived three months after leaving the White House, which is the shortest retirement for any president.
- His wife Sarah was widowed for 42 years, the longest of any first lady.

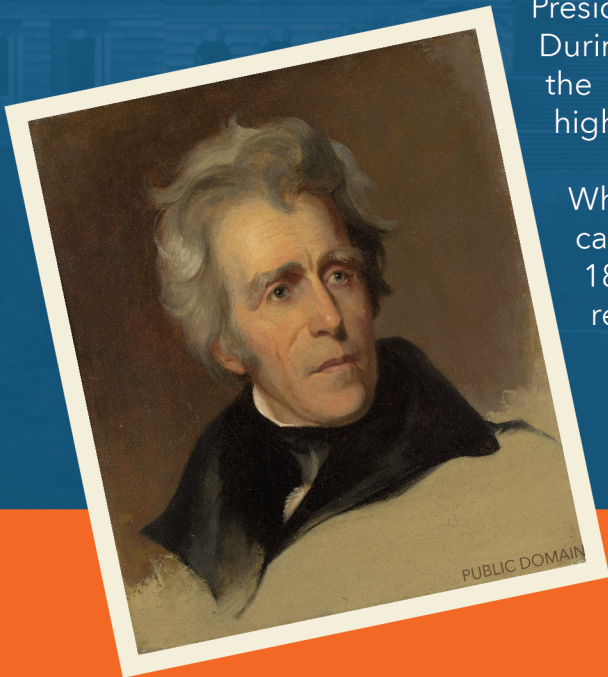
Rise to the Presidency

When Polk was 20 years old, he enrolled at the University of North Carolina. He was one of the top students in his class and learned how to speak well in front of other people. Out of his entire class, he was chosen to give the **commencement** speech at his graduation in 1818.

After graduating with honors, Polk became a lawyer, but he was mainly interested in politics. In 1824, he was elected to the U.S. Congress, but politics wasn't the only thing he cared about. He also wanted to settle down, so that same year, he married a beautiful and intelligent woman named Sarah Childress.

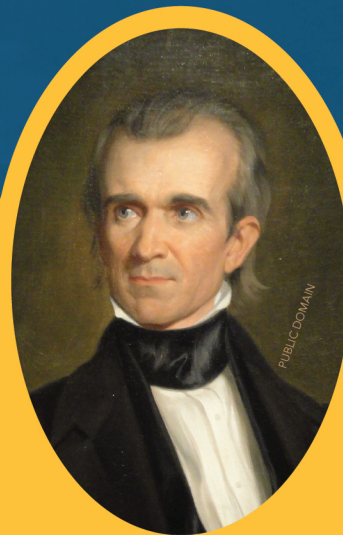
One of Polk's close family friends was a man named Andrew Jackson, who was a military hero from the War of 1812 and a politician. In 1828, Jackson was elected President. Polk strongly supported President Jackson and the new **Democratic Party** he had formed. During Jackson's presidency, Polk rose to become the Speaker of the House of Representatives, which meant he was the highest-ranking congressman in the country.

When Andrew Jackson left the White House in 1837, Polk's career continued to rise. He ran for Governor of Tennessee in 1839 and won, but lost his re-election race in 1841. He tried to return as governor in 1843 but lost again.



Speaker of the House

Prior to becoming President, James K. Polk was elected Speaker of the House of Representatives. The Speaker is chosen by the members of Congress and must have the support of a majority of the members voting. The Speaker plays a major role in what legislation is voted on in Congress. For most of American history, it has been in the line of succession to the presidency. As of 2021, the Speaker of the House becomes the President of the United States if the President and the Vice President are unable to discharge their duties.



Quote

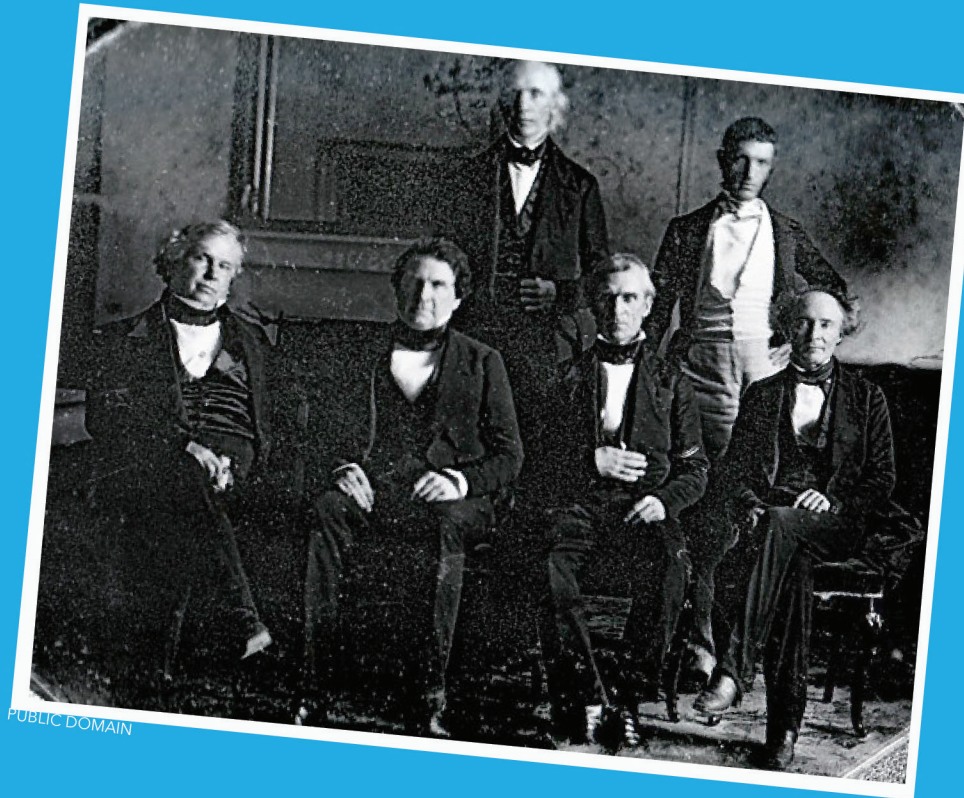
"I love you Sarah. For all eternity, I love you."
- last words, spoken to his wife, June 1849

Quote

"Ours was intended to be
a plain and frugal
government."
- inaugural address,
March 1845

Dark Horse Candidate

After **losing** twice, Polk was depressed. His career seemed to be over, but he still had an ambition to return to office. As the 1844 presidential election approached, Andrew Jackson felt Polk was the best candidate. The Democrats chose Polk as their presidential **nominee**. He defeated the **Whig Party's** candidate Henry Clay that fall and became President of the United States.



President

Once he moved into the White House in March 1845, President Polk got right to work. Every day, he worked long hours into the night.

The previous president, John Tyler, tried to get Texas to join America as a new state. Texas used to be under Mexico, but it declared independence in the 1830s because Mexico's government was **corrupt** and it didn't respect the rights of its citizens. After Texas won independence, President Tyler tried to convince it to join the United States. Polk made sure to continue this effort, and Texas entered the Union by December 1845. Americans were happy that Texas was now part of their country, but Mexico was upset because it wanted the state back.

Americans wanted more land and weren't happy that much of the western part of North America was still owned by Mexico. They also wanted this land to settle and live on. Tensions between the two countries increased and war broke out in April 1846.

Under Polk's leadership, the U.S. military defeated Mexico and even took over its capital, Mexico City. Polk had to overcome many challenges: he didn't get along well with his top Generals Winfield Scott and Zachary Taylor.

Still, when the war ended in February 1848, America had won an impressive victory. The United States had acquired half a million square miles of land, which today includes all of Arizona, California, Nevada, and Utah and parts of Colorado, New Mexico, and Wyoming.

Back in 1844, Polk had promised he would only serve one term. He was true to his word and didn't run for re-election in 1848. That year, one of his generals, Zachary Taylor, was elected to replace him as president. He and Sarah left the White House in March of 1849 and moved back to Tennessee.

Quote

"With me it is emphatically true that the presidency is 'no bed of roses.'"
- diary entry,
September 1847



PUBLIC DOMAIN

Mexican-American War

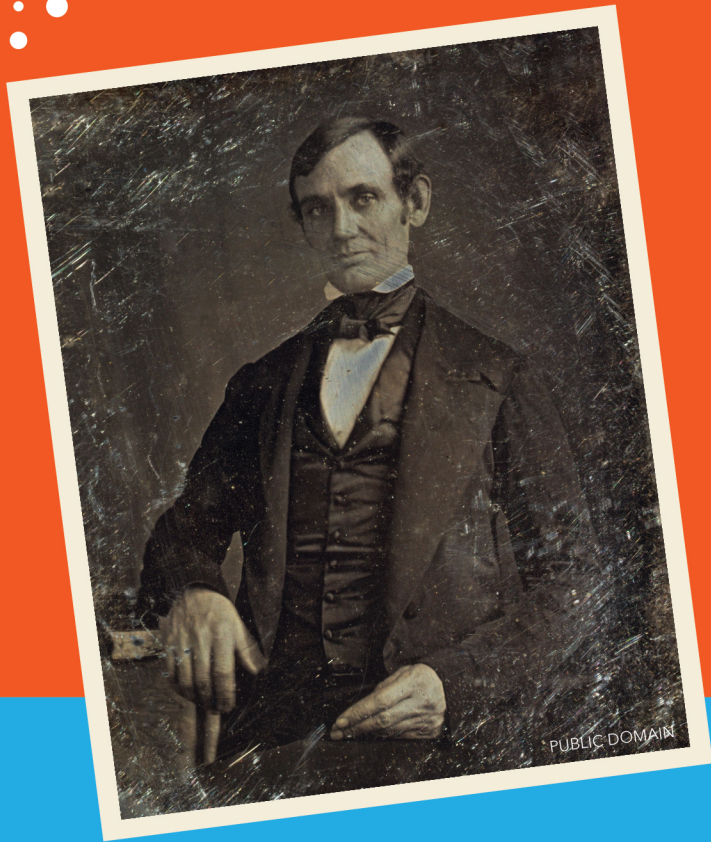
Many of the young soldiers that fought in the Mexican-American War would later become the most important generals of the American Civil War. This included Winfield Scott Hancock, Thomas J. "Stonewall" Jackson, Joseph E. Johnston, George McClellan, George Meade, George Pickett, and most famously, Ulysses S. Grant and Robert E. Lee. Many of them became close friends, learned about each other's strengths and weaknesses, and gained valuable combat experience. Sadly, they would find themselves fighting on opposite sides when the Civil War broke out.



PUBLIC DOMAIN

Retirement

Former President Polk was exhausted after finishing his term. Although he was one of the youngest presidents to enter office at age 49, by now he was 53 years old and in poor health. He contracted cholera and died on June 15, 1849, at his home in Nashville, Tennessee.



Legacy

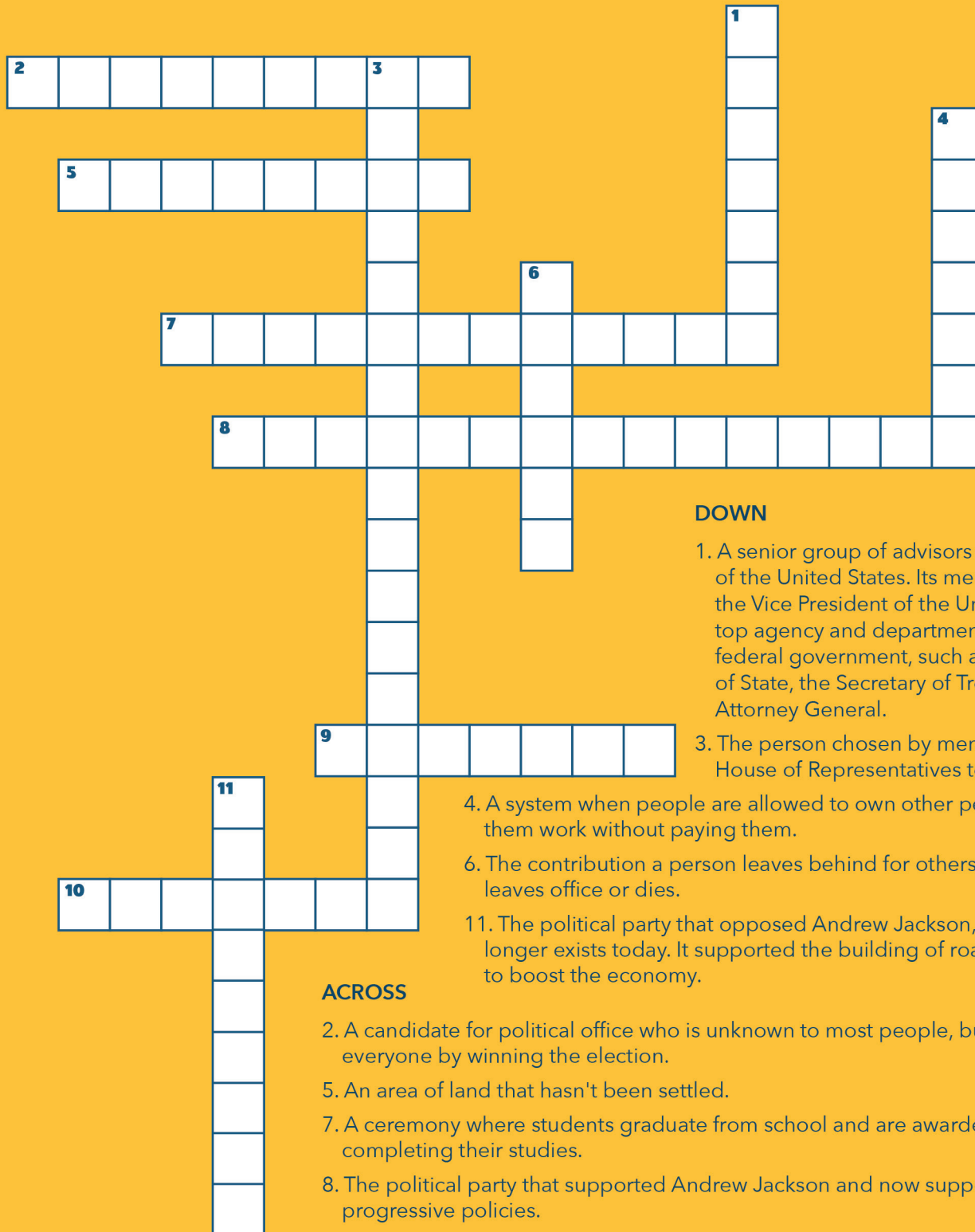
James K. Polk left a very important **legacy** for his country. By expanding America's size, he helped it become a major power in the world. This opened up new territories to Americans, allowing millions of people to prosper, and strengthened the country, but also introduced new problems. At the time, **slavery** existed in the southern United States and some wanted the new territories to have slaves, while others disagreed. For the next twelve years after Polk's death, Americans would argue about this issue but wouldn't come to an agreement. The problem of slavery would only be settled by the Civil War under the 16th President, Abraham Lincoln.

Writing Activity

President Polk won his election to the presidency unexpectedly. Not many people knew who he was. Write about a time when you accomplished something unexpected or surprising. What was it and how did it make you feel?



Crossword



DOWN

1. A senior group of advisors to the President of the United States. Its members include the Vice President of the United States and top agency and department leaders in the federal government, such as the Secretary of State, the Secretary of Treasury, and the Attorney General.
3. The person chosen by members of the U.S. House of Representatives to be its leader.

4. A system when people are allowed to own other people and make them work without paying them.
6. The contribution a person leaves behind for others after he or she leaves office or dies.
11. The political party that opposed Andrew Jackson, which no longer exists today. It supported the building of roads and canals to boost the economy.

ACROSS

2. A candidate for political office who is unknown to most people, but surprises everyone by winning the election.
5. An area of land that hasn't been settled.
7. A ceremony where students graduate from school and are awarded degrees for completing their studies.
8. The political party that supported Andrew Jackson and now supports liberal or progressive policies.
9. Dishonest, seeking selfish gain.
10. A person chosen by a party to be a candidate for specific political office.

ANSWERS ON PG 10

Glossary

Dark Horse: A candidate for political office who is unknown to most people, but surprises everyone by winning the election.

Speaker of the House: The person chosen by members of the U.S. House of Representatives to be its leader.

Cabinet: A senior group of advisors to the President of the United States. Its members include the Vice President of the United States and top agency and department leaders in the federal government, such as the Secretary of State, the Secretary of Treasury, and the Attorney General.

Frontier: An area of land that hasn't been settled.

Commencement: A ceremony where students graduate from school and are awarded degrees for completing their studies.

Democratic Party: The political party that supported Andrew Jackson and now supports liberal or progressive policies.

Nominee: A person chosen by a party to be a candidate for specific political office.

Whig Party: The political party that opposed Andrew Jackson, which no longer exists today. It supported the building of roads and canals to boost the economy.

Corrupt: Dishonest, seeking selfish gain.

Legacy: The contribution a person leaves behind for others after he or she leaves office or dies.

Slavery: A system when people are allowed to own other people and make them work without paying them.

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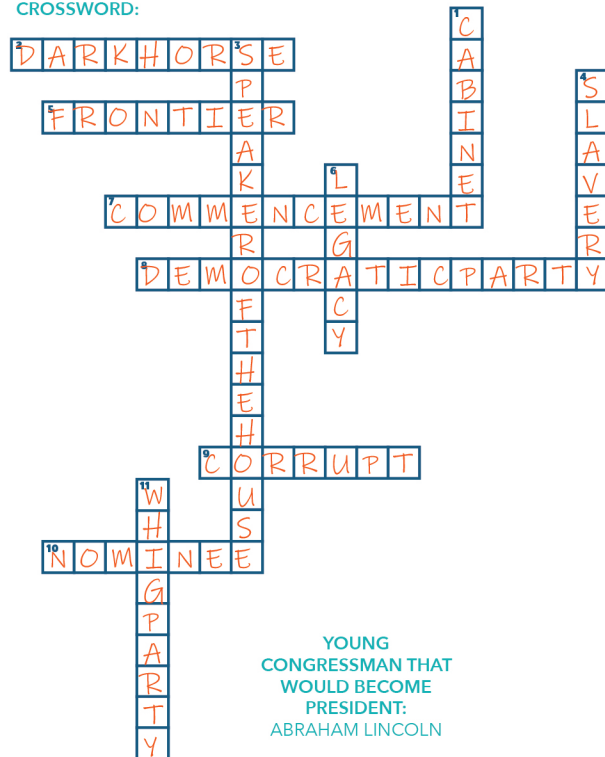
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Images: WikiCommons

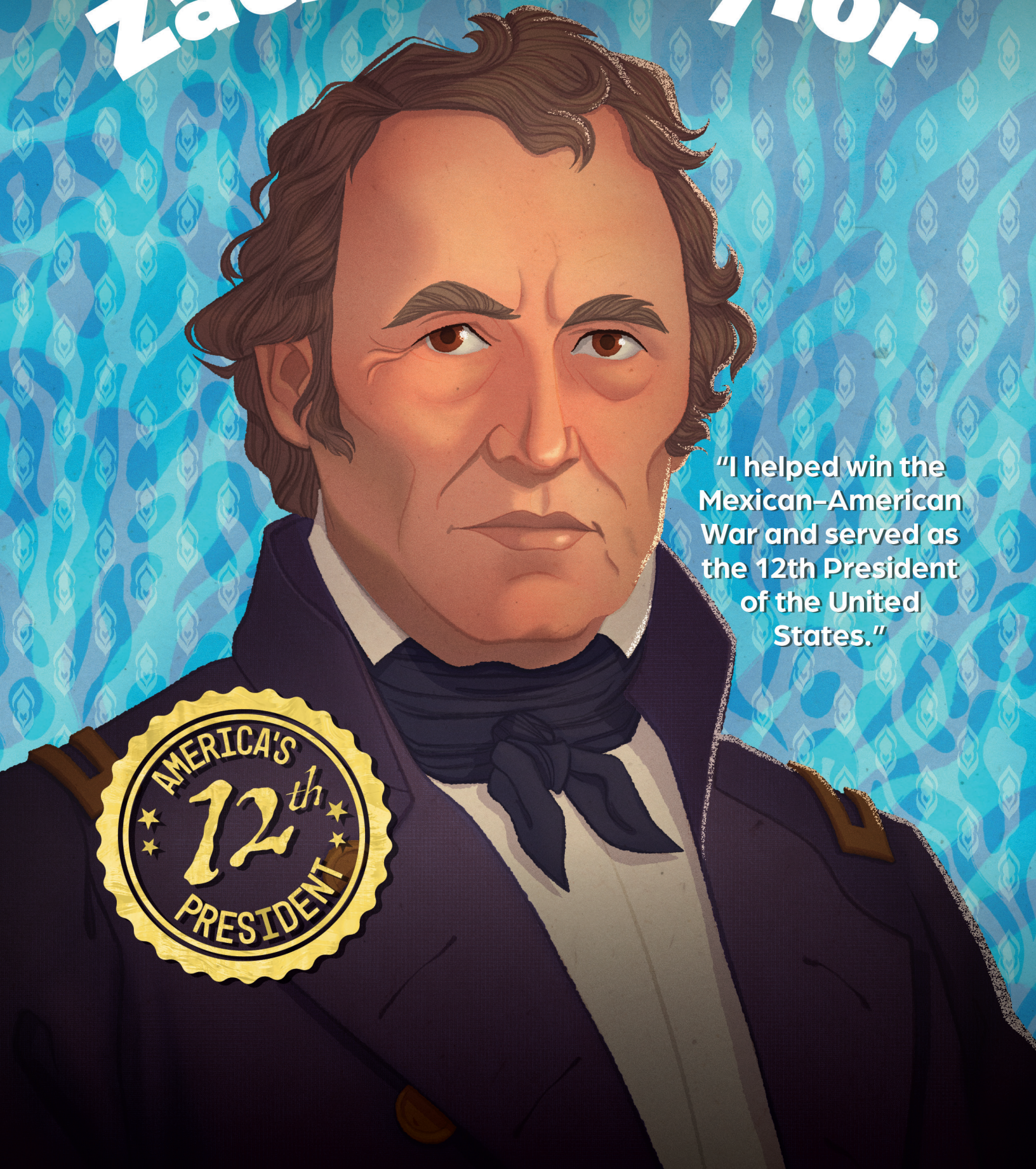
Answers

CROSSWORD:



YOUNG
CONGRESSMAN THAT
WOULD BECOME
PRESIDENT:
ABRAHAM LINCOLN

Zachary Taylor



"I helped win the Mexican-American War and served as the 12th President of the United States."





Become a Presidential Historian by Solving This Puzzle

In this book, you'll learn all sorts of facts about Zachary Taylor's amazing life and accomplishments. But there's still one last thing we need to know about him.

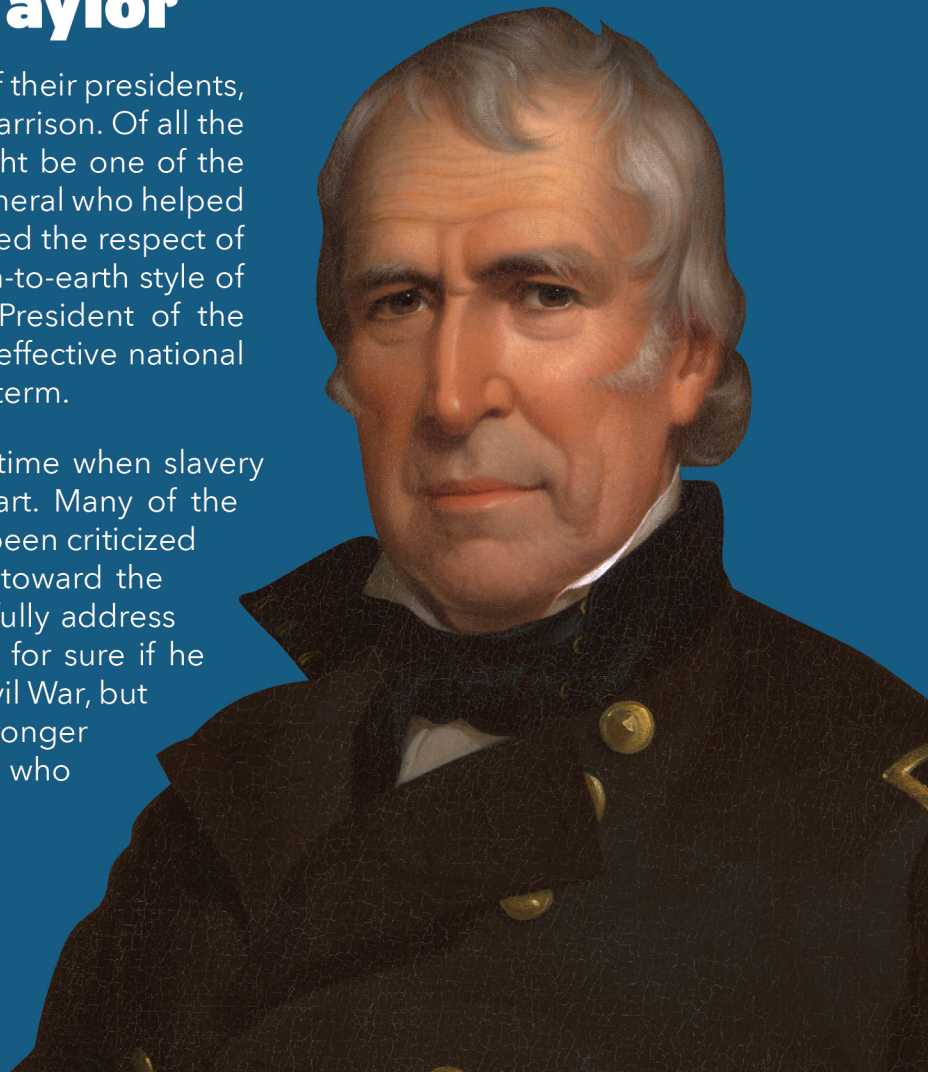
President Taylor once owned a horse that had previously performed in the circus. We need to know the horse's name. Your task is to help us uncover the answer! Hidden in the text are bolded letters. Read this book carefully to find them and fill the letters into the blanks below in the order they appear.

— — — — —
Once you've solved this puzzle, you'll be a
true PragerU Kids presidential historian!

Meet Zachary Taylor

Americans have forgotten about many of their presidents, such as Millard Fillmore and Benjamin Harrison. Of all the **obscure** presidents, Zachary Taylor might be one of the most impressive. He was a successful general who helped win a war for the United States. He earned the respect of his soldiers because of his steady, down-to-earth style of leadership. He was elected the 12th President of the United States and might have been an effective national leader had he not died so soon into his term.

Taylor served in the White House at a time when slavery was threatening to split the nation apart. Many of the presidents who came after Taylor have been criticized for failing to stop the country's march toward the Civil War. Taylor died before he could fully address the nation's divisions. We cannot know for sure if he would have been able to prevent the Civil War, but he does appear to have been a stronger leader than many of the presidents who came after him.



Young Zachary

Zachary Taylor was born to a prominent family on November 24, 1784, in Orange County, Virginia. He was the third child of Richard and Sarah Taylor. His father Richard had served under General George Washington during the American Revolution, including in the pivotal Battle of Trenton. The Taylors moved to Louisville, Kentucky just before Zachary had his first birthday.

Young Zachary grew up in the wild **frontier** and eventually had seven siblings. By 1800, their family owned 10,000 acres and 26 slaves. While Zachary wasn't a great student in school, he still learned the value of hard work on the family farm.



Interesting Facts

- He was nicknamed "Old Rough and Ready" because he was a tough warrior who was willing to face the same hardships his soldiers endured.
- He was a member of the Whig Party.
- James Madison, the 4th President of the United States, was his second cousin.
- He was the first president to have served in no prior elected office.
- His daughter, Sarah Knox Taylor, married Jefferson Davis, the future President of the Confederate States of America, in 1835.
- He was the second president to die in office.



Early Career

Ever since his youth, Taylor had been inspired by his father's service in the Revolution and wanted a military career of his own. In 1808, when he was 23, he joined the Army and received a commission as a first lieutenant. He also met Margaret Mackall Smith, who came from a prominent family in Maryland. They got married in 1810 and eventually had five daughters and one son. Sadly, two of their daughters died at a young age.

During the War of 1812, Taylor helped defend Fort Harrison in the Indiana Territory from an attack by Native Americans. Taylor was praised as a hero and awarded the rank of brevet major. For the next three decades, Taylor endured military life on the frontier. He was stationed in Wisconsin, Mississippi, Kansas, Louisiana, and many other states. He acquired large amounts of land in Kentucky, Louisiana, and Mississippi and became a wealthy man. He also fought Native Americans in the **Black Hawk** and Second **Seminole Wars**. At the same time, he respected Native Americans and wanted to protect them from white settlers. Taylor's soldiers admired him because he didn't mind sharing in their hardships and struggles. They nicknamed him "Old Rough and Ready" because of his toughness and rugged appearance.



Quote

"My life has been devoted to arms, yet I look upon war at all times, and under all circumstances, as a national calamity, to be avoided if compatible with the national honor."

- April 1848

Mexican-American War

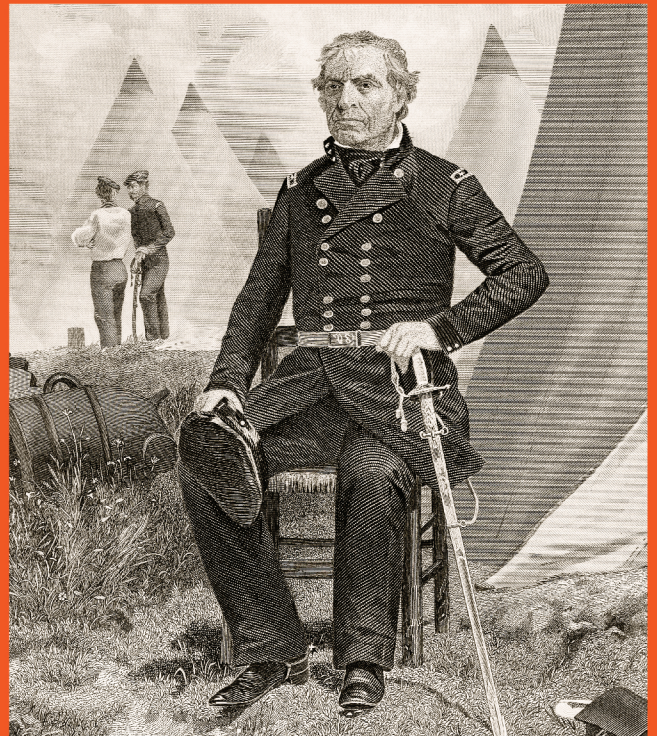
Zachary Taylor became famous across the country during the **Mexican-American War**. It all started in the spring of 1846, when President James K. Polk sent a force of about three and a half thousand men, led by Taylor, into territory near the Rio Grande River. Both Texas, which had just joined the United States, and the country of Mexico claimed the area as their own. Mexico considered Polk's move an act of aggression and, in April, its forces fired on Taylor's men. The war had effectively begun.

Soon, Taylor was made a major general, and he and General Winfield Scott became the two greatest military leaders of the war. At the battles of Palo Alto, Resaca de la Palma, Monterrey, and Buena Vista, Taylor and his men were outnumbered by the enemy. In fact, at Buena Vista, they were outnumbered by a three-to-one margin. Despite this, Taylor and his army won every battle. By the fall of 1847, General Scott captured Mexico's capital, Mexico City. The United States had won a stunning victory.

The nation was thrilled by Taylor's unlikely victories. Soon, he was being compared to previous American military heroes, such as George Washington and Andrew Jackson. Future Civil War general and President Ulysses S. Grant later wrote of Taylor, "No soldier could face either danger or responsibility more calmly than he... He was known to every soldier in his army and was respected by all."

Quote

*"I have no private purposes to accomplish, no party projects to build up, no enemies to punish—nothing to serve but my country."
- April 1848*



1848 Presidential Election

Quote

"The will of the people, as expressed through their representatives in Congress, ought to be respected and carried out by the Executive."

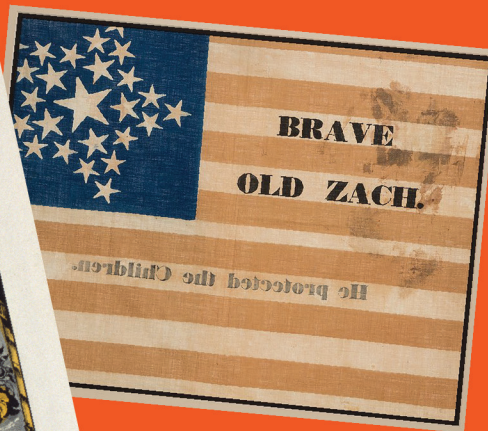
- April 1848

Taylor's victories immediately made him a candidate for president. However, it wasn't clear which of the two parties—the Whigs or the Democrats—he supported, and he had no real political experience. He hadn't even voted in an election before. It turned out that there were things Taylor liked and disliked about both parties. Most of all, he believed that the power of the president should be limited and that Congress should take the lead in governing the country. This aligned him closer to the Whig Party, which nominated him as their candidate for president in 1848, along with former New York Congressman Millard Fillmore as his running mate. Taylor defeated Democratic Senator Lewis Cass in a close race that fall.

Quote

"In the discharge of these duties my guide will be the Constitution, which I this day swear to 'preserve, protect, and defend.'"

- Inaugural Address, March 1849



Campaign Poster

Suppose you were to run for class president. What would your campaign poster look like?

Design a campaign poster. You might try to use a powerful slogan or images to show who you are and what you stand for.

President

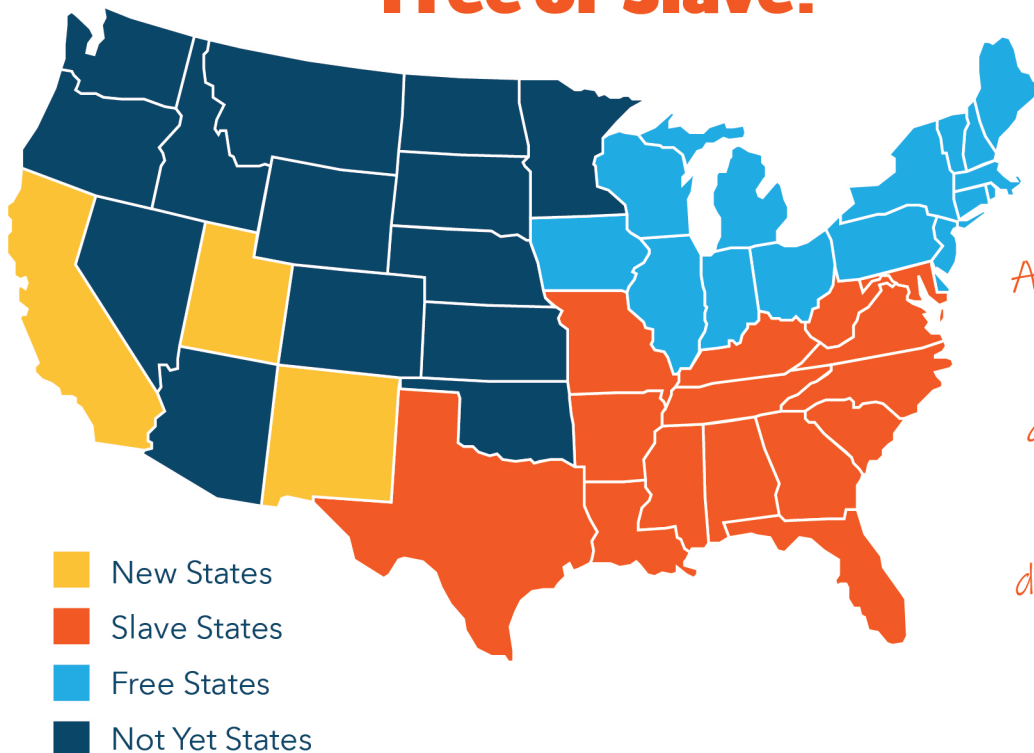


Zachary Taylor took office as the 12th President of the United States on March 5, 1849. He spent most of his presidency dealing with the issue of what to do about the territories won during the Mexican-American War. At the time, the United States was composed of 30 states, 15 of which were **free states** and 15 of which were **slave states**. Meanwhile, Americans were debating whether slavery should be allowed in the new territories—many Northerners wanted slavery abolished while many Southerners wanted to expand slavery westward. Both sides worried that adding more states would tip the balance and give the other side more votes in Congress. Taylor decided to urge those in California and New Mexico, likely free states, to apply for statehood. Taylor's plan would add at least two free states to the **Union**, giving the free states more votes in Congress. Many were surprised that Taylor, a slaveholder, would be

willing to give the advantage to the free states, but he didn't think that slavery would work in the new territories as Southerners felt it did in the South.

Southerners were enraged and some began discussing leaving the Union. Taylor responded that he would hang those guilty of **secession**. His priority, above all, was to preserve the Union. Many people worried that a civil war would break out, and several leaders in Congress, especially Henry Clay, Daniel Webster, and John C. Calhoun, debated about what to do. Clay came up with a compromise in January of 1850 which included admitting California as a free state and allowing the people in the New Mexico and Utah territories to decide whether to have slavery. Taylor strongly opposed the compromise.

Free or Slave?



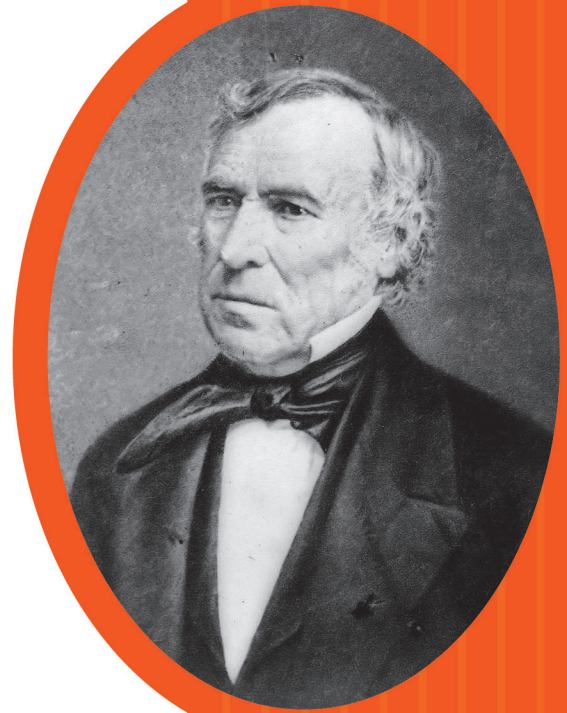
Quote

"Attachment to the Union of the States should be habitually fostered in every American heart. For more than half a century, during which kingdoms and empires have fallen, this Union has stood unshaken... whatever dangers may threaten it, I shall stand by it and maintain it."
- December 1849



Death of a President

In the middle of the controversy about slavery, Taylor attended Independence Day celebrations at the Washington Monument on July 4, 1850. It was a very hot day, and Taylor ate a lot of apples and cherries and drank ice-cold milk to stay cool. Soon, he began experiencing intense stomach pains. His condition worsened and, on July 9, 1850, he died in the White House at the age of 65. He was the second American President to die in office. Vice President Millard Fillmore succeeded him to the presidency. Fillmore reversed Taylor's policy and signed Clay's plan, which became known as the Compromise of 1850, into law.



Word Search

O B G A O R F Z U F D R C Q M
T B K I L U R J X T U I M E S
B X S N G X O I P H J N X Z E
R X G C Q T N I M W O I A I T
T Z W T U Z T A J I C C I Q A
X O M A A R I J N A H E F X T
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A B P L F R R A R F B Y U F E
U R H O X J M Y D I A Q G F V
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Q K A I N R E I D L O S A Z S
Q H C F K I N Y M M I Q B A O
S A H H X M C S Y O Y L X Q R
N P R E S I D E N T A M C U L

Free states
Slave states
Union
Secession

Arsenic
Taylor
Zachary
Soldier

Obscure
Frontier
Mexican-American
President

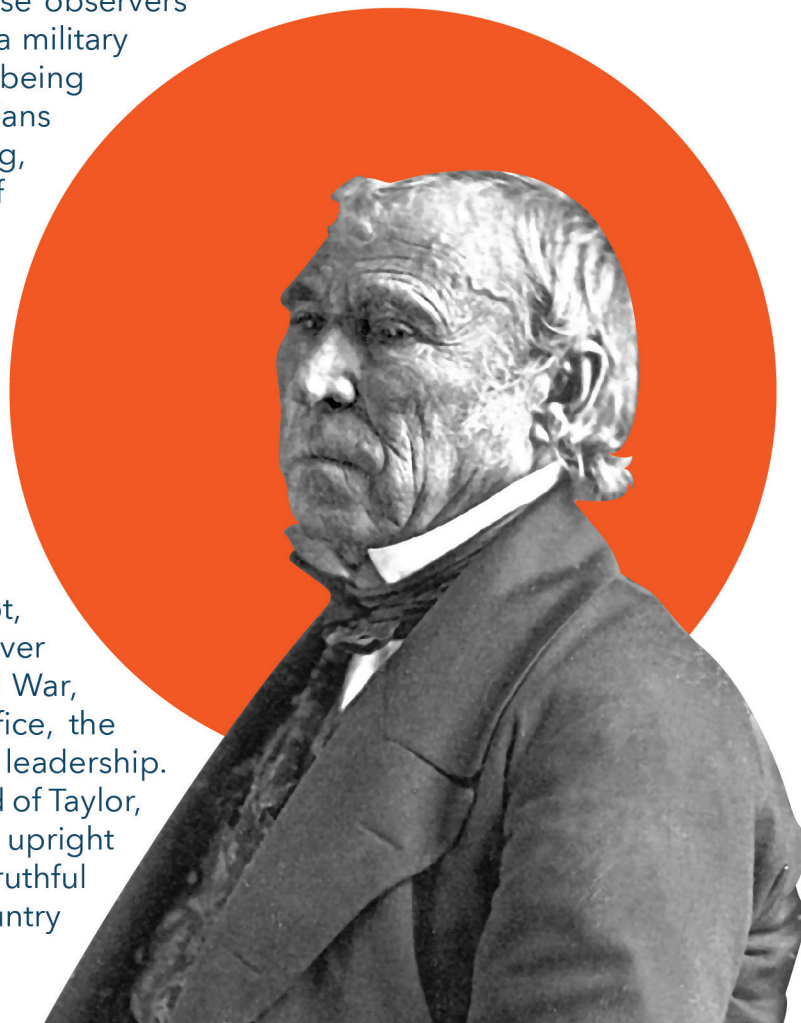
Death by Poison?

Over a century after Taylor's death, in the 1970s, conspiracy theories spread that America's 12th President was actually poisoned to death and was, therefore, the first chief executive to be assassinated. University of Florida Professor Clara Rising claimed that slaveowners, angered by Taylor's opposition to the expansion of slavery, killed him with a fatal dose of **arsenic**. To determine if the theory was true, Taylor's descendants allowed his casket to be opened and his remains to be tested for poison. The medical results did find some arsenic in Taylor's remains, but it was about the usual amount in most adults. Although historians aren't sure what exact stomach ailment killed Taylor, they are confident he wasn't poisoned.

Legacy

Like many obscure presidents, Zachary Taylor is often ignored, and even mocked, by modern day observers. These observers overlook Taylor's impressive achievements as a military leader, especially his heroic victories despite being outnumbered multiple times. Modern historians often rank him as a weak president. This ranking, however, is unfair since he served as chief executive for barely over a year and didn't have enough time to fully demonstrate his leadership skills. What we do know is that, unlike most of his successors, Taylor was a confident commander-in-chief, threatening to end the threat of secession, and taking a strong stance against the spread of slavery.

After Taylor died, his successor Millard Fillmore signed the 1850 Compromise, which temporarily delayed civil war. It did not, however, solve the issue of slavery. We will never know if Taylor would have prevented the Civil War, but it's possible that had he not died in office, the nation would have been better off with his firm leadership. Several decades later, Theodore Roosevelt said of Taylor, "He was an able and gallant soldier, a loyal and upright public servant, and a most kindly, honest, and truthful man. His death was a greater loss to the country than perhaps the people ever knew."



Peacemaker

President Taylor said that war should be "avoided if compatible with the national honor." Being a peacemaker means helping solve conflicts in a peaceful way. Think of ways you can be a peacemaker at home, at school, with your friends, and with strangers.



Glossary

Obscure: Not well known or understood.

Frontier: An area of land that hasn't been settled.

Black Hawk War: A war in 1832 between the United States and its Native American allies against a group of Native Americans led by Black Hawk. Zachary Taylor, as well as Abraham Lincoln, served in this war. The United States and its allies won the war.

Seminole Wars: A series of three wars that took place in Florida from 1816 to 1858 between the United States and several Native American tribes. Several presidents, including Andrew Jackson and Zachary Taylor, participated in the war. The United States ultimately won the war.

Mexican-American War: A war from 1846 to 1848 between the United States and Mexico. President James K. Polk and Generals Zachary Taylor and Winfield Scott led the United States to an overwhelming victory.

Free States: A state in the United States prior to the Civil War in which slavery was illegal.

Slave States: A state in the United States prior to the Civil War in which slavery was legal.

Union: A term used to refer to the United States, with emphasis on how it comprises multiple states.

Secession: The act of leaving an organization or government.

Arsenic: A chemical element that can be poisonous to humans.

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Answers:

THE NAME OF TAYLOR'S HORSE:
APOLLO



[illegible]

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