

presidents of the *United States of America*

"I served as the
28th President
of the United
States and led
the nation
through World
War I."



Woodrow Wilson



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Published by PragerU

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Become a Presidential Historian by Solving This Puzzle

President Wilson had two cats. We need your help to find out what their names were. 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.

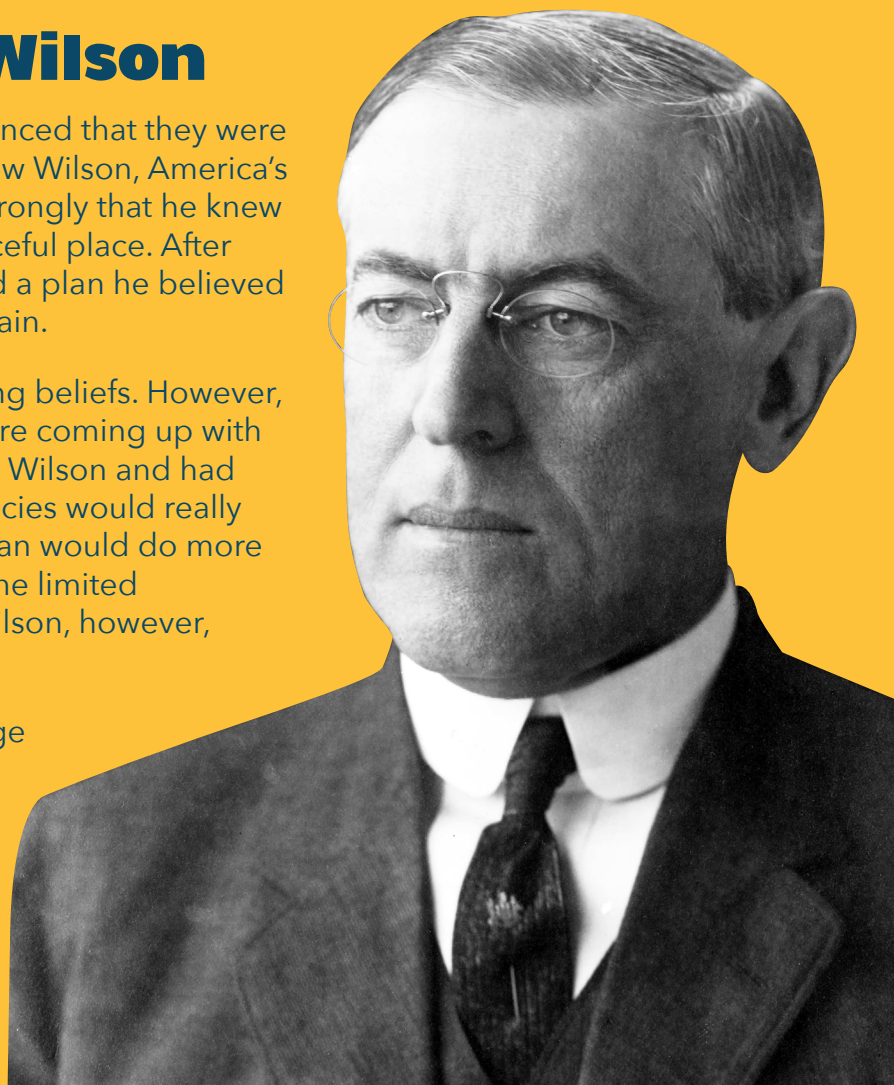
Once you've solved this puzzle, you'll be a true PragerU Kids presidential historian!

Meet Woodrow Wilson

Have you ever met someone who was convinced that they were right about something? That's what Woodrow Wilson, America's 28th President, was like. He believed very strongly that he knew what it would take to make the world a peaceful place. After leading the country into World War I, he had a plan he believed would prevent war from ever happening again.

There isn't anything wrong with having strong beliefs. However, it is important to listen to others when you are coming up with your opinions. **M**any people disagreed with Wilson and had reasonable concerns about whether his policies would really create a peaceful world. They worried his plan would do more harm than good and take the U.S. far from the limited government the Founders had intended. Wilson, however, refused to listen to them.

Wilson had spent much of his life as a college professor. In fact, he is America's only president (as of 2023) to have had a Ph.D. As president, he signed many laws that empowered the federal government and changed the country. He left an important legacy, but his story shows us that it's important to listen to everyone, even those you disagree with.



Young Thomas

Thomas Woodrow Wilson was born on December 28, 1856, in Staunton, Virginia. He was the third child of Joseph and Jessie Wilson. His father, Joseph, was a Presbyterian preacher. Young Thomas learned from him the art of public speaking.

Thomas was four years old when the Civil War began. His first memory was hearing that Abraham Lincoln was elected president and that the war would soon begin. The Wilsons were strong supporters of the **Confederate** cause.

Young Thomas suffered from poor eyesight, and some historians believe he had dyslexia. Still, he was an active youth and loved playing baseball.

In 1875, Thomas began attending the College of New Jersey, which is now known as Princeton University. He also dropped his first name, Thomas, in favor of his middle name, Woodrow.



Interesting Facts

- He is the only president (as of 2023) to have a Ph.D.
- He was a member of the Democratic Party.
- He appointed the first person of the Jewish faith (Louis Brandeis) to the Supreme Court.
- He was the first sitting president to meet with the Pope.
- He was the first sitting president to visit Europe.
- He was the second president to win the Nobel Prize.
- His wife Edith was the first woman to perform the tasks of the president.
- He is the only president (as of 2023) buried in Washington, D.C.
- Wilson's face appeared on the U.S. \$100,000 bill, which is the highest denomination of U.S. currency ever printed.



Academic

After graduating, Wilson initially tried being a lawyer. He hated it and went in a completely different direction. He was more interested in studying politics and government. He enrolled at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore to study history and political science. He earned his Ph.D. in 1886.

By then, he had married an attractive woman named Ellen Axson, who had also been raised by a Presbyterian minister. She was a talented artist. They eventually had three children.

Wilson began developing his views on government. In his Ph.D. **dissertation**, titled *Congressional Government*, he criticized America's governing principles. He disliked the Founding Fathers' system of checks and balances and said that it prevented the government from functioning effectively.

Like many **reformers** during this time, Wilson saw problems in society that he felt had to be addressed. Since America had progressed to a new stage as a world power, he believed that new **progressive** policies were needed.



Princeton University Students with Woodrow Wilson (center)

Princeton

Wilson served as a professor, first at Bryn Mawr College in Pennsylvania, then at Wesleyan University in Connecticut, and finally at Princeton University. In 1902, he was chosen to be Princeton's president. During his tenure, Wilson made many changes to how the university was run. Not everyone was happy about these changes, and many people on campus opposed him. Still, Wilson's efforts made him one of the most famous academics in the country.



Rise to Power

Even though most professors didn't run for office, the Democratic Party wanted to try something new. It chose Wilson as its candidate for Governor of New Jersey in 1910. Wilson promised he would be an "unconstitutional governor"—one who wouldn't let the law get in the way of reform. That's exactly what he **did**. He signed into law many progressive reforms, such as requiring candidates for office to run in **primaries**.

Quote

*"It is a fine system where some remote, severe academic schoolmaster may become President of the United States."
- September 1912*

The 1912 Presidential Election

Wilson's success as governor caught the eye of progressives across the country. In 1912, the Democrats chose him as their candidate for president. That year, Wilson faced two other candidates: incumbent President William Howard Taft of the Republican Party and former President Theodore Roosevelt of the Progressive Party. Although Roosevelt had been a Republican, he was angered by Taft's policies and ran as a third-party candidate.

Roosevelt's candidacy split the Republican vote, which gave the election to Wilson. In November 1912, Wilson won the election in a landslide, becoming the 28th **P**resident of the United States.

President

Now that Wilson was president, he had the opportunity to implement the ideas he had about government while he was a professor. He had an ambitious agenda, which he called the "New Freedom." Wilson signed laws that profoundly changed the country. In 1913, he signed the **Federal Reserve Act**, which created a powerful new system that managed America's money supply and economy. That same year, he signed a law imposing **income taxes** on the American people. The following year, he created a new agency, the Federal Trade Commission, to go after trusts if they acted like **monopolies**. Wilson's successes allowed him to be re-elected as president in 1916.

Since Wilson grew up in a pro-Confederate family, he was prejudiced against black Americans. He segregated blacks and whites in the government, so they couldn't work together. He argued, "**Segregation** is not humiliating but a benefit."

Although his New Freedom laws had a major impact on the country, Wilson made an even bigger impact with his foreign policy. When **World War I** broke out in Europe in 1914, he tried to keep the United States out of the conflict, but when Germany attacked American ships, he asked Congress to declare war in April 1917.

Millions of Americans fought in Europe during the war. At home, Wilson signed a law making it illegal to criticize the government. By 1918, American soldiers had helped the Allies, led by Britain and France, defeat the Central Powers, led by Germany.



American soldiers during World War I

Quote

"We have been proud of our industrial achievements, but we have not hitherto stopped thoughtfully enough to count the human cost."
- March 1913





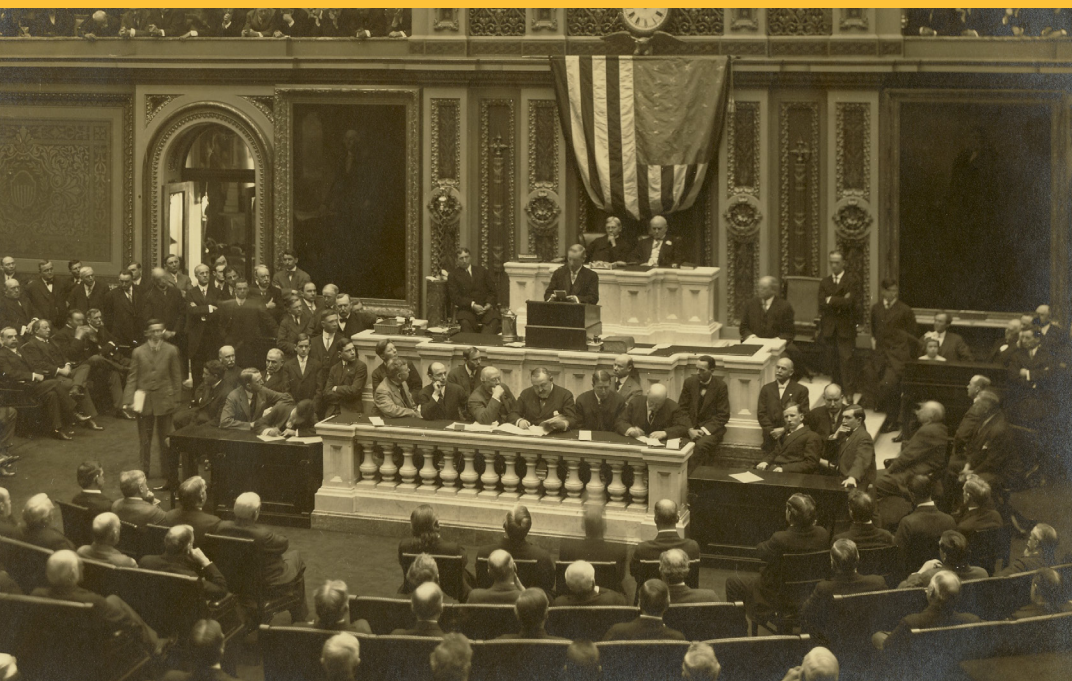
A World Government

After the carnage of the war, Wilson wanted to make sure that no future wars would ever happen again. He gave a speech in January 1918 where he announced his **"Fourteen Points,"** or **i**deas, that he felt would prevent wars. His plan involved respecting the rights of all countries to exist. It also called for a world government, called the **League of Nations**, to keep the peace. Many people around the world hoped his vision would become a reality, although many others felt it was impractical and **utopian**.

From 1918 to 1919, Wilson was in Europe personally negotiating the treaty to end the war and to create the League. The leaders of Europe, however, felt Wilson **n** was arrogant and resented him for trying to control the outcome of the treaty. They were more focused on punishing Germany.

Despite this, Wilson and the European leaders **s** were able to sign the Treaty of Versailles in June 1919. The treaty did include plans to create the League. Wilson now had to go home and get the Senate to approve the treaty. Many Americans, especially Republicans, had concerns about parts of the treaty. They were concerned because it might require America to participate in foreign conflicts even if those conflicts didn't really affect the country.

Wilson refused to cooperate with those who disagreed with him. Instead, he sought to rally the American people behind the treaty, so he went on an exhausting trip across the country to give speeches about the League. In September of 1919, he collapsed while on the road. Soon after, he suffered a devastating heart attack, leaving him partially paralyzed.



Quote

"The world must be made safe for democracy. Its peace must be planted upon the tested foundations of political liberty."
- April 1917



The First Woman President?

For the last year and a half of his presidency, Wilson was **incapacitated**. By this time, his first wife, Ellen, had died, and he had remarried a woman named Edith Galt. Edith had often assisted him during his second term. When Wilson became paralyzed, Edith sought to hide his condition from his advisors and the public. She secretly took up many of his tasks. In doing so, she became the first woman to exercise the powers of the presidency. Some have even called her America's first woman president.

She was, however, unable to convince her husband to listen to the Republicans' concerns. As a result, in November of 1919, the Senate rejected the treaty. Although the League of Nations was formed, the United States didn't join it. Without American participation, Wilson believed his dream of a new world was dashed.

During the 1920 presidential election, the Republican Party's candidate, Warren G. Harding, defeated the Democratic Party's candidate, James Cox, in a landslide. Cox had supported America joining the League, so his defeat showed the American people had completely rejected Wilson.





Writing Activity

Brainstorm some ideas of what you think would make the world a more peaceful place or write about a time when someone disagreed with your ideas or opinions—how did you respond?

Lined area for writing.



Above left: Wilson's home in New Jersey

Above right: Wilson at his home



Retirement

Woodrow and Edith Wilson retired from the presidency in March 1921. They moved to a home in Washington, D.C., not too far from the White House. Wilson spent the rest of his retirement a broken and bitter man. In November of 1923, he scolded the American people in a speech, saying, "we turned our backs" on our allies. He added that he believed that those he disagreed with would suffer "utter destruction and contempt."

Wilson died on February 3, 1924, at the age of 67.



Legacy

The Founding Fathers wanted Americans to be free, so they limited the power of the government. That way, the government wouldn't be able to oppress the people. Progressives in the late 19th and early 20th century, however, believed that the government needed more power to achieve certain goals, even at the expense of people's freedom.

As president, Woodrow Wilson gave the federal government new, unprecedented powers. He didn't realize, however, that these powers threatened the freedom of the American people. He created new laws and agencies to control what people said and did.

He imposed taxes on the American people, taking away their hard-earned money.

Wilson believed he could end all wars through his Fourteen Points and his League of Nations. This was a very unrealistic goal. To do this, he was willing to create a massive world government that could control what whole countries did. When his opponents raised their concerns, Wilson refused to listen. He also refused to listen to black Americans who suffered under his policies of segregation. Woodrow Wilson certainly had a major legacy. That legacy, however, transformed America into something different from what the Founders envisioned.



Glossary

Confederate: Relating to the Confederate States of America, the country created by the 11 Southern states when they seceded from the United States from 1860 to 1861.

Dissertation: A long essay on a particular subject, usually written as a requirement to obtain a Ph.D.

Reformer: Someone who plans or supports changes to a system, law, or organization to make it, as they see it, more modern or effective.

Progressive: A person who believes in achieving social, political, and economic reform by replacing the Founding Fathers' principles with new ideas and a more powerful government.

Primary: Elections that political parties use to select candidates for a general election.

Federal Reserve Act: A law, signed in 1913 that established the Federal Reserve System as the central bank of the United States. It gave the federal government the power to regulate how much money is in the economy as well as interest rates.

Income Tax: Taxes collected by the government on the money individuals and businesses make from their jobs.

Monopoly: A situation where there is a single seller with no competition in the market. Many people

believe this is harmful because the single seller can charge high prices on consumers and unfairly prevent other companies from competing.

Segregation: The institutional separation of people of different races, classes, or ethnic groups, especially as a form of discrimination.

World War I: A war that involved most of the countries in Europe from 1914 to 1918. It was considered the most devastating war in history up to that time.

Fourteen Points: President Woodrow Wilson's plan, announced in January 1918, to end future wars and create a peaceful world. His plan included respecting the rights of nations to govern themselves and trade peacefully with each other. It also included his plan for a League of Nations.

League of Nations: The first worldwide organization whose main goal was to maintain world peace. The idea of the League originated with President Woodrow Wilson. It functioned from 1920 to 1946, but it was proven to be ineffective when World War II broke out in 1939.

Utopian: Aiming for a perfect society; usually considered unrealistic and often harmful to society.

Incapacitated: Unable to work or do things normally.

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Answers

NAMES OF WILSON'S CATS:
MITTENS AND PUFFINS

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