

FROM EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS
BRADLEY COOPER & DORIS KEARNS GOODWIN

A HISTORY® CHANNEL ORIGINAL

A man in a grey suit and glasses sits at a dark wooden desk, resting his chin on his hand in a thoughtful pose. The desk is cluttered with a rotary telephone, a glass ashtray, and several papers. Behind him, two framed paintings of ships hang on a blue wall. A large, bold, red 'FDR' is superimposed over the scene, with the man's face partially visible through the letters.

FDR

EDUCATION GUIDE

The History Channel logo, featuring a stylized gold 'H' above the word 'HISTORY' in a white, sans-serif font.

H
HISTORY

Introduction

FDR is a three-night documentary event that provides an epic portrait of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, unpacking how his own fight with polio prepared him for the challenges of leading the U.S. through the Great Depression and World War II. *FDR* is executive produced by world-renowned presidential historian Doris Kearns Goodwin. As the nation's longest-serving president, FDR, along with First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt, led the nation through one of the most perilous times in history.

Based upon Goodwin's New York Times bestseller, *Leadership: In Turbulent Times*, viewers experience a most harrowing, yet heroic time in history when through grit, commitment and shared sacrifice FDR was the right man at the right time to lead the U.S. and the allied nations. With rich archival footage and insights from leading historians and experts, this documentary is an excellent opportunity for students to learn about this critical era in world history.

Curriculum Links

FDR is useful for History, American Culture, American Studies, Civics, and Government courses. It is appropriate for high school and college students. Students will be able to explore and discuss major themes and topics including the role of the federal government, FDR's unique leadership style, the balance of power between government branches, the causes and consequences of war, and the legacy of World War II.

Viewing Resource: Watchalong Guide

Students can use this guide to follow along as they watch and learn more about some of the people who shaped FDR's life and career.

<https://www.history.com/shows/fdr/interactives/fdr-family-friends-cabinet>

Key Terms to Define:

Students can define these terms before or after watching *FDR*.

- New Deal
- Lend-Lease
- Laissez-faire economics
- Brain Trust
- Allies
- Progressive
- Works Progress Administration
- Infrastructure
- Interventionist
- Isolationist



FDR Fact Sheet

FDR: The Early Years

- * Born: January 30, 1882 in Hyde Park, NY; 32nd President of the US (1933-1945)
- * FDR was born into a well-to-do family; he attended Groton preparatory school and Harvard University
- * The fifth cousin of President Theodore Roosevelt, FDR married TR's niece Eleanor in 1905
- * FDR was diagnosed with polio in 1921 at the age of 39
- * After building his political career in a variety of posts, FDR was elected Governor of NY in 1928

FDR: The New Deal

- * 1929: Stock market crash thrusts US into the Great Depression
- * At FDR's first inauguration on May 4, 1933 he announced "the only thing we have to fear is fear itself"
- * With a group of advisors known as the "Brain Trust," FDR developed plans for the New Deal
- * Key New Deal legislation: AAA (Agricultural Adjustment Act) and NIRA (National Industrial Recovery Act)
- * A second round of legislation, sometimes called the "Second New Deal," was passed in 1935 including the Social Security Act and the Works Progress Administration
- * FDR was re-elected in 1936 and 1940

Bonus: What was the Federal Writers' Project? Research this interesting aspect of the New Deal.

FDR: World War II Years

- * December 7, 1941: Pearl Harbor was attacked by Japanese forces; the next day Congress declared war
- * 1942: With Executive Order 9066, Roosevelt ordered Japanese Americans to internment camps throughout the country
- * The US committed hundreds of thousands of troops to the war effort; massive D-Day invasion launched on June 6, 1944
- * 1945: Roosevelt, Churchill, Stalin met at the Yalta Conference to lay out post-war plan
- * FDR dies on April 12, 1945; Harry Truman led the US through the conclusion of WWII



Discussion Questions:

Students can answer these questions in group discussions or in essay format.

1. One historian in this series talks about FDR's character as being key to his leadership. What does character mean, and how would you describe FDR's character?
2. Why do you think Roosevelt was a compelling presidential candidate in 1932?
3. Why was it important to Roosevelt to show people that government could help them through the Great Depression?
4. Why do you think FDR shielded the fact that he had polio from the American people?
5. What was the New Deal? What were some of the lasting effects of the New Deal and in what ways is it still relevant today?
6. What were some of the key pieces of legislation passed during the first 100 days of FDR's presidency?
7. What were some of Eleanor Roosevelt's key contributions as First Lady?
8. What role did "fireside chats" play during Roosevelt's presidency? Is there any equivalent to a "fireside chat" in U.S. politics today?
9. What does isolationist mean, and how does it compare with an interventionist approach in the context of World War II?
10. Why did the U.S. enter World War II?
11. Why did FDR intern Japanese Americans during World War II? What do you think were the ramifications of this policy?
12. In what ways did business and government unite during World War II, and why was this so essential to the Allied victory?
13. What role did anti-Semitism play during World War II? Do you think the U.S. could have done more to prevent the Holocaust?
14. What were some of the major turning points during World War II? Choose 3 and discuss or write about why they were critical events during the war.
15. Despite his popularity, FDR also had critics. What were some of the criticisms of his policies during his presidency?
16. After FDR's presidency, term limits were enacted, limiting the presidency to two terms. Why do you think term limits were put in place? Do you think the U.S. would have won the war if FDR had not been president during this era?
17. What is FDR's legacy in our world today? How did he shape U.S. society and the world?

Essay Prompts

Throughout this series, historians describe FDR's significance as a leader. Discuss these quotes as a class or ask students to write an essay about whether they agree with the quote and explaining why or why not using evidence from FDR's life.

"He says if the American people fall, the government will catch you. This is a vision that changes the very soul of America and persists to this day."

"He believed that what happened in the world beyond American shores would have an effect on what happened in the United States."

"He is a dealer in hope for the entire free world. Not an inconsequential responsibility."

Extended Activities

1. **Fireside Chats.** Ask students to learn more about FDR's fireside chats and their importance. Then, ask them to choose a topic and write an outline for a fireside chat about a topic relevant in our world today. This article provides helpful background: [The Fireside Chats - Definition, FDR & Significance \(history.com\)](#)
2. **FDR as Public Speaker.** FDR was known for his effectiveness as a public speaker. Many of his speeches are available to listen to online. Ask students to listen to FDR's first inaugural address available online in The History Channel speech archive. (<https://www.history.com/speeches/franklin-d-roosevelts-first-inaugural-address>) Students can think about what it would be like to hear Roosevelt's speech as it was being delivered. Lead the class or group in a discussion of Roosevelt's address and what they experience in listening to these words as opposed to reading them. [You may want to provide students with a written excerpt](#) of the speech and ask them to compare the written and oral versions. Students can learn more about some of Roosevelt's other significant speeches here: [7 of FDR's Most Inspiring Speeches](#). Ask them to choose one of his speeches and write a short essay about its significance.
3. **Arsenal of Democracy.** FDR talked about the importance of the U.S. becoming an "arsenal of democracy." Ask students to write an essay or discuss this phrase and its meaning in the context of World War II. This related article may be useful: [Becoming the Arsenal of Democracy | The National WWII Museum | New Orleans \(nationalww2museum.org\)](#)
4. **First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt.** As First Lady, Eleanor Roosevelt made many contributions to U.S. history. Students can learn more about her life and career, before and after her time as First Lady, and explore her legacy at <https://www.fdrlibrary.org/eleanor-roosevelt>. Students can write short biographies of Eleanor Roosevelt, create a resume that encapsulates her accomplishments, or write an essay about one of her major contributions.
5. **Letters to the President and First Lady.** During FDR's administration, many children wrote letters to President Roosevelt and the First Lady. Students can view many of these letters online at http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/active_learning/explorations/children_depression/help_president.cfm. Ask students to read one or more of these letters and write a short response paper about them. Students can also imagine they were children at the time FDR was president and write their own letters to him, reflecting the context of the time.



Additional Primary Sources

Library of Congress WPA Poster Collection:

[Posters: WPA Posters, Available Online | Library of Congress \(loc.gov\)](#)

President Franklin Roosevelt's Annual Message (Four Freedoms) to Congress (1941)

<https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/president-franklin-roosevelts-annual-message-to-congress>

Joint Address to Congress Leading to a Declaration of War Against Japan (1941)

[Joint Address to Congress Leading to a Declaration of War Against Japan \(1941\) | National Archives](#)

Executive Order 9066: Resulting in Japanese-American Incarceration (1942)

<https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/executive-order-9066>

General Dwight D. Eisenhower's Order of the Day (1944)

<https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/general-eisenhowers-order-of-the-day>

The Story of the S.S. St. Louis

archives.jdc.org/topic-guides/the-story-of-the-s-s-st-louis/

Related Websites

Learn more about this series:

<https://www.history.com/shows/fdr>

Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum

<https://www.fdrlibrary.org/>

Learn more about FDR from the Miller Center:

<https://millercenter.org/president/fdroosevelt>

White House Historical Association: Biography of Eleanor Roosevelt

<https://www.whitehousehistory.org/bios/eleanor-roosevelt>

