Your Road to the White House

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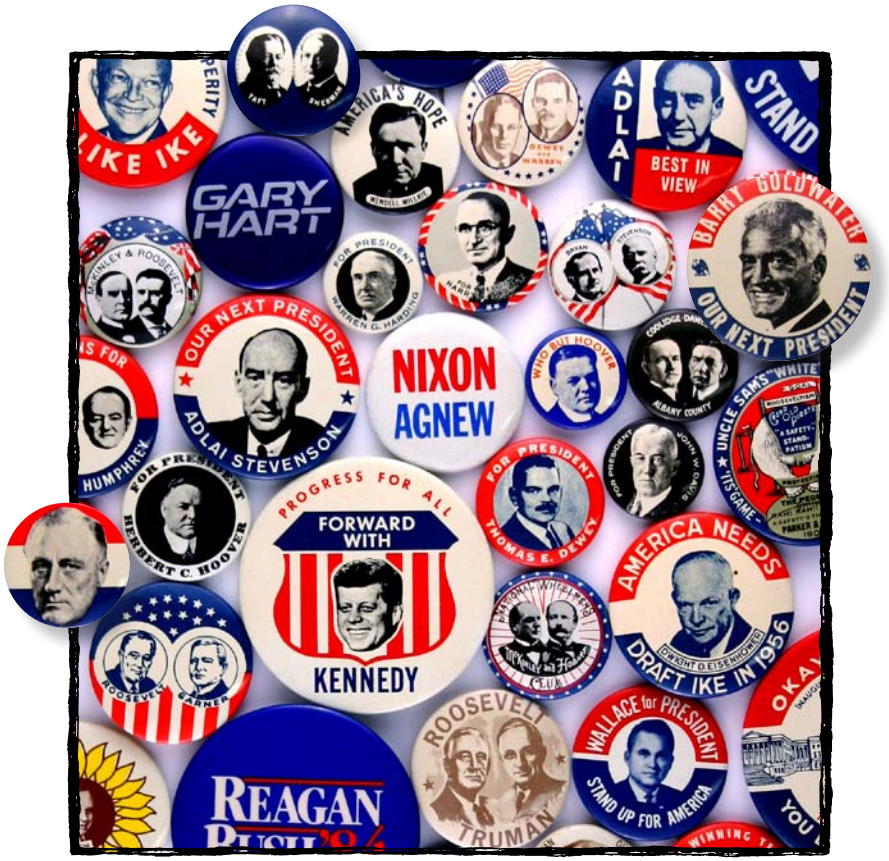

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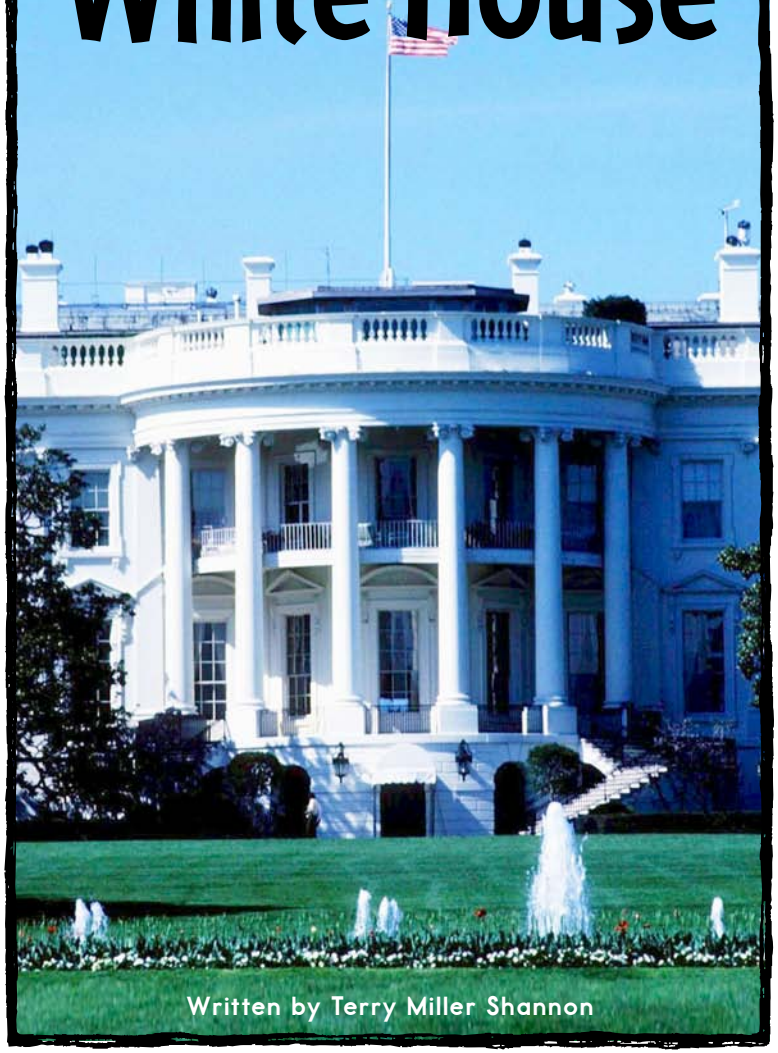

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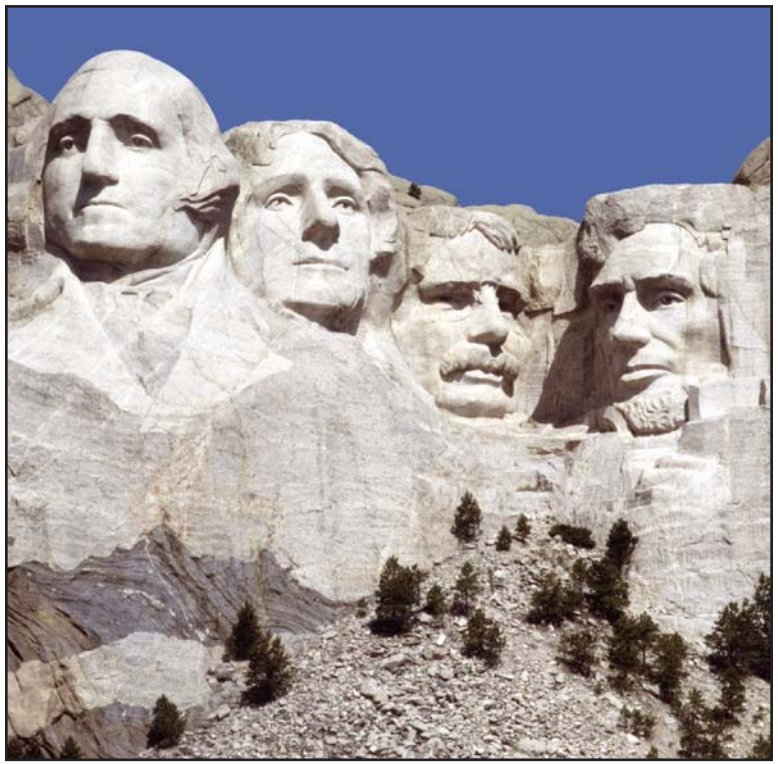

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Page 3: United States Capitol Building

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Correlation

LEVEL X	
Fountas & Pinnell	S
Reading Recovery	40
DRA	40

Table of Contents

President George H. Bush talks with reporters in the Oval Office.

So You Want to Be President

So, you've thought it over and you want to be the leader of the United States. Are you qualified to run? What **political party** will you represent? How about deciding on a **campaign** to persuade people to vote for you? And then, how do you ultimately win on Election Day? Think you can do it? Let's follow, step by step, the path you'll take to be elected president.

Are You Qualified?

You only have to meet a few easy requirements to run for the office of president! These rules are written in the **Constitution**. You must be 35 years old (uh oh—does this mean you'll be putting off your campaign for a few years?); have been born in the United States; and have lived in the United States for 14 years.

In the unlikely event that you are already president, you have another consideration: how many terms have you served? If you're elected for one four-year term, you have the option of running for a second term. You can only serve two terms (eight years) total. So, if you're on your second term, it might be time to think about changing careers!

George H.W. Bush
1989–1993

William J. Clinton
1993–2001

George W. Bush
2001–2009

Barack H. Obama
2009–present

It isn't a requirement, but you'll most likely want to be a **politician** before you run for president. Voters tend to prefer presidential candidates who have proven their experience in government and with leading people.

Candidates Who Weren't Politicians

Dwight D. Eisenhower is the only nonpolitician to win the presidency since 1900. However, "Ike" was a famous war hero. He commanded the Allied forces in Europe during World War II. Voters knew he was a proven leader and wanted him to lead the United States!

These nonpoliticians tried unsuccessfully to become president:

- Ross Perot, a Texas billionaire
- Ralph Nader, a consumer advocate
- Dr. Benjamin Spock, a famous children's doctor

Eisenhower encourages Allied troops during World War II.

American President Ronald Reagan (right) signs an agreement with Russian President Mikhail Gorbachev in 1987.

Do you know exactly what your job will be when you're president? It's always good to have a job description when you apply for a new job. In a nutshell, you'll:

- Make sure the government is functioning well
- Ensure the laws are being followed
- Command the Army, Navy, Marines, and Air Force
- Meet with leaders of other countries.

You say you're up to the challenge? You'll make a good leader of the country? Good. Your next step will be persuading the voters to agree that you're the best person for the job.

What U.S. Presidents Have in Common—So Far

U.S. presidents have been mostly white Protestant men, except for John F. Kennedy, who was Catholic, and Barack Obama, who was elected in 2008 as the first African American president. In 2000, the Democratic Party nominated Senator Joseph Lieberman as the vice presidential candidate—the first Jewish candidate from a major party. In 1984, Geraldine Ferraro ran as the Democratic Party's vice presidential candidate. Future presidential elections may see even more diverse candidates and winners.

John F. Kennedy

Joseph Lieberman

Barack H. Obama

Geraldine Ferraro speaking in 1984.

George W. Bush shakes hands with children during one of his campaign stops in 2004.

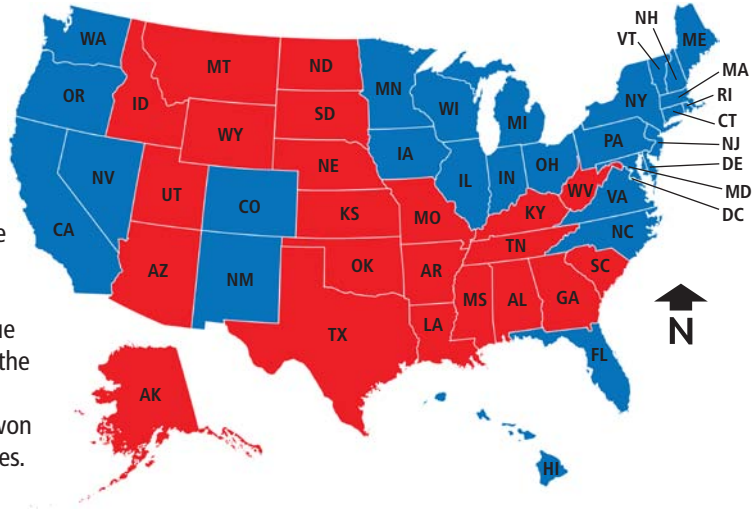
Time to Campaign!

You'll need to start rallying people to vote for you. Everything you do to get voters to prefer you to your opponent is called your campaign. You'll be traveling the country, advertising, speaking, debating, getting your photograph taken, marching in parades, shaking hands, and smooching babies. You'll hold news conferences, too. Are you ready for the grueling schedule?

Political Parties

But wait a minute! Before you start campaigning, you'll need to decide which political party you'll represent. A political party is a group of people with similar thoughts on how the government should be run.

The two main parties in the U.S. are the Democrats and the Republicans. Democrats tend to favor a strong federal government involved in people's lives through federal programs. Generally speaking, Republicans favor less government involvement in people's lives, especially when it comes to money. There is no one "right" party or "wrong" party. Most Americans don't believe everything one party stands for, and so they decide by choosing the party that most closely matches their values.



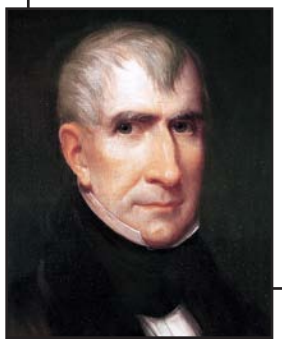
In the 2008 presidential election, the Democratic candidate won the blue states, and the Republican candidate won the red states.

A third-party candidate, Ralph Nader, ran for president in 2000 and 2004.

Republicans and Democrats are the major parties, but there are other political parties. When someone is called a "third-party candidate," it means that person is running as a representative of a party other than Republican or Democrat.

It Wasn't Always a Major Party

The Republican Party started out as a third party! The two major parties used to be the Democratic Party and the Whig Party. The last year the Whigs had a presidential candidate was 1856. The Republican Party took its place with a strong anti-slavery stance. Both the Republican and Democratic parties have evolved into political powerhouses.



William Henry Harrison, the first Whig president

Presidential candidate John Kerry campaigns in 2004.

Okay! Now that you've chosen a political party, you'll want to hire a campaign manager. Your manager will draw up a plan that will map out every move of your campaign. A large staff of advisors will assist your campaign manager. The manager is very important since a good campaign could make the difference between losing and winning.

There are two parts to a presidential campaign. In the first part, you work to win your party's nomination to be its candidate for president. In the second part of your presidential campaign, you've won your party's nomination and are concentrating on winning against the other parties' candidates.

Two Campaigns

So, in the beginning you're campaigning in order to triumph in the primaries. Primaries are local elections to choose one person to represent a political party in the general election. Some states don't hold **primaries**. Instead, the party members from a state choose a candidate by voting at a meeting called a **caucus**.

When the primaries and caucuses are over, the parties each hold a meeting known as a **convention**. At each convention, party members, or **delegates**, from each state vote to choose the party candidate.

Delegates promise to vote for the candidate winning the primary or caucus in their state. When each delegation has spoken ("The great state of Oregon casts its votes for . . . Candidate You!") and the votes have been tallied, you will learn if you've won your party's nomination.

The Number of Delegates

The Democratic Party has 4,353 delegates. A Democratic candidate must have 2,176 votes or more to win.

The Republican Party has 2,509 delegates. A Republican candidate must get at least 1,254 votes to win.

Now things really start to get serious.

As your party's presidential **nominee**, you'll now enter the second part of your campaign. Your goal is to defeat the presidential candidates from all the other parties and become the president of the United States. As you did before the primaries, you'll travel the country to speak, shake hands, and debate with other parties' candidates.

Volunteers help candidates get elected.

Do You Know?

When does your campaign actually begin? You will spend lots of time and effort before the primary elections. You may have actually started your campaign years before the primaries are held! Many candidates spend years campaigning and then never go beyond the primaries because someone else is chosen to be the party's nominee.

Candidates run TV ads to promote their policies and attack their opponents.

Financing Your Campaign

Have you been saving your allowance? Campaigning is expensive. Some experts estimate it costs at least (are you ready for this?) *20 million dollars* to mount a campaign that has a chance of winning the presidency. That's for a job that pays $400,000 a year. Campaign advertising takes a huge hunk of cash, since one 30-second commercial during a popular TV program can cost hundreds of thousands of dollars.

If you're not a millionaire, don't worry, you're not out of the running. Candidates don't usually pay for their own campaigns. Instead, they rely on contributions from supporters for their campaign costs. Whew! What a relief! But you should start making lots of friends now.

Election Day

Presidential Election Day is held every four years on the first Tuesday following the first Monday in November. If you have campaigned successfully, millions of people turning out to vote will check your name on the ballot.

Is It an Election Year?

Is this a presidential election year or not? One easy way to remember: election years end in numbers you can divide by 4 (2004, 2008, 2012, and so on).

Women voters were out in force in 1922, two years after the constitutional amendment passed that allowed them to vote.

Voters cast ballots in private voting booths.

Who Can Vote?

You must be a U.S. citizen over the age of eighteen to vote. Voters in most states must register before they can vote on Election Day.

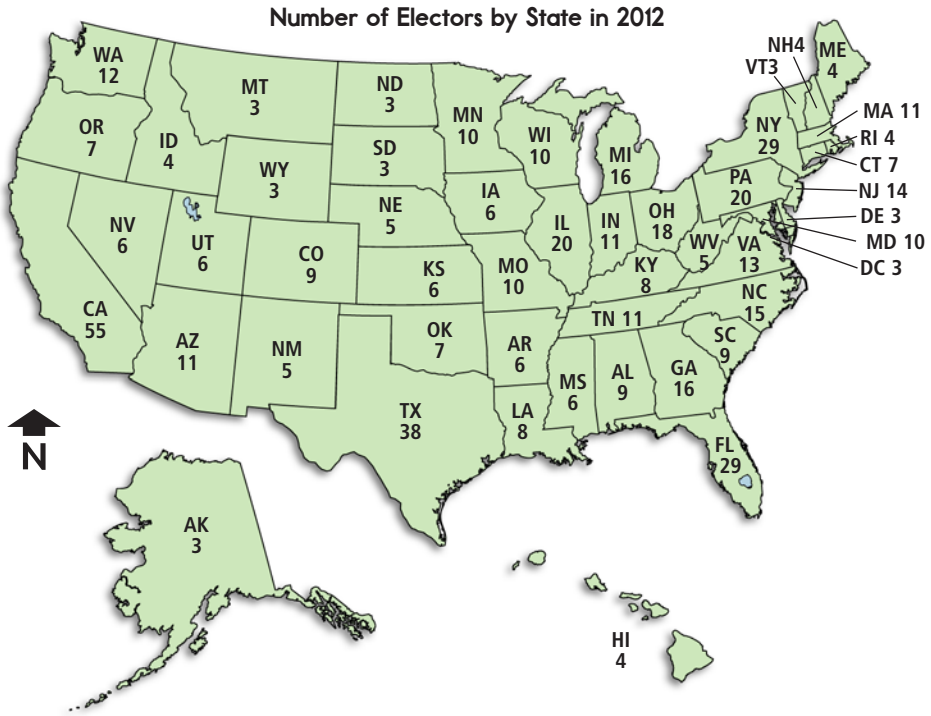
People vote by mail or in a polling place such as a church, school, or other public building. Each voter steps into a private booth. Different areas use different methods for the actual vote. In some states, the voter flips a switch on a voting machine to indicate the name of the chosen candidate (you!). Voters use pen or pencil to mark paper ballots in other polling places.

Predicting the Winner

The media, such as TV networks and newspapers, take frequent polls during the campaign to see who is the frontrunner. On Election Day, the media ask people whom they voted for as they leave polling places across the country. This method is called *exit polls*. They feed the information into a computer, which gives them an educated guess of who will be the winner.

This all sounds straightforward, but there's more to the system than meets the eye. The method for electing the president is called the electoral college. When voters go into the booths on Election Day, those votes are called the "popular vote." Winning the popular vote does not mean you've won the election. In 2000, Democratic candidate Al Gore won the popular vote, but Republican candidate George W. Bush won the electoral vote, making Bush president.

George W. Bush was finally declared president in 2001 after much controversy.



After the popular vote, there's a second election by people called **electors**. Each state has a certain number of electoral votes. The number for each state equals the sum of its senators and representatives. The more people who live in a state, the more electoral votes that state has. The popular vote is added up in each state. A candidate who wins the popular vote in one state also wins all the electoral votes in that state. Imagine you win the popular vote in a state with 24 electoral votes. This means you get all 24 electoral votes for that state.

Republican John McCain gives his concession speech in 2008.

Are you confused? Just try to remember that on Election Day, voters are actually voting for their candidates' electors. In order to win the presidential election, you must have the most electoral votes.

When a presidential candidate knows the other side has won, the losing candidate gives a **concession speech**. (Let's hope it's not you.) The talk is most often given at **campaign headquarters** to the people who supported the campaign. Usually, the candidate thanks everyone who helped and wishes the winner luck as president.

Close Calls!

One vote can literally pick a winner. For example, in 1882, there was an election to the Virginia House of Representatives. The votes were:

Robert Mayo: 10,505
George Garrison: 10,504

Inauguration

The new president has about ten weeks before taking office. That time is necessary for choosing a staff. Presidents select carefully, picking people they trust, whom they've worked with or know by reputation. If you become president, you'll need hundreds of staff members, including the heads of fourteen executive departments (such as the Department of Energy and the Department of Defense) who will act as your expert advisors. You'll also need time to move your family into the White House.

The Kitchen Cabinet

When Andrew Jackson was president (1829–1837), he often met with his administrative staff in his kitchen. His opponents were angered at these secret meetings. In a fit of name-calling, they dubbed Jackson and his advisors "the kitchen cabinet." The name has continued since that time.

U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton (left) meets with China's President Hu Jintao in Beijing.

Barack Obama is sworn in as president in 2009 as his wife Michelle looks on.

January 20th after Election Day is Inauguration Day, the day a president officially starts his or her four-year term. It's a huge celebration marking the end of hard campaign struggles. If you win, you'll be participating in parades, receptions, and balls attended by thousands.

The actual swearing-in is a solemn occasion. You will pledge to "faithfully execute the office of President of the United States" and promise to "preserve, protect, and defend the Constitution of the United States."

Now if you are fortunate enough to be elected as the country's most powerful leader, you will soon learn that when compared to the responsibilities of the job itself, getting elected was a "piece of cake."

Glossary

campaign a series of public appearances for influencing voters (p. 4)

campaign headquarters the main place where a campaign is run (p. 20)

caucus a meeting of political party leaders to vote for a candidate (p. 13)

concession speech speech given to show a candidate agrees the other candidate won (p. 20)

Constitution the written rules of the United States (p. 5)

convention a meeting for political party delegates to announce their presidential choice (p. 13)

delegates members of a political party who decide their party's presidential nominee after the primaries (p. 13)

electors the elected state representatives who really elect the president (p. 19)

nominee a person picked by a political party to run for elected office (p. 14)

political party a group of people who believe in similar ideas on how government should work (p. 4)

politician a person who holds elected office or helps others seek it (p. 6)

primaries local elections to choose a political party's candidate (p. 13)

Explore More

On the Internet, use *www.google.com* to find out more about topics presented in this book. Use terms from the text or try searching for glossary or index words.

Some searches to try: *Democratic Party, political primaries,* or *Barack Obama.*

Index