

ELEANOR ROOSEVELT

Often described as the most influential First Lady, Eleanor Roosevelt worked hard to do what she saw as important. From her efforts with immigrants and the nation's poor, to women's suffrage, the Civil Rights movement and the United Nations Human Rights Commission, Eleanor Roosevelt was not afraid to do what she believed in.

Born in 1884 into a wealthy New York family, Eleanor had many privileges. She also knew sorrow, as both her parents died while Eleanor was young. When she turned fifteen, Eleanor was sent to a private boarding school in England. Although finding herself in a new place, she became a strong student and leader in her class. It was while she was in England that her uncle, Theodore Roosevelt, was elected president of the United States.

Eleanor returned to New York in 1902. She did what was expected of a young woman from her social class, and she also worked for people who had fewer advantages. She taught classes for new immigrants and investigated working conditions in the city's garment industry. During this period, she also began to spend time with Franklin D. Roosevelt, a distant cousin who was beginning his political career. Eleanor spoke with Franklin about her experiences and took him to visit poor families that she had met.

The couple married in 1906. Over the next eleven years, they had six children. Eleanor was busy as a mother and wife. Despite the demands of her household and helping her husband in his career, Eleanor found time to be involved with many causes. She volunteered at a hospital to care for war veterans, and she helped the International Congress of Working Women.

Meanwhile, Franklin Roosevelt was a New York state senator. He later became Assistant Secretary of the Navy. In 1921, while campaigning for the vice presidency of the United States, he was partially paralyzed as a result of polio. When the family decided that Franklin would not give up his career, Eleanor helped with his physical rehabilitation and his continuing political efforts. She also maintained her own interests, including opening a girls school where she taught history and government.

In 1932 when the United States was struggling with the Great Depression, Franklin Roosevelt was elected president. In her new role as First Lady, Eleanor continued her involvement in social causes. She helped to forge contacts between civil rights leaders and the President. Franklin Roosevelt implemented social assistance policies called "The New Deal" which also showed influences from Eleanor. During World War II when Franklin was unable to travel due to his physical condition, Eleanor visited troops in the South Pacific. It was also during this period that Eleanor began writing a column called "My Day." She would continue writing the daily 500-word column that was carried in many newspapers until 1962.

While serving his third term in office, Franklin Roosevelt died in 1945. It seemed that Eleanor might stop her national and international work now that she was no longer the First Lady. But in 1946, she was appointed the head of the United Nations Human Rights Commission. She worked with delegates and world leaders over the next three years to write the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This document has since been translated into over 300 languages. It was designed for governments around the world. The declaration contains thirty articles that include the right to life, liberty and security of person, the right to education, and freedom from torture or cruel treatment.

Eleanor Roosevelt continued working for causes through her writing and speaking. She was an active participant in political campaigns and the Civil Rights movement throughout the 1950s. People all over the world recognized her for her efforts. Postage stamps in her honor were issued in many countries including the United States, Poland, Hungary, Israel, and India. Eleanor Roosevelt died in 1962.

Name _____ Date _____

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Eleanor Roosevelt was born in 1884 and died in 1962. What major events occurred during her lifetime? Draw a time line that shows events in Eleanor's life and other world events during this period.



