

Barack Obama Biography

Produced by Arts and Entertainment Television Networks, 2008

Grade Level: 6-12

50 minutes

DESCRIPTION

Tells the story of Barack Obama, from his childhood in Honolulu to the 2008 U.S. Presidential Election. Follows Obama through his teenage struggles for self-identity, his student days at Columbia University and Harvard Law School, and through his political career in Chicago, where he rose to fame through a focus on ethics and political reform. Highlights Obama's Democratic primary campaign and his journey toward becoming the 44th President of the United States. Originally appeared on TV's Biography Channel.

BACKGROUND

Barack Hussein Obama was born Aug. 4, 1961, in Honolulu, Hawaii. His father, Barack Obama, Sr., was born of Luo ethnicity in Nyanza Province, Kenya. He grew up herding goats with his own father, who was a domestic servant to the British. Although reared among Muslims, Obama, Sr., became an atheist at some point.

Obama's mother, Ann Dunham, grew up in Wichita, Kansas. Her father worked on oil rigs during the Depression. After the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, he signed up for service in World War II and marched across Europe in Patton's army. Dunham's mother went to work on a bomber assembly line. After the war, they studied on the G. I. Bill, bought a house through the Federal Housing Program, and moved to Hawaii.

Meantime, Barack's father had won a scholarship that allowed him to leave Kenya pursue his dreams in Hawaii. At the time of his birth, Obama's parents were students at the East-West Center of the University of Hawaii at Manoa.

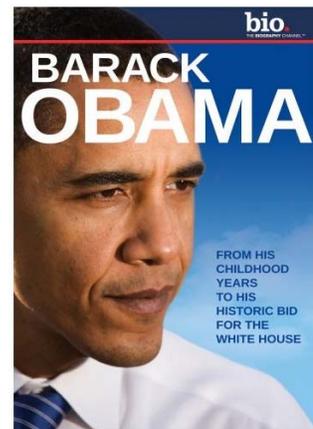
Obama's parents separated when he was two years old and later divorced. Obama's father went to Harvard to pursue Ph. D. studies and then returned to Kenya.

In his memoir, Obama described how he struggled to reconcile social perceptions of his multiracial heritage. He saw his biological father (who died in a 1982 car accident) only once (in 1971) after his parents divorced. And he admitted using alcohol, marijuana and cocaine during his teenage years.

After high school, Obama studied at Occidental College in Los Angeles for two years. He then transferred to Columbia University in New York, graduating in 1983 with a degree in political science.



After working at Business International Corporation (a company that provided international business information to corporate clients) and NYPIRG, Obama moved to Chicago in 1985. There, he worked as a community organizer with low-income residents in Chicago's Roseland community and the Altgeld Gardens public housing development on the city's South Side.



STANDARDS

Life Skills

- [Works well with diverse individuals and in diverse situations](#)

Writing, Reading, and Thinking

- [Uses reading skills and strategies to understand and interpret a variety of literary texts](#)
- [Uses the stylistic and rhetorical aspects of writing](#)
- [Understands and knows how to analyze chronological relationships and patterns](#)
- [Uses precise and descriptive language that clarifies and enhances ideas and supports different purposes \(e.g., to stimulate the imagination of the reader, to translate concepts into simpler or more easily understood terms, to achieve a specific tone, to explain concepts in literature\)](#)
- [Uses a variety of techniques to convey a personal style and voice \(e.g., stream of consciousness, multiple viewpoints\)](#)

Civics and Government

- [Understands ideas about civic life, politics, and government](#)
- [Understands the historical perspective](#)
- [Understands the essential characteristics of limited and unlimited governments](#)
- [Understands the concept of a constitution, the various purposes that constitutions serve, and the conditions that contribute to the establishment and maintenance of constitutional government](#)
- [Understands the major characteristics of systems of shared powers and of parliamentary systems](#)
- [Understands the central ideas of American constitutional government and how this form of government has shaped the character of American society](#)

INSTRUCTIONAL GOALS

- To explore the contributions of Barack Obama, from birth to present
- To provide factual information about American politics and the American form and system of government
- To stimulate interest in American politics, current events, and the biography of President Obama

ACTIVITIES

Before Showing

Activities

- Invite students to name the steps in the presidential-election process. List students' responses on the board. Then challenge students to number the steps in chronological order. Ask: Which of these things happens first? What happens next?
 - Make a "web" of what they know.
- Explain that although people think of the election as taking place on Election Day, the election of a new President is actually a long, complicated process. It begins when candidates decide to run—as early as two years before Election Day—and that the Electoral College doesn't meet until December.
- Review the many important steps that lead up to the inauguration of a new leader.
- Review the three branches of government and the President's role.
- Ask the students about any preconceived notions related to President Obama, either ones held during the presidential campaigns, media propaganda, or what they may currently hold.



During Showing

Activities

- Pause the media after significant events, including any literary, visual, mathematical, or theatrical elements, to address them specifically.
- Give students time to write down anything significant that is mentioned.

Themes to Review

- Identity
- Race/Racism
- Character Development
- Family
- Leadership
- Character Development
- Social Work/Advocacy/Community Service
- Death
- Perspective

After Showing

Activities/Application



- Have the students summarize Obama's life.
 - Ask them to create a time line and connect each point to how it may affect Obama today.
- Have the students write an essay on media propoganda and its place (if any) in public discourse.
- Have the students develop a time line related to the electoral process.
- Have the students diagram the branches of government.
- Host a faux election with your students.
- After a discussion, have students break into pairs and choose one theme from the biography. Have them explain how the theme they have chosen appears and plays out in the biography as well as in their own experiences.

THE PRESIDENCY & BEYOND

- Have your students act as Obama's speechwriter and write an inaugural address they would have liked him to present.
- Analyze his inaugural address with your students. Discuss metaphors and other literary elements inherent in the speech.
 - Compare and contrast his inaugural speech to Martin Luther King Junior's "I Have A Dream" speech.
- Watch two different recorded news broadcasts of inauguration events, and ask students to compare and contrast, either via either via essay or graphs and charts, the two productions.
- Have students pretend they are the President. Have them draft a plan as to what they would want to accomplish the first month in office and how they plan to meet these objectives.
- Discuss important elements of history and how they relate to Obama, such as Abraham Lincoln, the Constitution, the Great Depression, and even the socio-economic and socio-political climates before and during the early presidency.
- Have the students sketch a likeness of President Obama, including various symbols, and choose their favorite quote, incorporating that quote into the picture.
- Have the students write an essay, make a time line, or draw pictures related to what they think the next 4 years of this presidency may be like. What will be accomplished? What will happen? Why?





- Have a roundtable discussion on any of the themes presented in the biography. Take any ideas presented and then have a structured debate on any of those topics.
- As an activity for the remainder of the year, have the students form groups of two or three. Each group should keep abreast of Obama's presidency through reports and teacher-designated Web sites, including speeches, executive actions, legislative proposals, congressional responses to said proposals, and any other presidency-related news. They are then to analyze this data by answering the following questions:
 - What do you consider to be the most important presidential action(s) for the given period?
 - What form does each action take? Executive? Legislative? Foreign? Domestic? A speech? A trip?
 - What has been the public response to each of the above?
 - Do these actions correspond with and/or fulfill the plans and promises President Obama delineated in his inaugural address? If so, how? If not, why not?

RELATED RESOURCES

[The DCMP January 2009 newsletter](#)

[A&E Web Site](#)

[Barack Obama's Official Web Site](#)

[President Obama's Photostream](#)

[President Obama's YouTube Channel](#)

