**Theodore Roosevelt Biography:** Road to the Presidency

**Childhood:**

Theodore Roosevelt was born on October 27, 1858, and grew up in New York City, the second of four children. His father, Theodore, Sr., was a well-to-do businessman and philanthropist. His mother, Martha "Mittie" Roosevelt, was a Southerner, raised on a plantation in Georgia. "Teedie" grew up surrounded by the love of his parents and siblings, but he was always a sickly child afflicted with asthma and other ailments. As a teenager, he decided that he would "make his body," and he undertook a program of gymnastics and weight-lifting, which helped him develop a rugged physique. Thereafter, Roosevelt became a lifelong advocate of exercise and the "strenuous life." He always found time for physical exertions including hiking, riding horses, and swimming. He traveled widely through Europe and the Middle East with his family during the late 1860s and early 1870s, once living with a host family in Germany for five months.

*“The boy who is going to make a great man must not make up his mind merely to overcome a thousand obstacles, but to win in spite of a thousand repulses and defeats.”*

Answer questions 1-2

**Education and Entrance into Politics:**

As a young boy, Roosevelt was tutored at home by private teachers. In 1876, he entered Harvard College, where he studied a variety of subjects, including German, natural history, zoology, forensics, and composition. He also continued his physical endeavors, taking on boxing and wrestling as new pursuits. Upon graduating from Harvard College in 1880, Roosevelt entered Columbia University Law School. After only a year at Columbia, he dropped out to enter public service. In 1882, at the ripe age of 24, Roosevelt entered politics. He was elected to the New York Assembly and served two terms from 1882 to 1884.

*“The only man who never makes a mistake is the man who never does anything.”*

*“Big jobs usually go to the men who prove their ability to outgrow small ones.”*

*“I am only an average man but, by George, I work harder at it than the average man.”*

Answer questions 3-4

**Personal Tragedy and Exile into the Badlands**

During college, Roosevelt fell in love with Alice Hathaway Lee, a young woman from a prominent New England banking family he met through a friend at Harvard. They were married in October 1880. A double tragedy struck Roosevelt in 1884. On February 12th, Alice gave birth to a daughter, Alice Lee. Two days later, Roosevelt's mother died of typhoid fever and his wife died of kidney disease within a few hours of each other—and in the same house. For the next few months, a devastated Roosevelt threw himself into political work to escape his grief. Finally, he left his daughter in the care of his sister and fled to the Dakota Badlands. Once out West, Roosevelt soaked in the frontier lifestyle. He bought two ranches and a thousand head of cattle. He flourished in the hardships of the western frontier, riding for days, hunting grizzly bears, herding cows as a rancher, and chasing outlaws as a frontier sheriff. Roosevelt headed back East in 1886. Although he would frequent the Dakota Badlands in subsequent years to hunt, he was ready to leave the West and return to his former life.

Answer questions 5-6

**A New Love and a Return to Politics:**

Upon returning to New York in 1886, Roosevelt married his childhood sweetheart, Edith Kermit Carow. The couple would raise six children, including Roosevelt’s daughter from his first marriage, Alice. Roosevelt and Edith moved to Oyster Bay, New York, into a house known as Sagamore Hill. In New York, Roosevelt continued his writing career, which began in 1882 with the publication of his book, The Naval War of 1812. He wrote a number of books during this period, including *The Life of Thomas Hart Benton* (1887), *The Life of Gouverneur Morris* (1888), and *The Winning of the West* (four volumes, 1889-1896). Roosevelt also resumed his political career by running unsuccessfully for mayor of New York City in 1886. In 1888, he campaigned for Republican presidential nominee Benjamin Harrison. When Harrison won the election, he appointed Roosevelt to the U.S. Civil Service Commission. Roosevelt was re-appointed to the Commission by Democratic President Grover Cleveland in 1893. As commissioner, he worked hard to enforce the civil service laws, although he regularly clashed with party regulars and politicians who wanted him to ignore the law in favor of patronage. Roosevelt served dutifully as a commissioner until he accepted the presidency of the New York City Police Board in 1895. He demonstrated honesty in office, much to the displeasure of party bosses. He also cleaned up the corrupt Police Board and strictly enforced laws banning the sale of liquor on the Sabbath.

Answer questions 7-8

**The Navy and the Rough Riders:**

In 1897, the newly elected Republican President, William McKinley, appointed Roosevelt assistant secretary of the Navy. Roosevelt had long believed in the importance of the Navy and the role it played in national defense. As acting secretary of the Navy, he responded to the explosion of the U.S. battleship Maine in Havana Harbor in 1898 by putting the Navy on full alert. Roosevelt instructed Commodore George Dewey to make ready for war with Spain by taking the necessary steps for bottling up the Spanish squadron in Asian waters.

When the Spanish-American War began, Roosevelt resigned as assistant secretary of the Navy and volunteered for service as commander of the 1st U.S. Volunteer Cavalry, a unit known as the Rough Riders—an elite company comprised of Ivy League gentlemen, western cowboys, sheriffs, prospectors, police officers, and Native Americans. Once in Cuba, Roosevelt distinguished himself by leading them on a charge—on foot—up San Juan Hill (actually Kettle Hill) on the outskirts of Santiago. The contingent suffered heavy casualties. The Rough Riders returned to the United States as war heroes. Their varied backgrounds, colorful leader, and bravery on the battlefield brought them considerable attention. Roosevelt personally reveled in his time in the military. He later wrote about his military exploits:

*"I would rather have led that charge and earned my colonelcy than served three terms in the United States Senate. It makes me feel as though I could now leave something to my children which will serve as an apology for my having existed."*

*“No man is worth his salt who is not ready at all times to risk his well-being, to risk his body, to risk his life, in a great cause.”*

Answer questions 9-10

**Returning Hero:**

The Republican political machine in New York threw their considerable support behind the returning war hero, helping Roosevelt defeat a popular Democratic candidate to win the governorship of New York. Once elected, Roosevelt displayed his characteristic independence and unwillingness to buckle to the pressure of Republican Party bosses. In 1900, the leading New York Republican Thomas C. Platt conspired with national party boss Mark Hanna to get Roosevelt named as McKinley’s Vice President in his upcoming presidential campaign, in order to keep him from running for a second term in the governor’s office. Roosevelt campaigned vigorously for McKinley, traveling by train for more than 21,000 miles to speak in 24 states, and McKinley and Roosevelt won in a landslide over Democrats [William Jennings Bryan](http://www.history.com/topics/william-jennings-bryan) and Adlai E. Stevenson.

On September 6, 1901, a deranged anarchist named Leon Czolgosz shot McKinley at the Pan-American Exposition in Buffalo, New York. McKinley died eight days later, and Roosevelt was sworn in as the 26th president.

Answer Questions 11-12.

Name:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Theodore Roosevelt: Road to the Presidency**

1. **What ailments did Teddy Roosevelt struggle with as a Child?**
2. **As a teenager, how did Roosevelt attempt to “make his body?” What activities did he participate in?**
3. **What colleges/ universities did Roosevelt attend?**
4. **What was Roosevelt’s first political position?**
5. **What was the double tragedy that struck Roosevelt in 1884?**
6. **Where did Roosevelt retreat to after suffering this double tragedy?**
7. **Pres. Benjamin Harrison appointed Roosevelt to what position?**
8. **In 1895, what job did Roosevelt undertake?**
9. **How did Roosevelt feel about naval power and the navy?**
10. **What famous Cavalry group was Roosevelt a part of during the Spanish/American War?**
11. **Why did Platt/ Hanna want Roosevelt to be Vice President?**
12. **How did Roosevelt become the President of the United States?**