

The 16-part "Dreams of a Barefoot Boy" originally appeared in the 2017 Kansas Newspapers in Education. Have fun reading stories, answering questions, and completing activities while learning about Dwight Eisenhower's childhood.



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"Dreams of a Barefoot Boy"

Chapter 1: THE TEXAS RENEGADE



"Because no man is really a man who has lost out of himself all of the boy, I want to speak first of the dreams of a barefoot boy... Because today that dream of mine of 45 years or more ago has been realized beyond the wildest stretches of my own imagination, I come here, first, to thank you, to say the proudest thing I can claim is that I am from Abilene."

Dwight D. Eisenhower June 22, 1945

On October 14, 1890, David and Ida Eisenhower welcomed their third child, and third son, into the world. At the time, they had been living in Denison, Texas, for about a year, where David worked for the Missouri, Kansas and Texas (KATY) railroad. The home they lived in, right along the railroad tracks, is a Texas State Historic Site because of the child that was born there that day in 1890, David Dwight Eisenhower.

Less than two years after his birth, the Eisenhower family moved back to Abilene, Kansas, where four more sons were born, making Dwight, as he was called to avoid confusion with his father, the only son to not be born in Dickinson County, Kansas. As the boys grew, they would jokingly remind Dwight of that fact, calling him the "Texas Renegade."

The word renegade has several different meanings. In one case it is someone who betrays his organization, which in Dwight's case may have meant that he was the "outsider" in his family since he had been born in Texas while his brothers were all born in Kansas. Since the family moved back to Kansas when he was less than two years old, however, Dwight didn't remember any of his life in Texas, and always considered Abilene his home.

The other meaning of the word renegade that might also apply to young Dwight, is someone who behaves in a "rebelliously unconventional manner." When Dwight was an adult, he recalled that he was stubborn and had a pretty bad temper when he was growing up and had to learn how to control it. It was his mother who taught him a lesson when he was ten years old that he considered one of the most valuable of his life. She told him that "Hatred was a futile sort of thing... The person who had incurred my displeasure probably didn't care, possibly didn't even know, and the only person injured was myself."

As in most families, the boys argued and occasionally fought amongst themselves. Dwight often found himself at odds with his brother Edgar. Only two years older than Dwight, Edgar was a natural athlete, and even though they were about the same size, his strength and ability got the best of Dwight on more than one occasion. Dwight vowed that when he got older he would get even, but by the time he was ready to meet Edgar on equal footing, the two had outgrown any sibling rivalry.

Even in Dwight's childhood there were bullies; boys who thought they could pick on someone younger or smaller than them. Fortunately for Dwight,

lessons about how to treat others and family were instilled at home. When someone tried to start a fight with one of the Eisenhower boys, the older brothers quickly came to his rescue, even if he was the "Texas Renegade."

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why did Dwight Eisenhower's brothers call him a Texas Renegade?
2. What lesson did Dwight learn from his mother?
3. Why do you think that was the most valuable lesson he learned?
4. In what ways can you stop bullying today?

ACTIVITIES

1. Using a map, find Denison, Texas, and Abilene, Kansas. What is the distance between the two cities? What types of travel were used in the 1890s to go long distances?
2. Start a timeline of Dwight D. Eisenhower's life based on the information in the article.