

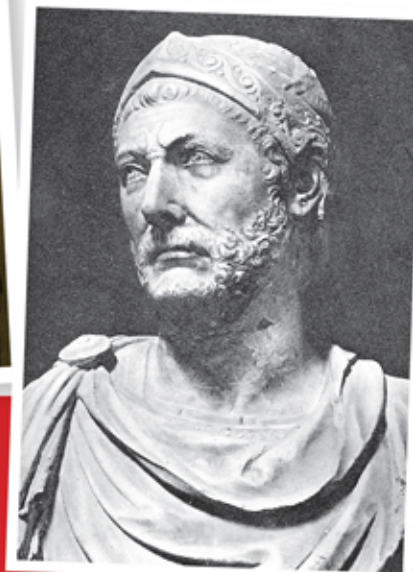
The 16-part "Dreams of a Barefoot Boy" originally appeared in the 2017 Kansas Newspapers in Education. Have fun reading stories, answering questions, and completing activities while learning about Dwight Eisenhower's childhood.



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"Dreams of a Barefoot Boy"

Chapter 12: READING HISTORY



"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

Can you imagine getting in trouble for reading? When Dwight Eisenhower was about twelve years old, his mother took his books on Greek and Roman history and locked them in the closet. He spent so much time reading stories of Hannibal, Caesar, Socrates, Xerxes and Brutus that he neglected chores and homework. For a while, the punishment worked and Dwight paid more attention to school work and chores around the house. Eventually, however, he found the key to the closet and when he knew his mother was going to be out of the house he unlocked it and began reading again.

Most of these books were military histories from two thousand years earlier, but that did not make the events any less real to Dwight. Hannibal, who led his armies against Rome in 219 B.C., was his favorite character as a youth. Not because Hannibal won (he didn't), but because he was the underdog in every story. Dwight sympathized with the underdog in history; the one who fought hard against tremendous odds.

In addition to ancient history, Dwight enjoyed reading about the Revolutionary War, where George Washington was his hero. Stories of Washington taught Dwight about stamina and patience in

adversity, courage, daring, and self-sacrifice. Impressed by Washington's character, Dwight read not only about his actions during the Revolutionary War, but his statesmanship and speeches to his countrymen, especially his Farewell Address. How much Dwight consciously modeled himself after Washington is debatable, but recent historians have favorably compared General and later President Eisenhower with his famous predecessor. Dwight's love of history continued throughout his life. In adulthood, he expanded his interests beyond conquerors, battles, and dramatic events of the past. He realized that these events would not have occurred, or their leaders been remembered if it had not been for millions of ordinary individuals. These men, Eisenhower said, "marched and sweated and died" carrying out the orders of their famous commanders. Eisenhower became more interested in real stories about average people who made history by living their lives as responsible citizens. These were the men and women who saw a wrong and tried to right it, or who faced an obstacle and worked to overcome it, benefitting themselves and others. Hundreds of history books and biographies have been written about Dwight D. Eisenhower and his lifetime

of public service. Their authors often relied on the documents from the Eisenhower Presidential Library. These include not only those written by Eisenhower, but thousands of letters written by individuals who supported or disagreed with him. All of them help us understand the events of the past and Eisenhower's important role in our nation's history.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Who were Dwight Eisenhower's historical heroes?
2. What does it mean to be an "underdog"?
3. Why do you think he admired them?
4. How did Eisenhower's understanding of who makes history change as an adult?

ACTIVITIES

1. Research the lives of George Washington and Dwight Eisenhower. How are they similar or different?
2. Who are your heroes? Why?