

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 16: LESSONS IN CHARACTER



"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

Dwight Eisenhower returned to Abilene on June 22, 1945 to a parade welcoming him home and honoring his leadership in Europe during World War II. After watching the celebration, his grateful acceptance of the recognition began with the above quote. He went on to say that this parade was not just for him; he was only a "symbol" of the soldiers, sailors and airmen who helped bring Allied victory.

Combined, these two parts of his speech tell us much about Dwight D. Eisenhower's character. That character was formed in Abilene by his family, friends, school, and community. Below are some of the lessons in character he learned in Abilene:

Responsibility: Dwight was taught responsibility at home through chores that he and his brothers had to do. They were needed in order to keep the family together and happy.

Respect: Since the family was poor, it was important to respect the things they had—replacing them cost precious money. Mr. Eisenhower lived by the rule "spare the rod and spoil the child." Dwight felt the sting of the rod from his father's hand, sometimes learning respect for his parents the hard way.

Honesty: When Dwight applied to the United States Military Academy, he requested letters of

recommendation from community leaders. According to Dwight, "each writer had something to say about the unimpeachable honesty" of his father. That reflected positively on Dwight and he tried to live his life in the same way.

Courage: Whether it was facing up to an aggressive gander when he was five, standing up to a bully when he was in grade school, or fighting a serious infection in his leg after a fall, Dwight learned to be courageous. He also recognized the courage of others, especially every soldier who fought to preserve freedom.

Cooperation: He and his brothers worked together to get chores done in the house or outside in the garden. He played sports, working as part of a team to win games. After graduation, he cooperated with his brother Edgar to ensure they both received a college education.

Perseverance: In order to get into the United States Military Academy, he worked hard to pass two written exams and a physical aptitude test. Once there, he had to earn a spot on the varsity football team. After his injury, he thought about giving up, but realized he was not a quitter.

The lessons in character Dwight Eisenhower learned in his hometown are not unique to him or to Abilene,

Kansas. In retirement, however, he realized that those values helped him achieve success and fame, and for that, he could say, "the proudest thing I can claim is that I am from Abilene."

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why did Abilene hold a parade in June 1945?
2. What does it mean to "spare the rod and spoil the child?"
3. Look up the definitions of any of the character traits that you are unfamiliar with.
4. Why do you think Dwight was proud of his hometown of Abilene?

ACTIVITIES

1. How do you show cooperation at home, school, and in sports?
2. Which character trait would you like to develop more in yourself? How can you use Dwight's example to help you?