

## Barack Hussein Obama, Jr.

2009

*Change will not come if we wait for some other person or some other time. We are the ones we've been waiting for. We are the change that we seek.*



Barack Hussein Obama **Jr.** was born in Honolulu, Hawaii. His father, Barack Obama, **Sr.** was born in Kenya, Africa. Obama's mother, Ann, grew up in Wichita, Kansas. Her family moved to Hawaii after World War II.

Ann met Barack Obama Sr. at the University of Hawaii where he was studying on a scholarship. They married and Barack Obama Jr. was born in 1961.

When he was two Obama's father and mother divorced. His father left Hawaii and went to Harvard for a Ph.D. He then returned to live in Kenya.

- **Born in Hawaii and lived in Indonesia**
- **Attended Harvard Law School**
- **Worked with the poor in Chicago**
- **Was the 3<sup>rd</sup> African American US Senator**
- **First African American United States President**

His mother married Lolo Soetoro, a student from **Indonesia**. In 1967, the family moved to **Jakarta**, where Obama's sister Maya Soetoro Ng was born. Obama went to elementary school there but his mother wanted him to return to Honolulu to finish his education.

When Barack was ten, he returned to Hawaii to live with his grandparents. Back in Hawaii Barack went to fifth grade at the Punahou Academy where he was one of three black students at the school. He graduated with **honors** in 1979. Barack says that this is the place he first understood what it meant to be born African

American. His mother often got him up at 4:30 in the morning to work on schoolwork together. He remembers her **commitment** to his education and her wish for him to do well in school so he could go to a good college. If he complained about having to get up so early his mother would remind him that “it’s no picnic for me either”. His nickname in school was “Barry” but he returned to being called Barack in college. Barack admitted using alcohol, marijuana and cocaine for a short time during his teenage years. He played basketball in his neighborhood and with his high school team. As president he continues to play basketball on a court in the white house. When his mother and sister returned from Indonesia the family continued to live with his grandparents.

Obama went to school in California at Occidental College for two years after high school. He then **transferred** to Columbia University in New York, and graduated in 1983 with a degree in political science.

Obama’s father died in 1982 in Kenya. Barack had spent only one month with his father during a visit in Honolulu after his parent’s divorce. He had a lifelong wish to know more about his Kenyan father and other relatives he had never met. He visited Kenya to learn more about his extended family. On this trip he made a visit to the graves of his father and grandfather. He wrote a book about his experiences. The audio version of his book, “Dreams of My Father” won a Grammy.

Obama entered Harvard Law School in 1988. He graduated **magna cum laude** in 1991. After Harvard, Obama worked in business for two years; he then moved to Chicago in 1985 and worked as a **community organizer** for low income residents and a civil rights lawyer.

He taught at the University of Chicago Law School and volunteered to **register** voters during Bill Clinton’s 1992 presidential campaign. Obama met his wife Michelle in 1988 when he was working at a Chicago law firm. They were married on October 3, 1992. They have two daughters, Malia and Sasha.

Obama's work with the poor inspired him to run for the Illinois State Senate as a

Democrat. He wanted to help them have better lives. He was elected in 1996.

In the State Senate, Obama worked on giving health care services and tax breaks to the poor, and improving **early childhood education**. After several men on death row were found innocent, Obama worked with law enforcement officials to begin videotaping confessions.

Obama disagreed strongly with President George W. Bush's idea to go to war with Iraq. He spoke against this war during a rally at Chicago's Federal Plaza in October 2002.

"I know that even a successful war against Iraq will require a U. S. occupation of **undetermined** length, at undetermined cost, with undetermined consequences," Obama said.

At the Democratic National Convention he delivered the **keynote** speech for the presidential campaign of John Kerry. Obama talked about the importance of unity and his feelings against the policies of George Bush.

He said "We are one people, all of us pledging allegiance to the Stars and Stripes, all of us defending the United States of America."

After the convention, Obama worked to be elected to the U.S. Senate. He and his opponent debated stem cell research, abortion, gun control, school vouchers and tax cuts and more.

In the November 2004 election, Obama received 70% of the vote. It was the largest election victory in Illinois history. Barack Obama became the third African-American elected to the U.S. Senate since **Reconstruction**.

Obama's work in the Senate included health concerns for the poor, support for Hurricane Katrina victims, alternative energy policies, and veteran's benefits. He wrote a second book during this time. *The Audacity of Hope: Thoughts on Reclaiming the American Dream*, was published in October 2006.

In February 2007, Obama announced his candidacy for the 2008 Democratic presidential nomination. He fought in a tough battle with former first lady and New York Senator, Hillary Rodham Clinton. He became the nominee on June 3, 2008. On November 4th, 2008, Barack Obama defeated Republican presidential nominee John McCain for the position of U.S. President. He is now the 44th president of the United States and the first African-American to hold this office.

Obama won the Nobel Peace Prize in October 2009. He won for his extraordinary efforts to strengthen international **diplomacy** and cooperation between peoples.

**Suggested Vocabulary and Activities for Barack Obama, US President**  
**Reading level 9.3**  
**Meets Oregon State Standards in Language Arts and Social Studies.**

Vocabulary.

Jr.

Sr.

Indonesia

Jakarta

Honors

Commitment

Transferred

Community organizer

Magna Cum Laude

Civil rights

Early childhood education

Keynote

Reconstruction

Diplomacy

Comprehension Questions

1. What cultures contributed to Barack Obama's family?
2. How did Obama's mother encourage his education?
3. Why did Obama wonder about his father's life?
4. How did working with the poor influence Obama's time in the Illinois Senate?
5. When did Obama speak out against the Iraq war?
6. When did Obama first understand what being an African American meant?

Discuss and Infer

1. What influences in his childhood influenced Obama the most?
2. Did Obama understand his father's life?
3. Why did Obama disagree with George Bush?
4. What State Senate and US Senate programs were influenced by his work as a community organizer?
5. What led him to win the Nobel Peace Prize?

## Connected Curriculum

1. On a map identify Obama's birthplace, his parent's birthplace, childhood home, and states where he went to school, lived and worked. Make a timeline of events in his life.
2. Read *Dreams of My Father*. How did his father's absence influence Obama's life?
3. What countries has Obama visited since he was President? Did this influence his winning the Peace Prize?