

Presidents & South Dakota

Teaching Tip

South Dakota: Visits by the Presidents

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Many presidents have visited South Dakota, including Mount Rushmore. The article below from the South Dakota State Historical Society Press website documents the Presidential visits from 1899 – 1999. (View: "[Patriotic Pageantry: Presidential Visits to South Dakota](#)" by Harold H. Schuler)

Video footage was used to document the Presidential visits.

The following film ([Watch PBS](#) (the film is silent)) was recorded on August 10, 1927, showing President Calvin Coolidge riding a horse to the dedication of the Mount Rushmore site. There are also views of Mount Rushmore as it looked before carving began (photo above). In the next clip, a narrator provides some detail about the events of the dedication. Coolidge addressed the assembly and presented sculptor Gutzon Borglum with steel drill bits, symbolically providing the tools to get the carving underway. ([Watch PBS/ Photos & Article](#))



Still from Film: Calvin Coolidge at Mt. Rushmore - 1927

On August 30, 1936, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt visited the Black Hills to dedicate the Jefferson sculpture. Roosevelt was already in the region on a tour of Great Plains states hard-hit by the drought of the 1930s.

In the photo left, a flag is removed from Jefferson's face during the dedication.



Still from Film: FDR at Mount Rushmore - 1936

The following clip ([Watch PBS](#)) contains two newsreel films. In the second, Roosevelt is shown speaking extemporaneously about the significance of Mount Rushmore and its place in history.

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On June 11, 1953, President Dwight Eisenhower became the first U.S. President to arrive in South Dakota by air. Eisenhower came to the state to address delegates attending a Young Republicans League convention in Rapid City.

President Eisenhower addressed the Delegates at a gathering at Mount Rushmore. In the following clip ([Watch PBS](#)), Eisenhower is seen speaking and mixing with a crowd. There are also shots of Eisenhower fishing, most likely in a stream in Custer State Park. The film is silent. A transcript of the speech is [available online here](#).



Still from Film: Dwight Eisenhower at Mt. Rushmore

President John F. Kennedy visited South Dakota on August 17, 1962. While Kennedy was here, he dedicated the recently completed Oahe Dam and the start of its full operation as an electric power plant.



OAHE DAM AND RESERVOIR
MISSOURI RIVER — PIERRE, SOUTH DAKOTA
LDS LARGEST ROLLED EARTH

South Dakota State Historical Society

The following film clip ([Watch PBS](#)) shows the arrival of Air Force One at the Pierre airport. Assembled dignitaries greet Kennedy, including Governor Archie Gubbrud and then-U.S. Senate candidate George McGovern. ([Listen to Kennedy's Speech](#))

Related Video

Cleaning Mount Rushmore: The following program features spectacular video showing National Parks Service workers using helicopters, ropes and harnesses to access every part of the sculpture. ([Watch](#))

Mount Rushmore Models: Danish-born sculptor Gutzon Borglum's original vision of the monumental Mount Rushmore figures was very different from the carving as it stands today.

Activities for Classroom Use

Visit [American Experience: Mount Rushmore](#) for educational resources, including a Teacher's Guide, an indepth documentary about Mount Rushmore, an interactive, primary resources and more.

- Example Activity Ideas from the Teacher's Guide
 1. Imagine that you have been selected to oversee the addition of a fifth figure to Mount Rushmore; this person need not have been President but must symbolize what you think has been the most important change in the United States since the era of Theodore Roosevelt. Whom would you choose, and why?
 2. Divide the class into groups of three students each. Each group should prepare a recommendation for a national memorial to the victims of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks and present its recommendation to the class, along with a sketch of the proposed memorial and information on where it would be located and how it would be financed. In their conversations about what kind of memorial to recommend, students should consider existing monuments and memorials and discuss what elements of those monuments are (or are not) effective; the website of the National Park Service contains links to places such as the U.S.S. Arizona Memorial and the Vietnam Veterans Memorial that students might want to consult.
- Visit [American Experience: Teacher's Guide](#) for additional activity ideas like the examples shown above.