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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

JAMES SUTHERLAND was a political reporter for a national news magazine for eight years, covering George W. Bush during the 2000 presidential election and the subsequent recount, the September 11, 2001 attacks, and Senator John Edwards's 2004 presidential campaign. He is now a freelance writer and lives with his wife in Brooklyn, New York.



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DISCUSSION GUIDE



UP*close:* **RONALD REAGAN** *POLITICAL STAR*

a twentieth-century life by **JAMES SUTHERLAND**

While reading **Up Close: Ronald Reagan**, ask your students to think about the following questions. Answers can either be written individually or discussed in groups to make for an interesting and thought-provoking classroom conversation.

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

- What factors made young Dutch's life difficult? How did he overcome these challenges?
- How did Dutch get his first job in radio? Why did he ultimately leave radio? What role really made him a star?
- Why could Reagan not fight in combat during the war? How did he contribute instead?
- Discuss SAG. What was Reagan's role in the organization? Discuss HUAC and how its suspicions affected Hollywood.
- How did Reagan meet Nancy Davis? According to chapter five, what did she say was his "secret"?
- How did Reagan begin making public speeches? What views would he express in them? How did these speeches lead to the start of his political career?
- Who was Holmes Tuttle? How did he and his friends encourage Reagan to run for office?
- What did Reagan promise in his 1967 inaugural address? What immediate obstacle did he face? What were his solutions to this problem?
- How did Reagan answer people who asked him to run for president in 1968? Why did he decide to run again for governor?
- What factors presented Reagan with a dilemma in the decision to run for president in 1976? Why did he finally decide to run?
- What was Reagan's initial campaign strategy for the 1980 primary election? What criticisms did he face, and what changes did he make to his strategy?
- What did Reagan mean when he said America was "a nation that has a government—not the other way around"? What was he suggesting the American people do?
- Who made up the troika? Discuss the pros and cons to having Reagan's staff set up in this way.
- Who was John Hinckley? What decision was reached about his punishment?
- Discuss Reagan's economic plan. Why did he and his advisors have trouble putting it into action? What was the ultimate solution?

- The author defines communism in chapter four and explains in chapter ten how it impacted American sentiment and US-Soviet relations. What is communism? What was Reagan's view of the philosophy?
- What was the PLO? In what ways did Reagan involve the US in the Middle East conflict? How did this make him feel?
- How did Reagan's staff, the public, and the Soviets react to his Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI)?
- What was Reagan's campaign strategy for the 1984 election? What were his major goals for his second term? How was this approach similar or different to his first campaign?
- Where was Reagan and Gorbachev's first meeting? Was it a success?
- What was the Iran-Contra Affair? Why was Reagan "in denial" about the situation?
- What agreement was reached in the treaty between the US and the Soviet Union in 1987? What changes did Reagan continue to call for? How did the Cold War end?

CRITICAL THINKING QUESTIONS & ACTIVITIES

- In the beginning of chapter one the author lists two effects that Reagan's childhood had on him. What were these effects? Do you agree that they influenced his character? List some examples from the text that either prove or disprove the author's assertion.
- Reagan fought many battles in his lifetime. He faced the harsh times of the Depression, career troubles both in acting and in politics, communism, international disputes, and public scandals, among many others. Because he was a public figure, his actions were widely discussed and criticized by the American people, especially the media. What do you think were Reagan's greatest strengths and weaknesses? Which battles do you feel he "won" and which did he "lose"? What would you call his greatest triumph throughout his long life?
- It is important to understand the electoral process to comprehend the reasons that Reagan acted, campaigned, and strategized in the ways that he did. In pairs or larger groups, research the process from the initial party primaries through the inauguration ceremony or even the campaign for reelection. You may choose to learn about the system in general or instead to focus on one particular president's road to the White House. Hold a mock election in your classroom with two students running against one another for president and the rest of the students rallying behind them in two parties. Assign the roles of campaign staffers, press secretaries, party leaders, and additional independent candidates.