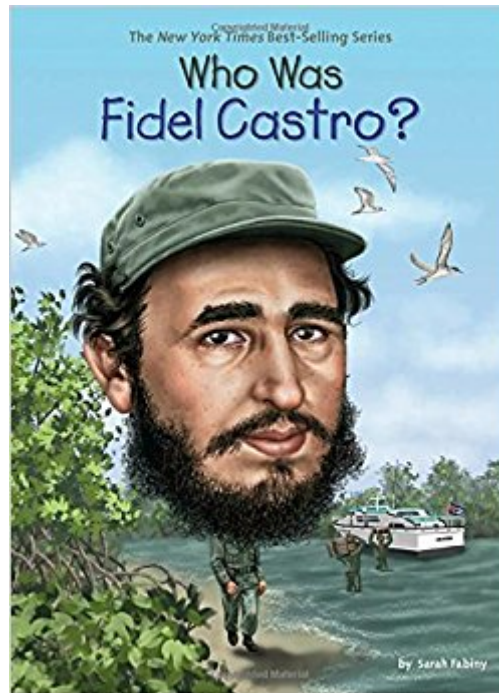




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Who Was Fidel Castro?



Synopsis

When Fidel Castro died on November 25, 2016, many people around the world responded with mixed emotions. Learn all about the man who shaped Cuba for more than half a decade. After overthrowing Fulgencia Batista in 1959, Fidel Castro became the leader of an island country only ninety miles away from Florida. While in power, Castro outlasted ten US presidents and turned the small nation into a one-party state with influence over the entire world. Called a leader by some and a dictator by others, Castro defined not one but several eras in world politics.

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Sarah Fabiny has written several Who Was? titles, including biographies of Beatrix Potter, Frida Kahlo, Rachel Carson, and Gloria Steinem.

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about his plans for the country. Cubans were ready for the freedom and changes that Fidel had promised them. The Cuban people were ready for a new leader. ã ã Spotlights shone on the stage where Fidel was to speak. Fidel finally stepped up to the microphone. He had a big, bushy beard and was dressed in an army cap and olive-green army fatigues. The crowds cheered even louder when they saw Fidel. ã ã Fidel spoke for two hours. He told everyone listening in Havana, across Cuba, and around the world that he was the new leader of the country. He would bring change to his beloved homeland. ã ã As Fidel ended his speech, several white doves were released. One of the doves landed on Fidel's shoulder. The crowd went silent. White doves were seen as a sign of peace. Many believed it was a sign from God. They believed that Fidel, who was only thirty-two years old at the time, had been specially chosen to lead Cuba. ã ã Chapter 1: ã ã A Privileged Childhood ã ã ã ã Fidel Castro was born on August 13, 1926. His father was named Angel. He was the owner of a sugar cane plantation. (A plantation is a very large farm that usually grows only one crop.) He had immigrated to Cuba from Spain in 1905. Fidel's mother, Lina, was a housekeeper at the plantation. Fidel was Angel and Lina's third child. After Fidel was born, the couple had four more children. Angel and Lina did not get married until Fidel was a teenager. ã ã ã ã The sugar cane plantation where Fidel grew up was called Las Manacas. It was near the town of Biran. Biran is at the eastern end of Cuba. At the time, this area was among the poorest in Cuba. Most people lived in simple shacks without running water or electricity. They worked on small farms and plantations for hardly any money. ã ã ã ã Fidel's father had started out like this. But he was determined to make a better life for himself. Angel taught himself to read and write. He worked hard and saved money so that he could buy his own property. Angel was proud to be able to give his own family the things he did not have as a child. ã ã The plantation grew to over twenty-five thousand acres. Three hundred families lived and worked on the property. Although Fidel was the owner's son, he played with the children of the laborers who worked on the plantation. And workers often ate meals with Fidel and his family. ã ã ã ã Fidel saw that his life was very different from the lives of the workers. The Castro children never worried about having enough to eat. They dressed in fine clothes and went to private schools. They rode horses, swam in the river, hunted, fished, and climbed in the nearby mountains. ã ã Fidel spent a lot of time with his older brother Ramon and his younger brother Raul. The brothers were very close, especially Fidel and Raul. Raul looked up to Fidel, and Fidel always looked out for his younger brother. ã ã ã ã From a very young age, Fidel had a stubborn streak and a strong temper. Although a bright boy, he had a hard time sitting still at school. Fidel argued with his teachers and fought with other students. He was always determined to get his own way. ã ã When Fidel was

about seven years old, his parents sent him to La Salle, a private Catholic boarding school. Ramon and Raul were also sent there. Their parents hoped that the boarding school would help their sons, especially Fidel, behave and be better students. But that did not happen. Fidel and his brothers did very little work and did not get good grades. At the end of Fidel's fourth-grade year, Angel brought his sons home. He refused to send them back to school. Although Fidel didn't like school, he didn't want to be stuck at home. In fact, he threatened to burn down the family house! So Fidel's father gave in. But he decided to send Fidel to an even stricter school. In 1940, Fidel moved to Dolores Academy. Raul joined his older brothers at the school when he was old enough to attend. The school's many rules had a good effect on Fidel. He studied more and his grades improved. Fidel also discovered he was good at sports. He made it onto the boxing, soccer, and baseball teams. When he was sixteen, Fidel convinced his parents to let him go to the Jesuit preparatory school of Belen in Havana. It was the most exclusive high school in the country. In time, Raul joined his older brother there. Fidel came from a rich family. Still, other boys saw Fidel as an outsider. Most of the students came from Havana. They were rich city boys and made fun of Fidel for being from the countryside. They called him a peasant behind his back. Fidel decided that rather than fighting, he would turn his energy to his studies. Soon his hard work impressed his teachers and the other students, too. Fidel graduated in the top ten of his class. His yearbook read "Fidel always distinguished himself in all subjects. He was a true athlete, always defending the banner of the school with pride and valor. He has won the admiration and affection of all. We do not doubt that Fidel has what it takes and will make something of his life."

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