



# Theodore Roosevelt:

## The Self (Re-) Made Man



# I. Theodore Roosevelt: The Self (Re-) Made Man

## II. Brief Description of the South Dakota Feature

President Theodore Roosevelt has at least two connections to South Dakota. First, as a young man, in order to live a vigorous life, he bought and ran a ranch in the Dakota Territory. Second, he is immortalized on Mount Rushmore, one of the “great faces” of our state. His life is a lesson in making yourself into the person you want to be, despite obstacles, by adopting an Internal Locus of Control.

## III. Lesson Plan Steps:

### A. Anticipatory Set

The counselor or teacher holds up the image of Mount Rushmore included in the packet, asking how many in the classroom have ever visited the monument. “So, who can tell me the names of the people carved into mountain? Well, in today’s lesson, we are going to talk about one of these famous American presidents, Theodore Roosevelt. The teacher could also talk about the “Night at the Museum” movies and discuss his depiction.

### B. Objective and Purpose

Students will be able to identify struggles and events in the life of Theodore Roosevelt as examples of an Internal Locus of Control and describe the difference between an Internal Locus of Control and an External Locus of Control.

“Our objective for this lesson isn’t really about learning some American history, though a group as smart as this one will no doubt do some of that. Instead, we are going to learn a bit about the life of TR (as some called him then and still do today) to see what kind of lesson he has to teach us.

One of the great ways to learn life’s lessons is found in both our classroom library and our school library in the section that includes biographies and autobiographies. When we learn about the lives of people important enough to write a book about, we can take the lessons they learned during their lives and apply them to our own situations. You might call this ‘vicarious learning,’ which just means things we learn from the experiences of others.

Just imagine if we had to learn everything on our own, trial and error. Rattlesnake slithers up, a stand of poison ivy looms up in the path ahead, Mom doesn’t tell us that the stove is hot when we are infants and, BAM!, we take the consequences. Sure, we learn not to try to pet the snake, plow through the poison ivy, or put our hand on the stove but the lesson comes at a price and sometimes a very heavy one. How much better is it when our parents can tell us not to run in the street, and we listen? Well, that is part of the people and animals and landmarks we are going to be exploring, learning lessons from their experience.

So, let’s see what Teddy Roosevelt has to teach us. Please take out the reading on Roosevelt that I’ve provided you.”

(Have the students do a read-aloud on that article or have them read it silently.)

### C. Resources to be Accessed

1. "Theodore Roosevelt: The Self (Re-) Made Man" (see below)
2. Instructional Guide on Internal Locus of Control (see below)

### D. Modeling

Think of situations in your own life or the lives of others or experiences that the students can relate to and talk about your response (external or internal locus of control).

### E. Checking for Understanding/Guided Practice

Use the Instructional Guide on Internal Locus of Control to check for understanding with your students.

Ask the students to interpret the following quotation attributed to Theodore Roosevelt and how it applies to this lesson: "If you could kick the person in the pants responsible for most of your trouble, you wouldn't sit for a month."

### F. Independent Practice

As you probably won't have assignments for students that will later be graded, this may be in the form of additional situations, in which students silently reflect on how one with an internal or external locus of control would respond.

### G. Student-Led Closure

Research has demonstrated that closure is an important part of any lesson because it "cements" the learning. When that closure is student-led, it guarantees that the students are engaged with the closure, enhancing the learning's deposit in long-term memory.

Thus, one example of a way to do this would be to put students in pairs and ask them to:

- Student 1: Define External Locus of Control for student 2.
- Student 2: Define Internal Locus of Control for student 1.
- Student 1: If Roosevelt had not decided he could change his life when he was young, or in other words if he had an External Locus of Control, how do you think his life would have been different?
- Student 2: Since Roosevelt decided to have an Internal Locus of Control, how did his life change? Give a specific example.

### H. Standards Addressed

SD Mindsets & Behaviors for Student Success: K-12 College, Career, and Life-Ready Competencies for Every Student:

- B-LS 4. Self-motivation and self-direction for learning.
- B-SMS 1. Responsibility for self and actions.
- B-SMS 5. Perseverance to achieve long- and short-term goals.

English/Language Arts:

5.RF.4 Reading with sufficient accuracy and fluency to support comprehension:

a. Read grade-level text with purpose and understanding.

6-8 RH.1 Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources.

6-8 RH.10 By the end of grade 8, read and comprehend history/social studies texts in the grades

6-8 text complexity band independently and proficiently.

Social Studies:

5.SS.10: The student demonstrates knowledge of events around the beginning of the 20th century.

G. The student tells the biography of Theodore Roosevelt, including: his upbringing, his life outside of politics, especially in the West, his fighting in the Spanish-American War, his presidency, his efforts at conservation.









# Theodore Roosevelt:

## The Self (Re-) Made Man

In the 19th century, the author Horatio Alger wrote a long list of novels about young Americans who “pulled themselves up by their bootstraps.” The main characters were always born into poverty, but by education, “smarts,” hard work, and ingenuity, they managed to become prosperous, even well-to-do. And they did it on their own. They had no wealthy parents to rely on. They didn’t win the lottery. They worked hard, saved their money, started businesses, and they did it all through their own efforts. Such a person came to be described as a “self-made man,” in other words, someone who made it on their own.

And the truth is there are lots of such people, and America is a place where this is more possible than any other country because Americans value opportunity, economic freedom, and the liberty to take risks and improve our lives for the better.

But young Theodore Roosevelt could hardly be described as someone who grew up in poverty. In fact, his father, Theodore Roosevelt, Sr., was a prominent businessman and philanthropist in New York City and his mother, Martha Bulloch, was from a wealthy family in Georgia. Teddy was born in 1858 with a “silver spoon in his mouth.”



Theodore Roosevelt Collection, Harvard College Library

**Young Theodore Roosevelt**



Theodore Roosevelt Collection, Harvard College Library

However, that wealth couldn't change the fact that he suffered from severe asthma, a lung ailment which left him wheezing and breathless whenever he exerted himself. His eyesight was also poor. As a result, his mother doted on him endlessly, encouraging him to live a life of idleness. Some would consider this attention combined with wealth (despite his illnesses) a free and easy life.

Well, TR refused to accept this future. Instead, he adopted an outlook on life that he called "the strenuous life," even writing a book on it later in 1901. He began exercising regularly, spending hours out-of-doors in fields and forest, pushing himself on forced marches, chopping wood, running, climbing, and gamboling about in every way possible. Slowly he found that the harder he worked, the harder he *could* work. His asthma abated and while he couldn't very well improve his eyesight, he decided to never let it interfere with what he wanted to do.

And what he wanted to do was everything. He applied to Harvard College and graduated magna cum laude, meaning he had excellent grades. Soon after he ran for the New York state legislature and, at the age of 23—a young whipper snapper who should have been silent before his wiser, older colleagues—went on the attack against “machine politics.” This was a corrupt system that provided people jobs and benefits based on their political party affiliation. TR was one of the leading reformers in the country, and people of both parties—the Democrats and Republicans—hated him for it. But he and his fellow reformers won the day in the end.

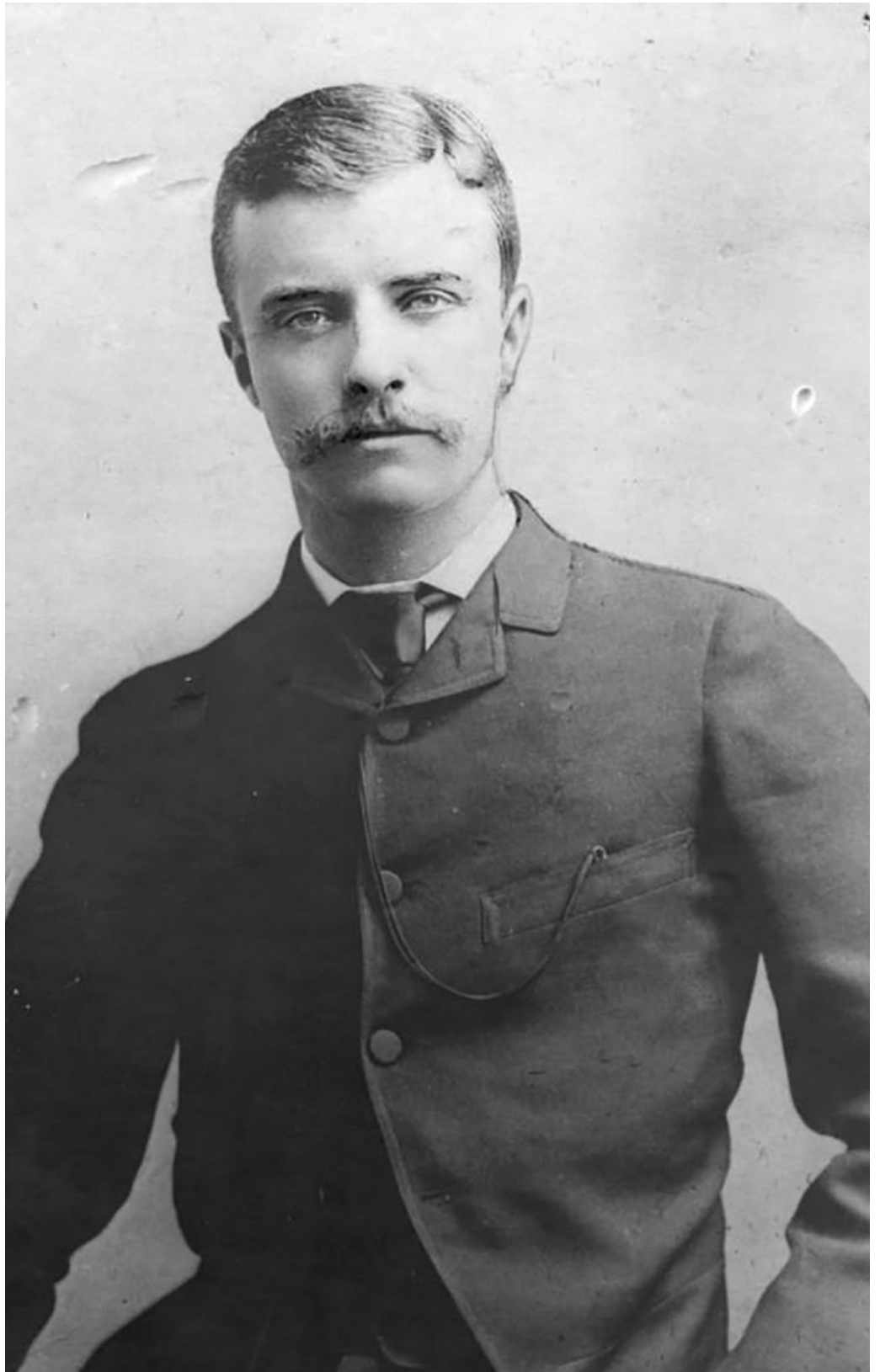


Photo courtesy of the Library of Congress.



But then came the real test of his mettle. On Valentine’s Day, 1884, both his beloved mother, Martha, and wife, Alice, died—just hours apart. Alice’s death occurred just two days after the birth of their only child, Alice Lee Roosevelt. TR was inconsolable. He forbid those around him to even utter their names. Unable to cope, he headed out to the Dakota Territory in the Badlands. He purchased a ranch and ran a large herd of cattle himself, along with the help of a group of cowboys who first thought he was a soft easterner but soon learned he was anything but and earned their respect. When he wasn’t ranching, TR was hunting and gained an appreciation for wildlife and the environment. He loved his life in Dakota Territory but realized that running away from grief was no way to live. He returned to New York and ran for mayor of the City of New York. He lost. Soon after, he lost his whole cattle herd in a severe Dakota blizzard.

None of which kept him down. Soon after, he became New York’s police commissioner, an administrative post that saw him prowling the city streets at all hours of the day or night to make sure his officers were protecting the citizens of the city from crime. During this time, he was also writing books, which were very popular. (Roosevelt was, in fact, the most prolific American president, writing 28 books in his lifetime.) His first book, “The Naval War of 1812,” was so well thought of that President McKinley appointed him the assistant secretary of the navy.



Photo courtesy of the Library of Congress.

When America declared war on Spain (1898), in order to free Cuba from that country's colonial rule, Roosevelt left that post in order to organize the 1st Volunteer Cavalry, better known as the Rough Riders, some of whom were his old cowboy friends from Dakota. Dashing into combat, the Rough Riders quickly defeated the Spanish in a battle, and Roosevelt became one of the biggest heroes of the Spanish-American War. At the end of the war, Roosevelt returned to New York and was elected that same year as governor of the state. He instantly threw himself into a crusade against corruption that was so successful that the party bosses in his state decided to nominate him for the vice presidency under McKinley, in order to strip him of power.

The plan backfired when President McKinley was assassinated and TR became president at 42 years of age, the youngest person to ever become president. As president he "busted trusts" (economic monopolies that prevented competition and kept prices high), pushed important laws through Congress on food and drug safety, set aside wilderness areas as national parks, settled strikes, kept European nations from interfering in the Western Hemisphere, built the Panama Canal, built a large navy, and made the United States a military and world power. He also negotiated an end to the war between Japan and Russia and earned a Nobel Peace Prize for his efforts. Not to mention he was shot during a campaign speech and kept speaking!

After retiring from the presidency, TR explored the Amazon River, continued writing books, advocated for the Conservation Movement, and, when America entered into World War I, requested that then President Wilson allow him to form a volunteer division of soldiers that he would lead into battle. the age of 58!



Photo courtesy of the Library of Congress.

A “strenuous life” indeed.

So what made the difference? What turned a frail, spoiled little boy into a cowboy, soldier, police commissioner, governor, and president who pushed America onto the world stage? Fundamentally, it was Roosevelt’s belief, *and his acting on that belief*, that he was in charge of his own life. In other words, Roosevelt had an Internal Locus of Control.

So what does that mean?

- Locus of Control simply means what a person believes about who is in control of their life.
- People with an Internal (inside) Locus of Control believe they control their life.
- Those with an External (outside them) Locus of Control believe others, or other factors, control their life.

And it matters which of these you adopt for yourself and your life.

People with an Internal Locus of Control know that their decisions and their actions have a lot to say about how their life turns out. They assign or attribute blame or credit for their triumphs and their failures to their own decisions, actions, and abilities. People with an Internal Locus of Control tend to be self-confident and effective. They also plan ahead.

People with an External Locus of Control assign responsibility for their situation in life to factors outside of themselves. When they experience a reversal or failure, they tend to look for others to blame. Sometimes they don’t even give themselves credit for a success, assigning it, instead, to luck, random chance, or “knowing the right people.” People with an External Locus of Control also aren’t very assertive. They don’t tend to pursue opportunities. They are more passive and, at times, even feel quite helpless.

More basically, people with an Internal Locus of Control tend to be more successful in life, socially and economically. They rise higher and faster. They also tend to be happier.





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## Want to learn more?

Visit Mount Rushmore National Memorial located in the Black Hills of South Dakota. Seeing it in person really brings home the grandeur of this massive, patriotic sculpture. The visitor area offers much more information about the four presidents memorialized there, including TR.