

Volodymyr Zelenskyy



Pre-Reading

A. Warm-Up Questions

1. What country is Volodymyr Zelenskyy from?
2. What is Zelenskyy's job?
3. What do you already know about this world leader?
4. What do you want to know more about?

B. Vocabulary Preview

Match up as many words and meanings as you can.

Check this exercise again after seeing the words in context on page 2.

- | | |
|----------------------|--|
| _____ 1. executive | a) a long, opinionated speech that criticizes someone or something |
| _____ 2. studio | b) dishonesty |
| _____ 3. satire | c) a senior manager or decision maker in a company |
| _____ 4. rant | d) an event or action that angers or shocks the public |
| _____ 5. corruption | e) to acquire or gather a lot of something |
| _____ 6. scandal | f) to face someone or something with courage |
| _____ 7. tension | g) a place where media is recorded |
| _____ 8. amass | h) a state of underlying stress and anger |
| _____ 9. stand up to | i) the opinion that people have of someone or something |
| _____ 10. reputation | j) the use of humour and exaggeration to criticize a person or situation |

Reading

1. Following a successful career as an actor and entertainment **executive**, Volodymyr Zelenskyy became the president of Ukraine on May 20, 2019. During his first two years in office, Zelenskyy's domestic policies focused on unifying the country, fighting corruption, improving the economy, and responding to the COVID-19 pandemic.
2. Zelenskyy was born on January 25, 1978, in Kryvyi Rih, Ukraine, which was then part of the USSR. His parents were Jewish, and he grew up speaking Russian. He also became fluent in Ukrainian and English. As a child, he spent four years in Mongolia before returning to his homeland to go to school.
3. Zelenskyy earned a law degree from the Kyiv National Economic University, where he was also active in the theatre. His theatre group, Kvartal 95 (Quarter 95), enjoyed success on television and soon established its own entertainment **studio**. In 2011, Zelenskyy became the general producer of Inter TV, a Ukrainian television channel. He also began to appear in feature films.
4. In 2015, Zelenskyy produced and starred in *Servant of the People*, a political **satire**. In this popular TV series, Zelenskyy plays a history teacher who is unexpectedly elected president after a **rant** about government **corruption** goes viral. In March 2018, employees at Kvartal 95 Studio registered Servant of the People as an official political party in Ukraine. That December, Zelenskyy announced that he was running for president, and he quickly became a front-runner. He went on to win the presidential election with 73% of the vote.
5. In 2019, Zelenskyy was involved in a political **scandal** when an American whistleblower accused US President Donald Trump of asking Ukraine for political favours in exchange for military aid. Zelenskyy's public approval began to decline during the pandemic. Meanwhile, **tensions** with Russia worsened as Russian President Vladimir Putin grew more concerned about Ukraine's interest in joining NATO and the European Union.
6. Toward the end of 2021, Russia began to **amass** troops along the Russia-Ukraine border, and critics feared Zelenskyy was too inexperienced to **stand up to** Putin. On February 24, 2022, Russia attacked Ukraine in a full-scale invasion. The Ukrainian Army refused to stand down, and fierce fighting followed. Despite offers of help to escape the war zone, Zelenskyy remained in Kyiv and encouraged his people to defend their country. Zelenskyy's speeches to his people began trending around the world, and Ukraine's president instantly achieved a new **reputation** as a brave wartime leader, committed to freedom and democracy.

"The fight is here; I need ammunition, not a ride."

—President Zelenskyy to the US government, who offered to evacuate him from Kyiv in February 2022

Family

Zelenskyy and his wife, Olena, an architect and screenwriter, have two children, daughter Aleksandra and son Kiril.

Comprehension

A. Timeline

Place the following in chronological order (1–10)
based on information from the reading.

- _____ Zelenskyy spent four years in Mongolia.
- _____ He became involved in a political scandal related to President Trump.
- _____ Zelenskyy refused to leave his country and inspired his people to be brave.
- _____ He was elected president with 73% of the vote.
- _____ Putin began amassing troops around the Ukraine-Russia borders.
- _____ Zelenskyy starred as a history teacher in *Servant of the People*.
- _____ He attended university to study law.
- _____ Zelenskyy announced he was running for president.
- _____ Kwartal 25 registered Servant of the People as a political party in Ukraine.
- _____ His theatre group was successful.

B. True or False?

Read the statements below.

If the statement is true, write T beside the sentence.

If it is false, write F and correct the information in your notebook.

- _____ 1. Volodymyr Zelenskyy is a practising lawyer.
- _____ 2. *Servant of the People* is an American movie.
- _____ 3. Zelenskyy became less popular among his people during the pandemic.
- _____ 4. When Russia attacked Ukraine in February 2022, Zelenskyy stayed in Kyiv.
- _____ 5. Zelenskyy is the democratic leader of Ukraine.

Vocabulary Review

A. Odd One Out

Circle the word that does not belong in the group.

- | | | |
|---|--|---|
| 1. a) studio
b) recording
c) tension | 4. a) satire
b) comedy
c) corruption | 7. a) tension
b) stress
c) reputation |
| 2. a) gather
b) stand up to
c) amass | 5. a) rant
b) studio
c) speech | 8. a) management
b) reputation
c) executive |
| 3. a) executive
b) reputation
c) public opinion | 6. a) corruption
b) dishonesty
c) satire | 9. a) tense
b) defend
c) stand up to |

B. Complete the Sentences

Complete the sentences using vocabulary from page 1.
You may need to change the word form.

1. All the news programs were covering the _____ about the senator who used the taxpayers' money to buy himself a mansion.
2. _____ kept rising throughout the week after the peace talks failed.
3. It's common to see someone go on a _____ on social media platforms when talking about politics or other controversial issues.
4. Troops _____ all along the border last week.
5. The judge has a _____ for being honest and fair.

Grammar Review

PHRASAL VERBS WITH “STAND”

A. Reference

Phrasal verbs are verbs that have one or two particles.
The particles can be prepositions or adverbs.

Phrasal Verb Form

verb + particle (+ particle)

Phrasal Verb	Meaning	Example
stand up	to not show up at an appointed time	The delegates were supposed to meet yesterday, but the representative from one country stood up the other members of the organization.
stand up to	to face someone or something with courage	Those soldiers stood up to the opposing army even though they had fewer weapons.
stand up for	to support or defend someone or something	The reporter stood up for her right to free speech by announcing on social media that the newspaper had cancelled her story.
stand by	to be ready for something to happen	Everyone in the country was standing by nervously for the president’s announcement.
stand down	to relax or end a state of readiness	The army general ordered his troops to stand down when the attack was called off.

B. Practice

Work with a partner. Take turns making your own sentences that use the following phrasal verbs with “stand.” Can you apply these words to the Russia–Ukraine conflict (or another conflict)?

- stand up
- stand up to
- stand up for
- stand by
- stand down

Discussion

1. How can war help determine a person's leadership capabilities?
2. What do you find most interesting about Zelenskyy's political rise?
What other leaders have risen to fame based on their celebrity status?
3. What character traits do entertainers and politicians have in common?
4. Why do you think the world became so supportive of Zelenskyy after Russia's attack?
5. Do you follow politicians on social media? Why or why not?
6. Does it surprise you that Ukrainian civilians were willing to take up arms and fight for their country's freedom?

English Spelling

Some news outlets spell the president's name in different ways: Zelenskyy, Zelensky, or even Zelenskyi. When he first took office, the president's administration didn't spell his name consistently. When the administration settled on *Zelenskyy*, many news sources also adopted this spelling.

It's a good idea to be mindful of some newly adopted English spellings of Ukrainian towns and cities. The spelling of Kyiv (previously Kiev), Lviv (previously Lvov), and Odesa (previously Odessa) are worth noting. Note that *Kyiv* is pronounced with one syllable and has a long E sound: /kiv/. Most importantly, the country should be referred to as Ukraine (not "the Ukraine").