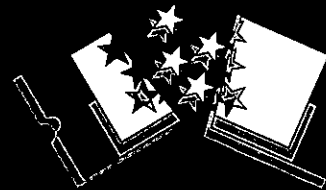


Exploring

LOOKING OVER THE PRESIDENT'S SHOULDER

an IRT Study Guide



As Chief Butler at the White House, Alonzo Fields served four US Presidents: Herbert Hoover, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Harry S Truman, and Dwight David Eisenhower. He dealt with heads of state, government officials, Hollywood celebrities, and everyone else who visited the White House, whether for an afternoon reception or a state dinner or an overnight stay. He worked closely with not only the President but also the First Lady, constantly learning to adapt as new families moved in and out of the White House. He worked with great skill and pride, although this job was far from the life he had planned for himself.

Alonzo Fields was born April 10, 1900, in Lyles Station, Indiana, in Gibson County just north of Evansville. Lyles Station was an all-black community founded by free slaves; Alonzo's grandfather had been a slave. Alonzo's family moved to Indianapolis when he was 11; there he developed his talents as a singer, which eventually led him to study at the Boston Conservatory of Music. To earn money for his studies he worked as a butler in the home of the president of M.I.T.

In October 1931 Mr. Fields's employer died unexpectedly. It was the height of the Depression, and with a family to support, Mr. Fields felt he had no choice but to suspend his music studies and accept his only job offer: to be a butler at the White House. Although he accepted this job as a temporary detour, his new career occupied him until February 1953, when he and his wife moved back to Boston in order to facilitate her health care.

In 1960 Mr. Fields published a memoir, *My 21 Years at the White House*. He was a frequent talk show guest and club speaker up to his death in 1994.

In December 1999, while doing research at the Indiana Historical Society for his play *Amber Waves*, IRT playwright-in-residence James Still found a small newspaper clipping about Alonzo Fields. He immediately thought the story might make a play, and after reading

21 Years in the White House



Mr. Fields's book he felt this was a great untold story. From the beginning he envisioned a one-man show with actor John Henry Redwood, who has appeared in such IRT productions as *Fences* and *Amber Waves*. An extensive search—from Lyles Station to the Harry S Truman Library in Missouri to the White House itself—finally led Mr. Still to Mayland Fields, Alonzo's widow (his second wife), in Boston. She readily gave permission for the play.

In July 2000 Mr. Still flew to Boston to spend two days with Mrs. Fields. She showed him all kinds of papers and memorabilia: newspaper articles, gifts from Presidents (Harry Truman's Stetson hat, Mr. Truman's desk plaque that says, "The Buck Stops Here," a painting by President Eisenhower of Abraham Lincoln), hundreds of daily menus planned in the White House, paycheck stubs, employment contracts, White House musical programs (Kate Smith, Marian Anderson, among many others), napkins with notes written on them, etc. Mr. Still's big discovery was the handwritten first draft of Mr. Fields's memoir, 400 pages long and completely unedited, untouched yet by a publisher.

Mr. Still also flew to Washington, DC, for a private tour of the White House—including the back stairs and butler's pantry and kitchens. As he was cataloguing the enormous amounts of research he had collected, IRT artistic director Janet Allen saw a place on the 2001-2002 season for *Looking over the President's Shoulder*. Suddenly Mr. Still was on the fast track.

In May and June 2001, Mr. Still wrote the first draft of *Looking over the President's Shoulder* and met with the IRT production designers. Over the next three months came three more drafts, another design conference, and two meetings with Mr. Redwood to read the play in its varying states. On October 2, rehearsals began. As with any new play, changes continued as the playwright, the actor, and the production team worked together to develop this tribute to an unsung American hero. ★

Herbert Hoover

Son of a Quaker blacksmith, Herbert Clark Hoover brought to the Presidency an unparalleled reputation for public service as an engineer, administrator, and humanitarian.

Born in an Iowa village in 1874, he grew up in Oregon. He enrolled at Stanford University when it opened in 1891, graduating as a mining engineer.

He married his Stanford sweetheart, Lou Henry, and they went to China, where he worked for a private corporation as China's leading engineer. In June 1900 the Boxer Rebellion caught the Hoovers in Tientsin. For almost a month the settlement was under heavy fire. While his wife worked in the hospitals, Hoover directed the building of barricades, and once risked his life rescuing Chinese children.

One week before Hoover celebrated his 40th birthday in London, Germany declared war on France, and the American Consul General asked his help in getting stranded tourists home. In six weeks his committee helped 120,000 Americans return to the United States. Next Hoover turned to a far more difficult task, to feed Belgium, which had been overrun by the German army.

After the United States entered the war, President Wilson appointed Hoover head of the Food Administration. He succeeded in cutting consumption of foods needed overseas and avoided rationing at home, yet kept the Allies fed.

After the Armistice, Hoover, a member of the Supreme Economic Council and head of the American Relief Administration, organized shipments of food for starving millions in central Europe. He extended aid to famine-stricken Soviet Russia in 1921. When a critic inquired if he was not thus helping Bolshevism, Hoover

retorted, "Twenty million people are starving. Whatever their politics, they shall be fed!"

After capably serving as Secretary of Commerce under Presidents Harding and Coolidge, Hoover became the Republican Presidential nominee in 1928. He said then: "We in America today are nearer to the final tri-



umph over poverty than ever before in the history of any land." His election seemed to ensure prosperity. Yet within months the stock market crashed, and the Nation spiraled downward into the Great Depression.

After the crash Hoover announced that while he would keep the Federal budget balanced, he would cut taxes and expand public works spending.

In 1931 repercussions from Europe deepened the crisis, even though the President presented to Congress a program asking for creation of the Reconstruction Finance Corporation to aid business, additional help for farmers facing mortgage foreclosures, banking reform, a loan to states for feeding the unemployed, expansion of public works, and drastic governmental economy.

At the same time he reiterated his view that while people must not suffer from hunger and cold, caring for them must be primarily a local and voluntary responsibility.

His opponents in Congress, who he felt were sabotaging his program for their own political gain, unfairly painted him as a callous and cruel President. Hoover became the scapegoat for the depression and was badly defeated in 1932. In the 1930s he became a powerful critic of the New Deal, warning against tendencies toward statism.

In 1947 President Truman appointed Hoover to a commission, which elected him chairman, to reorganize the Executive Departments.

He was appointed chairman of a similar commission by President Eisenhower in 1953. Many economies resulted from both commissions' recommendations. Over the

years, Hoover wrote many articles and books, one of which he was working on when he died at 90 in New York City on October 20, 1964. ★

Franklin D. Roosevelt

Assuming the Presidency at the depth of the Great Depression, Franklin Delano Roosevelt helped the American people regain faith in themselves. He brought hope as he promised prompt, vigorous action, and asserted in his Inaugural Address, "the only thing we have to fear is fear itself."

Born in 1882 at Hyde Park, New York—now a national historic site—he attended Harvard University and Columbia Law School. On St. Patrick's Day, 1905, he married Eleanor Roosevelt.

Following the example of his fifth cousin, President Theodore Roosevelt, whom he greatly admired, Franklin D. Roosevelt entered public service through politics, but as a Democrat. He won election to the New York Senate in 1910. President Wilson

appointed him Assistant Secretary of the Navy, and he was the Democratic nominee for Vice President in 1920.

In the summer of 1921, when he was 39, disaster hit—he was stricken with poliomyelitis. Demonstrating indomitable courage, he fought to regain the use of his legs, particularly through swimming. At the 1924 Democratic Convention he dramatically appeared on

crutches to nominate Alfred E. Smith as "the Happy Warrior." In 1928 Roosevelt became Governor of New York.

He was elected President in November 1932, to the first of four terms. By March there were 13,000,000 unemployed, and almost every bank was closed. In his

first "hundred days," he proposed, and Congress enacted, a sweeping program to bring recovery to business and agriculture, relief to the unemployed and to those in danger of losing farms and homes, and reform, especially through the establishment of the Tennessee Valley Authority.

By 1935 the nation had achieved some measure of recovery, but businessmen and bankers were turning more and more against

Roosevelt's New Deal program. They feared his experiments, were appalled because he had taken the nation off the gold standard and allowed deficits in the budget, and disliked the concessions to labor. Roosevelt responded with a new program of reform: Social Security, heavier taxes on the wealthy, new controls over banks and public utilities, and an enormous work relief program for the

unemployed.

In 1936 he was re-elected by a top-heavy margin. Feeling he was armed with a popular mandate, he sought legislation to enlarge the Supreme Court, which had been invalidating key New Deal measures. Roosevelt lost the Supreme Court battle, but a revolution in constitutional law took place. Thereafter the government could legally regulate the economy.

Roosevelt had pledged the United States to the "good neighbor" policy, transforming the Monroe Doctrine from a unilateral American manifesto into arrangements for mutual action against aggressors. He also sought through neutrality legislation to keep the United States out of the war in Europe, yet at the same time to strengthen nations threatened or attacked. When France fell and England came under siege in 1940, he began to send Great Britain all possible aid short of actual military involvement.

When the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, Roosevelt directed organization of the nation's manpower and resources for global war.

Feeling that the future peace of the world would depend upon relations between the United States and Russia, he devoted much thought to the planning of a United Nations, in which, he hoped, international difficulties could be settled.

As the war drew to a close, Roosevelt's health deteriorated, and on April 12, 1945, while at Warm Springs, Georgia, he died of a cerebral hemorrhage. ★



Alonzo Fields se during his 21 year

Harry S Truman

During his few weeks as Vice President, Harry S Truman scarcely saw President Roosevelt, and received no briefing on the development of the atomic bomb or the unfolding difficulties with Soviet Russia. Suddenly these and a host of other wartime problems became Truman's to solve when, on April 12, 1945, he became President. He told reporters, "I felt like the moon, the stars, and all the planets had fallen on me."

Truman was born in Lamar, Missouri, in 1884. He grew up in Independence, and for 12 years prospered as a Missouri farmer. He went to France during World War I as a captain in the Field Artillery. Returning, he married Elizabeth Virginia Wallace, and opened a haberdashery in Kansas City.

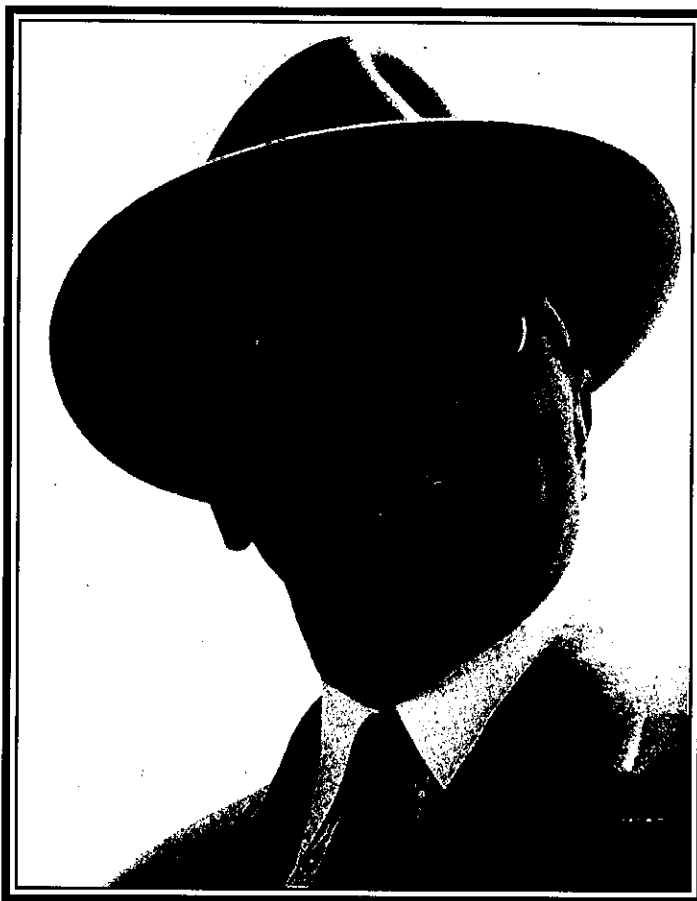
Active in the Democratic Party, Truman was elected a judge of the Jackson County Court (an administrative position) in 1922. He became a Senator in 1934. During World War II he headed the Senate war investigating committee, checking into waste and corruption and saving perhaps as much as 15 billion dollars.

As President, Truman made some of the most crucial decisions in history. Soon after V-E Day, the war against Japan had reached its final stage.

An urgent plea to Japan to surrender was rejected. Truman, after consultations with his advisers, ordered atomic bombs dropped on cities devoted to war work.

Two were Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Japanese surrender quickly followed.

In June 1945 Truman witnessed the signing of the charter of the United Nations, hopefully established to preserve peace.



Thus far, he had followed his predecessor's policies, but he soon developed his own. He presented to Congress a 21-point program, proposing the expansion of Social Security, a full-employment program, a permanent Fair Employment Practices Act, and public housing

and slum clearance. The program, Truman wrote, "symbolizes for me my assumption of the office of President in my own right." It became known as the Fair Deal.

Dangers and crises marked the foreign scene as Truman campaigned successfully in 1948. In foreign affairs he was already providing his most effective leadership. In 1947 as the Soviet Union pressured Turkey and, through guerrillas, threatened to take over Greece, he asked Congress to aid the two countries, enunciating the program that bears his name: the Truman Doctrine. The Marshall Plan, named for his Secretary of State, stimulated spectacular economic recovery in war-torn western Europe.

When the Russians blockaded the western sectors of Berlin in 1948, Truman created a massive airlift to supply Berliners until the Russians backed down. Meanwhile, he was negotiating a military alliance to protect Western nations, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, established in 1949.

In June 1950, when the Communist government of North Korea attacked South Korea, Truman conferred promptly with his military advisers. There was, he wrote, "complete, almost unspoken acceptance on the part of everyone that whatever had to be done to meet this aggression had to be done. There was no suggestion from anyone that either the United Nations or the United States could back away from it." A long, discouraging struggle ensued as U.N. forces held a line above the old boundary of South Korea.

Truman kept the war a limited one, rather than risk a major conflict with China and perhaps Russia.

Deciding not to run again, he retired to Independence. On December 26, 1972, after a stubborn fight for life, he died at age 88. ★

Dwight D. Eisenhower

Bringing to the Presidency his prestige as commanding general of the victorious forces in Europe during World War II, Dwight David Eisenhower obtained a truce in Korea and worked incessantly during his two terms to ease the tensions of the Cold War. He pursued the moderate policies of "Modern Republicanism," pointing out as he left office, "America is today the strongest, most influential, and most productive nation in the world."

Born in Texas in 1890, brought up in Abilene, Kansas, Eisenhower was the third of seven sons. He excelled in sports in high school, and received an appointment to West Point. Stationed in Texas as a second lieutenant, he met Mamie Geneva Doud, whom he married in 1916.

In his early Army career, he excelled in staff assignments, serving under Generals John J. Pershing, Douglas MacArthur, and Walter Krueger. After Pearl Harbor, General George C. Marshall called him to Washington for a war plans assignment. He commanded the Allied Forces landing in North Africa in November 1942; on D-Day, 1944, he was Supreme Commander of the troops invading France.

After the war, he became President of Columbia University, then took leave to assume supreme command over the new NATO forces being assembled in 1951. Republican emissaries to his headquarters near Paris persuaded him to run for President in 1952.

"I like Ike" was an irresistible slogan; Eisenhower won a sweeping victory.

Negotiating from military strength, he tried to reduce the strains of the Cold War. In 1953, the signing of a truce brought an armed peace along the border of South Korea. The death of Stalin the same year caused shifts in relations with Russia.

New Russian leaders consented to a peace treaty neutralizing Austria. Meanwhile, both Russia and the United States had developed hydrogen bombs. With the threat of such destructive force hanging over the world, Eisenhower, with the leaders of the British, French, and Russian governments, met at Geneva in July 1955.

The President proposed that the United States and Russia exchange blueprints of each other's military establishments and "provide within our countries facilities for aerial photography to the other country." The Russians greeted the proposal with silence, but were so cordial throughout the meetings that tensions relaxed.

Suddenly, in September 1955, Eisenhower suffered a heart attack in Denver, Colorado. After seven weeks he left the hospital, and in February 1956 doctors reported his recovery. In November he was elected for his second term.

In domestic policy the President pursued a middle course, continuing most of the New Deal and Fair Deal programs, emphasizing a balanced budget. As desegregation of schools began, he sent troops into Little Rock, Arkansas, to assure compliance with the orders of a Federal court; he also ordered the complete desegregation

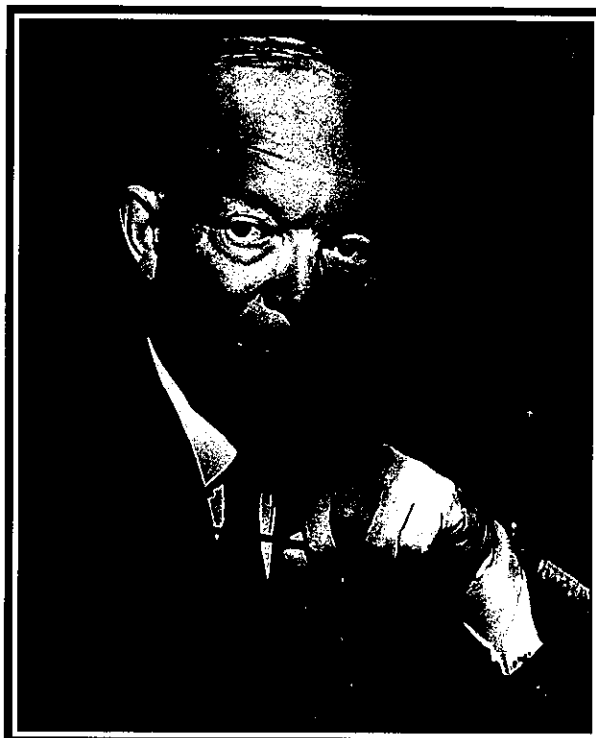
of the Armed Forces, a process which had been begun by President Truman. "There must be no second class citizens in this country," Eisenhower wrote.

Eisenhower concentrated on maintaining world peace. He watched with pleasure the development of his "atoms for peace" program—the loan of American uranium to "have not" nations for peaceful purposes.

Before he left office in January 1961 for his farm in Gettysburg, he urged the necessity of

maintaining an adequate military strength, but cautioned that vast, long-continued military expenditures could breed potential dangers to our way of life. He concluded with a prayer for peace "in the goodness of time." Both themes remained timely and urgent when he died, after a long illness, on March 28, 1969. ★

—Presidents' biographies courtesy of
whitehouse.gov.



Sir Winston Churchill

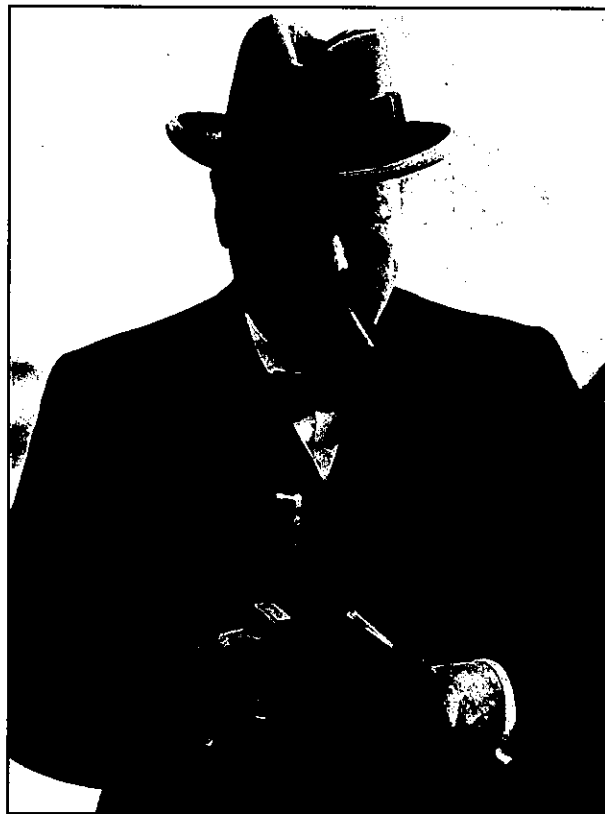
Sir Winston Churchill, born November 30, 1874, was the eldest son of British aristocrat Lord Randolph Churchill. He is best known for his stubborn yet courageous leadership as Prime Minister of Great Britain during World War II.

Following his graduation from the Royal Military College in Sandhurst, Churchill was commissioned in the Fourth Hussars in February 1895. As a war correspondent he was captured during the Boer War. After his escape he became a national hero. Ten months later he was elected to Parliament as a member of the Conservative Party. In 1904 he joined the Liberal Party, becoming president of the Board of Trade.

In 1910 he became Home Secretary, and in 1911 First Lord of the Admiralty. His career was almost destroyed when he was forced to resign as a result of the unsuccessful Gallipoli campaign during World War I. Nevertheless, he returned to government in 1917 as the Minister of Munition, joining the Coalition Party. He returned to the Conservative government in 1924 and was given the job of Chancellor of the Exchequer.

For ten years during the Depression Churchill was denied cabinet office. His support for King Edward VIII during his abdication was frowned upon by the national

British Prime Minister Winston Churchill was perhaps the most important of many White House visitors served by chief butler Alonzo Fields.



government. In September 1939, however, when Nazi Germany declared war on Poland, the public supported Churchill's views. Once again he was appointed First Lord of the Admiralty.

In 1940 Churchill succeeded Neville Chamberlain as Prime Minister. During World War II he successfully secured military aid and moral support from the United States. He traveled endlessly throughout the war, establishing close ties with leaders of other nations and coordinating military strategies which ultimately ensured Hitler's defeat.

Churchill's tireless efforts gained admiration from all over the world. He was defeated in the 1945 election, however, by the Labour party who ruled until 1951. Churchill regained power in 1951 and led Britain once again until 1955, when ill health forced him to resign. He spent much of his latter years writing (*The History of the English-Speaking People*) and painting. In recognition of his historical studies he received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1953; in 1963 the US Congress conferred on him honorary American citizenship.

In 1965, at the age of 90, he died of a stroke. His death marked the end of an era in British History.

—adapted from Verlag Norbert Schrepf

Questions for Critical Thinking

•This season the IRT is producing four plays which are based to some extent on historic events: *Alonzo*, *Looking over the President's Shoulder*, *The Color of Justice*, and *Julius Caesar*. Each of these plays treats its historical subject matter with varying degrees of accuracy. Are you familiar with other plays based on history?

What is the playwright's obligation when there is a conflict between historic accuracy and dramatic interest? How might this obligation vary based upon the playwright's intentions or our distance from the events depicted? When would you consider it to be definitely wrong to "bend" facts for dramatic interest? When might it be more acceptable?

•Alonzo Fields was neither rich nor famous; his name appears in few history books. Yet he provided significant service to the President and the country. What other little-known figures from the past or present can you think of who have an interesting story to tell? What person or persons have you known yourself who might be an interesting subject for a play? What is it about these people that makes them interesting?

•Alonzo Fields ended up spending his life doing something very different from what he had planned. Do you know other persons, either famous or historical or in your own life, who have had similar experiences? Were they disappointed or pleasantly surprised (or both)? How did they handle this aspect of life?

•Choose a figure from history or from your own life. How would you create a play about that person's life? What kind of research would you do? Would your play have just one actor or more? Would your play try to cover the character's entire life or only one particular aspect of that life? What actors can you think of who could play your principal character?

•This is a play which takes place in many different locations and which covers a long period of time. What are the challenges of designing scenery for such a play? What might be various solutions to these challenges? After seeing the IRT production, how effective did you find the scenic designer's choices? How did lighting help to meet these challenges?

•What do you know about American and world history between 1931 and 1953? What other plays or movies have you seen which take place during this time period? As you watch the play, how does your knowledge of historic events affect your reaction to the play?

•What do you imagine might be the special challenges to a playwright in creating a one-man-show? What special challenges might the actor face?

•Describe the performance of the actor in this play. Which moments were especially powerful for you? What made them so?

•Did you find any particular moments of this production to be memorable for you? Describe them and explain what made them so. Did you find yourself responding to certain aspects of the production more strongly than others? Text? Performance? Music? Visual design elements? Plot? How did your experience of this production compare to that of others? How do you explain the similarities or differences?

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Upcoming Student Matinees

A Christmas Carol • Student Matinees Sold Out
Sister Carrie • January 16, 22, 25, 30
The Color of Justice • Tuesday-Friday, Jan. 30 - March 1
Art • February 20
Agnes of God • April 10
Julius Caesar • Tuesday-Friday, April 3 - May 10
Ah, Wilderness! • April 30, May 1, 2, 3, 8

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