

Who is I. King Jordan?

Name _____ Class · period _____ Date _____

THE SHORT VERSION

Irving King Jordan (1943–present) became deaf at 21 after a motorcycle accident. In 1988, after the Deaf President Now protests shut down the campus, he became the first Deaf president of Gallaudet University in its almost 125-year history.

EARLY LIFE

A class clown, the Navy, and an accident that changed everything

01 CHILDHOOD AND THE NAVY

01 While growing up near Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Jordan was a class clown and his focus tended to gravitate towards socializing instead of his schooling.

02 Jordan joined the U.S. Navy, and even with his playful attitude, he had great success with them, earning multiple jobs in his time with the Navy.

He still held onto his youthful excitement by riding motorcycles and dancing at nightclubs during his time in the Navy, even though he became more disciplined.

02 THE ACCIDENT

01 Jordan's life was forever altered in a motorcycle accident that occurred when he was 21 years old. The accident caused him to remain in hospital care for over a year, and doctors didn't believe that he would survive the crash. They agreed that if he did, they thought he would be left in a coma. However, the only long term issue that he faced was losing his hearing.

03 AFTER THE ACCIDENT

01 After the crash, Jordan enrolled in Gallaudet University, which was a barrier-free institution for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing.

During the beginning of his time spent at Gallaudet, Jordan was introduced to a new world, and faced new struggles. He felt as if he was an outsider, unable to communicate with the other Deaf students, yet he did not feel accepted by hearing people. He was caught between two worlds.

- 02 His limbo between the two worlds could have been what helped him notice the injustices that took place at Gallaudet. Although the student population was Deaf, many of the employees of the university were hearing. This led to many of the hearing individuals in charge making condescending remarks, or treating the students as lesser people.

04 AFTER GALLAUDET, AND RETURNING

- 01 After graduating from Gallaudet, Jordan went on to earn a Ph.D. in psychology at the University of Tennessee, reading to fill in the gaps left by verbal lectures.
- 02 When he received his Ph.D., Jordan returned to Gallaudet and became an assistant professor of psychology. After several promotions, Jordan became the dean of the College of Arts and Sciences.

DEAF PRESIDENT NOW

Three finalists, a campus shut down, and a decision reversed

05 THE PROTESTS

- 01 In the late 1980s, Gallaudet University was seeking a new president. There were three finalists, one hearing and two Deaf. I. King Jordan was one of the Deaf candidates.
- There had never been a Deaf president in Gallaudet's almost 125 years of existence.
- 02 Despite student rallies in support of a Deaf president, the school's board eventually chose the hearing candidate.
- This caused the rallies to become protests as the students began to shut down the campus by blocking the entrances and boycotting classes.
- Eventually, students marched to Pennsylvania Avenue, heading towards the White House, and Jordan was caught between two worlds once again. While at first he believed he should support the university, he announced his stand with the students. In the end, a board member and the new president resigned, making I. King Jordan the first Deaf president of Gallaudet.

06 I. KING JORDAN'S IMPACT

- 01 The Deaf President Now (DPN) protests brought important national attention to the Deaf community, causing society to reflect more on the rights of Deaf people.
- After this exposure, Jordan was in a better place to become a spokesman for the Deaf, and he spent much of his time as president speaking on behalf of the community, and focused on employment opportunities.
- Jordan remained president of Gallaudet until 2006.
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- 02** Jordan has been recognized with many honorary degrees and awards, including serving on the *Commission on Presidential Scholars* during the Obama administration.
- 03** “What can Deaf people do — even with a college degree?” an interviewer asked. Jordan’s answer became the line he is best known for:

Deaf people can do anything except hear.

I. KING JORDAN

07 NAMES AND TERMS TO KNOW

NAME OR TERM	WHY IT MATTERS IN THIS STORY
Deaf President Now (DPN)	The 1980s student protests at Gallaudet that shut down the campus and brought national attention to Deaf rights.
Gallaudet University	The barrier-free institution Jordan enrolled in after his accident, later taught at, and eventually led.
“Caught between two worlds”	How Jordan described feeling as a new Deaf student, and again during the protests.
Commission on Presidential Scholars	One of the national roles Jordan was recognized with, during the Obama administration.
2006	The year Jordan stepped down after eighteen years as president of Gallaudet.

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

Answer in complete sentences using what you read

08 WRITTEN RESPONSE

- 01** How did Jordan become deaf, and how old was he?

02 Jordan said he was “caught between two worlds” at Gallaudet. What did he mean?

03 What injustice did Jordan notice at Gallaudet, and why might his position have helped him see it?

04 What did the students do after the board chose the hearing candidate?

05 At first Jordan believed he should support the university, then he changed his position. What did he decide, and why do you think it mattered?

06 “Deaf people can do anything except hear.” Using two other people from this packet, explain what Jordan meant.

09 WHERE THIS INFORMATION COMES FROM

I. King Jordan interview *Ability Magazine*

Extraordinary People with Disabilities Deborah Kent and Kathryn Quinlan

“Jordan” Ken Adelman

I. King Jordan biography Gallaudet University · gallaudet.edu

“I. King Jordan: Reflections on a Changing Culture” Joseph Shapiro and Vikki Valentine · NPR