

## Biography

Many nations of the Middle East were occupied by foreign powers for centuries. By the mid-1900s, people were demanding independence. Egypt, under British rule since 1882, declared its independence in 1922. British troops, however, remained in Egypt. Future president Gamal Abdel Nasser, a military leader at the time, emerged to lead Egypt to true independence. ♦ As you read, consider the circumstances that made Egypt ready for Nasser's leadership. Then on a separate sheet of paper, answer the questions that follow.

### Gamal Abdel Nasser (1918–1970)

Gamal Abdel Nasser was born to a lower-middle class family in Alexandria, Egypt. As a child, Nasser was beaten and then arrested by British soldiers when he took part in a protest against foreign rule. Later, in high school, he was expelled for leading student demonstrations against the British.

Nasser attempted to radically change Egyptian society by accelerating the pace of land reform and industrialization. He also granted women the right to vote. He viewed himself as the natural leader of Arab countries and was vocal in his opposition to the existence of Israel. In 1967, increasing tensions between Arabs and Israelis led Nasser to close the Gulf of Aqaba to Israeli shipping. As a result, Israel launched an assault on Egypt that became known as the Six-Day War. The Israeli army occupied the Sinai all the way to the Suez Canal, and Egypt lost the war.



Nasser, about 1964

Nasser entered the national military academy in 1937. While in the army, he developed close ties to Anwar Sadat and others who became part of the Free Officers Society. This secret revolutionary group was determined to oust the British and overthrow Egypt's royal family. In 1952, the Free Officers staged the revolt that toppled Egypt's King Farouk. Nasser became prime minister in 1954. He was elected president two years later. He negotiated a treaty with the British under which British troops left Egypt after more than 70 years of occupation. The British, however, still occupied the Suez Canal zone.

The loss to Israel was a humiliating defeat. Nasser offered his resignation, but the Egyptian government refused to accept it. Although he was in power for three more years, Nasser's influence was weakened. On September 28, 1970, he died of a heart attack. Nasser's leadership helped renew Arab national pride and remains his legacy to the Arab people.

## Questions to Think About

1. What were the aims of the Free Officers Society that Nasser formed?
  2. What were some of Nasser's accomplishments?
3. **Draw Conclusions** Why do you think Nasser is so important to the Egyptian people and is remembered as a hero?