Daniel Webster was born to a poor family in New Hampshire. Despite their lack of wealth, Webster's parents valued education and sent him to some of the finest schools.

As a child Webster struggled with public speaking. In his time school children were required to stand and speak when giving an answer in class. Webster was terrified of this. It was not until he attended Dartmouth College that he developed his reputation as one of the finest orators in the history of the United States. In fact, he was asked to deliver an important Independence Day speech shortly after his graduation in 1801.

Webster's speaking skills served him well as he ventured into politics. After working as a lawyer he became a leader of the Federalist Party. He served two terms in the House of Representatives and then served in the Senate. When the Federalist Party disbanded, Webster found himself a member of the National Republican Party. He believed in a strong federal government and defended the tariff that the South opposed. Although he and President Andrew
Jackson disagreed on many issues, Webster joined
Jackson in defeating South Carolina's attempts to
nullify the tariff.

Later in life Webster served twice as Secretary
of State. He was first named to that post under
William Henry Harrison, but he held the position
after Harrison died in office and John Tyler became
president.

As Secretary of State for President Millard
Fillmore, Webster supervised the enforcement
of the Fugitive Slave Act. He also argued for the
Compromise of 1850. This position angered the
North, but prevented the South from seceding from
the Union at the time. Webster realized this would
damage his own popularity in the North and with
his own party, but he was determined to save the
Union at any cost. Many historians believe this is
the reason Webster was never elected president.

In 1852 Webster died from an injury he received
after falling from his horse. The writer Ralph Waldo
Emerson wrote that Webster was "a man within and
without, the strong and perfect body of the first
ages, with the civility and thought of the last."

WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

1. Compare and Contrast  How did Daniel Webster and Andrew Jackson differ in
their views? How were they alike?

2. Expressing and Supporting a Point of View  Do you agree with Webster's decision
to try to reach a compromise to prevent secession? Why or why not?

ACTIVITY

You are a speech writer. Write a speech for or against preserving the
Union. Use colorful quotes from historical figures in your speech.