



James A. Garfield | Lesson Plan

How did James A. Garfield rise from poverty to become the 20th President of the United States, and what were his contributions to American society?

Students will understand how James Garfield overcame personal challenges to become president and how his leadership skills and commitment to civil rights shaped his brief presidency.

Learning Objectives:

- Identify the key life events of James Garfield.
- Explain how James Garfield's policies and actions aimed to protect the rights of African-Americans and promote civil service reform.
- Compare the key hardships and achievements that defined James Garfield's presidency.
- Evaluate James Garfield's contributions to American society and his potential impact had he lived longer.

Key Vocabulary:

- **Patronage:** Appointing people to government positions as a reward for political support.
- **Civil Service:** The permanent professional branches of a government's administration.
- **Reconstruction:** The period after the Civil War aimed at rebuilding the United States and integrating newly freed African-Americans into society.
- **Ambidextrous:** Able to use both hands equally well.
- **Radical Republican:** A faction within the Republican Party that advocated for strong measures to end slavery and promote African-American rights.

Educational Standards: CCRA.R.7, CCRA.W.2, CCRA.W.4, CCRA.W.9, CCRA.L.1, CCRA.L.2, CCRA.L.4, CCRA.SL.1, CCRA.SL.2

Academic Subject Areas: Biography, U.S. Presidents, Historical Figures

What You'll Need

- Video: *Guess or Mess: James Garfield* (Watch [Here](#))
- Worksheet: *Guess or Mess: James Garfield* (Click [Here](#))
- PragerU Kids biographical book: *James A. Garfield* (Download [Here](#))
- Large paper or poster board for each group, along with markers

Lesson Plan: Read and Discuss (60 minutes)

Introduction to Garfield: (5 minutes)



1. Begin with a brief discussion about U.S. presidents and the qualities that make a great leader. Ask students if they know any presidents who were known for overcoming personal challenges.
2. Display the *James A. Garfield* digital book using an electronic device. Briefly highlight Garfield's significance as the 20th president, his rise from poverty, and his efforts to protect civil rights and promote government reform. Show images from the digital book to provide a visual overview of his life and achievements.

Garfield History Huddle: (25 minutes)

1. Read the "Meet James A. Garfield" section on page 2 together as a class, with the teacher leading this page to model fluent reading and set the tone for the lesson.
2. After completing the teacher-led reading, explain that students will now explore other key aspects of Garfield's life in small groups.
3. Split the class into small groups and assign each group a different section of the digital book to explore:
 - Group 1: *Young James, Interesting Facts* (page 3)
 - Group 2: *Early Career, Rise to Power* (pages 4-5)
 - Group 3: *1880 Election, Assassination* (pages 6- 7)
 - Group 4: *Legacy* (page 8)
4. Allow time for each group to read their assigned section, taking turns reading aloud. As students read, they should discuss the main ideas.
5. Provide each group with a large piece of paper or a poster board and markers to write down key points and any interesting facts or quotes they find.
6. Allow each group one to two minutes to present their findings to the class. After each presentation, provide time for classmates to ask questions and discuss the content.

Worksheet Workshop: (15 minutes)

1. Hand out individual copies of the worksheet to each student. Explain how to fill out each section of the worksheet with these instructions:
2. **Timeline:** Students should select key dates and events mentioned throughout the digital book. The following are recommendations, but the teacher and students can use many other dates mentioned in the book:
 - 1831 - Birth of James Garfield
 - 1862 - Elected to the U.S. House of Representatives
 - 1880 - Elected President
 - 1881 - Assassination of Garfield
3. **Interesting Quote:** Have students choose a meaningful quote from the book to fill in the quote section on their worksheet.
4. **Interesting Fact:** Ask students to select an interesting fact about James Garfield that stood out to them and write it in the space provided.
5. **Vocabulary Builder:** Instruct students to choose a word from the Glossary on page 14 that they find interesting and use it in a sentence that conveys its meaning.

6. **Multiple Choice:** Explain that students should complete the multiple-choice section of the worksheet individually. (Note: The multiple-choice section corresponds to the *Guess or Mess* episode about Herbert Hoover and can also be used to play along while watching. See “Extension Activity” below.)

Reflection Round-Up: (10 minutes)

1. Briefly summarize the key points covered about James Garfield, focusing on his life, presidency, and legacy.
2. **Think-Pair-Share:** Ask students to recall one fact about James Garfield and share it with a partner. Encourage them to discuss why that fact was significant.
3. Give each student a sticky note or index card and ask them to answer one of these three sample reflection questions:
 - What did you find most interesting about James Garfield?
 - How do you think his presidency could have impacted the United States had he lived longer?
 - Can you think of a modern issue that relates to something Garfield dealt with?
4. **Bonus Activities:** If time allows, allow students to complete the puzzle on page 2 by finding hidden letters throughout the book. They can also explore and engage with other interactive activities included in the book.

Extension Activity: (20 minutes)

Guess or Mess Trivia Show: After the lesson, students can participate in the *Guess or Mess* trivia show for James Garfield—direct students to the multiple-choice section of the worksheet. Students can play along with the contestants to see if they can answer the trivia questions correctly.

PragerU 5-Minute Videos:

Did you know that PragerU has a comprehensive video catalog of U.S. Presidents in an easy-to-watch 5-minute format? Enhance this lesson plan with one of our insightful, engaging, and educational videos, which provide students with a deeper dive into the lives and legacies of America’s leaders. To view *James A. Garfield: The Great President Who Never Was*, click [here](#).

Don’t have time for a full lesson? Quick Activity (30 minutes)

Read the *James A. Garfield* book together as a class, with students taking turns reading aloud. Then, watch the *Guess or Mess* video and play along with the trivia questions.