



## Franklin Pierce | Lesson Plan

How did Franklin Pierce's leadership and decisions contribute to the growing division in the United States?

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Students will understand how Franklin Pierce's presidency influenced the nation during a time of rising tensions over slavery. They will explore his personal tragedies, political challenges, and the impact of his decisions on the path to the Civil War.

### Learning Objectives:

- Identify the key life events of Franklin Pierce.
- Explain how Franklin Pierce's presidency influenced the growing divide over slavery in the United States.
- Compare the key hardships and key achievements of Franklin Pierce that shaped his presidency.
- Evaluate Franklin Pierce's leadership skills and decisions in the context of the pre-Civil War era.

### Key Vocabulary:

- **Doughface:** A term used in the 19th century to describe Northern politicians who supported Southern interests, especially slavery.
- **Kansas-Nebraska Act:** A law that allowed residents of Kansas and Nebraska to decide whether to allow slavery, which led to violence and division.
- **Popular Sovereignty:** The idea that the people of a territory should decide whether to allow slavery.
- **Bleeding Kansas:** A series of violent conflicts in Kansas between pro-slavery and anti-slavery settlers.
- **Recluse:** A person who lives a solitary life and avoids other people, describing Jane Pierce's life in the White House.
- **Civil War:** A war between citizens of the same country; in this context, referring to the American Civil War.

**Educational Standards:** CCRA.R.1, CCRA.R.2, 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, Pre-Civil War America

### What You'll Need

- *Video:* *Guess or Mess: Franklin Pierce* (Watch [Here](#))
- *Worksheet:* *Guess or Mess: Franklin Pierce* (Click [Here](#))
- *PragerU Kids biographical book:* *Franklin Pierce* (Download [Here](#))

Scan to watch episode:



- Large paper or poster board for each group, along with markers

## Lesson Plan: Read and Discuss (60 minutes)

### Introduction to Franklin Pierce: (5 minutes)

1. Begin with a brief discussion about U.S. presidents who faced challenges during their leadership. Ask students if they know any presidents who had to deal with divisive issues like slavery.
2. Display the *Franklin Pierce* digital book using an electronic device. Briefly highlight Pierce's significance as the 14th president, his early success, personal tragedies, and how his presidency contributed to the nation's growing divide. Show images from the digital book to give a visual overview of his life and presidency.

### Pierce History Huddle: (25 minutes)

1. Read the "Meet Franklin Pierce" 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 Pierce'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 Franklin, Interesting Facts* (page 3)
  - Group 2: *Early Career* (page 4)
  - Group 3: *Mexican-American War, 1852 Presidential Election* (page 5)
  - Group 4: *Tragedy for the First Family, President* (pages 6-7)
  - Group 5: *Retirement, Legacy, Friends to the End* (pages 8-9)
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:
  - 1804 - Birth of Franklin Pierce
  - 1829 - Elected to New Hampshire House of Representatives
  - 1853 - Becomes President of the United States
  - 1854 - Signs the Kansas-Nebraska Act
  - 1869 - Death of Franklin Pierce

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 Franklin Pierce 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 9 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 Franklin Pierce 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 Franklin Pierce, focusing on his life, presidency, and legacy.
2. **Think-Pair-Share:** Ask students to recall one fact about Franklin Pierce 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 Franklin Pierce?
  - How do you think his presidency impacted the United States?
  - Can you think of a modern issue that relates to something Pierce 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 the 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 Franklin Pierce—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 that provide students with a deep dive into the lives and legacies of America’s leaders. To view *Franklin Pierce: A Torn President in a Torn Country*, click [here](#).

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

Read the *Franklin Pierce* 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.