

# presidents of the *United States of America*

"I was a popular politician from New Hampshire and served as the 14th President of the United States."

**Franklin Pierce**





# Become a Presidential Historian by Solving This Puzzle

In this magazine, you'll learn all sorts of facts about Franklin Pierce's amazing life and accomplishments. But there's still one last thing we need to know about him.

Almost every president has taken the oath of office while swearing on the Bible, but not Franklin Pierce. What did he use instead of the Bible? Your task is to help us uncover the answer! Hidden in the text are bolded letters. Read this magazine carefully to find them and fill the letters into the blanks below in the order they appear.



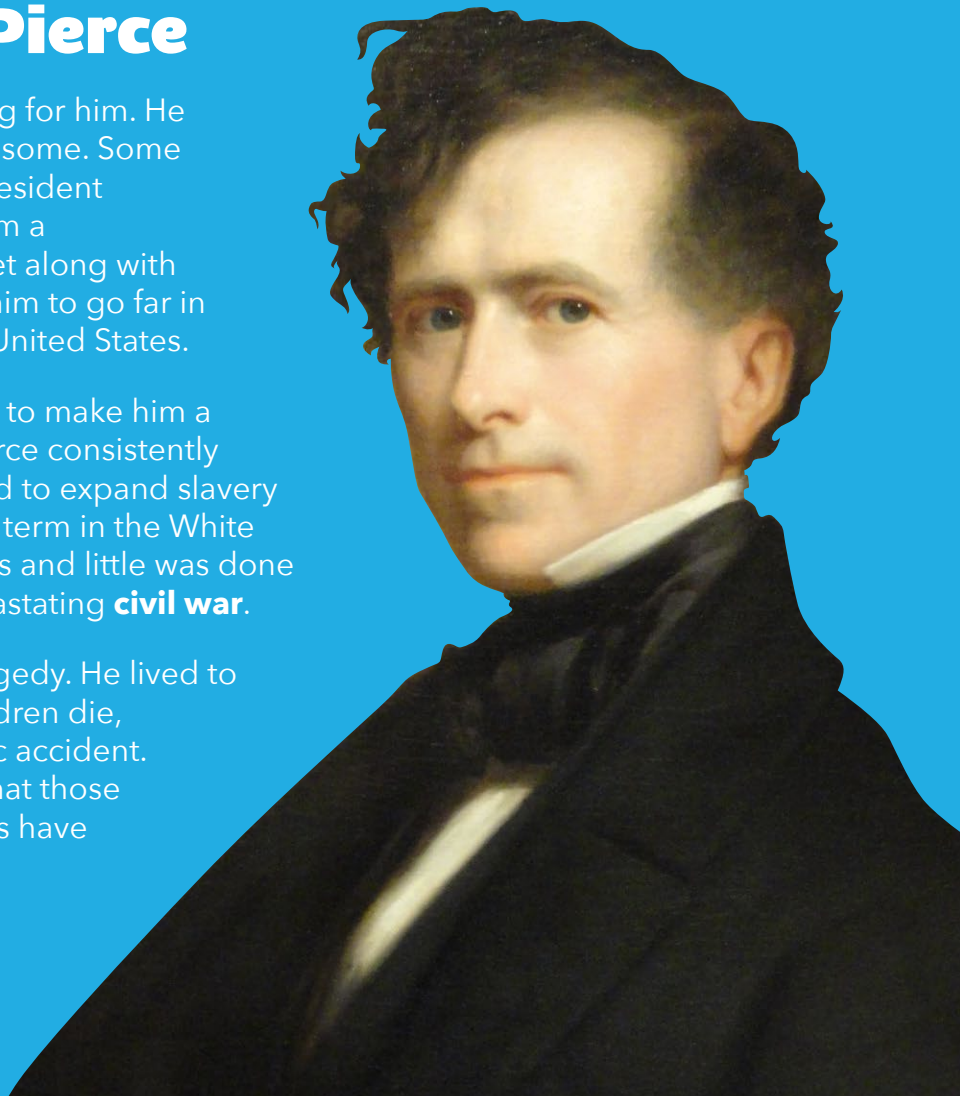
Once you've solved this puzzle, you'll be a true PragerU Kids presidential historian!

## Meet Franklin Pierce

Franklin Pierce had everything going for him. He was charming, intelligent, and handsome. Some have called him the handsomest president America has ever had. He came from a prominent family and seemed to get along with everyone. These qualities allowed him to go far in life, rising to the presidency of the United States.

Unfortunately, they weren't enough to make him a successful leader. **A**s president, Pierce consistently supported slaveholders who wished to expand slavery across the nation. During his single term in the White House, violence broke out in Kansas and little was done to avert what would become a devastating **civil war**.

Pierce's **l**ife was also marked by tragedy. He lived to see his wife and all three of his children die, including a son who died in a tragic accident. Franklin Pierce's story reminds us that those who seem to have it all don't always have a happy ending.



# Young Franklin

Franklin Pierce was born November 23, 1804 in Hillsborough, New Hampshire. He was the sixth child of Benjamin and Anna Pierce. His father was a veteran of the American Revolution and served under General George Washington at **Valley Forge**. Benjamin would also end up serving as the Governor of New Hampshire in the 1820s.

Young Franklin loved the outdoors and spent much of his childhood swimming, fishing, and ice skating. It was very easy to like Franklin - he was a sweet, polite boy. He attended local schools and, at the age of 12, was sent to a private academy.

When Franklin was 15, he began attending Bowdoin College in Maine. One of his classmates was Nathaniel Hawthorne, who had a talent for writing. Franklin enjoyed social life in college and had a lot of fun with his friends. He also developed strong public speaking skills.

## Interesting Facts

- He is the only president from the state of New Hampshire (as of 2023).
- He was a member of the Democratic Party.
- He was a classmate and lifelong friend of the famous writer Nathaniel Hawthorne (author of *The Scarlet Letter*).
- His good looks earned him the nickname "Handsome Frank."
- He delivered his entire inaugural address from memory, without reading from a script or notes.

Franklin Pierce's Childhood Home





## Early Career

Pierce's skills made him a natural in politics. He was a strong supporter of President Andrew Jackson and his vision of a more democratic country. Like Jackson, Pierce believed the common man, not the elites, should govern. Pierce was elected as a Democrat in New Hampshire's House of Representatives in 1829 at the age of 24. Three years later, Pierce was elected to the U.S. Congress, where he served until 1842, first as a representative and then as a senator.

During this time, he married a shy, devout woman named Jane Appleton, the daughter of Bowdoin College's president. They would have three children. Sadly, none of them would live to adulthood.

While in Congress, Pierce strongly opposed the **abolition** movement. Even though he was a Northerner, he was close to many Southern politicians who wanted to expand slavery.

Pierce and his wife didn't enjoy Washington, and they left the Senate to go **back** home to New Hampshire. For the next several years, Pierce was one of the top lawyers in the state. At the time, many people watched court cases as a form of entertainment. Pierce's speaking abilities attracted large audiences.



### Quote

*"I rely confidently on the patriotism of the people."  
- December 1855*



## Mexican-American War

After the Mexican-American War broke out in 1846, President James Polk commissioned Pierce a brigadier general in charge of 2,000 soldiers. Hoping for military glory, Pierce led his men to join forces with General Winfield Scott on Mexican territory. At the Battle of Contreras in August 1847, however, Pierce suffered a major leg injury when he fell off of his horse. As a result, he missed his chance to become a true war hero. Some of his political opponents would later criticize him for acting cowardly, even though the injury was just an unfortunate accident.



## 1852 Presidential Election

Despite Pierce's disappointing war experience, he was still a prominent political leader in New Hampshire. By the 1850s, the country was divided over the issue of slavery, with many Northerners hoping to prevent its spread into the new territories won during the war. By contrast, Southerners hoped slavery would expand. The Democratic Party had strong support in the pro-slavery South, but they realized that if they nominated a Northerner, they might be able to win over new voters and take the presidency.

Franklin Pierce was the Democrats' dream candidate, because he was a Northerner who agreed with them on slavery. These types of politicians were called "**doughfaces**." The Democrats nominated him for the presidency in 1852 to oppose his old commander Winfield Scott, the Whig Party's candidate. In November, Pierce won the presidency by a comfortable margin.

# Tragedy for the First Family

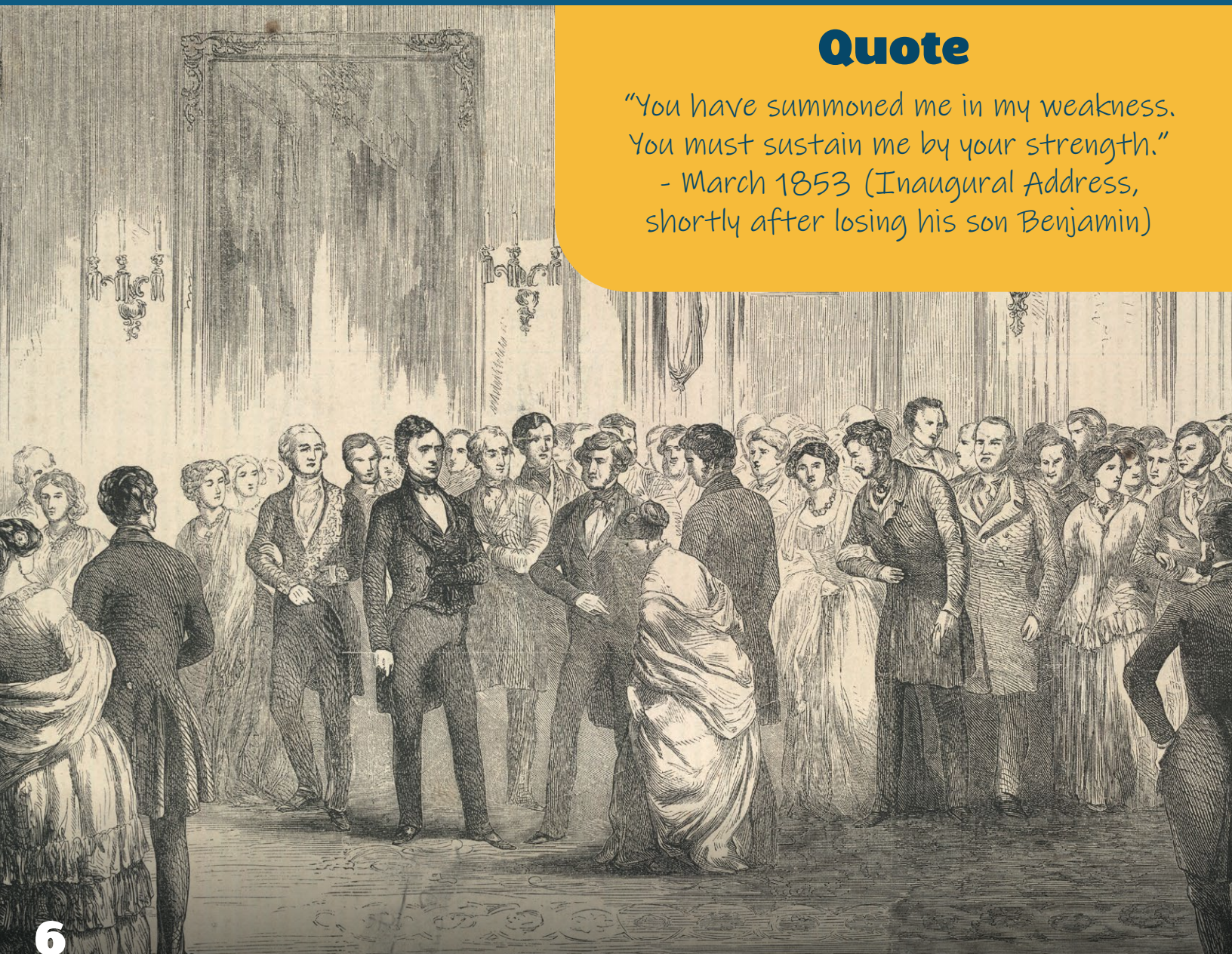
In January of 1853, a couple months after the election and before inauguration day, the Pierces suffered a devastating loss. After they and their 11-year-old son Benjamin boarded a train in Massachusetts, their car derailed and tumbled over. Pierce and his wife survived, but Benjamin was killed.

Both parents were heartbroken, but Pierce had to carry on, since he was about to become the nation's leader. Meanwhile, Jane spent most of her husband's presidency as a **recluse** in the White House.



## Quote

*"You have summoned me in my weakness. You must sustain me by your strength."  
- March 1853 (Inaugural Address, shortly after losing his son Benjamin)*



# President

Slavery was the biggest issue of Pierce's presidency. Back in 1820, Congress banned slavery in a large part of the Midwest United States as part of the **Compromise of 1850**. Southerners, and Pierce, supported removing the ban, but the president feared that if he signed a bill, he would lose popularity in the North. Instead, he hoped the **Supreme Court** would settle the issue and allow slavery across the country.

Illinois Senator Stephen Douglas interfered with Pierce's plan when he proposed the **Kansas-Nebraska Act**, which would allow the people in the territories to decide whether to allow slavery. This idea, called **popular sovereignty**, meant the ban from 1820 was over. Although Pierce would have preferred the issue settled by the Court, he signed it into law. This enraged people who opposed slavery.

When the Midwestern territory of Kansas began holding elections, pro- and anti-slavery forces moved in and fought for control. Pierce supported the pro-slavery activists. Soon, violence broke out in the state, and the conflict would become known as **Bleeding Kansas**. It was a glimpse of what was to come in the future Civil War.

Pierce's support for slavery and the violence in Kansas destroyed his popularity. The Democrats rejected him as their nominee in 1856 and, instead, chose James Buchanan, who won the election that fall.

## Quote

*"With the Union my best and dearest earthly hopes are entwined."  
- March 1853 (Inaugural Address)*

### KANSAS-NEBRASKA ACT, 1854.





## Retirement

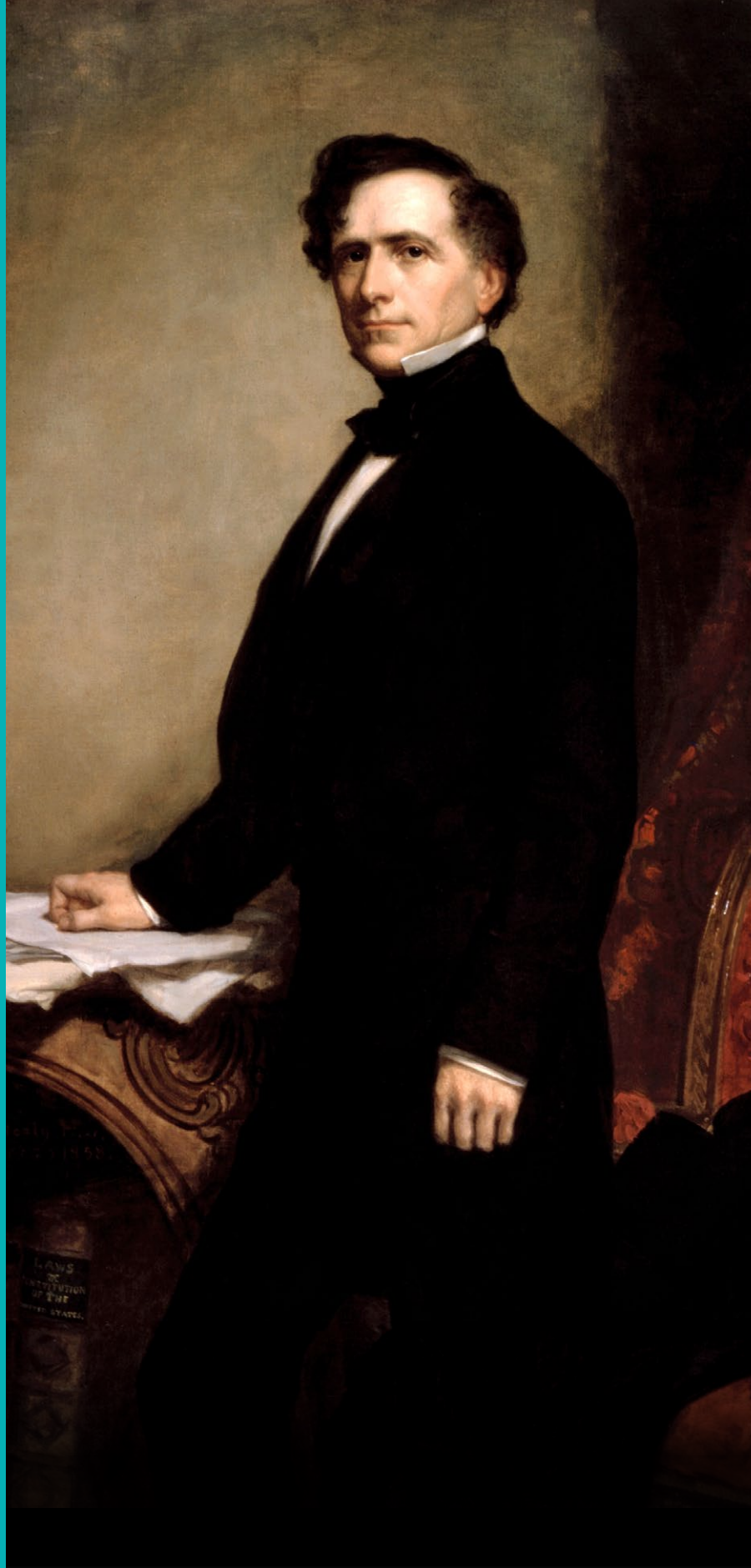
When Pierce's term ended, he and Jane moved out of the White House and back to New Hampshire. When the Civil War broke out in 1861, Pierce was torn. He felt the North had provoked the war, but he also hoped the **Union** would be preserved. He also opposed Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation, freeing the slaves in the South. Some Northerners believed that Pierce was no better than a traitor.

These were hard times for Pierce. In December of 1863, his wife Jane died of **tuberculosis**. Over the next few years, Pierce's health declined. He died on October 8, 1869 in Concord, New Hampshire at the age of 64.

## Legacy

Slavery was the most difficult issue in the early history of the United States. No American leader at the time was able to find a solution and unify the nation behind it. Ultimately, a terrible civil war would be fought to settle the matter.

Franklin Pierce is often criticized by historians for failing to prevent the war. Perhaps the issue was so complicated that no leader could have done so. Still, Pierce's consistent support for slavery can't be ignored. Although Pierce believed that his decisions would keep the nation together, most historians argue that he wasn't able to meet the challenges of the moment.



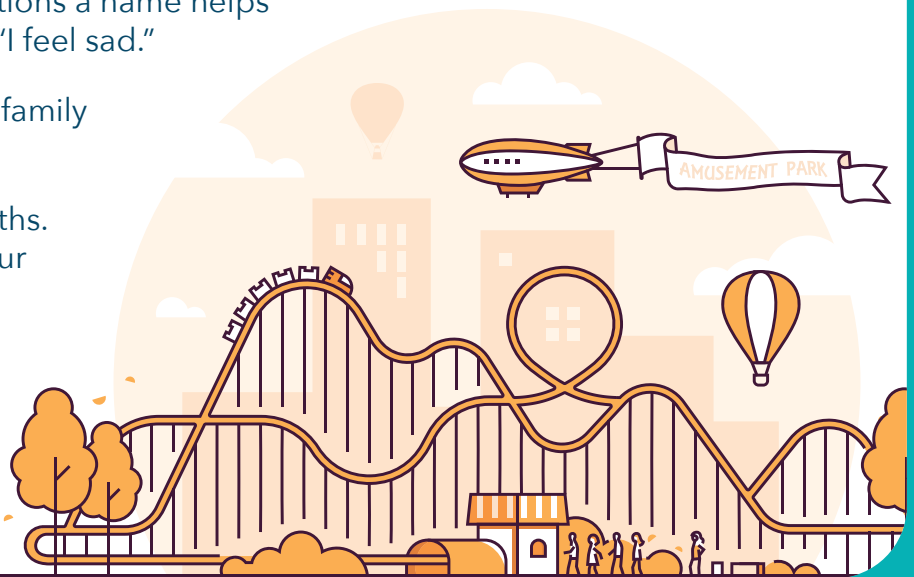


# Life is Full of Ups and Downs



Throughout Pierce's life, he experienced joy and sadness, success and loss. We all experience ups and downs during our lives. Whether you are going through happy times or hard times, here are some tips to help deal with the emotional rollercoaster called life.

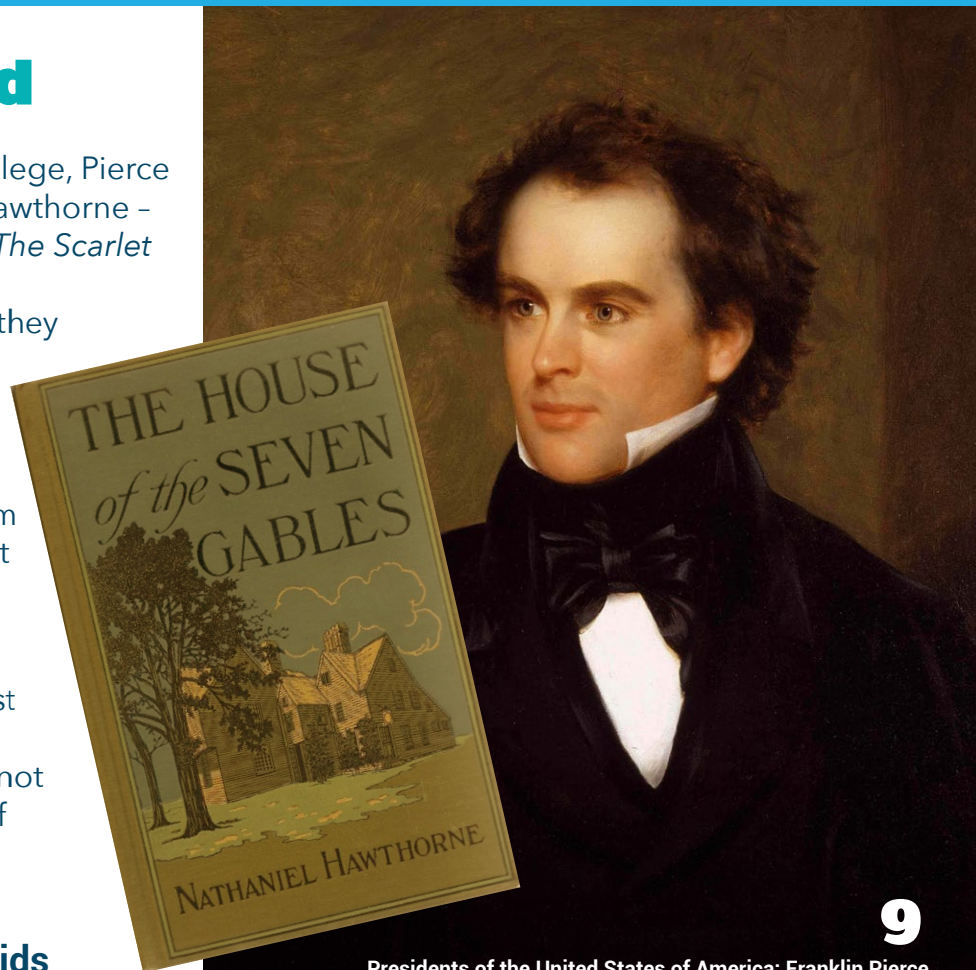
- 1. Name the feeling.** Giving your emotions a name helps you to identify what you are feeling. "I feel sad."
- 2. You're not alone!** Talk to a friend or family member about what you're feeling.
- 3. Breathe!** Take a few deep belly breaths. This can help you to calm down if your emotions get out of hand.
- 4. Keep a can-do attitude.** Don't give up. Remember that even if things didn't go well this time, life is full of opportunities. Next time, things can be better!



## Friends to the End

While he was a student at Bowdoin College, Pierce became close friends with Nathaniel Hawthorne - the future author of the famous books *The Scarlet Letter* and *The House of Seven Gables*. Throughout the ups and downs of life, they remained lifelong friends. When Pierce ran for president, Hawthorne wrote a biography of him to promote his campaign. As president, Pierce rewarded Hawthorne by appointing him as a diplomat to Great Britain, a job that paid the author well and allowed him much time to write.

When Hawthorne died in May 1864, just months after Jane's death, Pierce was devastated, writing to a friend, "I need not tell you how lonely I am, and how full of sorrow."



# Glossary

**Civil war:** A war between citizens of the same country.

**Valley Forge:** The location of the Continental Army's camps in the winter of 1777-78 during the American Revolution. Due to the lack of food and supplies, the winter at Valley Forge is remembered as a time of great suffering for the army.

**Abolition:** To end or stop something. In the 19th century in the United States, it referred to the elimination of the institution of slavery.

**Doughface:** A term used in the 19th century in America to describe a Northern politician who supported positions popular in the South, especially the expansion of slavery throughout the country. This was because those politicians were seen as moldable, or able to be manipulated and controlled like dough, by Southerners.

**Recluse:** A person who lives a solitary life and avoids other people.

**Compromise of 1850:** A series of laws passed by Congress and signed by President Millard Fillmore in 1850 to resolve issues related to slavery and land acquired in the Mexican-American War. The Compromise helped to delay the Civil War, but didn't resolve the underlying issue of slavery.

**Supreme Court:** The highest court in the United States. It currently consists of nine judges, all of whom are appointed by the president and confirmed by the U.S. Senate. Its main job is to interpret the Constitution and laws of the United States.

**Kansas-Nebraska Act:** A law in 1854 that allowed people living in the territories of Kansas and Nebraska to decide whether to have slavery there. It was based on the idea of popular sovereignty. The law angered people who were against slavery and contributed to the start of the Civil War.

**Popular sovereignty:** The idea from the 1850s in the United States that people should have the choice to allow slavery in the territory in which they live.

**Bleeding Kansas:** Violence that broke out in the territory of Kansas in the 1850s between people supporting and opposing slavery.

**Union:** The United States government during the Civil War that fought to prevent the Confederate states from seceding.

**Tuberculosis:** A bacterial disease that affects the lungs.

# Sources

Baker, Jean H. "Franklin Pierce." *Miller Center, University of Virginia*, <https://millercenter.org/president/pierce/>. Accessed 31 October 2022.

Holt, Michael F. *Franklin Pierce: The American Presidents Series: The 14th President, 1853-1857*. Times Books, 2010.

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## Answers:

WHAT FRANKLIN PIERCE USED  
INSTEAD OF THE BIBLE:  
A LAW BOOK

