



## James Polk | Lesson Plan

How did James Polk's presidency contribute to the expansion and development of the United States?

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Students will explore James Polk's pivotal role in expanding U.S. territory, his leadership during the Mexican-American War, and his influence on American politics. They will understand how Polk's decisions as the 11th President contributed to the growth of the nation and its emergence as a continental power.

### Learning Objectives:

- Identify the key life events of James Polk.
- Explain James Polk's contributions to the territorial expansion of the United States and his role in the Mexican-American War.
- Describe the impact of Polk's presidency on U.S. politics and territorial boundaries.
- Evaluate the significance of James Polk's leadership and his decision to fulfill all his presidential goals within a single term.

### Key Vocabulary:

- **Mexican-American War:** A conflict between the United States and Mexico (1846-1848) that resulted in significant U.S. territorial gains.
- **Manifest Destiny:** The 19th-century belief that the expansion of the U.S. across the American continent was both justified and inevitable.
- **Dark Horse:** A political candidate who is not well known but unexpectedly wins.
- **Annexation:** The addition of a territory to an existing country.
- **Legacy:** The contribution a person leaves behind for others after they leave office or die.

**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, Historical Figures, American Expansion

### What You'll Need

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

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

#### Introduction to Polk: (5 minutes)



1. Begin with a brief discussion about U.S. presidents and their roles in expanding the nation's territory. Ask students if they know any presidents who were involved in significant territorial changes or wars.
2. Display the James Polk digital book using an electronic device. Briefly highlight Polk's significance as the 11th president, his role in the Mexican-American War, and his expansion of the United States to the Pacific Ocean. Show images from the digital book to provide a visual overview of his life and achievements.

### **Polk History Huddle: (25 minutes)**

1. Read the "Meet James K. Polk" 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 Polk'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: *Rise to the Presidency, Speaker of the House* (page 4)
  - Group 3: *Dark Horse Candidate, President* (pages 5-6)
  - Group 4: *Mexican-American War, Retirement* (page 7)
  - Group 5: *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 other dates mentioned in the book:
  - 1795 - Birth of James Polk
  - 1845-1849 - Presidency
  - 1846-1848 - Mexican-American War
  - 1849 - Death of James Polk
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 Polk 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 10 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 James Polk 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 Polk, focusing on his life, contributions to U.S. territorial expansion, and his presidency.
2. **Think-Pair-Share:** Ask students to recall one fact about James Polk 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 Polk?
  - How do you think Polk's expansion policies impacted the United States?
  - Can you think of a modern issue that relates to something Polk dealt with?
4. **Bonus Activities:** If time allows, let students 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 Polk—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 K. Polk: Manifest Destiny*, click [here](#).

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

Read the *James Polk* 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.