



Chester A. Arthur Lesson Plan

How did Chester A. Arthur transform from a political insider associated with corruption to a reformer who fought against it?

Students will understand how Chester A. Arthur defied expectations during his presidency by supporting civil service reform and promoting integrity in government. They will also explore his contributions to building America's navy and his leadership style.

Learning Objectives:

- Identify the key life events of Chester A. Arthur.
- Explain how Chester A. Arthur's presidency marked a shift from political patronage to civil service reform.
- Compare the key hardships and key achievements of Chester A. Arthur that shaped his presidency.
- Evaluate Chester A. Arthur's leadership skills and decisions, which have impacted the United States' governance and navy.

Key Vocabulary:

- **Patronage:** The practice of giving government jobs to loyal supporters, often leading to corruption.
- **Civil Service Reform:** Changes in government employment policies to ensure jobs are given based on merit rather than political connections.
- **Pendleton Civil Service Act:** A law signed by Arthur that established that government jobs should be awarded based on merit.
- **Chinese Exclusion Act:** A law signed during Arthur's presidency that restricted Chinese immigration to the U.S.
- **Stalwarts:** A faction of the Republican Party that supported patronage and opposed civil service reform.

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

What You'll Need

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

Scan to watch episode:



Lesson Plan: Read and Discuss (60 minutes)

Introduction to Arthur: (5 minutes)

1. Begin with a brief discussion about U.S. presidents who are known for surprising the public with their actions. Ask students if they know any presidents who were not initially expected to be strong leaders but made significant contributions.
2. Display the *Chester A. Arthur* digital book using an electronic device. Briefly highlight Arthur's significance as the 21st president, his unexpected rise to leadership, and his efforts to reform government corruption. Show images from the digital book to give a visual overview of his life and achievements.

Arthur History Huddle: (25 minutes)

1. Read the "Meet Chester A. Arthur" 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 Arthur'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 Chester, Early Career* (page 3)
 - Group 2: *Rise to Power, Patronage* (page 4)
 - Group 3: *The 1880 Presidential Election, Assassination of Garfield* (page 5)
 - Group 4: *President, A Man of Fine Taste* (pages 6-7)
 - Group 5: *Retirement, 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:
 - 1829 - Birth of Chester A. Arthur
 - 1871 - Appointed Collector of the Port of New York
 - 1881 - Becomes President after Garfield's assassination
 - 1883 - Signs the Pendleton Civil Service Act
 - 1886 - Death of Chester A. Arthur
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 Chester A. Arthur 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 Chester A. Arthur 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 Chester A. Arthur, focusing on his life, presidency, and legacy.
2. **Think-Pair-Share:** Ask students to recall one fact about Chester A. Arthur 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 Chester A. Arthur?
 - How do you think his presidency impacted the United States?
 - Can you think of a modern issue that relates to something Arthur 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 Chester A. Arthur—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 *Chester Alan Arthur: The President Who Didn’t Want to Be President*, click [here](#).

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

Read the *Chester A. Arthur* 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.