



Martin Van Buren | Lesson Plan

How did Martin Van Buren help shape America's political landscape and navigate the challenges of his presidency?

Students will understand how Martin Van Buren played a key role in establishing the modern political party system and managed the economic challenges during his presidency. They will explore his contributions to American politics, his alliances with Andrew Jackson, and his controversial legacy.

Learning Objectives:

- Identify the key life events of Martin Van Buren.
- Explain Martin Van Buren's role in creating the modern political party system in America.
- Discuss the economic challenges Van Buren faced during his presidency, particularly the Panic of 1837.
- Evaluate Martin Van Buren's political strategies and their long-term impact on American democracy.

Key Vocabulary:

- **Political Party:** An organized group of people with similar political aims and opinions.
- **Panic of 1837:** A financial crisis in the United States that led to a severe economic depression.
- **Spoils System:** The practice of giving government jobs to political supporters after winning an election.
- **States' Rights:** The rights and powers held by individual states rather than the federal government.
- **Annex:** To incorporate a territory into a country.

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

Lesson Plan: Read and Discuss (60 minutes)

Introduction to Van Buren: (5 minutes)



1. Begin with a brief discussion about the development of political parties in the U.S. Ask students if they know why political parties were formed and what role they play.
2. Display the *Martin Van Buren* digital book using an electronic device. Briefly highlight Van Buren's significance as the 8th president, his role in creating the modern political party, and his presidency during a major economic crisis.

Van Buren History Huddle: (25 minutes)

1. Read the "Meet Martin Van Buren" section on page 2 together as a class, with the teacher leading to model fluent reading and set the tone for the lesson.
2. Split the class into small groups and assign each group a different section of the digital book to explore:
 - Group 1: *Young Martin, Interesting Facts* (page 3)
 - Group 2: *Early Career, National Leader* (page 4)
 - Group 3: *The Jackson Era* (page 5)
 - Group 4: *The 1836 Election, President* (page 6)
 - Group 5: *Retirement, Legacy, "OK!"* (pages 7-9)
3. Allow time for each group to read their assigned section, taking turns reading aloud. Students should discuss the main ideas.
4. 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.
5. 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 with these instructions:
2. **Timeline:** Students should select key dates and events mentioned throughout the digital book. Suggested dates:
 - 1782 - Birth of Martin Van Buren
 - 1837 - Becomes President
 - 1837-1841 - Presidency and the Panic of 1837
 - 1862 - Death of Van Buren
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 Martin Van Buren that stood out to them and write it in the space provided.
5. **Vocabulary Builder:** Instruct students to choose a word from the Glossary 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 Martin Van Buren 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 Martin Van Buren, focusing on his life, presidency, and legacy.
2. **Think-Pair-Share:** Ask students to recall one fact about Martin Van Buren 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 reflection questions:
 - What did you find most interesting about Martin Van Buren?
 - How do you think his presidency impacted the United States?
 - Can you think of a modern issue that relates to something Van Buren 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 Martin Van Buren—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 deeper dive into the lives and legacies of America’s leaders. To view *Martin Van Buren: Political Magician*, click [here](#).

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

Read the *Martin Van Buren* 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.