

Martin Van Buren

Pre-Reading

A. Warm-Up Questions

1. How was Martin Van Buren different from the first seven presidents?
2. Who was Andrew Jackson?
3. What was Van Buren's political relationship to Andrew Jackson?
4. What was the Panic of 1837?
5. What does the term "economic depression" mean?



B. Vocabulary Preview

Match as many meanings and words as you can before you read. Check this exercise again after seeing the words in context on page 2.

- | | |
|----------------------------|---|
| _____ 1. descent | a) a restaurant and bar |
| _____ 2. tavern | b) a serious bacterial disease that affects the lungs |
| _____ 3. inn | c) family origin |
| _____ 4. locals | d) not seen by the public |
| _____ 5. attorney | e) a hotel |
| _____ 6. tuberculosis | f) a group that works together for the same cause |
| _____ 7. widower | g) people who live in the neighborhood |
| _____ 8. congenial | h) a major problem |
| _____ 9. behind the scenes | i) the voting ballot |
| _____ 10. coalition | j) a long period of economic decline |
| _____ 11. ticket | k) a legal representative, a lawyer |
| _____ 12. crisis | l) a man whose spouse has died |
| _____ 13. depression | m) pleasant |

Reading

1. Martin Van Buren was the eighth president of the United States. He was born in 1782 in a New York town called Kinderhook. His mother and father were of Dutch **descent**. Martin's father was a tavern keeper. Martin spent a lot of time in his family's **tavern** as he was growing up. A tavern, in those days, was not just a place to drink. It was a restaurant, a town meeting place, and a place where people voted during elections. It was also an **inn** for travelers. Martin learned a lot in his father's busy tavern as he listened to **locals** and travelers discuss politics.
2. Martin Van Buren's practical education took place in his father's tavern, but his formal education took place in local schools. When he was fourteen, he decided to study law. First, he studied with a local **attorney**. Then, he finished his law studies in New York City. In 1803, he went back to Kinderhook and established a successful law practice with his half brother. In 1807, Martin married a distant cousin named Hannah. They had a very happy marriage. Sadly, in 1819, Hannah died of **tuberculosis**. Martin was left a **widower** with four sons. He never remarried.
3. Known for his organizational skills and **congenial** manner, Martin Van Buren rose quickly in politics. From 1815 to 1819, he served as state attorney general in New York. In 1821, he was elected to the US Senate. Van Buren also brought his formidable skills for organization to Washington. As a senator, he worked quietly and effectively **behind the scenes** to form political **coalitions**.
4. Van Buren had been a senator for three years when John Quincy Adams was elected president in 1824. Although Van Buren didn't like many of the new president's policies, he kept his criticism to himself. He set his sights on the 1828 election. Andrew Jackson, who had lost to Adams in 1824, was running for president again. Jackson asked Van Buren to be the chief organizer of his campaign. With tremendous popular support and a well-organized campaign, Jackson won the election. That year, Van Buren was also elected governor of New York. A few months later, President Jackson asked Van Buren to return to Washington to be his secretary of state. In 1832, Andrew Jackson won a second term as president. Van Buren was elected vice president on the Jackson **ticket**.
5. In 1836, Van Buren ran for president. The popular Andrew Jackson supported him fully. The Democratic Party, which Jackson and Van Buren had built, ran an excellent campaign and Van Buren won easily. President Van Buren planned to continue Jackson's policies. However, shortly after he took office, the Panic of 1837, a terrible financial **crisis**, struck. For five years, the US suffered the second worst **depression** in its history. Banks failed. Businesses closed. Many people lost their jobs, their houses, and their land. In 1840, Van Buren ran for a second term as president, but he was not re-elected.
6. Martin Van Buren is remembered as an unsuccessful president. However, he is also remembered as a very important politician in American history. Among other achievements, he helped to create the Democratic Party and the two-party system. In 1849, Van Buren returned to Kinderhook, New York. He died there in 1862.

"The less government interferes with private pursuits, the better for general prosperity."

—Martin Van Buren

Comprehension

A. True or False?

Read the statements below.

If the statement is true, write T beside the sentence.

If it is false, write F and correct the information in your notebook.

- _____ 1. Martin Van Buren was born in New York City.
- _____ 2. Martin Van Buren's grandparents were from Holland.
- _____ 3. Martin Van Buren's father was a busy politician.
- _____ 4. Martin Van Buren started studying law in New York City.
- _____ 5. Martin Van Buren established a law practice with a distant cousin.
- _____ 6. Van Buren's wife, Hannah, died soon after they married.
- _____ 7. Van Buren was the state attorney general of New York.
- _____ 8. Van Buren had a talent for forming political coalitions.

B. Ask & Answer

Practice asking and answering the following questions with your partner.

Then write your answers in complete sentences in your notebook.

1. How did Van Buren's upbringing help him in politics?
2. Where did Van Buren study law?
3. What skills and characteristics made Van Buren a good politician?
4. What was the most important political office that Van Buren held in New York?
5. When was Van Buren elected to the US Senate?
6. Why was the 1828 election important to Van Buren?
7. What role did Van Buren play in the election of 1828?
8. What offices did Van Buren hold in President Jackson's administration?
9. When did Van Buren become president?
10. What major events made Van Buren's presidency very difficult?

Vocabulary Practice

A. Odd One Out

Choose the word that fits each definition using the list to the right.

- _____ 1. someone who lives in a place that you're visiting
- _____ 2. a list of candidates endorsed by a political party
- _____ 3. an economic crisis that lasts a long time
- _____ 4. an old-fashioned word for a small hotel
- _____ 5. a man whose wife has died
- _____ 6. someone who seems to make supernatural things happen
- _____ 7. a place where people gather to drink and socialize
- _____ 8. groups that join together to achieve a goal
- _____ 9. a serious disease that especially affects your lungs
- _____ 10. a small animal known for being clever
- _____ 11. your family lineage
- _____ 12. things you have practiced and can do very well
- _____ 13. another word for lawyer
- _____ 14. a terrible situation with many problems
- _____ 15. someone who has a job taking care of something

Word List

- coalition
- tuberculosis
- a local
- crisis
- ticket
- depression
- inn
- widower
- magician
- tavern
- keeper
- attorney
- fox
- descent
- skills

Vocabulary Practice cont.

B. Complete the Sentences

Complete the sentences using vocabulary from the list to the right.

1. I felt like a _____ weight had been lifted from my shoulders.
2. She was a _____ opponent, so I was surprised that I won the tennis match.
3. I met a _____ historian who knows everything about the history of her town.
4. We finally found a _____ and inexpensive solution to the problem.
5. He is a very _____ host, and everyone enjoys his dinner parties.
6. She gave him a _____ wink, which made him trust her even less.
7. He's a _____ cousin on my father's side.
8. She's the _____ executive of a successful company.

Word List

- practical
- congenial
- sly
- local
- formidable
- tremendous
- distant
- chief

Discussion

1. "As to the presidency, the two happiest days of my life were those of my entrance upon the office and my surrender of it." Why do you think Van Buren said this? Use your knowledge of Van Buren's political career and presidency to answer.
2. Van Buren was known as an elegant dresser who enjoyed the finer things in life. Andrew Jackson was the first president who presented himself as the "common man." However, these two men were close friends and political allies. Why? What do you think they had in common?
3. During his political career, Van Buren was called "The Sly Fox" and "The Little Magician." Why do you think he was given those nicknames?
4. Van Buren said, "The people under our system, like the king in a monarchy, never dies." What kind of system is Van Buren talking about? Is Van Buren saying the same thing that the Founding Fathers said? Explain.

Answer Key

LESSON DESCRIPTION:

In this lesson, students read a short biography about the eighth US president. They review new vocabulary and compare Martin Van Buren to Andrew Jackson.

LEVEL: Int – Adv

TIME: 1–2 hours

TAGS: Martin Van Buren, American presidents, president, government, politics, Andrew Jackson, depression

Pre-Reading

A. WARM-UP QUESTIONS

1. Van Buren was the first president of Dutch descent (not of English or Scots-Irish descent). He was also the first president who was born a US citizen (not born under the British flag).
2. Andrew Jackson was the seventh president of the United States.
3. Jackson and Van Buren were political allies. Van Buren was the chief organizer of Jackson's campaign for the presidency. Van Buren and Jackson created the Democratic Party.
4. The Panic of 1837 was an economic crisis in the United States. It was the second worst depression in US history. It occurred soon after Van Buren took office as president.
5. An economic depression is a long period of time when there is little economic activity. In a depression, many businesses fail. People lose their jobs and can't find new ones.

B. VOCABULARY PREVIEW

- | | | | | | | |
|------|------|------|------|-------|-------|-------|
| 1. c | 3. e | 5. k | 7. l | 9. d | 11. i | 13. j |
| 2. a | 4. g | 6. b | 8. m | 10. f | 12. h | |

Comprehension

A. TRUE OR FALSE?

1. F – He was born in a New York village called Kinderhook.
2. T
3. F – His father was a tavern keeper.
4. F – He first started studying law with a local attorney in his town.
5. F – He started a law practice with his half brother. He married a distant cousin.

6. F – She died 12 years after they married.
7. T
8. T

B. ASK & ANSWER

1. In his youth, Van Buren learned a lot by listening to politicians and travelers discuss politics in his father's tavern.
2. He started studying law with a local attorney and finished his law studies in New York City.
3. Van Buren had a congenial personality. He also had excellent organizational skills and was good at forming coalitions.
4. He was elected governor of New York.
5. He was elected to the US Senate in 1821.
6. He did not like President John Adams's policies. Van Buren was a supporter of Andrew Jackson.
7. Van Buren was the chief organizer of Jackson's 1828 campaign for president.
8. Van Buren served as Jackson's secretary of state and his vice president.
9. He became president in 1836.
10. The Panic of 1837, and the depression that followed it, caused the most trouble for President Van Buren.

(continued on the next page...)

Answer Key cont.

Vocabulary Practice

A. ODD ONE OUT

- | | | |
|---------------|-----------------|--------------|
| 1. a local | 6. magician | 11. descent |
| 2. ticket | 7. tavern | 12. skills |
| 3. depression | 8. coalition | 13. attorney |
| 4. inn | 9. tuberculosis | 14. crisis |
| 5. widower | 10. fox | 15. keeper |

B. COMPLETE THE SENTENCES

- | | |
|---------------|--------------|
| 1. tremendous | 5. congenial |
| 2. formidable | 6. sly |
| 3. local | 7. distant |
| 4. practical | 8. chief |

Discussion

Use these questions for writing or speaking practice. For writing practice, you can assign one to each student or allow students to choose one. For speaking practice, discuss in groups or as a class.

SPELLING NOTE:

This lesson shows the American spelling of the words *Neighborhood*, *Travelers*, and *Practice*. Most other English-speaking countries spell these words this way: *Neighbourhood*, *Travellers*, and *Practise* (when used as a verb; *Practice* when used as a noun). Make it a challenge for your students to find these words in the lesson and see if they know the alternate spellings.