

Franklin Pierce

"I never justify, sustain, or in any way or to any extent uphold this cruel, heartless, aimless, unnecessary war."

—Franklin Pierce



Pre-Reading

A. Warm-Up Questions

1. What do you know about President Franklin Pierce?
2. Do you know what the most controversial issue of Pierce's presidency was?
3. What did the Compromise of 1850 have to do with Pierce's presidency?
4. What do you know about the Kansas–Nebraska Act?

B. Vocabulary Preview

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

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|--------------------|---|
| ___ 1. general | a) the legal profession |
| ___ 2. the bar | b) one part of an organization (or building) |
| ___ 3. maintain | c) likely to cause an argument |
| ___ 4. wing | d) to cancel or reverse |
| ___ 5. dark horse | e) an army commander |
| ___ 6. contentious | f) anger |
| ___ 7. hostility | g) to express a strong belief |
| ___ 8. repeal | h) an organ in the abdomen that cleans the blood |
| ___ 9. activist | i) a person who supports and promotes a cause or change |
| ___ 10. liver | j) a person who is unexpected to succeed |

Reading

1. Franklin Pierce was the 14th president of the United States. He was born in 1804 in New Hampshire. Franklin was born into a well-known family. His father, a Revolutionary War hero, served as governor of New Hampshire twice. His father was also a **general** in the state militia. As a boy, Franklin studied in local and preparatory schools. After he graduated from college, he entered law school. In 1827, Pierce was admitted to **the bar** and became a successful lawyer in Concord, New Hampshire.
2. In 1828, Franklin Pierce was elected to the New Hampshire legislature. From 1833 to 1842, Pierce served in the US Congress, in both the House of Representatives and the Senate. Pierce resigned from the Senate in 1842. He returned to New Hampshire to be with his family and to practice law again.
3. From 1846 to 1848, Pierce fought in the US–Mexican War. During the war, he rose from the rank of colonel to brigadier general. Many historians **maintain** that Pierce did very little of note during the war. However, he was regarded as a war hero when he returned to New Hampshire.
4. In 1852, the American Party, a **wing** of the Democrat Party, nominated Pierce for president. Pierce was a **dark horse** candidate. He had not been anyone’s first choice to run. He finally won the nomination on the 49th ballot. William King, a Southerner, was nominated for vice president to balance the ticket. Pierce and King won the election by a wide margin.
5. As president, Franklin Pierce inherited the most **contentious** issue of the mid-1800s—the question of the expansion of slavery into new territories. Two years before Pierce took office, the Compromise of 1850 had been passed in an effort to appease both the North and the South. However, the **hostility** between the two regions continued to grow. The North was still against the spread of slavery. The South still pushed for the right to bring slaves into new American lands.
6. In 1854, Congress passed the Kansas–Nebraska Act. The new law created the territories of Kansas and Nebraska and **repealed** the Missouri Compromise of 1820. It also allowed the people of new territories to decide the question of slavery by popular vote, known as “popular sovereignty.” The fight over slavery turned Kansas into a political and physical battleground. Thousands of pro and anti-slavery **activists** came to Kansas to vote “yes” or “no” on the question. Many pro-slavery people also crossed the border from Missouri to vote or cause trouble in Kansas. The two sides became extremely violent, and Kansas became known as “Bleeding Kansas.”
7. President Pierce supported the Kansas–Nebraska Act. He also enforced the Fugitive Slave Act, thus angering the anti-slavery North even more. Pierce was not nominated for a second term. In March of 1857, he went back to New Hampshire, where he returned to the practice of law.
8. In 1869, Franklin Pierce died of cirrhosis of the **liver**. He is remembered for his support of the South and of slavery. He is also remembered for his strong support of the Kansas–Nebraska Act and the Fugitive Slave Act, laws which increased tensions between the North and the South and pushed the nation closer to Civil War.

Comprehension

A. Timeline

Place the following in chronological order (1–10).

- _____ Franklin Pierce graduated from college.
- _____ Pierce was admitted to the bar.
- _____ Pierce fought in the US–Mexican War.
- _____ Franklin Pierce was first elected to Congress.
- _____ Pierce was elected to the New Hampshire legislature.
- 1 Franklin Pierce was born in 1804.
- _____ Pierce resigned from the Senate.
- _____ Pierce began to practice law in Concord, New Hampshire.
- _____ Pierce won the presidential election by a wide margin.
- _____ Pierce was nominated for president by the American Party.

B. Ask & Answer

Practice asking and answering the following questions with your partner. Then write your answers in complete sentences in your notebook.

1. What was Franklin Pierce’s first job?
2. What was Franklin Pierce’s highest rank in the US–Mexican War?
3. Which political party nominated Pierce for president?
4. Why was Pierce considered a “dark horse” candidate?
5. What was the most important and controversial issue of Pierce’s presidency?
6. Why had the Compromise of 1850 been passed?
7. How did the North and South feel about the spread of slavery into new territory?
8. What was the Kansas–Nebraska Act?
9. Why did activists from the North and the South start coming to Kansas?
10. Why was Kansas called “Bleeding Kansas?”

Vocabulary Practice

A. Choose the Closest Meaning

Choose a word or phrase that is closest in meaning to the underlined expression.

1. As a general, he tried to keep the townspeople safe from enemy attacks.
 - a) In general, women are safer drivers than men.
 - b) Her explanation was general, not specific.
 - c) He entered the army as a private and retired as a general.
2. Jack's practice failed because he was always rude to his patients.
 - a) Skateboarding on a busy street is not a good practice.
 - b) Mary established her own medical practice in Calgary, Alberta.
 - c) You need to practice a lot to be good at anything.
3. Sandra rose from lieutenant to captain during her time in the army.
 - a) His anger rose as he listened to the politician's speech.
 - b) The students rose and said the Pledge of Allegiance.
 - c) John rose from assistant manager to general manager in three years.
4. The food company maintained that all its products were healthy and fresh.
 - a) Do you know that maintaining a healthy weight is not that difficult?
 - b) Thomas Jefferson maintained that knowledge and happiness are related.
 - c) My parents maintained their sense of humor through both sad and happy times.
5. The new wing of the school is named after a former teacher.
 - a) We took the bird with a broken wing to the animal hospital.
 - b) The largest wing is for patients with very serious illnesses.
 - c) I didn't study for the test, but I'll wing it and hope for the best.
6. We need to balance diet and exercise in order to be healthy.
 - a) Learn to balance your time between homework and social activities.
 - b) I need to learn to balance my checkbook.
 - c) She lost her balance and fell off the exercise bike.



Vocabulary Practice cont.

A. Choose the Closest Meaning cont.

7. I'm going to vote a straight ticket when I go to the polls in November.
- How many tickets do you have for the candidate's speech?
 - Who is running on the ticket with Governor Walker?
 - His car was ticketed because he parked in a reserved space.
8. The law student celebrated with champagne when she was admitted to the bar.
- He wasn't admitted to the bar because he was too young to drink.
 - She admitted to her parents that she had failed the final exam.
 - You must have excellent grades to be admitted to a top graduate school.

B. Matching

Match the correct definition to each word on the left.

- | | |
|-----------------------|--|
| _____ 1. militia | a) controversial, causing quarrels |
| _____ 2. preparatory | b) unfriendliness or anger |
| _____ 3. resign | c) to think of someone or something in a certain way |
| _____ 4. balance | d) help to get ready for the next step |
| _____ 5. rank | e) a voting system |
| _____ 6. of note | f) to offer something to make someone less angry |
| _____ 7. spread | g) a position or level in the military |
| _____ 8. regard | h) to expand, to extend |
| _____ 9. nominate | i) something important or interesting |
| _____ 10. ballot | j) to leave a job or position |
| _____ 11. inherit | k) to make two parts equal, to maintain equilibrium |
| _____ 12. appease | l) to formally suggest a candidate for an election |
| _____ 13. contentious | m) trained citizen soldiers who are usually local |
| _____ 14. hostility | n) someone who works for a political cause |
| _____ 15. activist | o) to have to deal with a problem or situation that had existed before |

Discussion

1. Franklin Pierce said, “Involuntary servitude [slavery] is recognized by the Constitution and stands like any other admitted right.” In your opinion, did Pierce consider slavery a moral question, a political question, a legal question, or a constitutional question? Explain.
2. The *New York Times* wrote the following after Pierce was elected president: “We have fallen on great times for little men.” How do you think the *New York Times* regarded Pierce? Why do you think that the *Times* and many people saw Pierce this way?
3. Franklin Pierce sympathized with the South even though he was from the North. How did Pierce show that he sided with the South?

Answer Key

LESSON DESCRIPTION:

In this lesson, students read a short biography about the 14th president of the United States. They learn about the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854 and discuss slavery.

LEVEL: Int – Adv

TIME: 1–2 hours

TAGS: Franklin Pierce, Pierce, American presidents, president, US, slavery, Kansas, Nebraska, US–Mexican War, history

Pre-Reading

A. WARM-UP QUESTIONS

1. Answers will vary. Franklin Pierce was the 14th president of the United States. He was a little-known, obscure president. Some historians call him one of the worst US presidents. He was not nominated for a second term.
2. The most controversial issue of Pierce’s presidency was the expansion of slavery into new territories.
3. The Compromise of 1850 was passed two years before Pierce became president, but the issue of slavery was still a contentious topic. Hostilities between the North and the South continued to grow.
4. The Kansas–Nebraska Act was passed in 1854 during Pierce’s presidency, and Pierce strongly supported the legislation. The Kansas–Nebraska Act created the territories of Kansas and Nebraska and repealed the Missouri Compromise of 1820. It also allowed the people of new territories to decide the question of slavery by popular vote. The fight over slavery turned Kansas into a political and physical battleground.

B. VOCABULARY PREVIEW

- | | | | | |
|------|------|------|------|-------|
| 1. e | 3. g | 5. j | 7. f | 9. i |
| 2. a | 4. b | 6. c | 8. d | 10. h |

Comprehension

A. TIMELINE

- 2 Franklin Pierce graduated from college.
- 3 Pierce was admitted to the bar.
- 8 Pierce fought in the US–Mexican War.
- 6 Franklin Pierce was first elected to Congress.
- 5 Pierce was elected to the New Hampshire legislature.
- 1 Franklin Pierce was born in 1804.
- 7 Pierce resigned from the Senate.
- 4 Pierce began to practice law in Concord, New Hampshire.
- 10 Pierce won the presidential election by a wide margin.
- 9 Pierce was nominated for president by the American Party.

(continued on the next page...)

Answer Key cont.

Comprehension cont.

B. ASK & ANSWER

1. He was a lawyer first.
2. His highest rank was brigadier general.
3. The American Party, a wing of the Democrat Party, nominated Pierce for president.
4. He was considered a dark horse candidate because he was not the party's first choice to run and it took 49 ballots for him to win the nomination.
5. The question of the expansion of slavery into new territories was the most controversial issue.
6. The Compromise of 1850 had been passed to try and appease the North and South.
7. The North was anti-slavery and against the spread of slavery. The South was pro slavery and wanted the right to bring slaves into new territories.
8. The Kansas-Nebraska Act was a law that repealed the Missouri Compromise of 1820 and allowed the question of slavery in new territories to be decided by popular vote.
9. People from the North were coming to Kansas to vote against slavery, and people from the South were coming to vote for slavery. People from Missouri were also crossing the border into Kansas to vote for slavery.
10. Kansas was called "Bleeding Kansas" because the pro-slavery and anti-slavery sides often became violent.

Vocabulary Practice

A. CHOOSE THE CLOSEST MEANING

- | | | | |
|------|------|------|------|
| 1. c | 3. c | 5. b | 7. b |
| 2. b | 4. b | 6. a | 8. c |

B. MATCHING

- | | | | | |
|------|------|------|-------|-------|
| 1. m | 4. k | 7. h | 10. e | 13. a |
| 2. d | 5. g | 8. c | 11. o | 14. b |
| 3. j | 6. i | 9. l | 12. f | 15. n |

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 *Humor* and *Practice*. Most other English-speaking countries spell these words this way: *Humour* 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.