

James Buchanan

Pre-Reading

A. Warm-Up Questions

1. What do you know about President James Buchanan?
2. Who was Dred Scott?
3. Why were the mid-1800s a very difficult time for the United States?

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.



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|------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| ___ 1. tutor | a) a private school |
| ___ 2. academy | b) a concern, a problem, a topic |
| ___ 3. admit | c) someone or something that came before |
| ___ 4. expel | d) controversial, causing people to argue |
| ___ 5. former | e) to prohibit, to not allow, to forbid |
| ___ 6. explorer | f) to expand, to cover a larger area, to go quickly (like a disease or rumor) from one person to another |
| ___ 7. inherit | g) a person who gives private lessons to a student |
| ___ 8. contentious | h) an attitude, point of view, position on an issue |
| ___ 9. issue | i) to kick out of school, to force someone to leave a school for breaking the rules |
| ___ 10. spread | j) someone who goes to a new place to learn more about it |
| ___ 11. sue | k) to go to court in order to ask for something |
| ___ 12. maintain | l) to state that something is true, to insist or claim |
| ___ 13. constitutional | m) to let a person join an organization, to allow someone to become a student in a college, university, or private school |
| ___ 14. ban | n) a law or situation that follows the rules of a country, something that is legal because it follows the rules of the founding document of a country |
| ___ 15. stance | o) to receive something from a person or situation that had existed before |

Reading

1. James Buchanan was the 15th president of the United States. He was born into a rich family in 1791 in Pennsylvania. His father was a successful businessman. James received his early education from **tutors** and the local **academy**. At age 16, he entered Dickinson College, but he was **expelled** for bad behavior. He was readmitted to the college and graduated with honors. James also studied law. He was **admitted** to the bar in 1812 and established a successful law practice in Pennsylvania.
2. In 1814, James Buchanan was elected to the Pennsylvania legislature. In 1821, he was elected to the US House of Representatives, where he served for ten years. In 1834, he was elected to the US Senate. He served as a senator until 1845. During his political career, Buchanan also served as secretary of state, minister to Russia, and minister to England.
3. In 1856, Buchanan ran for president. He ran in a three-way race against John C. Fremont, a military hero and **explorer**, and Millard Fillmore, a **former** president. Buchanan won the election with most of his support coming from the South and the border slave states.
4. As president, James Buchanan **inherited** the most **contentious issue** of the mid-1800s—the question of the expansion of slavery into new territories. The South still pushed for the right to bring enslaved people into new US territories. The North was still against the **spread** of slavery. In his campaign, Buchanan had promised to find a way to bring the country together. However, in reality, he had always been on the side of the South. Although Buchanan personally disliked slavery, he felt that slavery was simply a question of property rights, protected by the Constitution.
5. During his presidency, President Buchanan showed his sympathy for the South once more in the Dred Scott case. In this Supreme Court case, an enslaved man named Dred Scott was suing for his freedom. Scott had lived in free territories and then had returned to Missouri, where slavery was legal. He **maintained** that he should be free, with the rights of a citizen. President Buchanan secretly influenced a Northern judge to vote with the Southern majority in order to make the decision broader. In the end, the Court ruled that Black people were not citizens and could not **sue** in a court of law, that slavery was **constitutional** in all territories, and that Congress had no power to **ban** slavery in any territory. The ruling pleased the South and angered the North.
6. Buchanan supported the South again in the conflict in “Bleeding Kansas.” Activists on both sides were using the ballot box and violence to influence whether Kansas would be a free state or a slave state. Buchanan pushed for admitting Kansas to the Union as a slave state. Again, the president’s **stance** enraged the North.
7. James Buchanan was, by his own choice, a one-term president. Many historians consider him one of the worst presidents in American history. He is remembered for his lack of leadership. He is also remembered for his support of the institution of slavery. President Buchanan died June 1, 1868.

“The test of leadership is not to put greatness into humanity, but to elicit it, for the greatness is already there.”

—James Buchanan

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. James Buchanan came from a well-to-do family.
- _____ 2. In his youth, James was always on his best behavior.
- _____ 3. James Buchanan was a lawyer before he entered politics.
- _____ 4. Buchanan served as minister to England and Russia.
- _____ 5. Buchanan ran against three other candidates in the 1856 election.
- _____ 6. Buchanan was a Northerner who sympathized with the South.

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 the first election that James Buchanan won?
2. How long did Buchanan serve in the US House of Representatives?
3. Who were Buchanan's opponents in the election of 1856?
4. What was the most controversial issue of the mid-1800s?
5. Describe Dred Scott's situation.
6. What was the Supreme Court's decision in the Dred Scott case?
7. What role did President Buchanan play in the Dred Scott case?
8. How did President Buchanan view slavery?
9. Why was Kansas called "Bleeding Kansas"?
10. What was President Buchanan's stance on the conflict in Kansas?

Vocabulary Practice

Complete the sentences using vocabulary from the list on page 1.

1. Can women _____ for the right to become priests?
2. After the divorce, she started missing her _____ husband.
3. New York City is going to _____ smoking in all public places.
4. He hired a _____ to help him with his algebra homework.
5. The principal defended her _____ on school uniforms at the school board meeting.
6. The doctor said that the flu can _____ from one person to another very quickly.

Discussion

1. James Buchanan said, "The ballot box is the surest arbiter of disputes among free men." Do you think that this was true in "Bleeding Kansas"? Explain.
2. Although Buchanan didn't like slavery personally, he said that the way to deal with the slavery question was to "let it alone." In your opinion, why did he think that ignoring the question of slavery was the best way to deal with it?
3. "The presidency, although a crown of honor far more glorious than that of any monarch in Christendom, is also a crown of thorns. I shall carry to my grave the consciousness that I at least meant well for my country."

What does the statement above show you about Buchanan's character? In your opinion, is "meaning well" enough? Can you name and discuss other leaders who, in their own eyes, meant well but created problems that led to war?

Answer Key

LESSON DESCRIPTION:

In this lesson, students read a short biography about the 15th president of the United States. They learn about Buchanan’s role in the expansion of slavery and in the conflict in “Bleeding Kansas.”

LEVEL: Int – Adv

TIME: 1–2 hours

TAGS: James Buchanan, president, American Presidents, slavery, history, American history, South, politics

Pre-Reading

A. WARM-UP QUESTIONS

- Answers will vary. James Buchanan was the 15th president of the United States. By his own choice, he was a one-term president. Many historians consider Buchanan one of the worst presidents in American history. He is remembered for his lack of leadership. He is also remembered for his support of the institution of slavery.
- Dred Scott was an enslaved man who sued for his freedom and lost. His case was decided by the Supreme Court in 1857. The Court ruled that slavery was constitutional in all territories, that Congress had no power to ban slavery in any territory, and that Black people were not citizens and could not sue in a court of law. The ruling intensified the hostility between the North and the South.
- During the mid-1850s, the question of the expansion of slavery into new territories became more divisive than ever.

B. VOCABULARY PREVIEW

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

Comprehension

A. TRUE OR FALSE?

- T
- F – He was expelled from school as a teen.
- T
- T

- F – He ran against Millard Fillmore and John C. Fremont.
- T

B. ASK & ANSWER

- He was elected to the Pennsylvania legislature.
- He served in the House for ten years.
- His opponents in the 1856 election were John C. Fremont and Millard Fillmore.
- The expansion of slavery into new territories was the most contentious issue of the mid-1800s.
- Dred Scott was an enslaved man who had lived in free territories and then had returned to Missouri, where slavery was legal. He maintained that he should be free since he had lived in free territories.
- The Supreme Court ruled that slavery was constitutional in all territories, that Congress had no power to ban slavery in any territory, and that Black people were not citizens and could not sue in a court of law. The ruling intensified the hostility between North and South.
- President Buchanan secretly influenced a Northern judge to vote with the Southern majority in order to make the ruling broader.
- Although Buchanan personally disliked slavery, he felt that slavery was simply a question of property rights, protected by the Constitution.
- Pro-slavery and anti-slavery activists were using violence to try to control whether Kansas would be a free state or a slave state.
- Buchanan wanted Kansas to enter the Union as a slave state.

(continued on the next page...)

Answer Key cont.

Vocabulary Review

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|-----------|----------|-----------|
| 1. sue | 3. ban | 5. stance |
| 2. former | 4. tutor | 6. spread |

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 *Behavior*, *Honor*, *Rumor*, and *Practice*. Most other English-speaking countries spell these words this way: *Behaviour*, *Honour*, *Rumour*, 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.