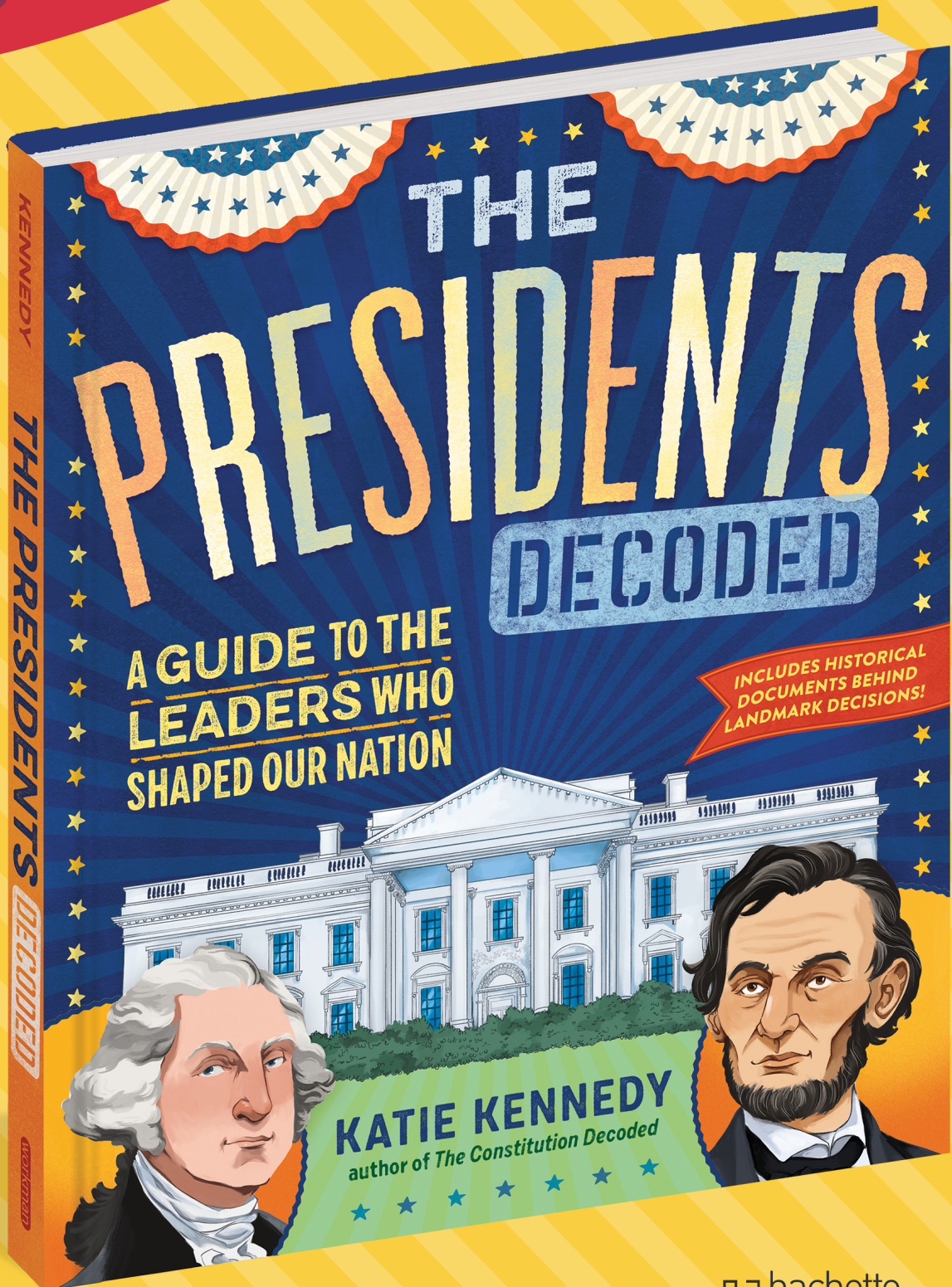
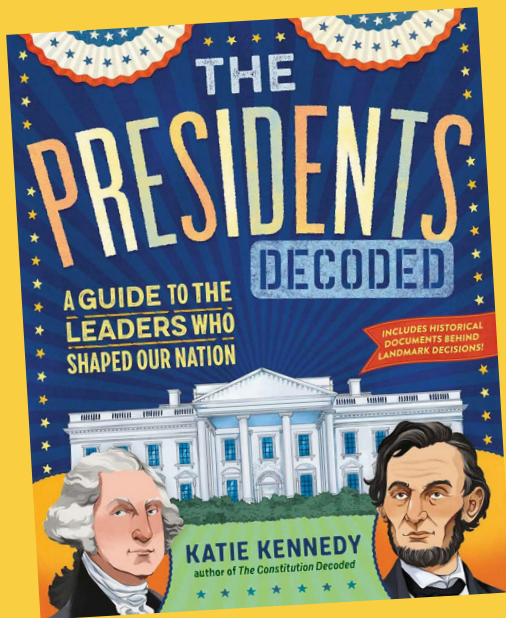


EDUCATOR GUIDE





ABOUT THIS BOOK

THE PRESIDENTS DECODED

HC 9781523515868

Ebook 9781523525171

Ages 10 and up

Whenever you teach this book, there is a good chance that we are in the middle of either an election, primary season, inauguration, or midterm. The current president may have a high or low approval rating, and they will be navigating challenges to domestic and foreign policy. Presidential politics have been a constant in American history.

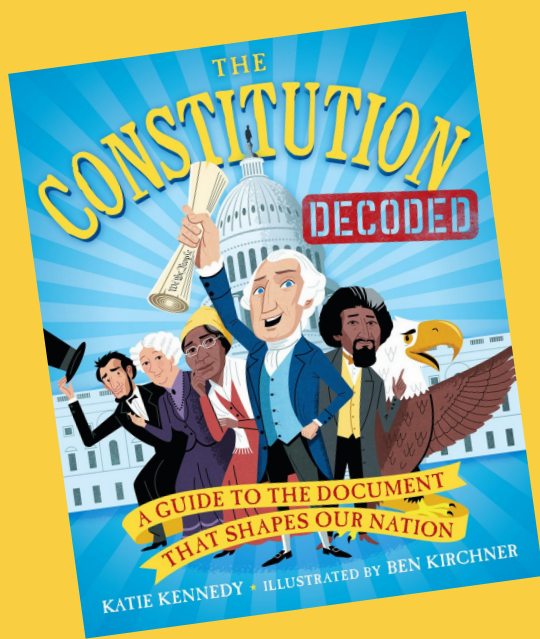
In *The Presidents Decoded*, Katie Kennedy gives you a glimpse into the lives of the forty-five people who have held the highest office in our nation. Using excerpts from primary sources that are decoded, or explained, by the author, this book helps readers understand the events that impacted the presidents' early lives, shaped their presidencies, and defined their legacies.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Katie Kennedy has taught college history and the American government for thirty years. She currently teaches in Iowa, where she lives with her husband and son. She once caught her then-nine-year-old daughter sneak-reading the Constitution under the covers with a flashlight. She's never been prouder.



She is the author of *The Constitution Decoded: A Guide to the Document That Shapes Our Nation*, as well as, two young adult novels, *Learning to Swear in America* and *What Goes Up*.



ALSO BY KATIE KENNEDY

THE CONSTITUTION DECODED

TP 9781523510443

Ebook 9781523511914

Ages 10 and up

BEFORE YOU READ

Ask students to brainstorm about the role of the president:

What questions do you have about the presidency?

What do you think would be hard about being president?

What would be fun about being president?

Do you think you'd make a good president?
Why or why not?

GUIDED READING & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1 Explain the difference between primary, secondary, and tertiary sources. What are the benefits of reading each of these types of sources? What are the limitations of each of these types of sources? Why is it important to gather information from multiple sources instead of relying on a single source (or type of source)?
- 2 The author, Katie Kennedy, writes that President Howard Taft “had the temperament of a judge, not a president: He tried to see all sides of an issue, but he didn’t act decisively, and he was a poor leader” (126). What personal qualities do you think are the most important for a president?
- 3 Most people who have served as president had experience serving in the military, practicing law, or serving in a state or federally elected office. Make a chart to show which presidents studied law, served in the military, and held an elected office before becoming president. Are there presidents who did more than one of these things? Are there presidents who did none? What kind of experience do you think that a president should have?
- 4 Kennedy writes, “Of the first twelve presidents, only two did not enslave people: John Adams and his son, John Quincy Adams” (8). If we were to grade the early presidents based on their response to slavery, almost all would do poorly. Why do you think the founders handled the issue of slavery the way they did? How does the fact that they did not work to abolish slavery impact the way you view them?

GUIDED READING & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 5 Early in our nation's history, the vice president was not chosen by the president but was the candidate who received the second-highest number of votes. This meant that a president and vice president could have very different views. What might the benefits of making the runner-up the vice president be? What might be the potential negative consequences? Why do you think this policy changed?
- 6 President Thomas Jefferson is credited with the idea of the need for a "wall of separation between Church & State" (17). In your own words, explain what this phrase means. Why is freedom of religion important for a democracy?
- 7 Kennedy writes about President Abraham Lincoln's legacy: "No president faced greater challenges, defended democracy more vigorously, or led the nation with more courage, humor, and humility" (74). At the same time, she notes: "The two presidents before Lincoln, Franklin Pierce and James Buchanan, were two of the worst presidents in American history" (71). Why do you think challenges reveal the best and the worst in people? What personal qualities did Lincoln have that Buchanan and Pierce lacked?
- 8 If you had a time machine and could choose one president from American history to be the president again, who would you choose? What qualities did they demonstrate in the past that make you believe they would make them a good president for this generation? What would you want them to accomplish as president?

GUIDED READING & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 9 The Sedition Act of 1798 made it a crime to criticize the president. Kennedy notes that “critics thought it was a clear violation of the right to free speech” (11). This law, and later acts like it, have been repealed. Why is it important to allow people to criticize the president (and the government)? Do you think any aspects of a president’s personal or political life should be “off-limits” to criticism?
- 10 Three presidents have been impeached: Andrew Johnson, Bill Clinton, and Donald Trump. Why do you think the Constitution provides a process to hold the president accountable for obeying the law? What could happen without a way to remove a president from office?
- 11 All the presidents profiled in *The Presidents Decoded* have been men, all have been Christian, and all but Barack Obama have been white. Why do you think there has not been more diversity in the people elected to the presidency? How might gender, race, and religious faith impact how a person fulfills their duties as president?



EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

- 1 Starting with *The Presidents Decoded*, research the president who was in the White House when you were born, when your parents or guardians were born, and when their parents or guardians were born. Create a timeline showing how the United States has changed in these three generations. What challenges faced your parents' and grandparents' generations? How were these challenges resolved? What challenges face your generation? What do you think the next president of the United States should do to fix them?
- 2 Benjamin Harrison became president in 1888 by winning the electoral college vote despite losing the popular vote to Grover Cleveland. Four other presidents lost the popular vote but won the electoral college vote: John Quincy Adams, Rutherford B. Hayes, George W. Bush, and Donald Trump. "Cleveland ran for president three times, and he won the popular vote all three times—but he only won the electoral college twice, in 1884 and 1892" (98). Research the Electoral College's formation and its role in elections and then debate whether America should continue to elect presidents via the Electoral College or change to selecting solely on the basis of which candidate wins the popular vote.
- 3 Many former presidents have established presidential libraries or homes (like George Washington's Mount Vernon and Thomas Jefferson's Monticello). Choose one to explore virtually and create a presentation giving a virtual tour of the site for your classmates. What are the highlights of the library or house? What interesting artifacts do they have? What can you find in the archives? You may even want to plan an in-person visit if you live near one of these!

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

4 Today, we are familiar with the Republican and Democratic parties. Most presidents have been members of one of these parties, but Washington and Adams were Federalists, and other presidents belonged to the Whig and the Democratic-Republican parties. Kennedy mentions other political parties, like the Know-Nothing Party and the Populist Party. Today, people might talk about the Green Party and the Libertarian Party. What did each of these parties stand for? Working with a group, create a plan to form a new political party. What would your party's platform be (a platform describes a political party's values and goals)? What would you call the party?

5 Frederick Douglass was never elected to serve in Congress, but his writing and speeches have inspired many politicians and presidents. In an 1852 speech, he urged those in power to oppose slavery, saying: "The man who is right is a majority. He who has God and conscience on his side, has a majority against the universe. Though he does not represent the present state, he represents the future state. If he does not represent who we are, he represents what we ought to be" (59).

Write a persuasive speech or letter urging the current president to take a stand on something, whether or not it's politically unpopular, but that you believe is essential to the future. Once you have revised this speech or letter, send a copy to the President at The White House, 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW, Washington, DC 20500.



EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

6 *The Presidents Decoded* uses excerpts from primary sources that are “decoded” when Katie Kennedy paraphrases the documents and explains their significance. Choose one of the presidents that you found the most interesting and use the resources of the American Presidency Project (<https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/>), National Archives (<https://www.archives.gov/presidential-libraries>), or Library of Congress (<https://www.loc.gov/>) to find primary sources related to their presidency. Choose a primary source that reveals something about the president’s campaign, time in office, or life after the presidency and “decode” it by paraphrasing the document (putting it in your own words) and explaining what it reveals.

7 Four presidents have been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize: Theodore Roosevelt (116), Woodrow Wilson (127), Jimmy Carter (189), and Barack Obama (217)—research why they were awarded the prize and their remarks when they accepted it. You can explore the Nobel archives at <https://www.nobelprize.org/>.

8 While this book focuses mainly on the men who served the country as President between 1789 and 2023, Kennedy mentions several First Ladies' accomplishments. For example, Lou Hoover was one of the first female geologists (141); Edith Wilson “ran the country” while her husband was ill (133); Eleanor Roosevelt was extremely popular as she helped guide the nation through two major crises (the Great Depression and World War II) (150); Hillary Clinton was the “first First Lady to win national office” (204); and Jill Biden was the “first First Lady to have a doctorate” (231). Research one of the First Ladies and prepare a presentation about her life and accomplishments. (Note to teachers: You may want to assign First Ladies randomly to your students since they may only be familiar with a few.)