

A Teacher's Guide to THE CONSTITUTION **DECODED**

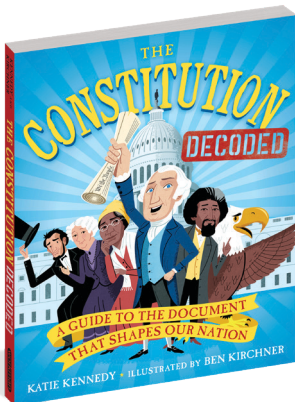
A GUIDE TO THE DOCUMENT THAT SHAPES OUR NATION

BY KATIE KENNEDY ★ ILLUSTRATED BY BEN KIRCHNER

FOR THE TEACHER

Congratulations on choosing this amazing book for your students. This text will take your students on an informational journey where they will learn about the Constitution and how our democratic government was designed to function. You will travel back in time but also journey forward to our present day. Along the way will be many important stopping points for your class to explore. Students will read and discuss the articles that built the foundation of the Constitution, then continue to explore the *Bill of Rights* and the amendments. Students will learn the details of this living document. All of the text deserves careful reading and thoughtful discussion. The goal of this guide is to help you, the teacher, build an informational timeline with your class and have many thought-provoking detours on your journey. It will teach your students to value these freedoms for the present day and their futures. You will enable a new generation of citizens to learn about our government and how it was designed to work.

ABOUT THE BOOK



The Constitution Decoded explains our rights and responsibilities as citizens of the United States of America. For that purpose, the author has written this book to teach us about the defining document that details the rules and responsibilities for living life in our democracy. The entirety of the Constitution is included in this text. The author uses the word “Decoded” in the title as a way to provide us with an explanation of the complex ideas that make up the Constitution. It is a document that dates back to the earliest years of our nation’s history. The language is translated in everyday terms to build our knowledge of the laws of our democracy. The vocabulary words are defined so that the reader can better understand the content of the document. This guide’s purpose is to support you, the teacher, in using the book as a teaching text for your students.

USING THE CONSTITUTION DECODED IN THE CLASSROOM

This text includes many supports for students but at the same time, it includes information on each article and amendment in detail. In order for students to navigate this text, it is important to read together the beginning part of the book and locate the areas of support. Content area vocabulary and their definitions are included at the bottom of many pages to further support students. There are additional sections to enhance the students’ background knowledge. These include:

- **Text of the Constitution with a side-by-side translation of original text**
- **A *Did You Know?* section with additional background information**
- **A *Content Vocabulary* section with definitions pertaining to each article and amendment at the bottom of most pages**
- **A *Constitution in Action* section explains how the document is used in practice**

The discussion questions are designed to align with the *Common Core Standards* that include the four domains of Reading, Writing, Language, and Speaking and Listening. The Grade 5 Common Core standards are referenced throughout this guide, but all of the activities and questions can be adapted to meet your grade level. This text can be used in Grades 3 through 8 with appropriate adaptations.

Name: _____

Date: _____

THE CONSTITUTION DECODED ANTICIPATION GUIDE:

Let's test our knowledge. Answer *T* (True) or *F* (False) to the following 10 statements.

1. Nothing could be added to the Constitution once it was written and signed.
2. The Constitution established two branches of government.
3. The Constitution allows the president to serve two or more terms in office.
4. The *Declaration of Independence* was signed on July 4, 1776.
5. The 15th Amendment gave women the right to vote.
6. The judicial branch of government passes laws.
7. The executive branch of government includes the president and vice president.
8. States can make their own laws.
9. You can become president if you are 30 years old.
10. The Constitutional amendments made changes to the original seven articles.



THE CONSTITUTION DECODED SCAVENGER HUNT

Let's find it! Participate in this scavenger hunt to locate important sections of the Constitution.

1. Find Article VII. What color-coded section and page does Article VII begin on?
2. Find the glossary. What is the meaning of the word *bills* in the Constitution?
3. Find the *Did You Know?* section on the 19th Amendment page. What information did it give?
4. Find the chart in Article I (page 26) that gives information about Congress. What information does it give?
5. Locate the *Constitution in Action* segment in Article V. What is the heading of the segment?
6. Find the illustration on page 158. Who is illustrated with the 24th Amendment?
7. Find the *Declaration of Independence*. What color-coded section and page does this begin on?
8. Find Article II, Section 4 on page 66. Which words are listed in the vocabulary section?
9. Find the text feature on page 87. Identify the text feature and describe the information it represents.
10. Which amendment does the illustration on pages 146 and 147 explain?
11. Find the section in the book to look up a word and its definition. What is this section called?
12. Find the timeline on pages 42–43. What happened in 1865?

PRE-READING DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Read aloud the Introduction to the text. Tell students to listen for the following information:

- Why was the Constitution written?
- When was the Constitution written?
- What does the Supremacy Clause say and what does it mean?
- Which original thirteen states did the Constitution mean to govern? (Refer to *Did You Know?* on page 6.)

Your task: Working with a partner, use sticky notes to record what you learned, citing evidence from these pages.

DIVING INTO THE CONSTITUTION

The Preamble (Page 6)

The *Preamble* states the goal of the Constitution. Students need to understand the meaning of these important academic vocabulary words that define the goal.

Read aloud to class. Have students read along. Review the translation. Discuss the following:

- What is the purpose of the *Preamble*?
- After reading the *Preamble*, highlight the following important vocabulary words that are included in this section: *justice, tranquility, common defense, general welfare, liberty, and posterity*. Define each word as it is used in context.
- Then, as a class, using chart paper, rewrite the *Preamble* using everyday words to replace the highlighted words. Explain what it means.

Optional task: Students will represent the important vocabulary words in the *Preamble* using graphics, illustrations, and/or technology. The use of illustrations, graphics, and technology provides a modification and accommodation to respond to students based on specific learning needs and allows full engagement of all using the principles of Universal Design for Learning.*

Articles in the Constitution

There are seven articles in the Constitution. Each article is dedicated to a certain aspect of formation and function of our democratic government. Each article describes the way in which the government is structured and how it operates.

General discussion/questions about each of the seven articles:

These questions can be used as oral discussions with students in small groups or pairs. Then return to the whole class to reexamine the ideas.

What is the main focus of Article I?

- Article I, page 11: What does the diagram on page 11 represent?
- Review the three-column chart on pages 12–13. Record one example of an assigned power that is different from one other in each of the three different levels of government.
- How is the Senate different from the House of Representatives? How are they the same?
- Using a T-Chart, on one side write facts about the House of Representatives, and on the other, write facts about the Senate.
- Section 4 details elections for Senators and Representatives. How are these elections determined? Who monitors the members of the House and the Senate?
- What is an *enumeration*? What is its purpose and how is it different today? How is the census of today different from the original one stated in Article I, Section 2? How does redistricting work after a census has been counted, and how can it affect election outcomes today?
- What is the subject of Article I, Sections 6–9? Describe one common idea running through these four sections.
- Review the timeline on pages 42–43. Which events are listed? What is their significance to Section 9, Article I?
- What powers did the states lose in Section 10 of Article I?



Executive Branch: Article II

- Who makes up the executive branch of government?

After reading this article, discuss the following:

- Section 1 sets up the executive branch and the Electoral College.
- What are the requirements for becoming president of the United States? What is the succession of power for the president?
- Describe the role and responsibilities of the president. Cite evidence from the articles in your response.
- Article II, Section 4 refers to the impeachment of the president or vice president. What crimes does the Constitution refer to as impeachable offenses?

Article III

- What branch of government is set up in Article III?
- Who makes up this branch of government? What kinds of judicial cases does this branch of government oversee?
- How is treason defined in Article III?

Article IV discusses the relationships of the states to one another and the relationship between the states and the federal government.

- Locate the opening pages of Article IV. Think about what this illustration is showing. What do you think this article will be explaining? What was the goal of Article IV?
- What rights did citizens have when visiting other states? What was the significance of the Dred Scott Decision?
- How can a state become part of the United States? What territories are part of the United States but lack voting rights?

What is the main focus of Article V?

What issues are included in Article VI?

After reading and reviewing Article VII, discuss the following:

- How many states initially ratified the Constitution?
- What did its citizens agree to as part of their state's ratification?

THE AMENDMENTS

The Bill of Rights: Amendments 1–10

Personal freedoms were an important concept for the people in the original states. They had fought for freedom from England and the King and wanted to ensure their rights to these freedoms were an essential part of the Constitution. To that end, these ideas were added as the first ten amendments and are referred to as the *Bill of Rights*.

Think about the rights that each of the first ten amendments represent, then create a visual representation that includes each of these ten amendments and the right the citizen gained with that amendment. Visual presentation could be: PowerPoint, display board, video, or graphic presentation.



Amendments XI to XXVII

In response to these questions, refer to not only the text of the Constitution and its translation, but use the information from the Did You Know? and Constitution in Action sections for a thorough explanation.

- What is the gist of Amendment XI?
- Section 1 of Article II, the 12th Amendment, and the 20th Amendment all address voting for president and vice president. Describe how each element addresses the election. What is in place today?
- The Civil War divided the nation into the North and South. The issue of slavery was contentious between them. After the war, three amendments were added to the Constitution that addressed the rights of African Americans. What issues pertaining to enslaved people were the subjects of these amendments?
- Amendment XVI: What is an income tax and what does this amendment establish?
- What did the 17th Amendment change about the election of senators?
- Amendment XVIII and Amendment XXI are related to prohibition. What is prohibition and how are these two amendments related?
- Amendment XIX: What is the main idea of this amendment? Describe this amendment in your own words.
- How are the 20th, the 22nd, and the 25th amendments related? What is the topic of these amendments? What are the requirements of each of these amendments?
- Amendment XXIII: The White House is located in the District of Columbia. What did the 23rd Amendment establish?
- Amendment XXIV: What additional freedom did this amendment give citizens?
- What restrictions on voters were lifted with the 26th Amendment?
- Amendment XXVII: Describe why this amendment was finally ratified in 1992.
- Read the *Declaration of Independence*. What did you learn about why this document was written?

Looking Back—Discussion Questions:

These can be oral discussions or written prompts.

- What is the role and responsibility of Congress? Cite evidence from the text in your response.



States' rights is an important theme in the Constitution. Review the articles that pertain to states' rights. Use that information to explain the power of the states versus the federal government. Cite evidence with your examples.

- The first article, Article I, is the most detailed article in the Constitution. What was the reason it was put first and what details did it include and why?
- Why was freedom such an important theme throughout the Constitution?
- What freedoms have been the most challenging to enact?
- Which articles and amendments refer to individual freedoms and rights?
- Write a paragraph describing the House of Representatives and its members. Include information from the *Did You Know?* section on page 14.

Extension Idea:

In the opening pages of the book, the author includes nine illustrations of famous Americans. Choose one of these figures from history and provide additional research information. Include any information about their connection to the Constitution. When completed, students could provide a representation of this historical figure in any representative form.

Using the *Preamble* as your guide, write a set of five articles for your classroom. Using the articles from the Constitution as examples, decide what rules and regulations are most important for your class to follow. Make sure these essential principles serve as a structure for your classroom while acknowledging your freedoms and responsibilities.

Common Core Standards:

Reading

CCSS.RI.5.1, 5.2, 5.3, 5.4

Writing

W.5.1.a, b, c, 5.2.a, b, c, d, e

Language

CCSS.L.5.4.a, b, c

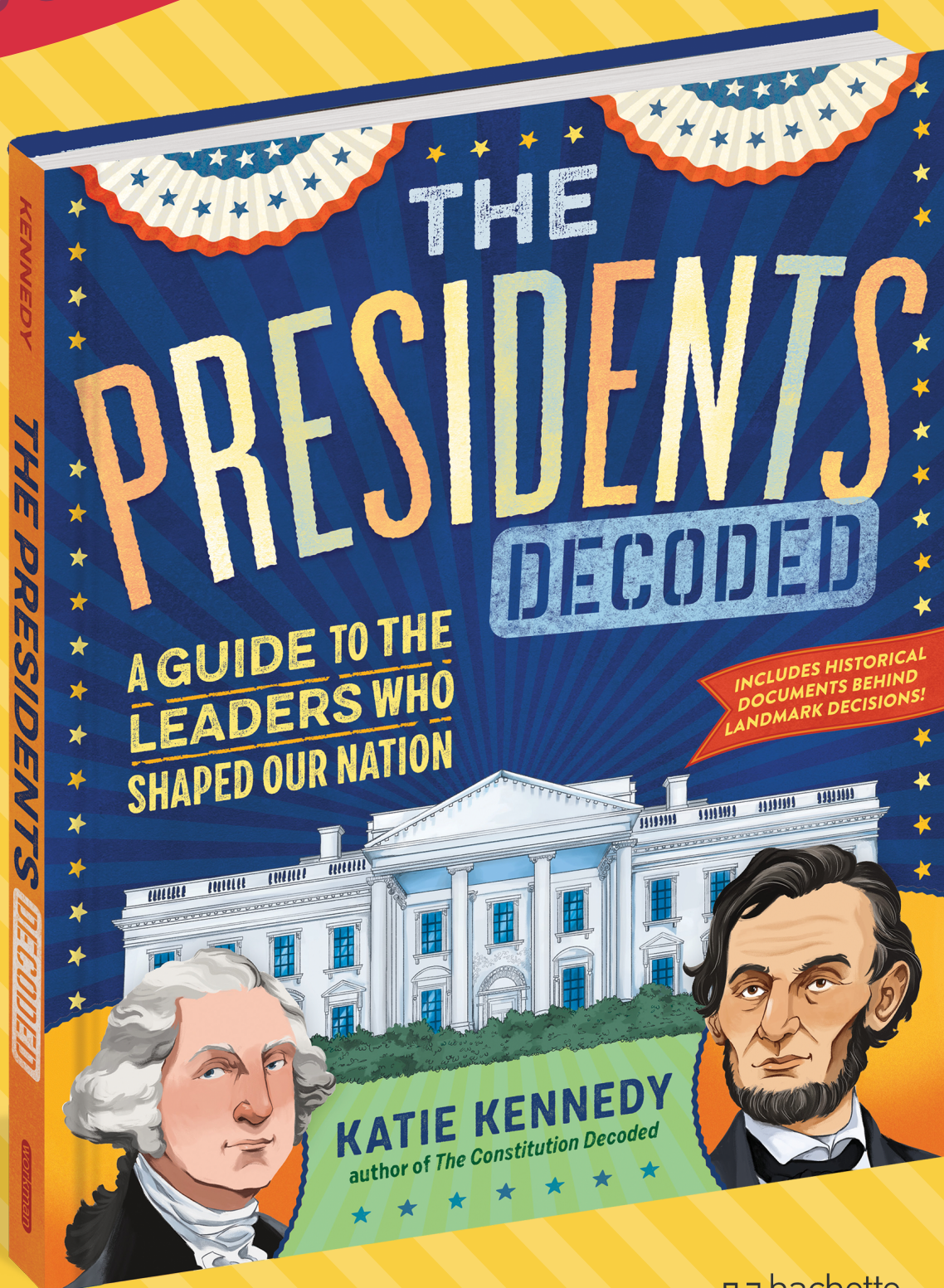
Speaking and Listening

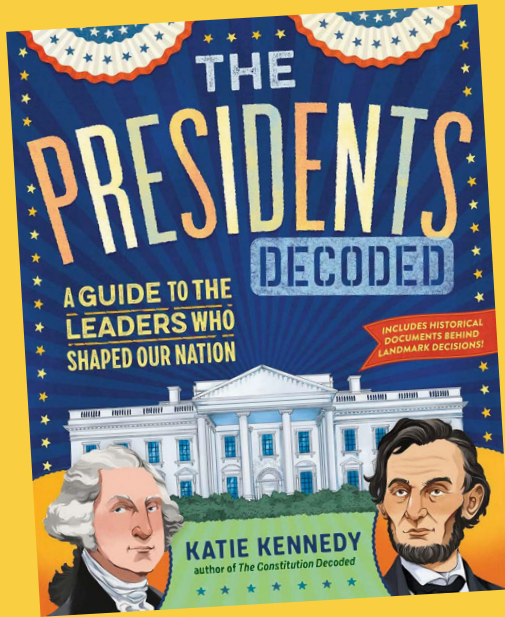
SL.5.1.a, b, c, d, 5.2, 5.4, 5.5

**Universal Design for Learning*
udlguidelines.cast.org



EDUCATOR GUIDE





ABOUT THIS BOOK

THE PRESIDENTS DECODED

HC 9781523515868

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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.

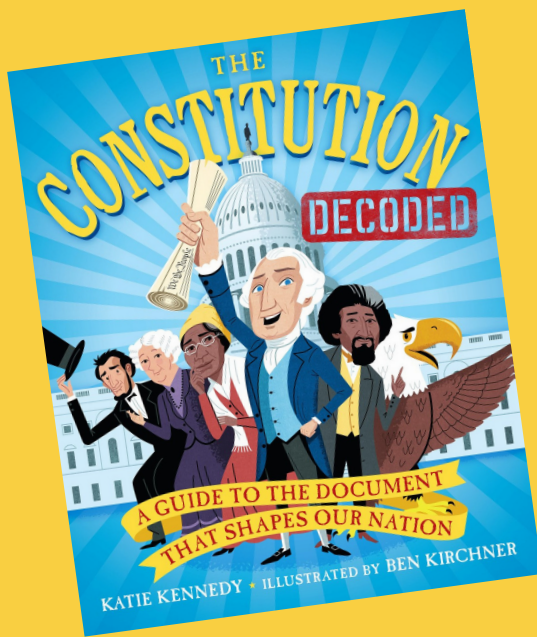
In *The Presidents Decoded*, Katie Kennedy gives you a glimpse into the lives of the forty-five people who have held the highest office in our nation. Using excerpts from primary sources that are decoded, or explained, by the author, this book helps readers understand the events that impacted the presidents'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


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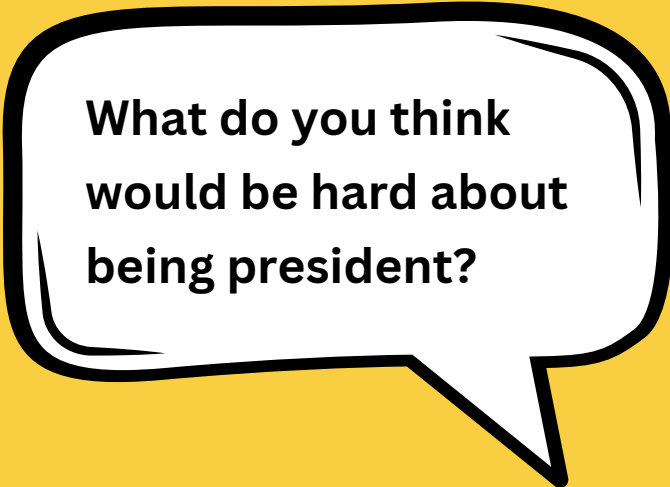
Ages 10 and up

BEFORE YOU READ

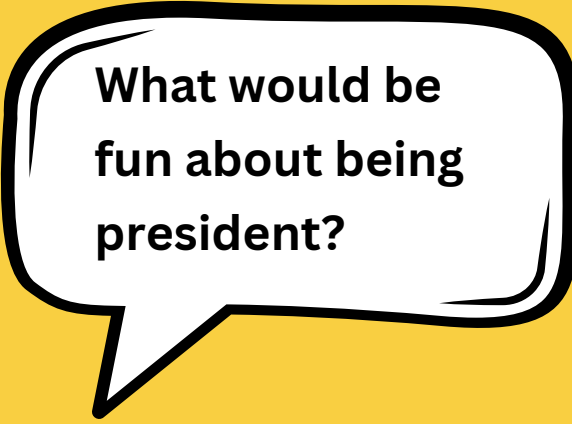
Ask students to brainstorm about the role of the president:

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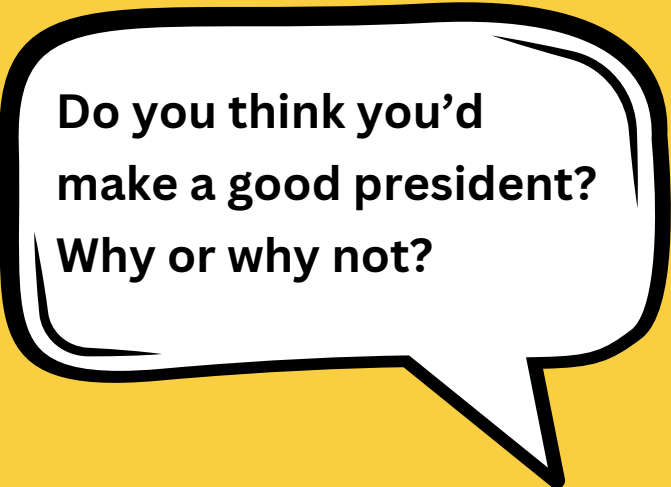
What questions do you have about the presidency?

A white speech bubble with a black outline and a tail pointing towards the bottom-left.

What do you think would be hard about being president?

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What would be fun about being president?

A white speech bubble with a black outline and a tail pointing towards the bottom-left.

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.)