

TITLE:

United States Presidents – Giant Jenga

Learning about the past and recent history and fun facts of the Presidents of the United States of America

CONTRIBUTOR:

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TOPIC:

American History: United States Presidents

GRADE LEVEL:

8 – 12*

**Can be adjusted for all age groups (young children through adults)*

TIME ALLOTMENT:

20 – 30 minutes

STANDARDS TO BE ADDRESSED:

(Texas) Title 19. Part 2. Chapter 113. Subchapter C. Rule 113.44 Throughout social studies in Kindergarten-Grade 12, students build a foundation in history; geography; economics; government; citizenship; culture; science, technology, and society; and social studies skills. The content, as appropriate for the grade level of course, enables students to understand importance of patriotism, function in a free enterprise society, and appreciate the basic democratic values of our state and nation... (TEC 28,002(h))

STATEMENT OF OBJECTIVE AND LESSON OUTCOME:

The learner will:

- Identify different past and present Presidents of the United States based on varying fact questions.
- Name their favorite President and why.
- State information surrounding the Office of the President, its role in the community, and presidential elections.
- Interact with peers when answering questions.

MATERIALS, RESOURCES, AND TECHNOLOGY TO BE USED BY TEACHER / STUDENT:

- Jenga-style game*
- Question-and-Answer Sheet
- Assorted small prizes (e.g., stickers, pencils, hard candy, balls, bookmarks)

**These items will need to be constructed prior to setting up the activity. Instructions for the construction of these items can be found under the “Procedures” portion of the Lesson Plan.*

INTRODUCTION OF TOPIC:

The President of the United States is part of the Executive Branch of the United States Government. The President is both the head of state (leads interactions with other countries) and the head of government (works as an executive to oversee the day-to-day needs of the country) and Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces (leads the decisions of the military). Under Article II of the U.S. Constitution, the President is responsible for the execution and enforcement of the laws created by Congress. Thus, the primary roles of the President are: to make treaties with the approval of the Senate, to veto bills and sign bills sent by Congress, to represent our nation in talks with foreign countries, to enforce the laws that Congress passes, and to act as the Commander-in-Chief during war. The President also plays a key role as the Political Party Leader in shaping their political party’s positions on major issues and help raise money for their party’s needs.

Presidents are elected every four years by the people through a representative Electoral College System. (People elect people who vote on their behalf for president.)

For more information on Presidents, review the list of Presidents and the suggested Questions-and-Answers Lesson Plan Procedures for Instructions.

A list of Presidents includes:

- George Washington (1789 – 1797)
- John Adams (1797 – 1801)

- Thomas Jefferson (1801 – 1809)
- James Madison (1809 – 1817)
- James Monroe (1817 – 1825)
- John Quincy Adams (1825 – 1829)
- Andrew Jackson (1829 – 1837)
- Martin Van Buren (1837 – 1841)
- William Henry Harrison (1841) – died in office
- John Tyler (1841 – 1845)
- James Polk (1845 – 1849)
- Zachary Taylor (1849 – 1850)
- Millard Fillmore (1850 – 1853)
- Franklin Pierce (1853 – 1857)
- James Buchanan (1857 – 1861)
- Abraham Lincoln (1861 – 1865) *assassinated in second term
- Andrew Johnson (1865 – 1869)
- Ulysses S. Grant (1869 – 1877)
- Rutherford B. Hayes (1877 – 1881)
- James Garfield (1881) *assassinated
- Chester A. Arthur (1881 – 1885)
- Grover Cleveland (1885 – 1889)
- Benjamin Harrison (1889 – 1893)
- Grover Cleveland (1893 – 1897) *same Cleveland as earlier
- William McKinley (1897 – 1901) *assassinated
- Theodore Roosevelt (1901 – 1909)
- William H. Taft (1909 – 1913)
- Woodrow Wilson (1913 – 1921)
- Warren G. Harding (1921 – 1923) *died in office
- Calvin Coolidge (1923 – 1929)
- Herbert C. Hoover (1929 – 1933)
- Franklin D. Roosevelt (1933 – 1945) *only president to serve over 2 terms (served 4), died in office
- Harry S. Truman (1945 – 1953)
- Dwight D. Eisenhower (1953 – 1961)
- John F. Kennedy (1961 – 1963) *assassinated
- Lyndon B. Johnson (1963 – 1969)
- Richard M. Nixon (1969 – 1974) *only president to resign from office
- Gerald R. Ford (1974 – 1977)
- James “Jimmy” Earl Carter (1977 – 1981)
- Ronald Reagan (1981 – 1989)
- George Bush (1989 – 1993)
- William “Bills” J. Clinton (1993 – 2001)
- George W. Bush (2001 – 2009) *son of George Bush
- Barack H. Obama (2009 – 2017) *first African American president
- Donald J. Trump (2017 – 2021)

- Joseph “Joe” R. Biden, Jr. (2021 – present) *oldest President to be elected

PROCEDURE FOR INSTRUCTION:

Materials to Make before the Activity:

- Jenga-style game – purchase a wooden Jenga-style game from online or a game store
 - Option 1: Write the questions from the Questions-and-Answers Sheet on each Jenga piece (This allows you to have the participants do the questions themselves with their groups without much participation of the leader. It also allows multiple Jenga-games to be purchased and multiple groups playing at the same time.)
 - Option 2: Write a number on the Jenga piece and the leader will read the corresponding question. (This allows the Jenga game to be reused for other Jenga-style games)
- Questions-and-Answer Sheet – using the Lesson Plan Introduction and General Research on Presidents, write some questions and answers. Some questions that should be included include:
 - Who is our current president? (Joseph “Joe” R. Biden, Jr.)
 - How long is a president’s term in office (4 years)
 - How many presidents have we had in the history of the United States? (46)
 - Who was the first president (George Washington, who served from 1789 – 1797)
 - What president has served two nonconsecutive terms? (Grover Cleveland. He was the 22nd and 24th presidents of the U.S.)
 - Which president has served the longest in office (Franklin D. Roosevelt. He served 4 consecutive terms, 12 years and 39 days in office)
 - What are some of the roles of the president (leader of political party, head of state, commander-in-chief, leader of the government)
 - Who was the oldest president to be elected? (Joseph “Joe” R. Biden, Jr. at 77 years old)
 - Which presidents have monuments in the National Mall in Washington, D.C. (George Washington [Washington Monument], Abraham Lincoln [Lincoln Memorial], Thomas Jefferson [Jefferson Memorial], Franklin D. Roosevelt [Franklin D Roosevelt Memorial])
 - Who was the first president inaugurated in Washington, D.C. (Thomas Jefferson)
 - Who was the first president to live in the White House (John Adams. George Washington presided in our capitol which was in New York.)
 - Who was the first U.S. President born after the American Revolution? (Martin Van Buren, born in New York)
 - Who was the first president to visit all 50 states? (Richard Nixon. He was also the only president to resign after the 1970’s Watergate Scandal.)
 - Who was one of the four vice presidents who were elected president the next consecutive year, after serving as vice president? (John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, Martin Van Burren, George H.W. Bush)
 - Which president won by the flip of a coin? (Thomas Jefferson over Aaron Burr)

- Which president never had a first lady? (James Buchanan was a bachelor and never married.)
- Who was the first president to be photographed at his inauguration? (Abraham Lincoln. He was also the tallest president at 6'4".)
- Which president never earned a college degree? (George Washington, Andrew Jackson, Martin Van Buren, Zachary Taylor, Millard Fillmore, Abraham Lincoln, Andrews Johnson, Grover Cleveland, and Harry S. Truman [He attended business college for a law degree but never graduated.]
- Who was the youngest president elected? (Theodore Roosevelt at age 42.)
- Who is the only president to receive a Purple Heart (military medal for bravery and injury in battle)? (John F. Kennedy for his service in WW2.)
- Aside from George Washington, name a president who was also a general before president. (In order of rank, highest to lowest Generals: Dwight D. Eisenhower – General of the Army [5-star], Ulysses S. Grant – General of the Army [4-star], Andrew Jackson – 2 star, William H. Harrison– 2 star, Zachary Taylor – 2 star, Rutherford B. Hayes – 2 star, James A. Garfield (2-star), William H. Taft – 2-star, Franklin Pierce – 1-star, Chester A. Arthur (1-star), Andrew Johnson – 1-star, Benjamin Harrison – 1-star)
- Which president served the shortest term in office? (William Henry Harrison with only 32 days)
- Which presidents are related? (John Adams and John Quincy Adams – father and son, William Henry Harrison and Benjamin Harrison – grandfather and grandson, George H.W. Bush and George W. Bush (father and son)
- Which past presidents are still alive today? (Jimmy Carter, Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, Barack Obama, Donald Trump)
- What state is the most common birthplace for U.S. Presidents? (Virginia has eight: Washington, Jefferson, Madison, Monroe, William H. Harrison, John Tyler, Zachary Taylor, Woodrow Wilson)
- Which presidents died on July 4? (John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, and James Monroe – all Founding Fathers)
- Which election was the closest in U.S. History (after the amendment where presidents and vice presidents are elected with separate votes)? The election of 1824: Andrew Jackson had 99 electoral college votes and John Quincy Adams had 84 votes.)

Set-up Prior to the Activity:

- Prepare an area for the participants. There should (ideally) be a small table where the Jenga-style game can be set in the center and movement of participants all the way around the table. If no table is available, it does work setting up the game on the floor.
- Set up the Jenga-style game. Make sure the question blocks (or numbered blocks) are evenly distributed with the blank blocks as you set up the game. Use a crisscross fashion for stacking: Put down three Jenga blocks all going the same direction. Then, stack on top of them three more Jenga blocks rotated 45 degrees. Then, put three more Jenga

blocks going in the same direction as the bottom. Continue this stacking until all Jenga pieces are placed. Everything should be squared off and stable. (If you have younger participants, maybe have two smaller stacks, splitting the Jenga-style game into two games. Or – if you have a larger group, maybe have two full Jenga-style games going on simultaneously on two different tables.)

The Activity:

- Place the participants sitting around the stacked Jenga. Students should be encouraged to listen to the answers of the other members.
- Give directions to the group:
 - Instructions: “We will pick a team to go first and then we will rotate clockwise for playing this game. When it’s your turn you will carefully remove a Jenga piece from the stack. (It cannot be from the top three rows [or 2 rows if using half a set].) If it has a question on it, you will read the question out loud to the group and answer it to the best of your ability. (Note: If using numbers, say “If it has a number on it, tell me the number, and I will read a question to you, and you will answer it to the best of your ability.”) If you answer correctly, you get a prize. (if prizes are given) After you have pulled out a piece, add it back to the top of the stack. The game is over when the stack falls over. Everyone will walk away with a prize, and everyone can only have one prize.
- Use a random generator app, flip a coin, or rock-paper-scissors game to determine which team goes first.
- Follow the instructions
- Keep resetting up and playing the game as time allows.

After the Activity:

- Find all the pieces for the Jenga-style game and put it away
- Ask any follow-up questions from the entire group

LESSON CLOSURE:

Ask the following: “Now that we’ve participated in this game and learned about the Presidents, I want to see what everyone has learned. Let’s take turns and say one new thing that we’ve learned.” (Go in a circle and let each participant speak.)

ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT UNDERSTANDING:

Review the objectives for possible assessment questions. Give a quick quiz to see how many of the objectives were achieved.

- Example: Who is the current president?
- Example: How long is a president’s term in office?
- Example: What does the President do / What is his job?
- Example: Who is your favorite president, in your opinion, and why?