

American Government & Politics: A Christian Worldview.
Presidential Pardon Project (20–25 Minutes)

TEACHER INSTRUCTIONS

Goal

This activity shows students several famous presidential pardons in history (not the same ones in the book) and puts them into the role of a U.S. President who must consider pardoning five individuals convicted of federal crimes.

Instructions

1. Suggestion: Print the handout front to back, and tell students not to turn over the sheet yet!
2. Have students volunteer to read the pardon summaries on the front side of the handout.
3. Tell students to turn over the handout, and read the instructions together.
4. Give students 10–15 minutes to answer these questions individually (more or less, of course, based on your classroom time).
5. Ask for volunteers to answer; get several per scenario if possible!

Suggested Key

***Note:** Like the recent veto activity, student answers should reflect a commitment to limited government and Constitutional adherence. Students should focus on the lack of enumerated powers (Article I, Section 8) and the protections under the Bill of Rights.*

1. **Scenario 1 (Pardon – Unconstitutional):** This is a direct violation of the First Amendment. Requiring a “fee” to express an opinion on public platforms is a tax on free speech.
2. **Scenario 2 (Pardon – Unjust):** This is an unjust law; it is a victimless commerce regulation that violates the right of individuals to consensually trade goods when no fraud or harm has occurred.
3. **Scenario 3 (Pardon – Unconstitutional):** This violates the First Amendment right to assemble. Protecting the state from “panic” is not an enumerated power that overrides the right of people to gather peacefully.
4. **Scenario 4 (?):** Even though Splithers frames his actions as political protest against inflation, he is arguably creating fraudulent currency. This could undermine the economy’s stability and functions as a direct, non-consensual theft from anyone who unknowingly accepts the fake notes. Of course, on the other hand, a president might pardon him if he believes Splithers was simply trying to provide a coupon-like system that defrauded no one.
5. **Scenario 5 (Pardon – Unconstitutional):** This law clearly violates the Fourth Amendment. A citizen has the right to be secure in his effects. The government lacks the power to track all privately owned storage devices.

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Famous U.S. Presidential Pardons

John Adams (1800): Pardoned John Fries, a leader of a rebellion in Pennsylvania protesting a federal property tax.

Thomas Jefferson (1801): Granted pardons to all those convicted under the controversial Alien and Sedition Acts, often referring to the laws as null and void.

James Madison (1812): Pardoned John P. Van Ness, a prominent D.C. figure, for his involvement in a duel, a common but illegal practice among the political elite.

James Monroe (1817): Pardoned those who deserted the U.S. Army during the War of 1812.

John Quincy Adams (1826): Issued a conditional pardon to James B. Nones, a naval officer who had been court-martialed for disobedience.

James K. Polk (1846): Commuted the death sentence of William W. Scott, a soldier who had deserted his post during the Mexican-American War.

Andrew Johnson (1868): Issued a universal pardon for all citizens who had participated in the “rebellion” against the United States (Confederates), including Confederate States of America President Jefferson Davis.

Rutherford B. Hayes (1878): Issued a pardon to Dr. Samuel Mudd, the physician who had treated John Wilkes Booth after the Lincoln assassination, in recognition of his service during a yellow fever outbreak in prison.

Grover Cleveland (1886): Pardoned James W. “Jim” Butler, a man convicted of mail robbery, based on evidence that he had been a victim of a forced confession.

Woodrow Wilson (1920): Pardoned John T. “Jack” McCue, a man wrongly convicted of military desertion.

Warren G. Harding (1921): Commuted the 10-year sentence of socialist leader Eugene V. Debs, who was convicted under the Espionage Act for an anti-war speech.

Calvin Coolidge (1924): Pardoned Dr. Charles A. Lindbergh Sr. (posthumously), who had been prosecuted for his anti-WWI sentiments.

Harry S. Truman (1947): Granted amnesty to nearly 1,600 men who had violated the Selective Service Act during WWII.

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You are the President of the United States. Several potential presidential pardon cases have come before your desk. For these below cases, decide whether or not to pardon the individuals and scenarios in which they are involved, then briefly explain the reason(s) why you did or did not pardon them.

The Broadcast Tax: Ohio-based Internet radio host William Jasper was convicted under a federal law requiring a “Digital Civic Responsibility Fee” to broadcast opinions online, arguing the fee funds “verified information” programs. (Jasper refused to pay the fee.)

Decision: ☐ PARDON ☐ DENY

Reason:

The Nutritional Mandate: Florida homemaker Lois Cauwels was jailed for violating a federal law forbidding the sale of raw milk between neighbors, intended to force all dairy consumption through federally-inspected, industrial processing plants that U.S. government agents say are unsafe.

Decision: ☐ PARDON ☐ DENY

Reason:

The “Crisis” Assembly: A group was convicted for meeting in a private home to discuss concerns about federal overreach, violating a federal Emergency Order that forbids unauthorized gatherings to prevent the spread of what U.S. agents say will panic the public.

Decision: ☐ PARDON ☐ DENY

Reason:

The Currency Restorer: Texas doctor George Splithers was convicted of producing high-quality monetary notes that exactly mimic federal currency, arguing that these notes are “private community vouchers” designed to help his local town avoid the inflation caused by federal monetary policy.

Decision: ☐ PARDON ☐ DENY

Reason:

The Privacy-Seeker: North Carolinian Bonnie Fern was convicted for refusing to register several digital storage drives with the Department of Commerce, after the passage of a law intended to keep track of all personal data kept by private citizens.

Decision: ☐ PARDON ☐ DENY

Reason: