

# presidents of the *United States of America*

"I defeated the greatest empire in the 18th century and served as the first President of the United States."



**George Washington**



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# Become a Presidential Historian by Solving This Puzzle

In this book, you'll learn all sorts of facts about George Washington's amazing life and accomplishments. But there's still one last thing we need to know about him.

During the Christmas season in 1787, George Washington paid 18 shillings to bring a unique animal to his home to entertain his guests, and your task is to find out what it was. You can help us uncover the answer! Hidden in the text are bolded letters. Read this book carefully to find them and fill the letters into the blanks below in the order they appear.

— — — — —  
Once you've solved this puzzle, you'll be a true PragerU Kids presidential historian!

## Meet George Washington

George Washington is literally everywhere! His face is carved on Mount Rushmore. His name is on street signs, schools, and even the nation's capital. An entire state is named after him. His portrait even appears on the one dollar bill. Have you ever wondered what made him so special?

The reason is simple: George Washington was one of the greatest and most important leaders in all of history. Without him, there would be no United States, and millions of people, including Americans today, would have never lived in freedom.

During the American Revolution, Washington led the Continental Army as its **commander-in-chief**. Despite facing great hardships, Washington and his men persevered and defeated Great Britain, the most powerful empire in the world.

When the Founding Fathers met in 1787 to create a new system of government, Washington served as the president of the Constitutional Convention. He also served as the first President of the United States from 1789 to 1797. In these positions, he helped create our system of government and led the nation with great honor and integrity.

People around the world respect Washington because of his great character. He worked hard to do what he felt was the right thing to do, even if others disagreed with him. Most military and political leaders throughout history have wanted to conquer and rule as many people as possible. Washington, however, was different. He believed that power should remain with the people and he gave up power twice in his life, so that his fellow countrymen could be free.



## Young George

George Washington was born on February 22, 1732 in Popes Creek, Virginia to Augustine and Mary Ball Washington. His father was a farmer who owned many acres of land in Virginia. Young George had three older half-siblings (from his father's first marriage) and five younger siblings. He grew to become a strong boy, working hard on his family's plantations and enjoying the outdoors. Life seemed to be going well for young George, but in 1743, when he was 11, his father died. It was a difficult loss for the Washington family. Even worse, without his father around to provide for them, the family couldn't afford to give George much of an education.

Still, young George did inherit land and several enslaved servants. Also, since George was left without a father, his older half-brother Lawrence helped raise and mentor him. Sadly, tragedy struck the Washington family again when Lawrence suffered from a lung disease and died in 1752.



## Interesting Facts

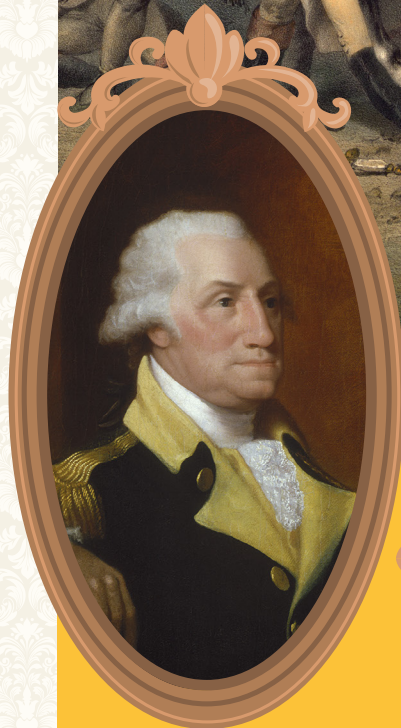
- He is often referred to as the "Father of His Country."
- He supported the Federalist Party
- He left the colonies/the United States just once in his life – during a trip to Barbados when he was 19 years old.
- He was over six feet tall while his wife Martha was barely five feet tall.
- He was a member of a prominent social organization called Freemasons.
- Thomas Jefferson once called him "the best horseman of his age."
- He is the only president to be **unanimously** elected by the Electoral College (twice, in 1789 and 1792).t
- His close friend, Henry Lee, paid tribute to Washington after his death, famously saying that he was "First in war, first in peace, and first in the hearts of his countrymen."
- He is one of only two people whose birthdays are celebrated as a national holiday in the United States (the other being Martin Luther King, Jr.).

# Young Warrior

By the time he was a young man, Washington craved adventure, so he joined the local militia under the British army, becoming a colonel. At the time, the British and the French were competing to control North America. In 1754, at the age of 22, Washington led an attack on the French at the Battle of Jumonville Glen. The attack on the French force helped spark a major global conflict known as the **Seven Years' War**.

The following year, in July 1755, he fought the French and Native Americans in the Battle of Monongahela. Although he was sick at the time, the young Washington braved enemy fire and rallied the British forces into a retreat, saving many of their lives. He survived, even though the French shot two horses that he rode during the battle and he had four bullet holes through his coat. Later, Washington said he survived the battle because of "the miraculous care of **Providence**." After this event, many people recognized Washington's courage and leadership abilities, calling him the "Hero of the Monongahela."

By this time, Washington wanted to settle down. He owned thousands of acres of land and lived at his beautiful Mount Vernon estate overlooking the Potomac River. In 1759, he married a wealthy widow named Martha Dandridge Custis, who had two children, Jacky and Patsy, from her previous husband. Although he and Martha never had any of their own children, he served as Jacky and Patsy's stepfather. Washington retired from the military and spent most of his time working on his farm, becoming one of the richest men in America.



## Quote

*"I retain an unalterable affection for you, which neither time nor distance can change."*  
- Letter to Martha Washington, June 1775



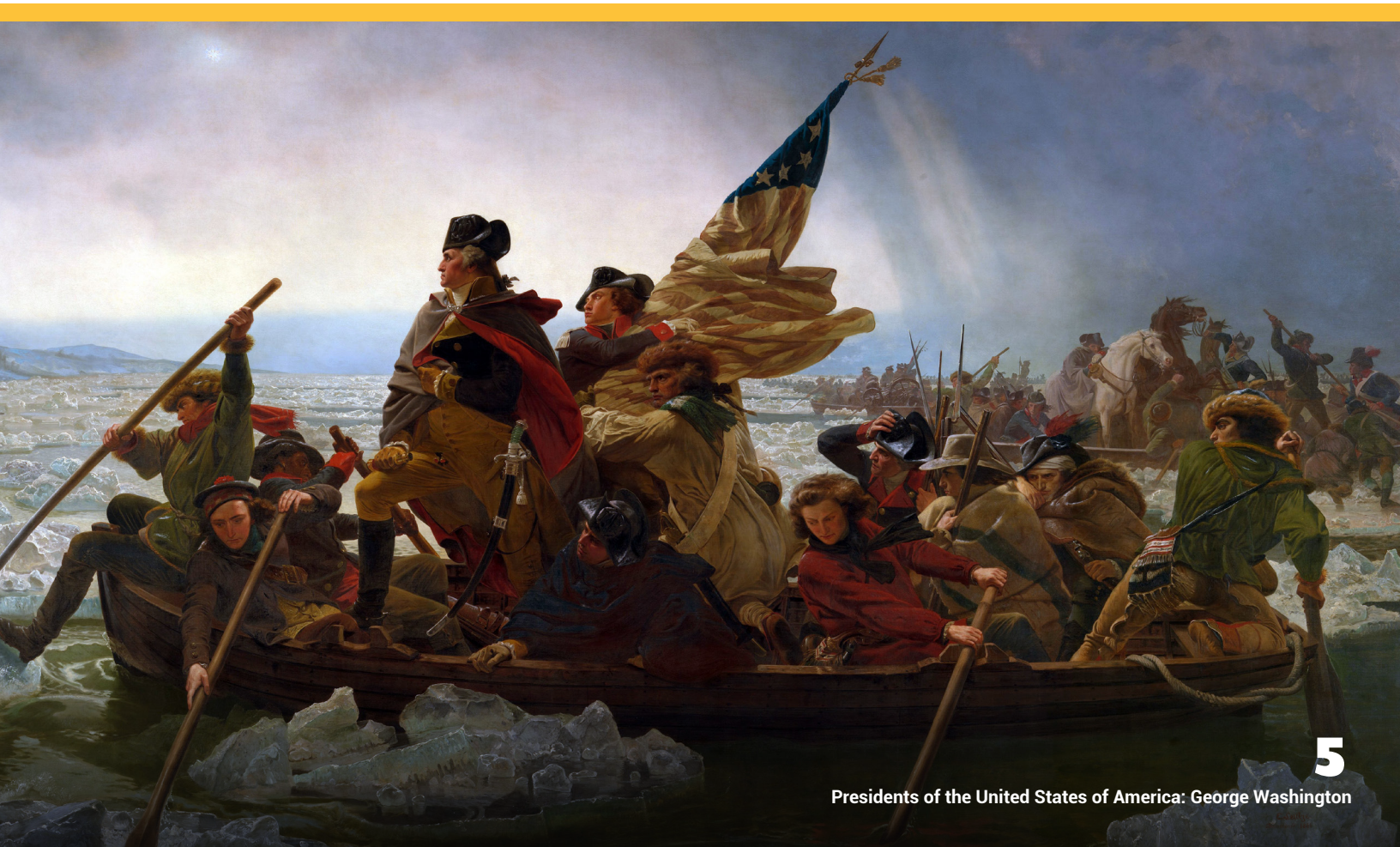
# The American Revolution


In the 1760s, the British government began violating Americans' rights by imposing unfair taxes. These taxes were unfair because the British did not allow the Americans representation when creating the taxes. As a result, the Americans had never agreed to them. In response, the colonists began to send petitions and protest against these measures. Washington emerged as a leader of the **patriot** cause. In 1774, the colony of Virginia sent him to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania to meet with delegates from the other colonies in the **Continental Congress**. They discussed how to respond to the crisis.

When **King George III** sent a large military force to Boston to enforce his taxes, the patriots began to take up arms to defend themselves. In April of 1775, war broke out, and the American Revolution began. By June of 1775, the Americans needed someone to

lead the **Continental Army**, so the Congress unanimously chose Washington as its commander-in-chief. Americans were amazed that, as a wealthy man, Washington was willing to risk everything he had to defend their rights. Just before taking command, he wrote to Martha, "I go fully trusting in that Providence, which has been more bountiful to me than I deserve."

The war lasted eight long years. For most of the conflict, the British appeared to be winning. They had a well-trained army with years of experience fighting in Europe. Meanwhile, Washington's army was poorly fed, had limited supplies, and was inexperienced. Washington worked very hard to support his men. He didn't take a single day off during the entire war, and spent much of it begging Congress and the states for the supplies his army needed.



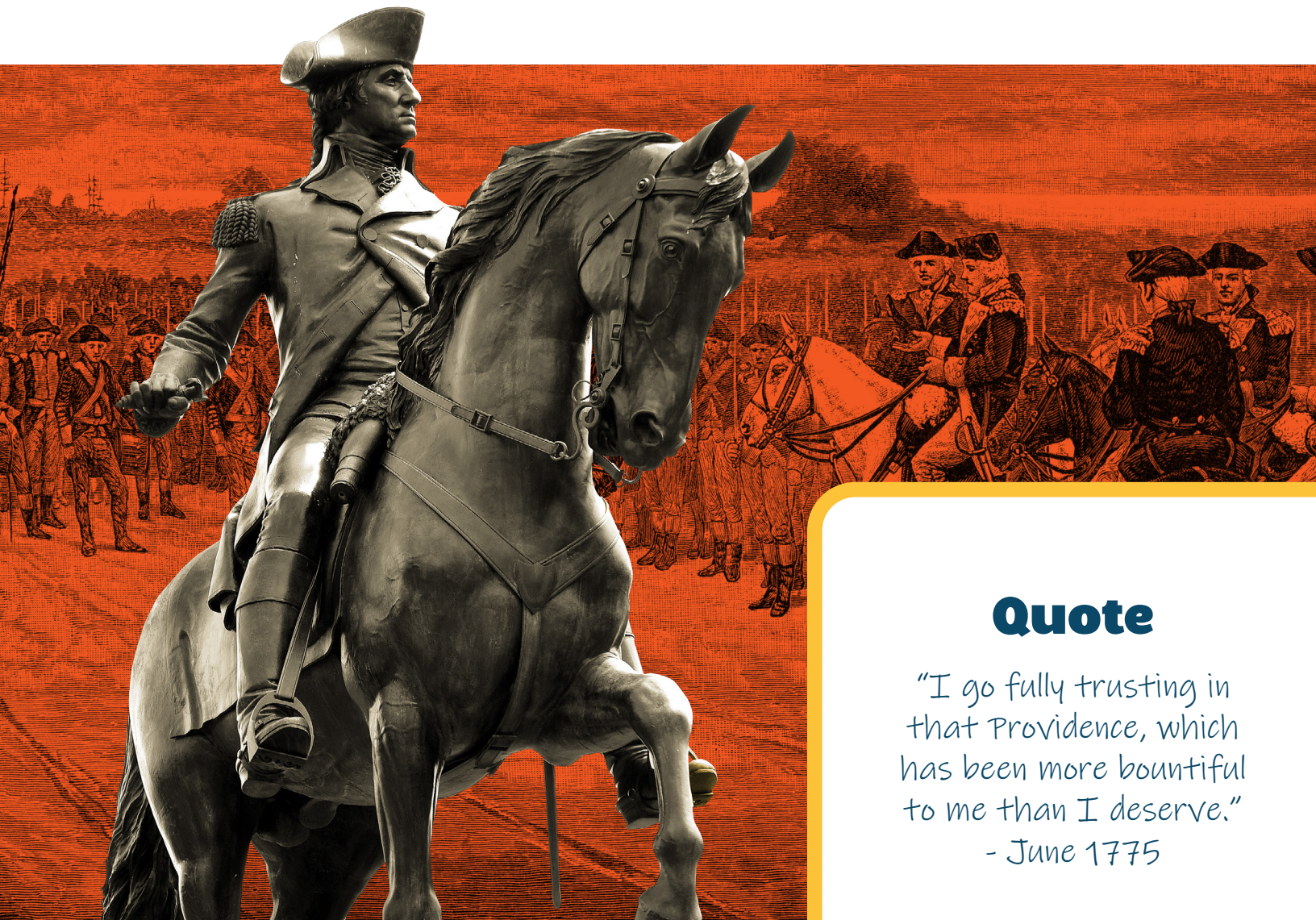


In the summer of 1776, the British inflicted a devastating defeat on Washington's army in New York. It looked like the **A**mericans might lose the war and their freedoms, but Washington executed a daring plan on Christmas night in 1776. He and his army crossed the Delaware in the middle of a major snowstorm and won an impressive victory at the Battle of Trenton. One week later, he defeated the British again at the Battle of Princeton. Through these victories, Washington saved the American cause.

The next several years, however, were very frustrating times for Washington. He suffered several defeats and many of his soldiers died

during the brutal winter of 1777-78 when they set up camp in Valley Forge, Pennsylvania. Ultimately, Washington lost more battles than he won, but he was still able to keep his army together. He also got a major boost from his former adversary, the French, who decided to help the Americans.

In October of 1781, Washington and the French commander, the Comte de Rochambeau, combined their forces and attacked the British at Yorktown, Virginia. Washington fired the first shot at the battle and, after almost two weeks of fighting, the American and French armies triumphed. At this point, the British knew they could not win the war.



## Quote

"I go fully trusting in that Providence, which has been more bountiful to me than I deserve."  
- June 1775



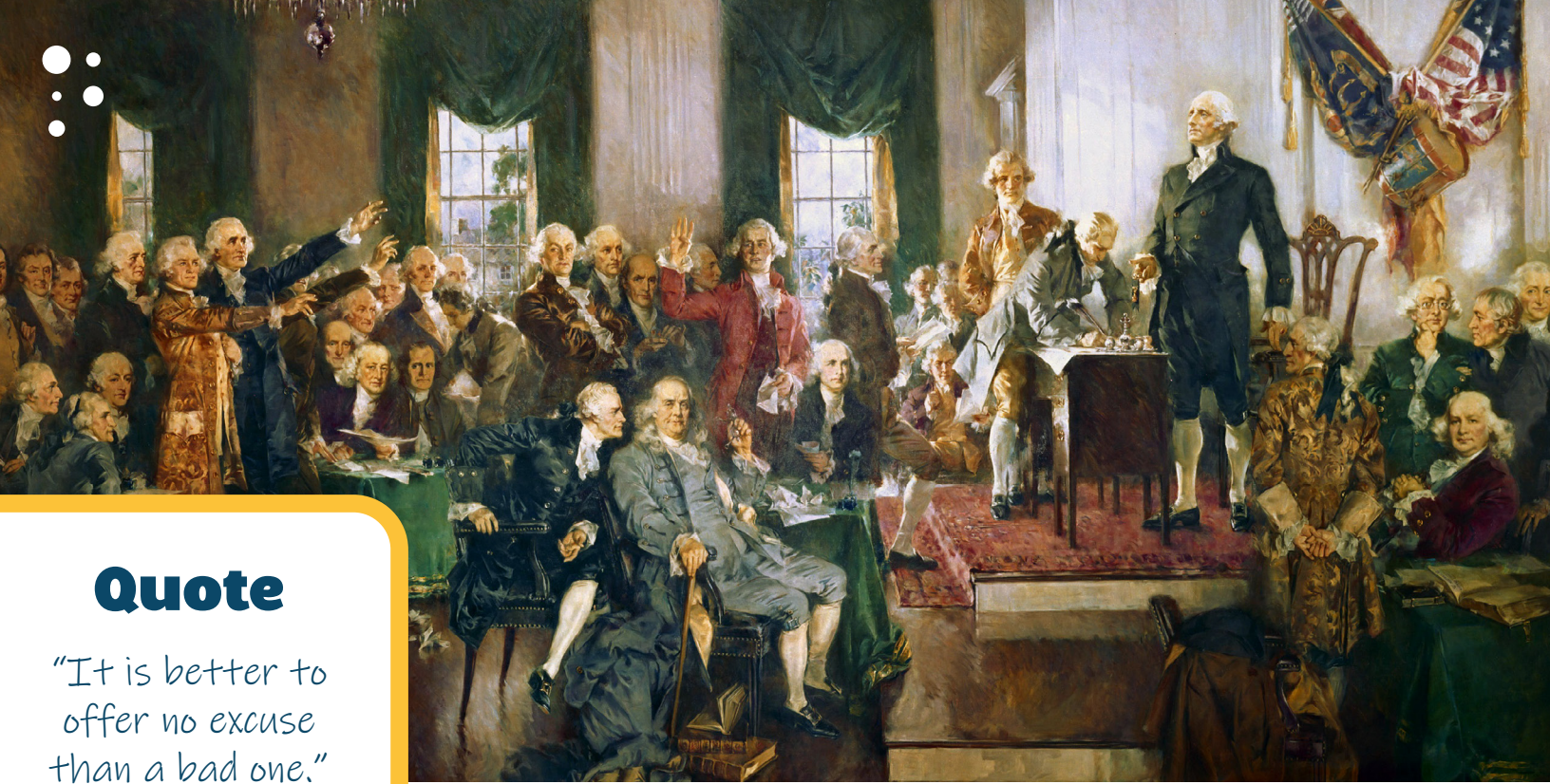
Even though the Americans were on the verge of winning independence, many wondered if their new country could survive without a king. In 1782, an officer named Lewis Nicola encouraged Washington himself to become the king of the new United States. In response, Washington rejected this suggestion. He had fought too long to free his country from one king. He knew that if he had declared himself a monarch, America would just replace one king for another and the entire war would have been for nothing.

In 1783, Washington also had to stop his soldiers from disobeying Congress. By then, many of his officers were mad that Congress hadn't paid them for their service. The officers considered intimidating members of Congress with their weapons. Although Washington wanted his men to be paid, he feared that disobeying the people's representatives might

lead to a dictatorship of some kind, where the military and not the people made laws. In 1783, he gave a passionate speech at the army camp in Newburgh, begging them to respect America's civilian leaders. Inspired by Washington's example, the officers gave up on their plot, allowing America to remain a free country.

The United States officially won its independence when a peace treaty was signed on September 3, 1783. On December 23, 1783, George Washington appeared before Congress to say goodbye and formally give up his title as commander-in-chief. He then returned back on horseback to his Mount Vernon estate, arriving on Christmas day. Washington's decision to give up power stunned the world. Even his former adversary, King George III, said that this act made him "the most distinguished character of the age."





## Quote

*"It is better to offer no excuse than a bad one."  
- October 1791*

# Constitutional Convention

Washington enjoyed being home again at Mount Vernon with **M**artha. By then, Jacky and Patsy had both died. The Washingtons were sad to lose them both, but they were overjoyed to adopt two of Jacky's children, Washy and Nelly, raising them as their own children.

Although the United States was free, its government did not function well. The country had very little leadership and couldn't perform many basic tasks, like raising money to carry out its duties. Washington and others worried that if the government was too weak, European empires might try to take advantage of the situation, split up the states into different countries, and rule once again over the American people.

To address these issues, Washington and other Founders met in Philadelphia for the **Constitutional Convention** of 1787. The delegates unanimously elected Washington to

serve as the president of the Convention. During the Convention, the delegates worked hard to draft a new constitution for their country. By September of 1787, they had finished drafting what would become the U.S. Constitution, the official law of the land. Americans felt safe about the Constitution since Washington supported it. Without Washington's endorsement, one of the greatest political documents in world history may never have been ratified.

The Constitution created a new office: the Presidency of the United States. The American people overwhelmingly wanted one man for the job: George Washington. Although he preferred to remain at home in Mount Vernon, he answered the call of duty once again. After Washington was elected unanimously in early 1789, he took the oath of office in New York City to become America's first president on April 30 of that year.

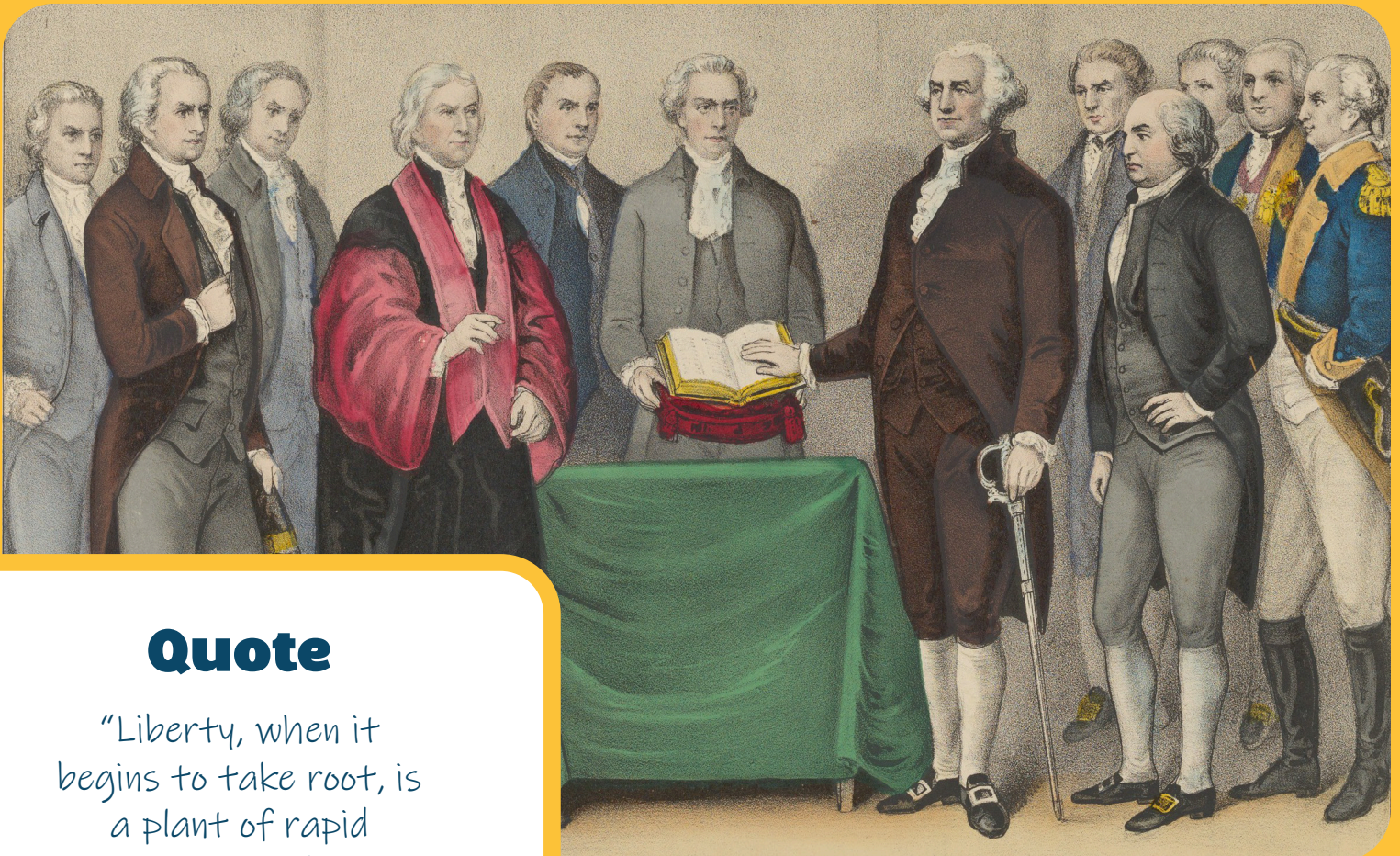


# President

Washington served as president, first in New York City, and then in Philadelphia. As president, he made many important decisions that still impact our lives today. He supported the adoption of the **Bill of Rights**, which guaranteed Americans' basic freedoms. He helped decide where the White House and U.S. Capitol building would be located. He established the first **Cabinet of the United States** and first national bank, which brought order to the nation's economic and political systems. Many historians consider Washington's Cabinet the greatest in American history, since it included brilliant Founders like Thomas Jefferson as the Secretary of State and Alexander Hamilton as the Secretary of Treasury. He also appointed the first members


of the Supreme Court.

In 1789, the French Revolution broke out, sparking another war throughout Europe. Some Americans wanted to enter the war in support of their former ally France, while others favored having closer ties to Great Britain so the United States could access greater trade. People argued passionately about which side to support. Washington knew, however, that the United States was still too young and weak to fight another war. He worked hard to preserve peace for America and succeeded by signing the Jay Treaty with the British. Although the agreement was controversial, historians now credit Washington for saving his country from being destroyed in an unnecessary war.



## Quote

“Liberty, when it begins to take root, is a plant of rapid growth.”  
- March 1788



Some Americans, like Thomas Jefferson and James Madison, disagreed with some of President Washington's decisions and created a new party, the Democratic-Republican Party. Alexander Hamilton opposed Jefferson and Madison and formed the Federalist Party. Although Washington hoped to maintain national unity between the two parties, he felt most at home with the Federalists.

Many historians believe that Washington's most important decision as president was, once again, to leave power. He was so popular that he could have been re-elected over and over, serving as president for the rest of his life. In 1796, however, one year before the end of his second term, he issued a Farewell Address announcing his retirement. After his vice president, John Adams, was elected to replace him, Washington left office in 1797, once again returning to Mount Vernon. In doing so, he established the **precedent** that presidents should only serve, at most, two terms. Future presidents followed Washington's example and refused serving more than two terms, until Franklin D. Roosevelt decided to run for a third term in 1940. Many Americans believe that the two-term limit has prevented many presidents from becoming too powerful.



## Quote

*“There is but one straight course & that is to seek truth & pursue it steadily.”*  
- July 1795

## Farewell Address

In September 1796, near the end of his presidency, Washington published his famous Farewell Address to the American people. Not only did it announce that he was retiring for good, but it also gave advice to Americans on how to succeed without him. The Address is full of great wisdom and was intended to guide those alive at the time, as well as future generations.

For over a century after its publication, Americans considered the Farewell Address to be as important a document as the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. Washington's advice in his Farewell Address still guides America over two centuries later.

"The name of American, which belongs to you in your national capacity, must always exalt the just pride of patriotism."

"Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, religion and morality are indispensable supports."

"Observe good faith and justice towards all nations; cultivate peace and harmony with all."

## Retirement

Tired from a lifetime of public service, Washington was grateful to be back at home with Martha, Washy, and Nelly. There was, however, one remaining problem in his life that he wanted to resolve. Just like many of his fellow Virginians, he had depended on enslaved African-Americans servants on his estate throughout his life. By the time he had left the presidency, there were over 300 enslaved people at Mount Vernon.

Washington knew, however, that slavery was evil and went against the principles of equality that he had long fought for. Washington saw many African-Americans fight courageously in the American Revolution and supported passing

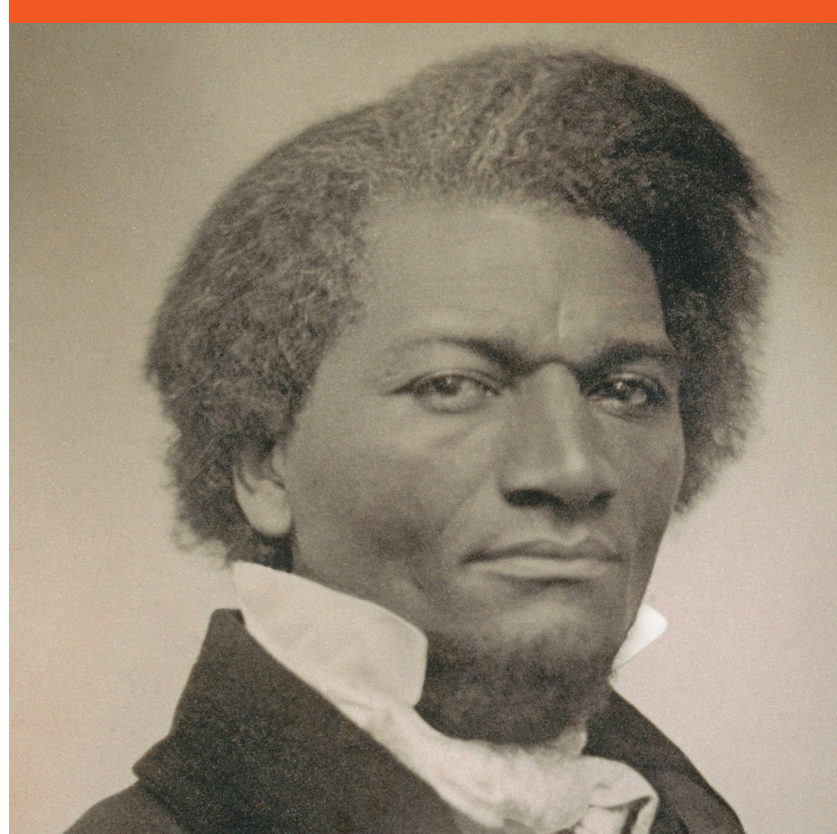
laws to end slavery over time. In 1786, he wrote "there is not a man living who wishes more sincerely than I do, to see a plan adopted for the abolition of it [slavery]."

Washington worried that trying to eliminate slavery too quickly would disrupt the young country's social and economic fabric and destroy it, preventing anyone from having freedom. This would harm millions of white and black people's lives. Also, if slavery was eliminated too quickly, the southern states, which were dependent on it, might break off from the Union. This would divide up the young nation and make it vulnerable to its enemies.



He came up with plans to lease out his enslaved servants to other estates so they could be paid for their labor. Unfortunately, these plans never worked out. As he neared the end of his life, however, he wanted to find the best possible solution. In his will, Washington ordered that all of the enslaved servants under his authority be freed and that the elderly among them be taken care of by his estate for the rest of their lives. He also wanted the young among them to be given an opportunity to have a better future, so he required that they be taught how to read and write and be taught a "useful occupation." In doing so, Washington became the only major slaveholding Founder to free his enslaved servants. African-American activist Frederick Douglass later praised him as the Founder who "could not die till he had broken the chains of his slaves."

George Washington remained active in retirement. Every day, he rode horseback and inspected his farms. After serving the country for so long, he also enjoyed spending time with his family. However, after riding in a rain and snowstorm on December 12, 1799, he began suffering from a throat ailment, or what some now call epiglottitis. The situation worsened and, on the evening of December 14, he died at the age of 67. As the news of his passing spread across the country, millions of Americans mourned the loss of their greatest Founding Father.



## Quote

"Few men have virtue to withstand the highest bidder."

- August 1779

"Washington could not die till he had broken the chains of his slaves."

- Frederick Douglass



## Legacy

For most of world history, almost every country or empire was ruled by a monarch, emperor, or some type of military conqueror. These rulers often took control of as much land and people as possible and rarely respected the rights of those they ruled. They usually held a tight grip on power until they died.

Washington wanted to change all of that. He had a vision for a country where the people lived free from **tyranny** and where political power ultimately belonged to them, not their leaders. By defeating the British and leading the effort to set up the new American government, he successfully established the first large, **free republic** in world history.

Throughout his career, many wanted Washington to become a dictator or remain as president for the rest of his life. Instead, he proved his devotion to the people by leaving power twice, first after the American Revolution, and second, after two terms as president. He could have remained the most powerful man in the country, but, because of his character and integrity, instead chose to live as a private citizen on his farm. In doing so, he set an example for all future **leaders**, that they should use power to serve the people and not themselves. Over 200 years after his death, Washington remains an inspiration for people around the world who believe in liberty and justice for all.



# Word Search

B P L B A T Z P A N N K U T S  
T D U A K O L U I D R N Y T F  
V O C A B I N E T K A R H R U  
R O Y E V R U S A N A G A E X  
G E R K E T O C I N I U H P U  
P F C U Z A M M N R M L R U T  
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I Q E E E U N O F D I I Q L A  
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X N K L E L I V A A U K C C W  
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P L I B O N E W O L X K N N A  
A S K E G Q E N R R M Y N W M  
M F R D X B S D T I P U Y X X  
G H V R Y P C M J P T D I G Q

UNANIMOUSLY

PROVIDENCE

PATRIOT

BILL OF RIGHTS

CABINET

PRECEDENT

REPUBLIC

TYRANNY

ANSWERS ON PG 16



## Action Hero

Some of the most famous images of Washington, such as the one on the dollar bill, depict him as a stern, old man. The real George Washington, however, was a man of action. Throughout his military career, Washington fearlessly led his troops into battle himself, coming under enemy fire. He miraculously survived so many battles (in one instance, with bullet holes in his coat) that many people felt he was protected by God.

During the Battle of Princeton, General Washington single-handedly stopped a retreat and inspired his men to victory. One of his men later wrote, "I shall never forget what I felt at Princeton on his account, when I saw him brave all the dangers of the field and his important life hanging as it were by a single hair with a thousand deaths flying around him. Believe me, I thought not of myself."



Mt. Vernon, home of  
President George Washington

## Do you know the U.S. Constitution?

Fill in the blanks to complete the Preamble of the U.S. Constitution

We the People of the \_\_\_\_\_ States, in Order to  
\_\_\_\_\_ a more \_\_\_\_\_ Union, establish \_\_\_\_\_,  
insure \_\_\_\_\_ Tranquility, \_\_\_\_\_ for the common  
\_\_\_\_\_, promote the general \_\_\_\_\_, and secure  
the \_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_ to ourselves and  
our \_\_\_\_\_, do ordain and \_\_\_\_\_ this  
Constitution for the United States of America.

ANSWERS ON PG 16



# Glossary

**Commander-in-Chief:** The person who is the top leader of an army or military branch.

**Unanimously:** With the agreement of everyone involved.

**Seven Years' War:** A major war mainly between Great Britain and France that took place from 1756 to 1763. In the United States, it was and is known as the French and Indian War.

**Providence:** A term people in George Washington's time used to refer to God.

**Patriot:** A person who strongly supports their country and is willing to defend it from all threats. During the American Revolution, the colonists who fought for their rights and supported an independent United States were often referred to as patriots.

**Continental Congress:** The legislative body that made laws for the American colonies and states around the time of the American Revolution. George Washington was a delegate to the first and second continental congresses from 1774 to 1775.

**King George III:** The ruler of Great Britain who presided over unjust laws that oppressed the American colonies. During his reign, the United States declared and won independence from Great Britain.

**Continental Army:** The military force that fought to free the United States against Great Britain during the American Revolution. George Washington served as the Continental Army's commander-in-chief.

**Constitutional Convention:** The meeting that took place from May to September 1787 in Philadelphia where many of the Founding Fathers drafted the U.S. Constitution. George Washington served as the presiding officer of the Convention.

**Bill of Rights:** The first ten amendments to the U.S. Constitution, which were ratified in 1791. They are often considered the most important amendments and protect the basic rights of American citizens, such as freedom of speech and worship and the right to bear arms and to be tried by jury.

**Cabinet of the United States:** A senior group of advisors to the President of the United States. Its members include the Vice President of the United States and the top agency and department leaders in the federal government, such as the Secretary of State, the Secretary of Treasury, and the Attorney General.

**Precedent:** An event or action that serves as an example for similar situations in the future.

**Tyranny:** When a government rules unfairly and harshly without respecting the rights of the people.

**Republic:** A system of government in which power ultimately comes from the people. In this system, the people usually exercise that power by electing representatives to vote for laws and a president to enforce those laws. The power of the government in a republic is limited and exists to protect the rights of the people.

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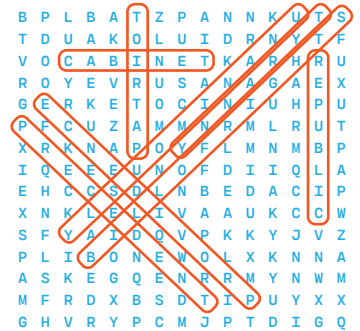
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## Answers:



WASHINGTON'S UNIQUE ANIMAL:  
CAMEL

**DO YOU KNOW THE U.S. CONSTITUTION?**  
We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.

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