

★ George Washington President of Precedence



Dr. Brandon Moore

Introduction

“As the first of everything in our situation will serve to establish a precedent, it is devoutly wished on my part that these precedents may be fixed on true principles.” – President George Washington

George Washington is well-known for a variety of exploits during his life, but perhaps his greatest legacy was his leadership as the first President of the United States. President Washington, when elected to office, was acutely aware of the power of this newly-formed office as well as how his actions would influence the future of the nation. He set several precedents that are integral to the executive branch of government today. This lesson asks students to read and analyze short essays on the presidency of George Washington, compare his actions with current presidents, and to apply critical thinking in the form of a short essay about his presidency. Specifically students will:

- demonstrate an understanding of the concept of precedence and its importance in politics,
- evaluate George Washington's influence on presidential precedent, and
- analyze and explain important presidential precedents set by President Washington that are still followed today.

Grade Level or Course

High school U.S. Government



Time Allowed

Two or three 45-50 minute class periods.

Social Studies Standards

This activity addresses the following National Council for the Social Studies Themes:

- II – Time, Continuity, and Change
- V – Individuals, Groups, and Institutions
- VI – Power, Authority, and Governance
- X – Civic Ideals and Practices

This activity addresses the following *Social Studies High School U.S. Government TEKS*:

- 1 History.** The student understands how constitutional government, as developed in America and expressed in the Declaration of Independence, the Articles of Confederation, and the U.S. Constitution, has been influenced by ideas, people, and historical documents. The student is expected to:
 - 1F: identify significant individuals in the field of government and politics, including George Washington...
- 2 History.** The student understands the roles played by individuals, political parties, interest groups, and the media in the U.S. political system, past and present. The student is expected to:
 - 2A: give examples of the processes used by individuals, political parties, interest groups, or the media to affect public policy; and
 - 2B: analyze the impact of political changes brought about by individuals, political parties, interest groups, or the media, past and present.
- 8 Government.** The student understands the structure and functions of the government created by the U.S. Constitution. The student is expected to:
 - 8B: analyze the structure and functions of the executive branch of government, including the constitutional powers of the president, the growth of presidential power, and the role of Cabinet and executive departments.
- 29 Social Studies skills.** The student applies critical-thinking skills to organize and use information acquired from a variety of valid sources, including electronic technology. The student is expected to:



29F: analyze information by sequencing, categorizing, identifying cause-and-effect relationships, comparing, contrasting, finding the main idea, summarizing, making generalizations and predictions, drawing inferences and conclusions, and developing connections between historical events over time.

- 30 Social Studies skills.** The student communicates in written, oral, and visual forms. The student is expected to:
 - 30C: interpret and create written, oral, and visual presentations of social studies information; and
 - 30D: transfer information from one medium to another.

Materials Needed

- Background reading: University of Virginia Miller Center of Public Affairs Web site on Washington – <http://millercenter.org/president/washington>
- Important links from this website to read:
 - A Life in Brief
 - Campaigns and Elections
 - Domestic Affairs
 - Foreign Affairs
 - The American Franchise
 - Impact and Legacy
 - Key Events

continued on page 54 ►

George Washington

continued from page 53

- *The Presidency of George Washington* by Jack D. Warren (recommended reading for teachers)
- **Worksheets:** George Washington as President worksheet chart; George Washington as President take-home essay; Essay scoring rubric

Vocabulary

Precedent; appointment; executive privilege; executive restraint

Lesson Sequence

Introduction

Discuss the following questions with the class to introduce the topic.

- What do you know about George Washington? What is he most famous for? Make a list on the board and answer these questions.
- Discuss the definition of historical precedent and how precedent is set. Look up the definition together if need be.
- Did you know that George Washington was the most important president? Why?
- Discuss some of the precedents that presidents follow today. You may need to help the students with a discussion of how many terms a president can serve. The precedent for two terms was set by George Washington and was followed with no written rules until FDR ran for an unprecedented four terms as president. This was changed by the 22nd Amendment to the Constitution.

Instructional Input

- Project the attached “What did George Washington accomplish as President” on the board and discuss the history of his presidency with the students, answering questions as you go.
- *Homework at end of first day* – Assign students to research precedent in the office of the President and bring in three examples for the next day. Start the next day by discussing different precedents for five minutes.

Guided Practice

- Have the students get into groups of 2-3 and give them the url for the web site to access the information (<http://millercenter.org/president/washington>)
- Read the section entitled “The American Franchise” aloud in class before allowing students to start work on the notes.
- Instruct the students to read the assigned information and fill out



President George Washington and his Cabinet.

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Members of Washington's cabinet included Secretary of War Henry Knox, Secretary of the Treasury Alexander Hamilton, Secretary of State Thomas Jefferson, and Attorney General Edmund Randolph. Not pictured because he was not technically a part of the Cabinet was Vice President John Adams. Historians generally agree that George Washington put together the most brilliant group of cabinet officers in our nation's history. Unlike subsequent presidents that often polled their cabinet officers in making decisions, however, George Washington made all presidential decisions. He would often seek memos from his cabinet officers to seek their differing opinions, but he never put decisions to a vote.

the chart worksheet as completely as possible. *Finish as homework for second day.*

- Open the third day by discussing the notes and George Washington's impact as President of the United States.

Assessment

- Hand out the take-home essay and have students answer two of the three questions in complete sentences and grade using the attached rubric.

Take-Home Essay: George Washington American President

Instructions

Choose two of the three following questions and answer them in complete sentences. You may do outside research to answer these questions, but you must turn in your notes with the essay.

1. What, in your opinion, was President Washington's most important act as president? How can you prove it?
2. How did President Washington shape the presidency as the first executive officer under the Constitution? What precedents did he set that are still followed today?

3. Relate the issues that President Washington dealt with as president to the president today. What similarities do you see between now and then? What differences do you see?

Extension

Research “precedent” in the office of the President and form a timeline chronology of precedents set by presidents from Washington to today.

Websites

University of Virginia Miller Center of Public Affairs Web site on Washington <http://millercenter.org/president/washington>.

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What did George Washington Accomplish as President?

Overall question: What did Washington accomplish as President?

1. General Administration
 - a. Washington's influence was important at the Constitutional Convention, where he brought credibility to the meeting
 - b. Washington believed that energy was needed in the executive branch of government
 - c. Presidential powers were framed with Washington in mind, even though he never said he'd accept the job
 - d. The founders assumed that Washington would be the first president and serve for the rest of his life
 - e. Goals upon being elected
 - i. Persuade Americans that energetic executive authority is not tyrannical and can be trusted – only through time
 - ii. Solve the economic crisis – with Hamilton's help
 - iii. Solve crisis in the Northwest with the Indian tribes – did not want war with Great Britain
 - iv. Establishment of Washington DC as an independent federal city – worked alone
 - f. The President is not a figurehead – he was an acting executive
2. Foreign Affairs
 - a. Washington believed the future economic greatness of the US was located in the Ohio Valley
 - i. In the Ohio Valley, the Indians were allied with the British and the both resisted US expansion
 - ii. The British were supposed to evacuate their forts, from which they supplied the Indians, but they did not
 - iii. Washington did not mind going to war with Indians, but not Great Britain
 - b. Washington and Knox had a paternal view of Indians
 - i. Wanted them to be turned into farmers and good citizens integrated into the republic
- ii. Diplomatic challenge – upset foreign nations
 1. Negotiated with the principal tribes in north and south of the conflict
 2. Sent expeditions to the frontier to put the Indians down – first two failed
- a. General "Mad" Anthony Wayne finally defeated the Indian Confederacy at the "Battle of Fallen Timbers"
- c. Washington believed that having power or just the ability to project it and to be willing to use it means that you have power
- d. Jay's Treaty
 - i. Upset many people – felt gave too much leeway to Britain
 - ii. Washington determined foreign affairs based on principle, not popular opinion – what was best for the country
3. Economics
 - a. Financial Crisis – US was \$51 million in debt
 - i. Alexander Hamilton came up with a plan to solve the debt problems
 - ii. Washington believed that solving the nation's debt honestly was the just thing to do to ensure the credibility of the new government – he believed the original bondholders from the Revolutionary War should get the money for the bonds
 - iii. Under Hamilton's program the speculators or whoever held the government bonds got the money – he stated that it was necessary to pay whoever held the bonds to establish the credit of the United States of America
 - iv. Crisis solved
 1. Attracted foreign capital
 2. Made expansion possible

George Washington's Precedents Name

Instructions: As you read the information on President George Washington, fill out the information for each precedent and write an explanation of the precedent set. Then write a description or give an example of how the precedent is used today.

PRECEDENT	ACTION	SIMILAR TODAY? HOW?
President is independent in dealing with foreign affairs.		
President can send emissaries overseas for negotiations.		
President is Commander-in-Chief		
Strong and cautious central government		
Peaceful transfer of power		
Inaugural Address		
Separation of executive and legislative branches		
Supreme Court appointments		
Federal government is supreme power.		
Two-term limit.		
Power to dismiss federal employees		
President chooses cabinet members		
Executive privilege		
Not unduly influencing the judicial and legislative branches of government		
Executive restraint		
Role of Vice-President		
Image of presidential greatness and dignity		

George Washington as President Essay Scoring Rubric

	4 Excellent	3 Average	2 Needs Minor Work	1 Needs work or major work
Focus on Topic (Content) /4	There is one clear, well-focused topic. Main idea stands out and is supported by detailed information.	Main idea is clear but the supporting information is general.	Main idea is somewhat clear but there is a need for more supporting information.	The main idea is not clear. There is a seemingly random collection of information.
Support for Topic (Content) /4	Relevant, telling, quality details give the reader important information that goes beyond the obvious or predictable.	Supporting details and information are relevant, but one key issue or portion of the storyline is unsupported.	Supporting details and information are relevant, but several key issues or portions of the storyline are unsupported.	Supporting details and information are typically unclear or not related to the topic.
Introduction (Organization) /4	The introduction is inviting, states the main topic and previews the structure of the paper.	The introduction clearly states the main topic and previews the structure of the paper, but is not particularly inviting to the reader.	The introduction states the main topic, but does not adequately preview the structure of the paper nor is it particularly inviting to the reader.	There is no clear introduction of the main topic or structure of the paper.
Sequencing (Organization) /4	Details are placed in a logical order and the way they are presented effectively keeps the interest of the reader.	Details are placed in a logical order, but the way in which they are presented/ introduced sometimes makes the writing less interesting.	Some details are not in a logical or expected order, and this distracts the reader.	Many details are not in a logical or expected order. There is little sense that the writing is organized.
Transitions (Organization) /4	A variety of thoughtful transitions are used. They clearly show how ideas are connected.	Transitions clearly show how ideas are connected, but there is little variety.	Some transitions work well; but connections between other ideas are fuzzy.	The transitions between ideas are unclear or nonexistent.
Pacing (Organization) /4	The pacing is well-controlled. The writer knows when to slow down and elaborate, and when to pick up the pace and move on.	The pacing is generally well-controlled but the writer occasionally does not elaborate enough.	The pacing is generally well-controlled but the writer sometimes repeats the same point over and over, or spends too much time on details that don't matter.	The pacing often feels awkward to the reader. The writer elaborates when there is little need, and then leaves out necessary supporting information.
Conclusion (Organization) /4	The conclusion is strong and leaves the reader with a feeling that they understand what the writer is "getting at."	The conclusion is recognizable and ties up almost all the loose ends.	The conclusion is recognizable, but does not tie up several loose ends.	There is no clear conclusion, the paper just ends.
Accuracy of Facts (Content) /4	All supportive facts are reported accurately.	Almost all supportive facts are reported accurately.	Most supportive facts are reported accurately.	NO facts are reported OR most are inaccurately reported.
Grammar & Spelling (Conventions) /4	Writer makes no errors in grammar or spelling that distracts the reader from the content.	Writer makes 1-2 errors in grammar or spelling that distract the reader from the content.	Writer makes 3-4 errors in grammar or spelling that distract the reader from the content.	Writer makes more than 4 errors in grammar or spelling that distracts the reader from the content.
Sentence Structure /4	All sentences are well-constructed with varied structure.	Most sentences are well-constructed with varied structure.	Most sentences are well-constructed but have a similar structure.	Sentences lack structure and appear incomplete or rambling.
Total /40				