

Name _____ Date _____

George Washington

The first president of the United States, George Washington, was born in Pope's Creek, Virginia on February 22, 1732. As a child, he did not have much formal training, but when he was sixteen years old he learned how to survey land, which is a way of taking measurements and making maps. Later, he became the county surveyor.

George Washington was a major in the Virginia militia in the early 1750s. He made a historic 300-mile journey to report to the colonial officials concerning the French presence in the Allegheny River Valley. In 1754, he fought against three hundred French soldiers at Fort Duquesne. By this time he had been promoted to colonel. A year later, during a fierce battle, two horses were shot from underneath him, but he survived unhurt. This same year, he was given the job of commanding all of the troops of Virginia.

He was married in January 6, 1759 to Martha Dandridge Custis. Though he and Martha never had any children of their own, he did become a father to Jacky and Patsy, her children from a former marriage. Patsy later died of epilepsy, to Washington's grief.

As a result of the French and Indian War, England was given all of the land east of the Mississippi. Now the British government wanted to tax the colonies. Men such as Patrick Henry and George Mason, along with Washington, agreed that it was unfair for Britain to place a tax on the colonies when the colonies were not allowed power to make decisions with the British government. In 1775, a group of men from the colonies fired the first shots of the American Revolution while returning fire at British troops.

Later in the same year, the Second Continental Congress met and chose George Washington to be commander-in-chief of the Continental Army. Washington accepted the position but refused payment for his services. He requested only reimbursement for expenses.

Over the next seven years Washington faithfully led his untrained but willing army in several battles against the British troops. At first, the British had the upper hand with their fine weapons and training, but the perseverance and conviction of the Continental soldiers finally began to pay off. In 1778, the Continental army was aided by the French navy and the tide began to turn. On October 19, 1781, General Charles Cornwallis surrendered to Washington and the Continental Army, ending the war. The treaty was signed two years later in 1783.

Washington returned to civilian life but was quickly drawn back into politics. As the delegate from Virginia, he became involved in writing the Constitution for the new country. After the Constitution had been ratified, Washington was unanimously elected to be the president.

The capitol of the new nation temporarily moved from New York to Philadelphia. Washington was the one to select a site along the Potomac River for a new capitol to be built. A French engineer, Pierre L'Enfant, was hired to design the city.

In 1792, Washington was elected to a second term. During his second term he dealt with the Whisky Rebellion. This was a revolt in Pennsylvania concerning taxes on exporting alcohol. He also was successful in implementing a treaty concerning relations between the U.S. and Britain.

Although many wanted Washington to be president for a third term, he declined. He moved back to his beloved Mt. Vernon. After only three years of retirement, he died at the age of 67 on December 14, 1799. He was buried there in the family vault.



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George Washington: Sequencing Activity

Number the events from George Washington's life in correct order.

- _____ 1. He was elected first U.S. president.
- _____ 2. He married Martha Dandridge Custis.
- _____ 3. He was chosen to be commander-in-chief of the Continental Army.
- _____ 4. He was born in Virginia.
- _____ 5. During a battle, two horses he rode on were shot dead.
- _____ 6. He learned to survey land.
- _____ 7. He became a major in the militia.
- _____ 8. He retired at Mt. Vernon.
- _____ 9. He chose a site along the Potomac River for the capitol.
- _____ 10. The Revolutionary War began.

George Washington: Critical Thinking Question

1. How do you think that George Washington's early life was different from your life?

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George Washington: Critical Thinking Questions

2. If you had been George Washington, what might you have told your friends about your experience of having two horses shot from under you in battle?

3. How do you think Martha Washington felt about the Congress wanting George Washington to serve a third term as president?

4. If you could ask George Washington one question about his life, what would it be?

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George Washington: Answers Sequencing

1. 8
2. 5
3. 6
4. 1
5. 4
6. 2
7. 3
8. 10
9. 9
10. 7

Critical Thinking

These questions could be starting points for individual student research, discussion questions, or questions answered by each student individually on paper.