

Week 1: George Washington

B. – February 22, 1732 – [Wakefield, Virginia](#)

D. – December 14, 1799 – Mount Vernon, Fairfax County, Virginia

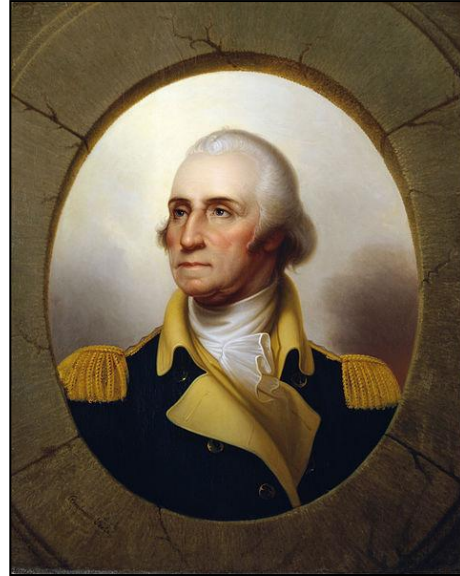
College attended – None

Occupation – Planter

Religion – Episcopalian

Political Party – None

Served as president: 1789-1797



This Week's Supplies:

Read a biography aloud this week about George or Martha Washington.

Ingredients for [cherry pie](#)

Young children can cartoon George Washington [here](#).

Key Facts

History

George Washington was first in many things. In fact, it was Light-Horse Harry Lee, Revolutionary War hero and father of Robert E. Lee, who summed up Washington best when he described his beloved general as “First in War, first in Peace, and first in the hearts of his countrymen.”

Indeed, George Washington had been first in many things. He was one of the first American leaders to advocate force as a means of maintaining liberty. He served his country admirably in America’s Revolutionary War as our nation’s first commanding general. Following Washington’s defeat of Great Britain, America was finally at peace and had been officially recognized as a free and independent, sovereign nation. By that time, General Washington had become a hero to his countrymen. So adored and trusted was he that some Americans wanted him crowned king! Can you imagine that? If they had had their way we’d be bowing to presidents today and addressing them as Your Majesty, Your Royal Highness, or Your Excellency! Fortunately, George would consider nothing more than “Mr. President,” so the people settled, instead, for [unanimously](#) electing him the first president of the United States. He served two terms and remains to this day the first and only U.S. President to have received a unanimous vote.

And yet, Washington did not particularly care for politics. He was so [reluctant](#) to assume the presidency, if truth be told, that he once wrote, “If I should receive the appointment, and if I should be [prevailed upon](#) to accept it, the acceptance would be attended with more [diffidence](#) and reluctance than I ever experienced before in my life.” Nevertheless, he willingly served his

country when called, but much preferred farming and being with Martha on his beloved 5,000 acre [Mount Vernon](#) estate. Washington was, in fact, ahead of his time in regards to innovative farming methods such as crop rotation, soil erosion prevention techniques, animal husbandry, fish fertilizer, and recycling. He even invented a revolutionary new way to [thresh wheat](#).

- To learn more about George Washington watch this [video](#).

Government

It may seem hard for us to believe today, but did you know the Founding Fathers' original intent was a republic void of political parties? They believed in the simple adherence to the United States Constitution. George Washington even warned against political parties in his farewell presidential address when he said:

There is an opinion, that parties in free countries are useful checks upon the administration of the Government, and serve to keep alive the spirit of Liberty. This within certain limits is probably true; and in Governments of a Monarchical cast, Patriotism may look with indulgence, if not with favor, upon the spirit of party. But in those of the popular character, in Governments purely elective, it is a spirit not to be encouraged. From their natural tendency, it is certain there will always be enough of that spirit for every salutary purpose. And, there being constant danger of excess, the effort ought to be, by force of public opinion, to mitigate and assuage it. A fire not to be quenched, it demands a uniform vigilance to prevent its bursting into a flame, lest, instead of warming, it should consume.

But it was not long after the Constitution was ratified that powerful leaders became divided on core principles and it was, in fact, during Washington's presidency that the first two political parties emerged.

Federalists like Alexander Hamilton and John Adams believed in a strong centralized government and that only well-educated aristocrats could be trusted to run the country and make important decisions. Even George Washington, as opposed as he was to political parties, maintained many Federalist beliefs.

Democratic-Republicans like Thomas Jefferson and James Madison, on the other hand, believed strongly in states' rights and a small centralized government. They trusted the ability of ordinary American citizens to decide on local and national issues for themselves. Though different in name, today's political parties remain divided over many of the same core principles.

- Examine the above portion of George Washington's farewell address. Discuss today's political parties and their core principles with your family. How do they compare with what you have just learned about the early Federalist and Democratic-Republican parties? Which party do you find yourself aligning with and why? Do you agree or disagree with Washington's warning? If you agree, what alternative would you suggest?

Language

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines *precedent* as *something done or said that can be used as an example or rule to be followed in the future*. Our first president was acutely aware that he was walking as he said, "...on untrodden ground." He went on to say, "There is scarcely any part of my conduct that may not hereafter be drawn into precedent."

- Go [here](#) to discover the precedents George Washington established for future American presidents. List them.

Cooking with George



But George Washington wasn't the only one setting precedents. His wife, Martha, was too!

[Martha Washington](#), or Lady Washington as she was affectionately called, was an amazing woman. Ever by her husband's side, she spent the frigid winters of the Revolutionary War with her husband and among pitifully clad war-weary soldiers. She darned their socks and even delivered soup to them. And, she was America's first First Lady.

As First Lady she took her role very seriously. She too recognized the fact that future first ladies would look to her as an example of how to act the part of a proper First Lady.

Martha's chief duties, as she saw them, were to be an encouragement to her husband and graciously host his countless dinner guests in a manner fitting to the President of the United States of America. But who would be *her* example and how should she conduct *herself* in a manner worthy of one in her position? Like her husband, her only examples were the aristocratic traditions of Old England. Using them as her prototype, Martha began serving her country as First Lady of the United States.

The First Lady's most time-consuming duties were planning and overseeing elegant affairs, which included regular multi-course meals and the occasional ball. These would, in fact, establish the precedents of elaborate presidential dining and galas that continue to take place in the White House to this day.

But, of the many delicacies served at these affairs, simple American pie remained throughout George Washington's life one of his favorite indulgences. And, although young George never did chop down that legendary cherry tree, he never could turn down a good cherry pie!



- Bake a [cherry pie](#) in honor of George Washington.

Did You Know?

George Washington was the only U.S. president to have resided in two national capitals and three Executive Mansions.

When Washington became president in 1789, New York City was our nation's capital. At that time, the *first* first couple resided in the [Samuel Osgood House](#). A few months later they moved into the [Alexander Macomb House](#). Then in 1790, Philadelphia became our nation's temporary capital until construction of Federal City (now Washington D.C.) could be completed. From 1790 to the end of his presidency in 1797, George and Martha Washington would reside in the [Robert Morris Mansion](#), the most stately home in Philadelphia.