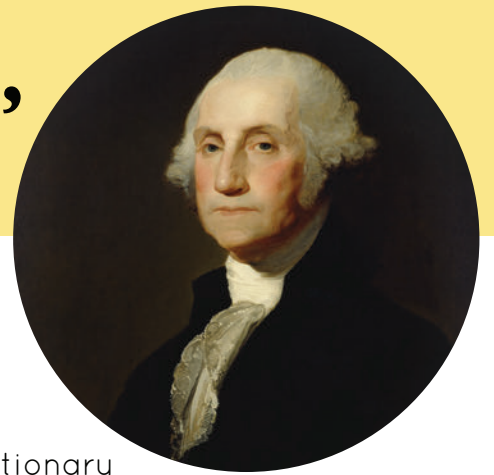


George Washington, a Man of Firsts



George Washington was the first president of the United States, but he was also first in many other ways. In fact, his friend Henry Lee III once said that Washington was “first in war, first in peace, and first in the hearts of his countrymen.” Washington was a leader during the Revolutionary War and in the early days of the U.S. government. To this day he is called the Father of our Country.

George Washington became well known for leading the Continental Army against Great Britain during the American Revolutionary War. For five long years, General Washington fought side by side with his soldiers. Both the soldiers and America’s leaders praised Washington as a calm military hero. But Washington was thankful when the long fight was over. He returned to his home in Virginia and hoped to live a quiet family life for the rest of his days.

The new nation had other plans for George Washington, though. The U.S. Constitution required that Americans elect a president. Even though Washington did not run for office, his fellow citizens chose him to be the first U.S. president. He took office in 1789, and that led to more firsts.

In some ways, Washington invented the presidency. Since no one had been President of the United States before, there was no model for how to do it. Washington would be the one creating the model. The way he acted would guide what future presidents would do. Washington thought presidents should not be like kings. Many of his first actions were based on that belief. He was the first to create a cabinet, a small but important group of people to advise him. He also started the tradition of giving a State of the Union speech. This speech tells Americans how the country is doing and what plans the president has for the future. Presidents still give this speech each year.

One of the last things George Washington did as president was set another example for future presidents. He had served as president for two terms, or eight years. Many people thought he should continue as president. He chose not to stay in power for too long, though. Again, he wanted to make sure presidents did not act like kings.

In many ways, George Washington lived up to the words of his friend Lee. As the first leader of the Continental Army and then as the first president of the United States, he set examples of strong leadership for the nation.

Directions: Answer the questions about the text.

1. What is the main idea of the text?
 - a. George Washington was a war hero.
 - b. George Washington led the country in many firsts.
 - c. George Washington was the first president.
 - d. George Washington wanted to live a quiet life at home.

2. What new ideas did George Washington bring to the job of president? Name three.

3. What did George Washington believe about presidents?

4. What details from the text show that George Washington was, as Henry Lee III said, "first in the hearts of his countrymen"?

5. What other information would help you learn about George Washington as a person and leader? Write two questions you could research to learn more.
