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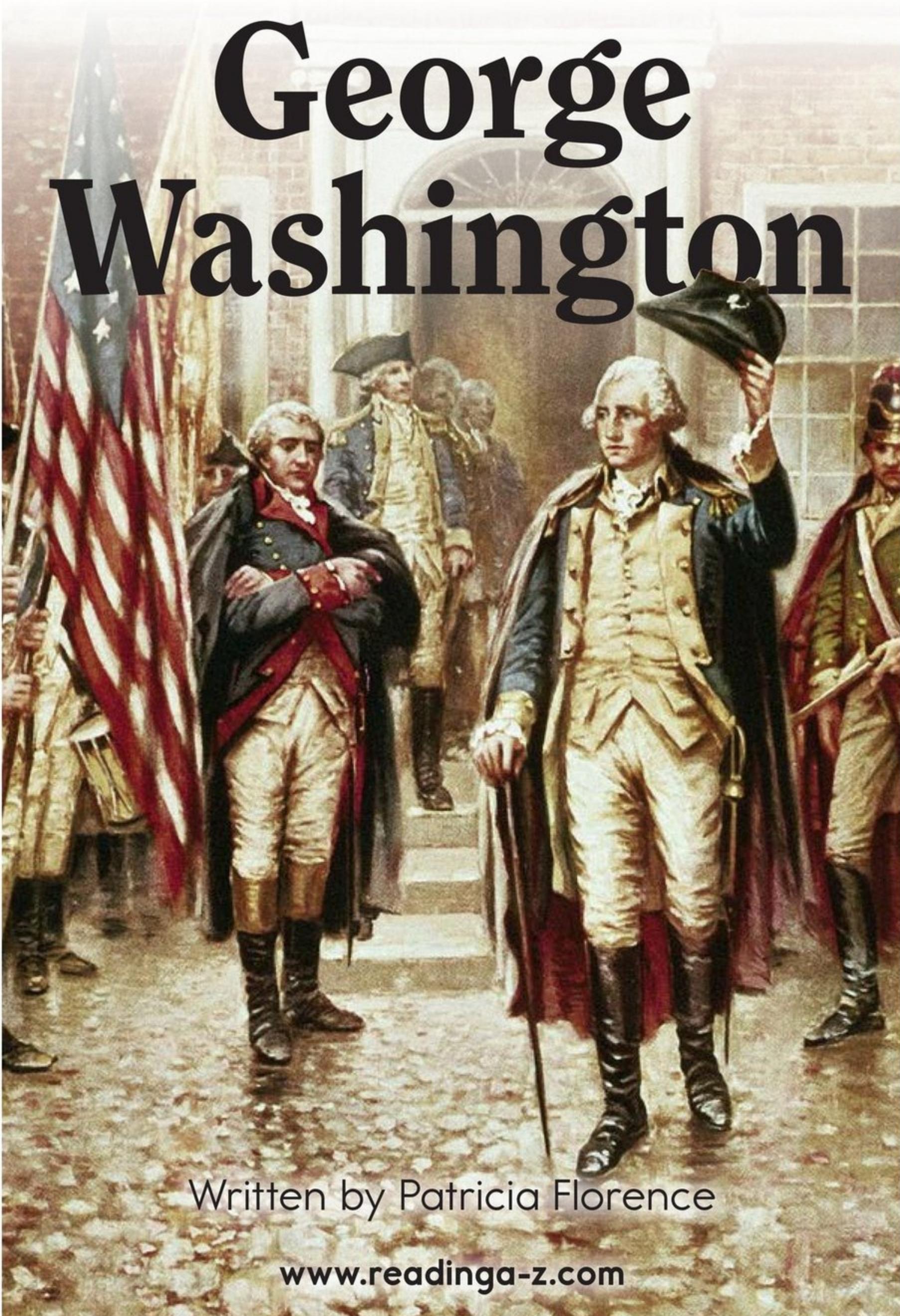
George Washington



Written by Patricia Florence

www.readinga-z.com

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Focus Question

Why is George Washington one of the most famous presidents in the history of the United States?

Words to Know

character
colony
Constitution
convention
joined forces

oath
retreat
term
treaty

Front cover: A painting of George Washington by American artist John Vanderlyn

Title page: A painting shows Washington saying farewell to his officers at the end of his military career.

Page 3: Betsy Ross works on an American flag with George Washington seated on the left.

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George Washington
World Leaders
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George Washington took the oath of office in New York on April 30, 1789.

The First President

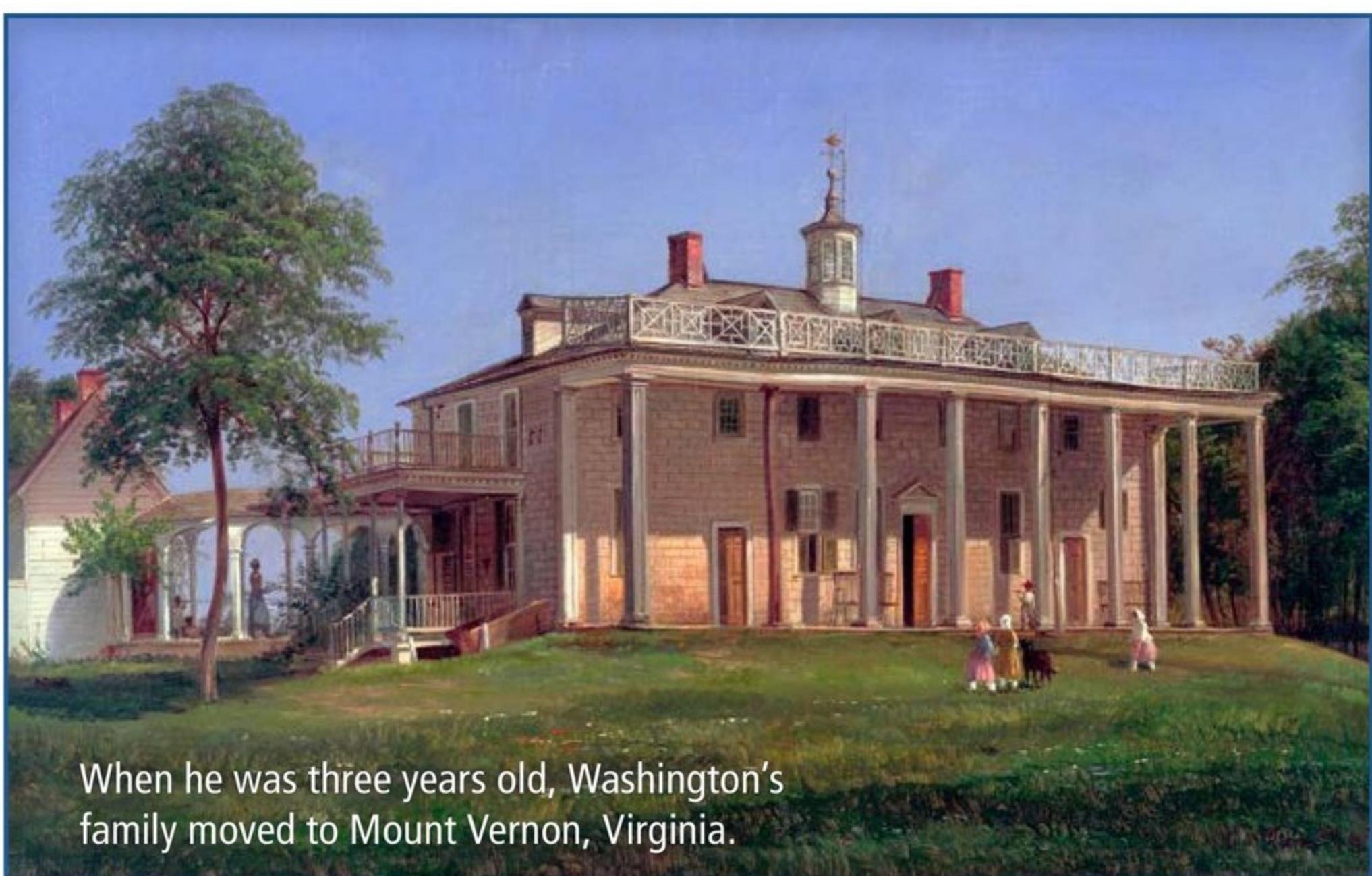
On a bright day in 1789, George Washington began the **oath** that would make him president. It had been a long but rewarding journey to this moment. Washington had already served his country as a military leader, and now he would serve as its highest political leader.

As he finished the oath of office, the large crowd cheered loudly. George Washington was now the first president of the United States of America!

A Young Farmer

George Washington was born on February 22, 1732. His parents, Augustine and Mary, raised him on a large farm in Virginia. When George was just eleven years old, his father died. George's half brother Lawrence helped raise him instead.

In his youth, George did not have much formal education. He learned more by doing things, like farming. George's family home, Mount Vernon, was his favorite place, and he loved to farm the land there. However, he also loved the military and would soon get a chance to serve.



When he was three years old, Washington's family moved to Mount Vernon, Virginia.



During the French and Indian War, George Washington became well known as a brave leader.

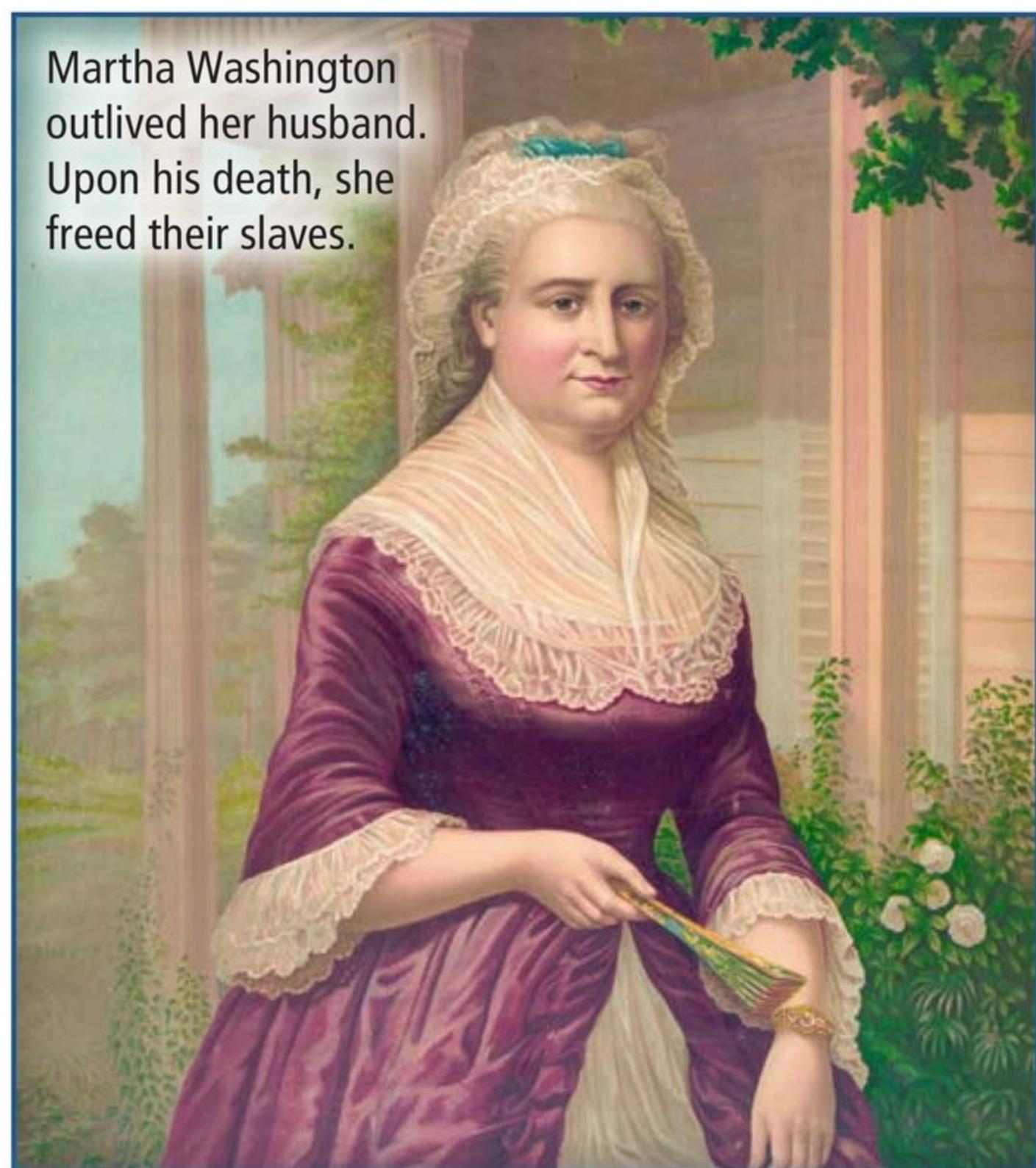
The French and Indian War

At that time, the United States was not yet a country. Each state was a British **colony**—an area controlled by another country. There was no national army at that time. Instead, each colony had its own army. Beginning in 1752, Washington served in Virginia's army.

By 1754, the French and Indian War had begun between Great Britain and France. Both wanted to control land in North America. Native Americans **joined forces** with the French. Washington led the Virginia army on behalf of the British.

Great Britain won the French and Indian War, and people began to see that Washington was a strong military commander. Yet he dreamed of farming once again and returned to Mount Vernon. There, in 1759, he married Martha Custis. Martha's family owned a lot of land and many slaves.

During that period of history, many people owned slaves. Although the Washingtons owned more than three hundred slaves, George felt that slavery was wrong. He ordered that his slaves should be set free upon Martha's death.



Thomas Jefferson and others present the Declaration of Independence to the Second Continental Congress in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.



Fighting for Independence

By the 1770s, people living in the colonies were unhappy. Great Britain was charging taxes on products in the colonies, such as tea. Colonial leaders met for nearly two months at the First Continental Congress in September 1774. They made a plan to stand up to the British and protect the colonists' basic rights. Some leaders were prepared to break away from Great Britain entirely. Washington attended the meeting in full uniform. He was prepared to fight if Great Britain didn't agree to their plan.

Great Britain opposed the plan, and the colonial leaders held the Second Continental Congress in the spring of 1775. At that meeting, they set up a new government. They asked George Washington to lead a new Continental Army against the British. The colonists were ready to fight for independence.

Washington won his first victory in March 1776. He successfully pushed the British army out of Boston and into New York City. The British would not be easy to beat, however. They had a powerful army led by General William Howe.

While leaders finalized the plans for independence during the summer of 1776, Washington's troops came under attack by Howe and his forces. Howe defeated the Continental Army at a battle on Long Island, New York. Thousands of soldiers died. Washington was forced to retreat.





Despite ice floes and frigid temperatures, Washington and his men managed to cross the Delaware River, capturing more than nine hundred British soldiers.

Washington, camped on the Pennsylvania side of the Delaware River, had an idea. The enemy had stopped in New Jersey, on the other side of the river. On a cold Christmas night in 1776, Washington led his men across the river in a surprise attack. It led to an important victory.

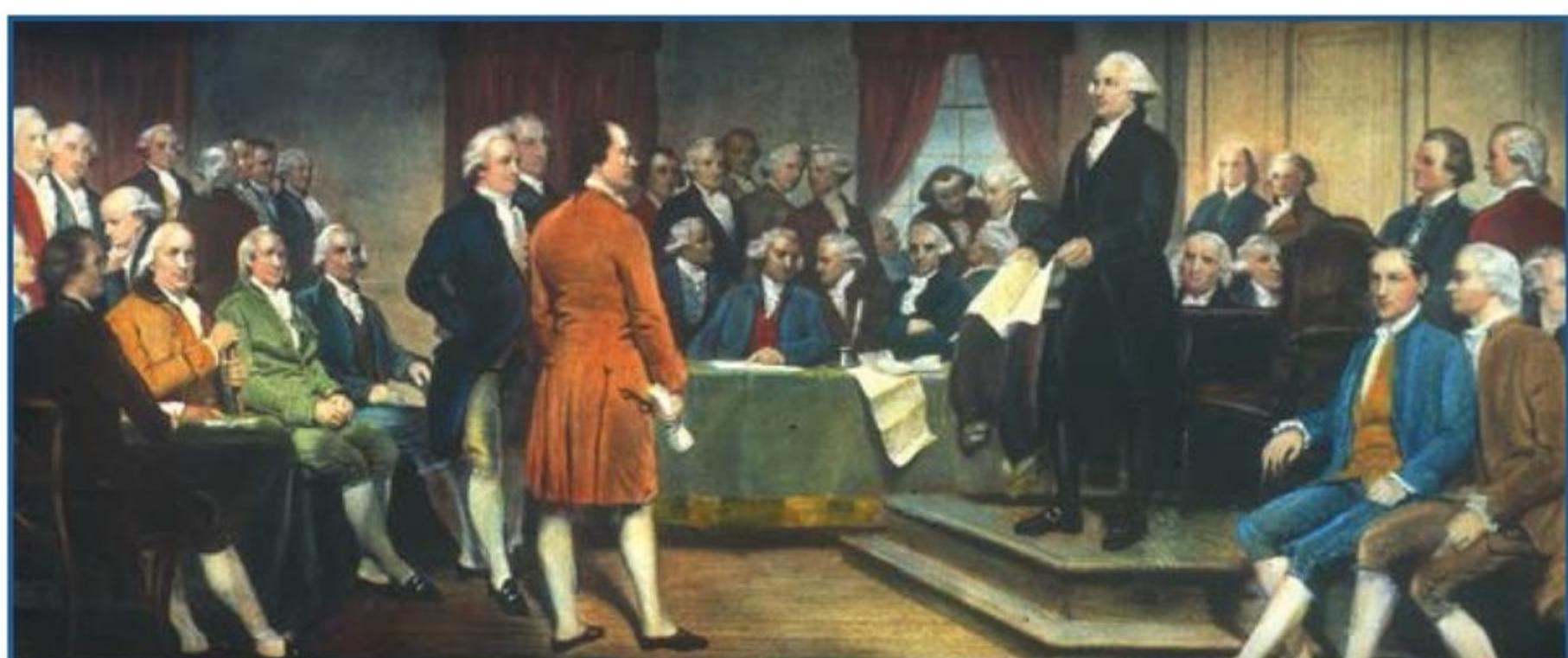
The war would continue for another five years. In 1778, France joined forces with the Continental Army. Finally, in 1781, Washington marched into Yorktown, Virginia, where he and the French forces surrounded the British. The British surrendered, and the war was over. The colonists had won.

A New Country

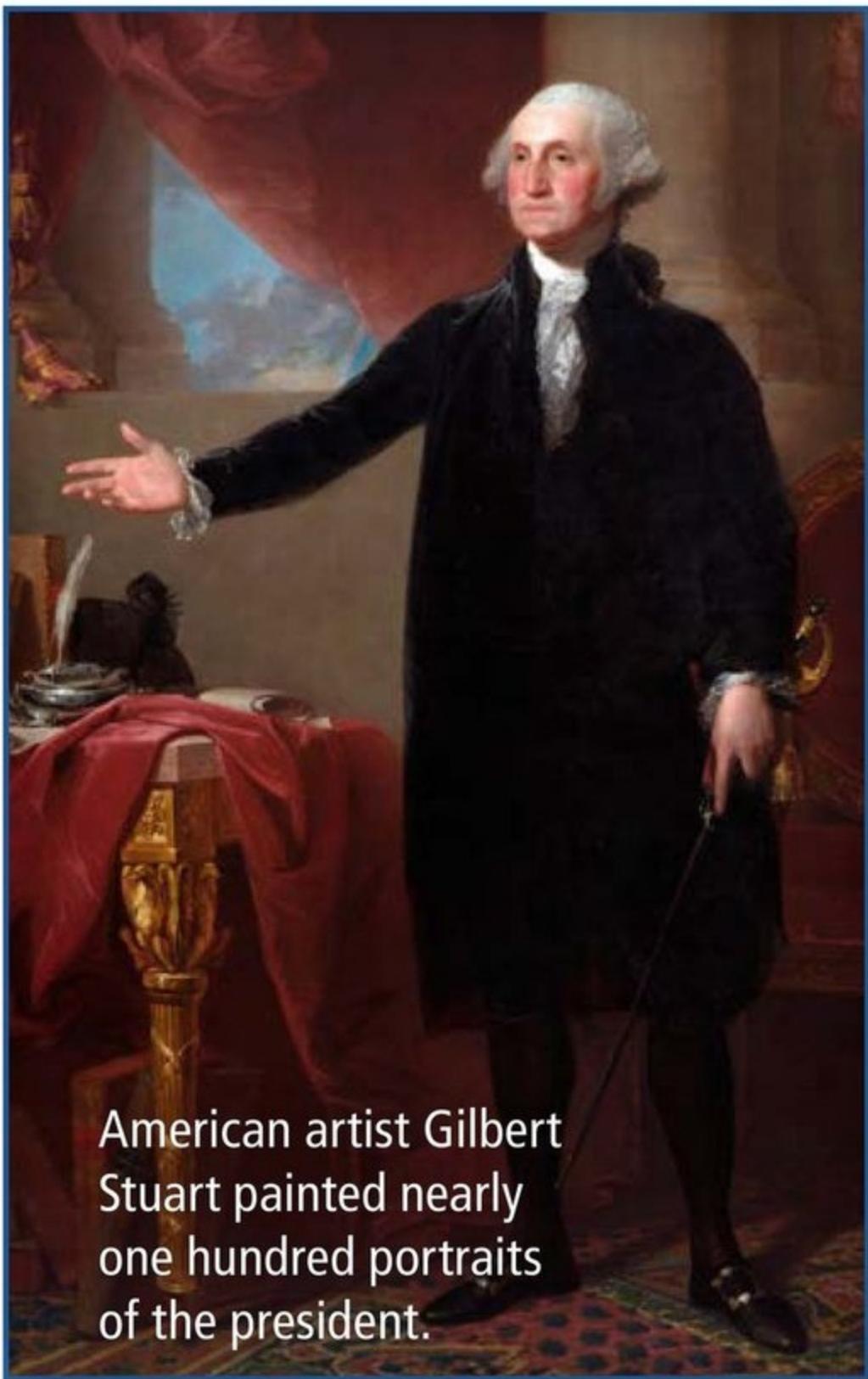
In 1787, leaders held a **convention** to come up with a plan for the new government—the **Constitution**. George Washington led the meeting and impressed everyone with his leadership. It was no surprise when he was asked to be the first president of the United States.

Washington did not want the job, but he felt a duty to say yes. So in the spring of 1789, he left Mount Vernon for New York City, where he became president of the United States on April 30.

As America's first president, Washington had a number of important tasks to do. The most important task was to set up the government described in the Constitution.



George Washington, standing at right, was the president of the Constitutional Convention in 1787.



American artist Gilbert Stuart painted nearly one hundred portraits of the president.

Washington's style of leadership was a good match for this task. He led the nation firmly and with great dignity—just as he had led the Continental Army.

Washington was elected president again in 1792. He

faced a major problem in his second **term** with the Whiskey Rebellion. People who made whiskey were angry that the government was taxing them. Washington had to send in the military to calm them.

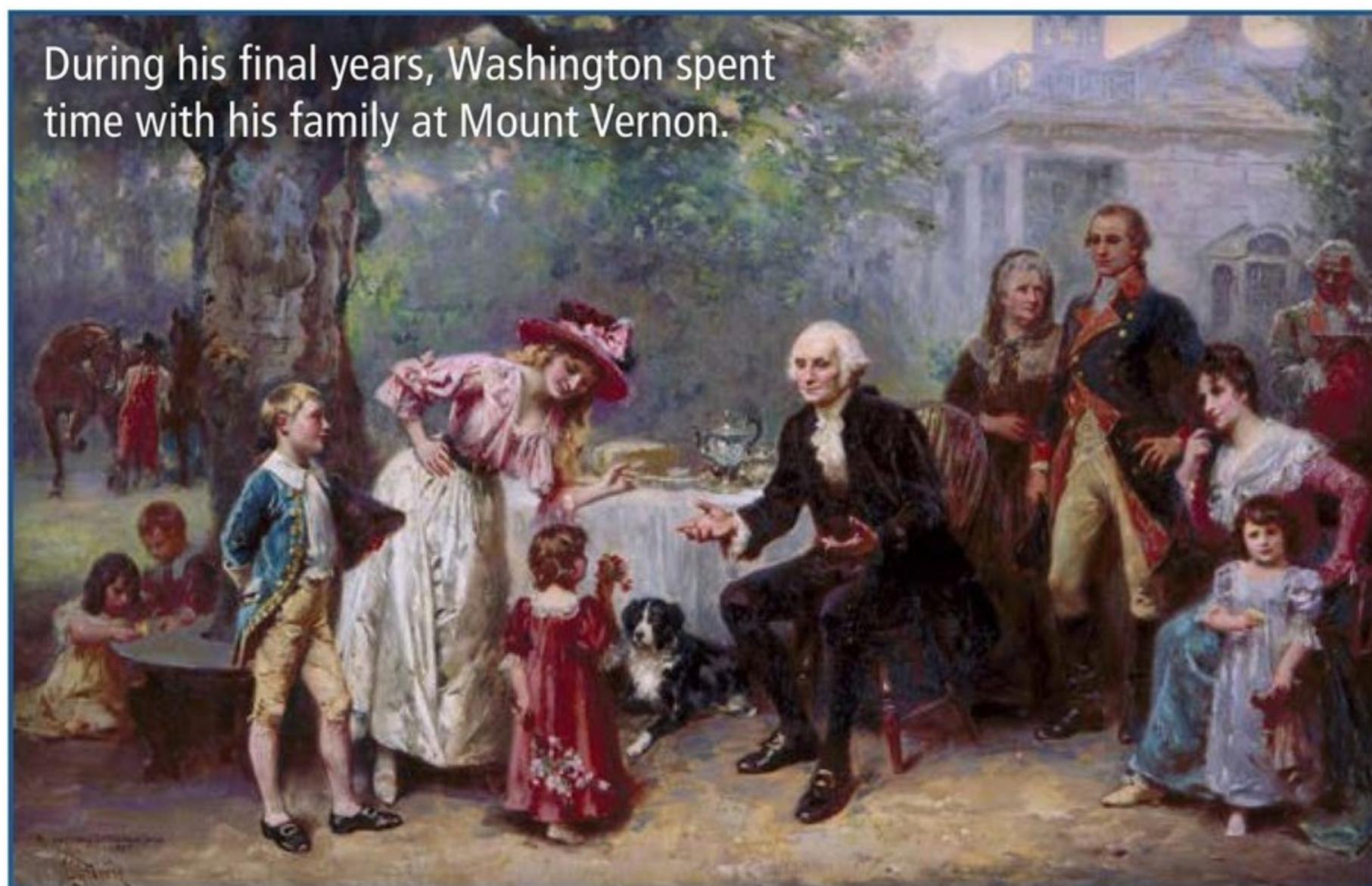
Washington was also facing another war between Britain and France. He declared that the United States would not get involved. A **treaty**, or official agreement, was signed but remained unpopular. Many people thought the treaty supported the British too much, and President Washington himself was blamed.

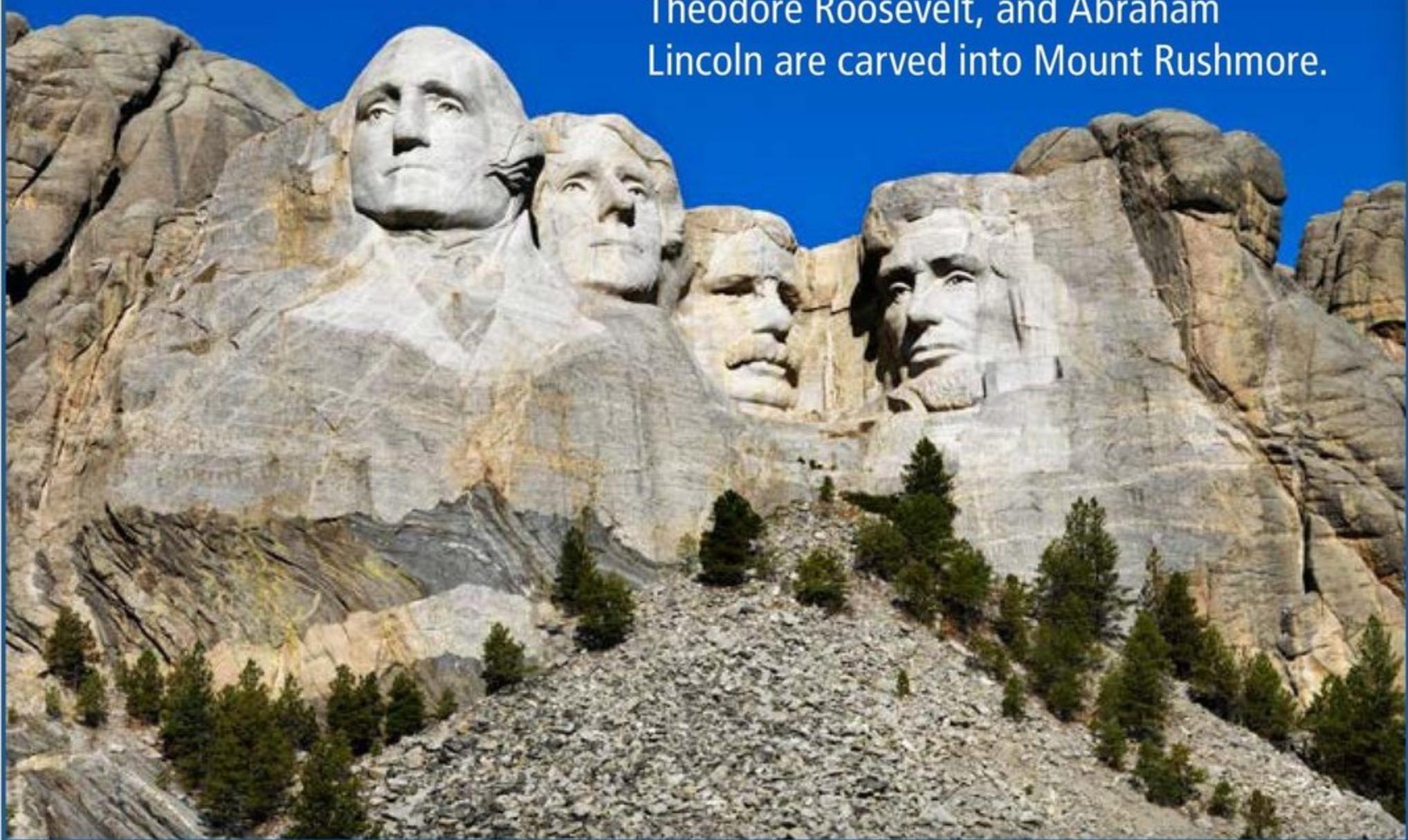
Farewell

Feeling tired after serving his country for so many years, Washington chose not to serve a third term as president. Before leaving office, he wrote a Farewell Address, in which he offered some advice. He warned against joining forces with other nations because it could lead to more war. He also warned against building too big of an army.

In 1797, Washington began his retirement at Mount Vernon, spending time with Martha and overseeing his beloved farm. Two years later, during a cold and snowy Virginia winter, Washington fell ill. He died on December 14, 1799.

During his final years, Washington spent time with his family at Mount Vernon.





Presidents (from left to right) George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Theodore Roosevelt, and Abraham Lincoln are carved into Mount Rushmore.

Father of His Country

George Washington's place in history is firm. His courage and **character** are as admired today as they were when he was alive. His leadership style, both in the military and in the presidency, are great models for modern military officers and presidents to follow.

The nation admired him then, and the world admires him today. A congressman at the time said Washington was "first in war, first in peace, first in the hearts of his countrymen." George Washington truly was the Father of His Country.

The Life of George Washington



Glossary

character (<i>n.</i>)	the moral strength of a person; the overall nature of a person or place (p. 14)
colony (<i>n.</i>)	a settled area that is ruled by or belongs to another country; a group settled in one of these areas or countries (p. 6)
Constitution (<i>n.</i>)	the written rules that govern the United States (p. 11)
convention (<i>n.</i>)	a political meeting where delegates form plans, set goals, and select people to run for office (p. 11)
joined forces (<i>v.</i>)	worked together toward a common goal (p. 6)
oath (<i>n.</i>)	a formal promise (p. 4)
retreat (<i>v.</i>)	to withdraw or move away from a battle with an enemy or an uncomfortable situation; to turn back because of a dangerous or difficult situation ahead (p. 9)
term (<i>n.</i>)	a set or limited period of time in an official position (p. 12)
treaty (<i>n.</i>)	a formal agreement of peace or friendship between two nations or groups (p. 12)

George Washington

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Word Count: 1,056

Connections

Writing

Write a biography of George Washington. Include details from the book and outside resources.

Social Studies

Imagine being alive when George Washington became the first president of the United States. Write a journal entry from April 30, 1789, the day George Washington became president.

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