

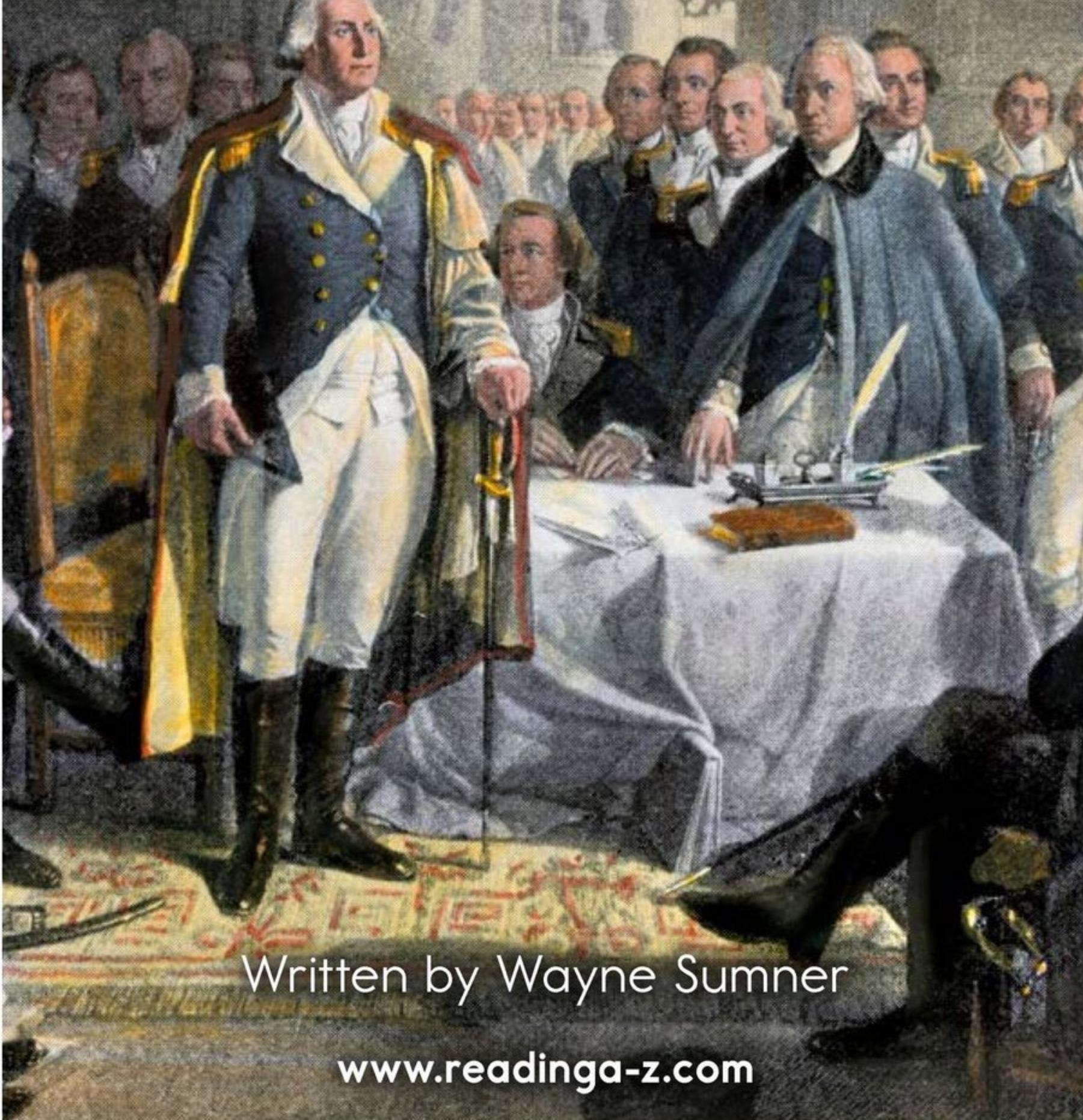
LEVELED BOOK • Y

# George Washington



Written by Wayne Sumner

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## Focus Question

Why is George Washington known as the  
“Father of His Country”?

# Words to Know

alliances	precedents
Continental Congress	preserve
delegates	revolt
inaugurated	revolution
militia	term
neutral	unanimously

Front cover: A painting shows Washington and his army entering New York in 1783.

Title page: Washington meets with his generals during the Revolutionary War.

Page 3: A painting shows Washington and his troops on the night they crossed the Delaware River in 1776.

## Photo Credits:

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## Correlation

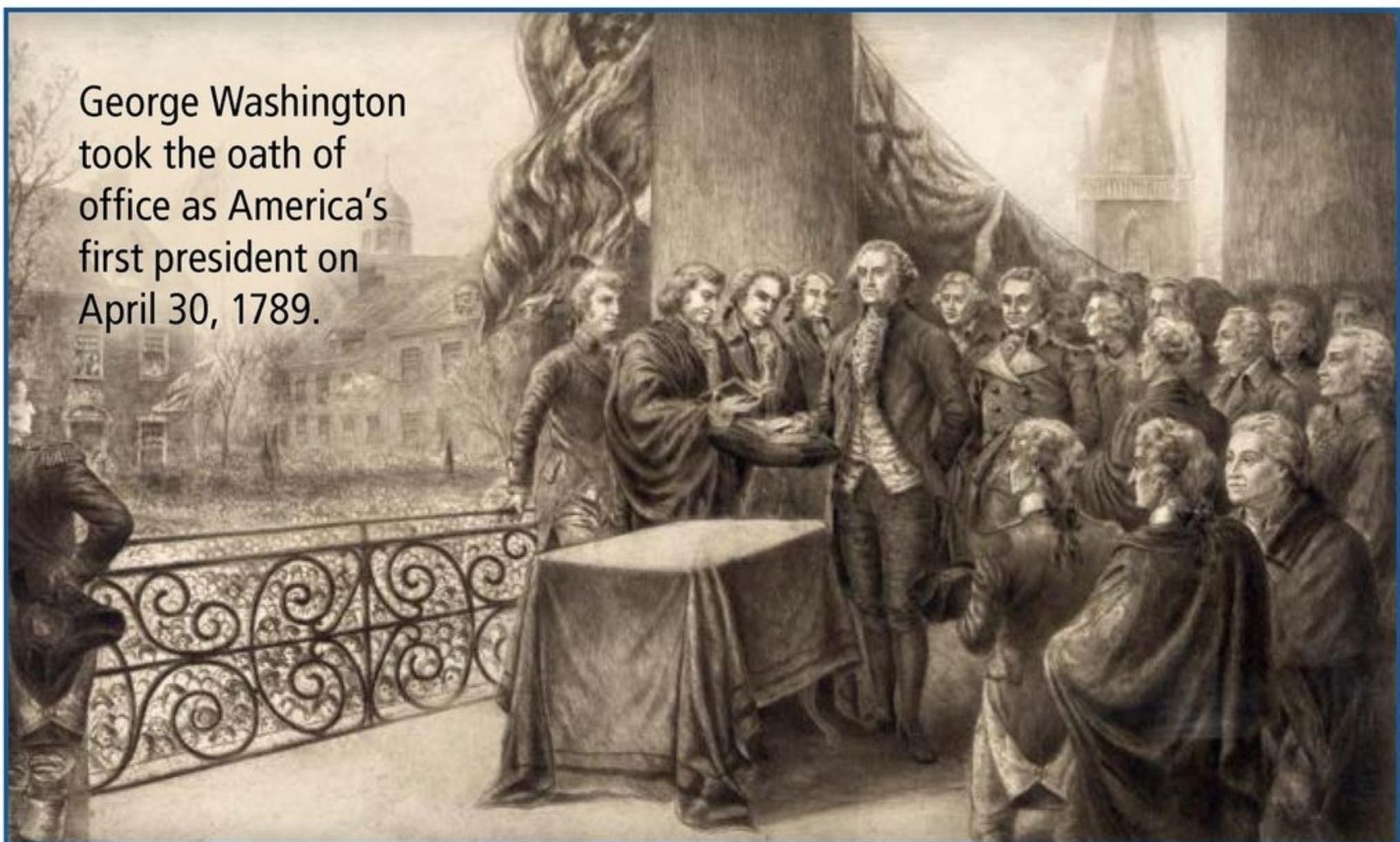
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George Washington took the oath of office as America's first president on April 30, 1789.



## Taking the Oath as President

George Washington had been a farmer, a military officer, and an army general, and now he was about to be **inaugurated** as president of the United States.

The scene was Federal Hall in New York City. Robert Livingston, the highest judge in New York, stepped toward Washington with a Bible in hand. Washington placed his hand on it and recited:

*I do solemnly swear that I will faithfully execute the office of President of the United States, and will to the best of my ability, preserve, protect, and defend the Constitution of the United States.*

The onlooking crowd cheered enthusiastically. George Washington was now officially the president of the United States of America.

## Farming Mount Vernon

On February 22, 1732, George Washington was born to Augustine and Mary Ball Washington. From the time he was three, George and his family lived at Mount Vernon, their estate in Virginia, where George's father worked as a farmer. The elder Washington died when George was just eleven years old. Luckily for young George, his older half brother Lawrence looked after him and raised him.

George was not particularly well educated and learned more from doing things, especially his daily tasks at Mount Vernon. He gained practical life lessons such as how to tend a field of crops. By the time George was twenty years old, he was in charge of Mount Vernon. It was a lot of work, but it suited him; he loved farming and would farm Mount Vernon for the next twenty years.

George Washington may have loved being a farmer, but he was also interested in the military. The events of the day would provide him with an opportunity to serve. In the 1700s, each of thirteen colonies was ruled by the British, and each colony had its own **militia**. Washington served as an officer in the Virginia militia beginning in 1752. A conflict known as the French and Indian War would soon challenge him.

During the French and Indian War, George Washington gained a reputation as a brave and demanding commander.



Great Britain was upset that the French were expanding their reach in North America. A general sent Washington to reason with them. Eventually a war broke out with the French, who refused to stop. Native Americans joined the French side, adding to their forces. Washington commanded the Virginia militia on the British side and gained a reputation as a fine military commander. At the end of the French and Indian War, the British were victorious.

After the war's end, Washington retired to Mount Vernon and married a wealthy Virginia widow named Martha Dandridge Custis. Martha's family owned thousands of acres of land and more than three hundred slaves.

Although Washington became a slave owner by marriage, he personally opposed slavery. He wrote in his will that he wanted his slaves to be freed upon Martha's death. When Washington died before Martha, she freed them.

## America's Revolution

Life in the British colonies in the late 1700s was challenging. Britain had passed a number of laws forcing the colonists to pay high taxes on goods such as tea and paper. Washington and other colonial leaders were frustrated and decided to make plans to resist.

In 1774, colonists chose **delegates** from the colonies to attend a secret meeting, called the First **Continental Congress**, in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, where Washington supported a plan to take military action against the British if they continued. Desire for **revolution** was already rumbling, and in April 1775 colonial armies fired the first shots of the American Revolution. The next month, the delegates held the Second Continental Congress, at which Washington and the delegates agreed that it was time to fight. Washington was appointed commander in chief of the new Continental Army on July 3, 1775. During his first months as leader, he strengthened his army with more ammunition and won early battles against the British. Washington's first major military action was in March 1776, when he drove the British army out of Boston and into New York. The break from Britain became official on July 4, 1776, when the Declaration of Independence was signed.

## Battles In and Near New Jersey, 1776–1777



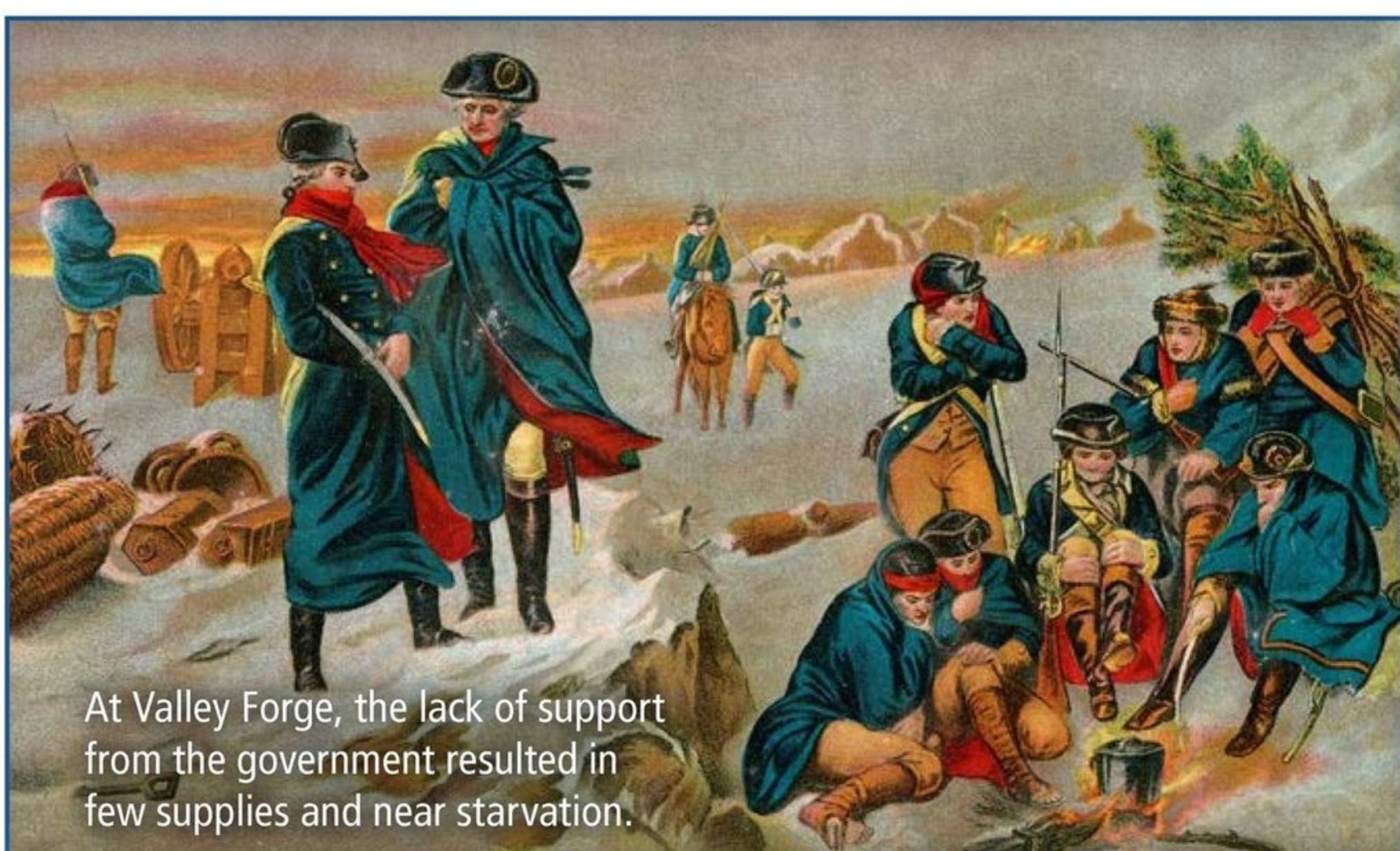
That summer, Washington's army suffered a humiliating defeat in Long Island, New York. The British captured and killed thousands of Washington's men and forced Washington to retreat. However, late in 1776, while the enemy camped in Trenton, New Jersey, Washington led a surprise attack. In the middle of a pitch-black Christmas night, the Continental Army rowed across the Delaware River and won a crucial victory. It was the enemy's turn to retreat—all the way back to New York.

Another turning point came in 1777 when the colonial forces soundly defeated the British in a series of battles at Saratoga, a city about 180 miles (290 km) north of New York City. The French, seeking revenge after losing the French and

Indian war to the British, had been keeping an eye on the conflict. They decided to join forces with the colonists. The help of the French would make a key difference in the war's outcome.

Washington, however, was still being challenged farther south. General Howe captured the colonial capital city of Philadelphia on September 26, 1777. Washington and his men had no choice but to retreat to nearby Valley Forge. They endured a cold, harsh winter without enough food or supplies. Some three thousand men deserted Washington's army.

The colonists' ultimate victory wouldn't come until 1781, when, supported by the French army and navy, they surrounded the British at Yorktown, Virginia. The British were compelled to surrender.





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

After their victory, the colonists began setting up a permanent government for the United States. The colonists wanted their new war hero, George Washington, involved in the process.

Washington's friend and fellow Virginian James Madison asked him to attend a government meeting with more than fifty other delegates in Philadelphia. At that meeting, called the Constitutional Convention, America's Founding Fathers worked toward creating a plan for a new government. However, they needed someone to lead it. Not surprisingly, they turned to George Washington.

Washington did not want to be the nation's first president, but he felt it was his duty to accept the position. In February 1789, members of congress **unanimously** elected Washington. That spring, he traveled from his home in Mount Vernon to New York City, where he took the oath of office on April 30.

## The First President

President Washington had a lot to do. After all, no one had ever been president before. It was up to him to set numerous **precedents**. He set about establishing three branches of government: executive (overseen by the president), legislative (Congress), and judicial (the Supreme Court).

Washington's presidential style had been formed during his military career. He was not afraid to make a decision and stick to it.

### Do You Know?

Washington's presidency naturally included "firsts."

- At his inauguration, Washington read an inaugural address to Congress. Today, presidents deliver it before an assembled crowd.
- He was the first president to deliver an annual speech to Congress, called the State of the Union address. To this day, presidents deliver a State of the Union address to Congress each year.
- Washington served only two terms, a practice that endured until 1940 and became law in 1951.

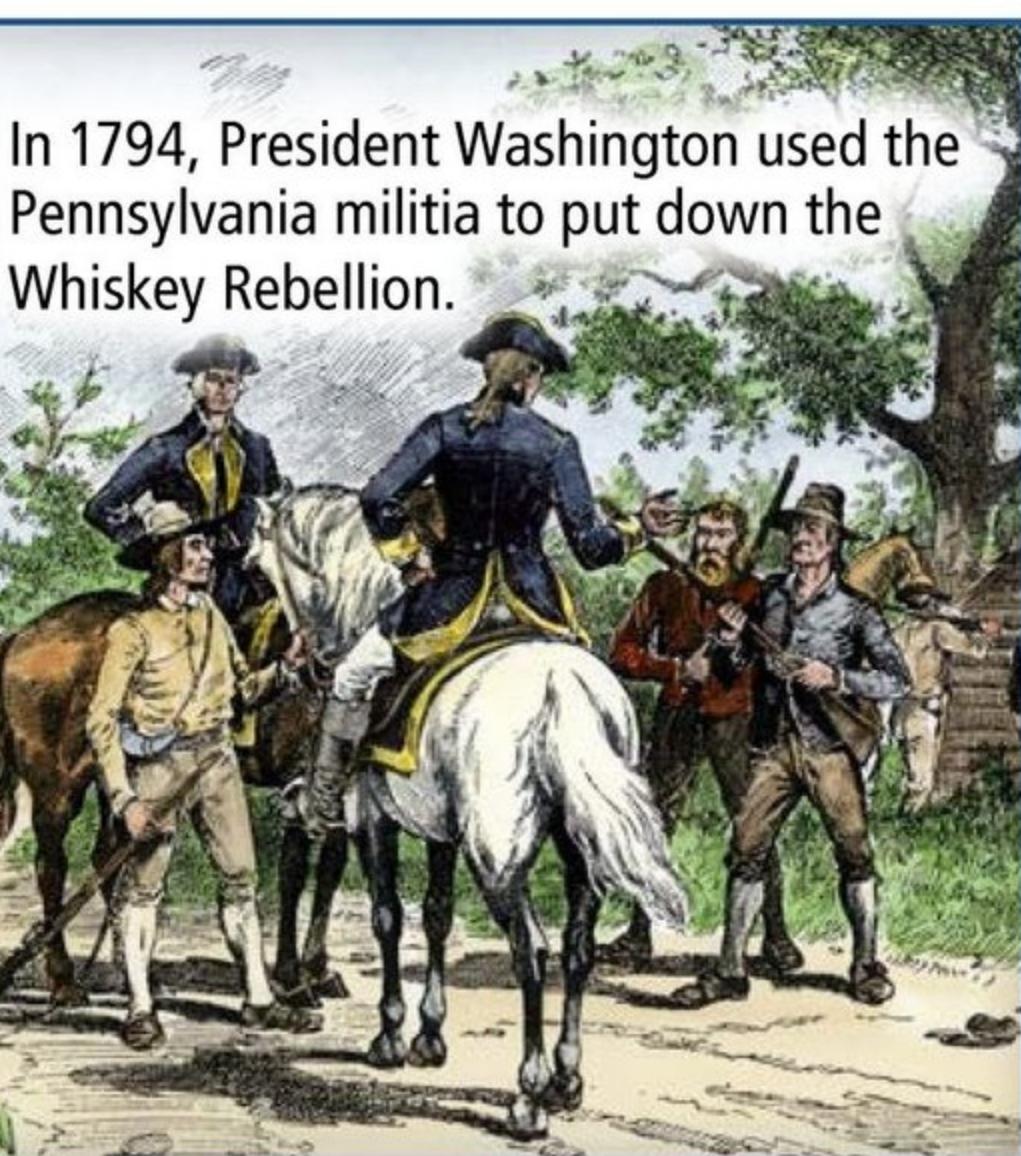


President Barack Obama gives his inaugural address in 2013.

In 1792, Washington was elected to a second **term** as president. The position would be filled with more conflict during the next four years.

One major conflict Washington faced in his second term was the Whiskey Rebellion. The new government was taxing colonial makers

of whiskey, and people felt that was unfair. When a group of people in Pennsylvania began to **revolt**, President Washington ordered that state's militia to calm the unrest.



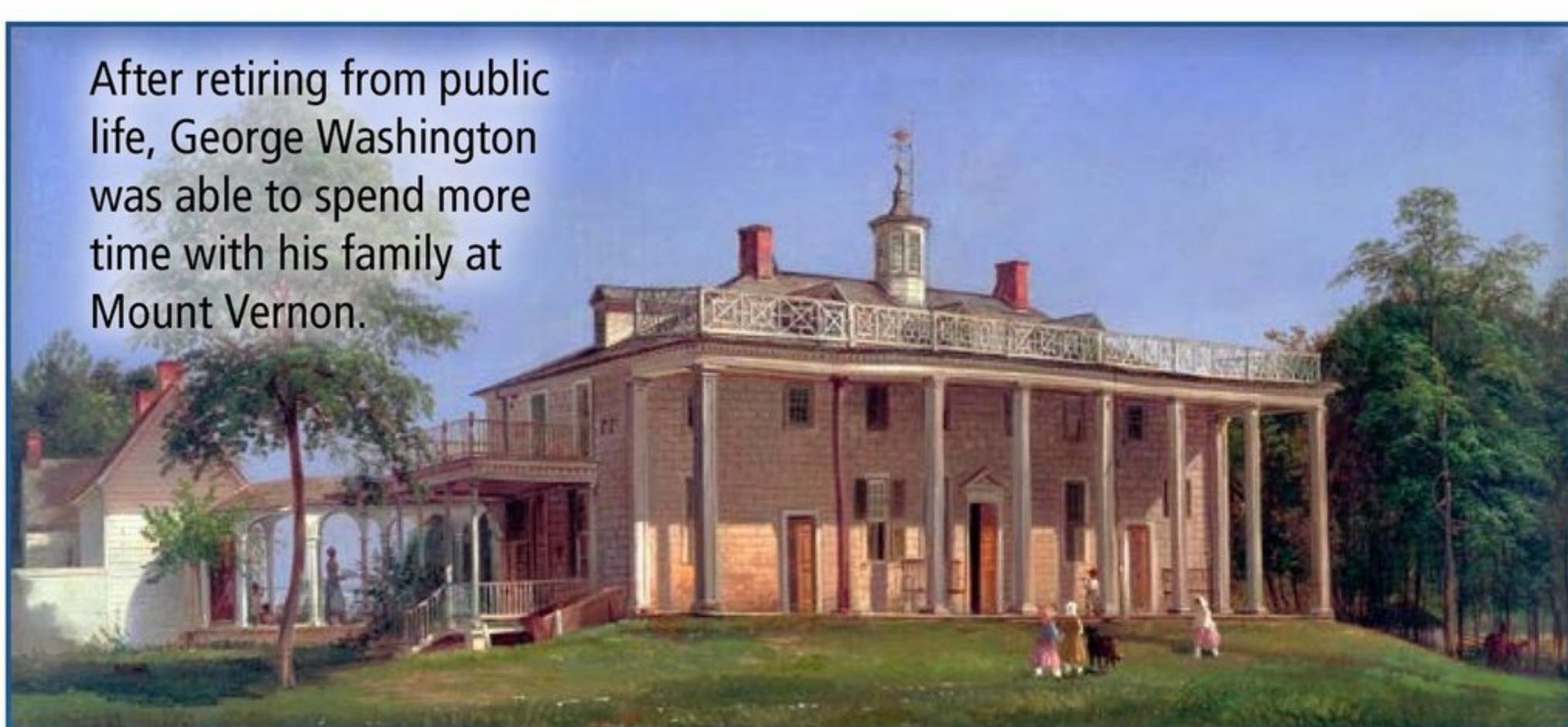
Also during Washington's second term as president, another war between Britain and France threatened to break out. Believing that military action should only be used when necessary, Washington did not want the United States to get pulled into the conflict. He was committed to the idea that the United States would remain **neutral**. It was not a well-liked decision. For the first time in his career, Washington faced unpopularity with both the public and the press.

## A Hero Retires

Setting a precedent that would remain in place for nearly 150 years, Washington decided to end his presidency after two terms. Before he was finished, however, he offered some advice to the young nation he loved so much. In his Farewell Address, Washington, ever conscious of military matters, urged caution when making **alliances** with other nations since he believed such friendships could lead to war. He also warned against forming too large an army, which might also encourage military conflicts. Most important, Washington felt, was for the American people to stand united as one nation.

Relieved to return to Mount Vernon and be a farmer again, a tired Washington began his retirement in 1797. In late 1799, he became ill with a bad sore throat. On December 14 of that year, Washington died.

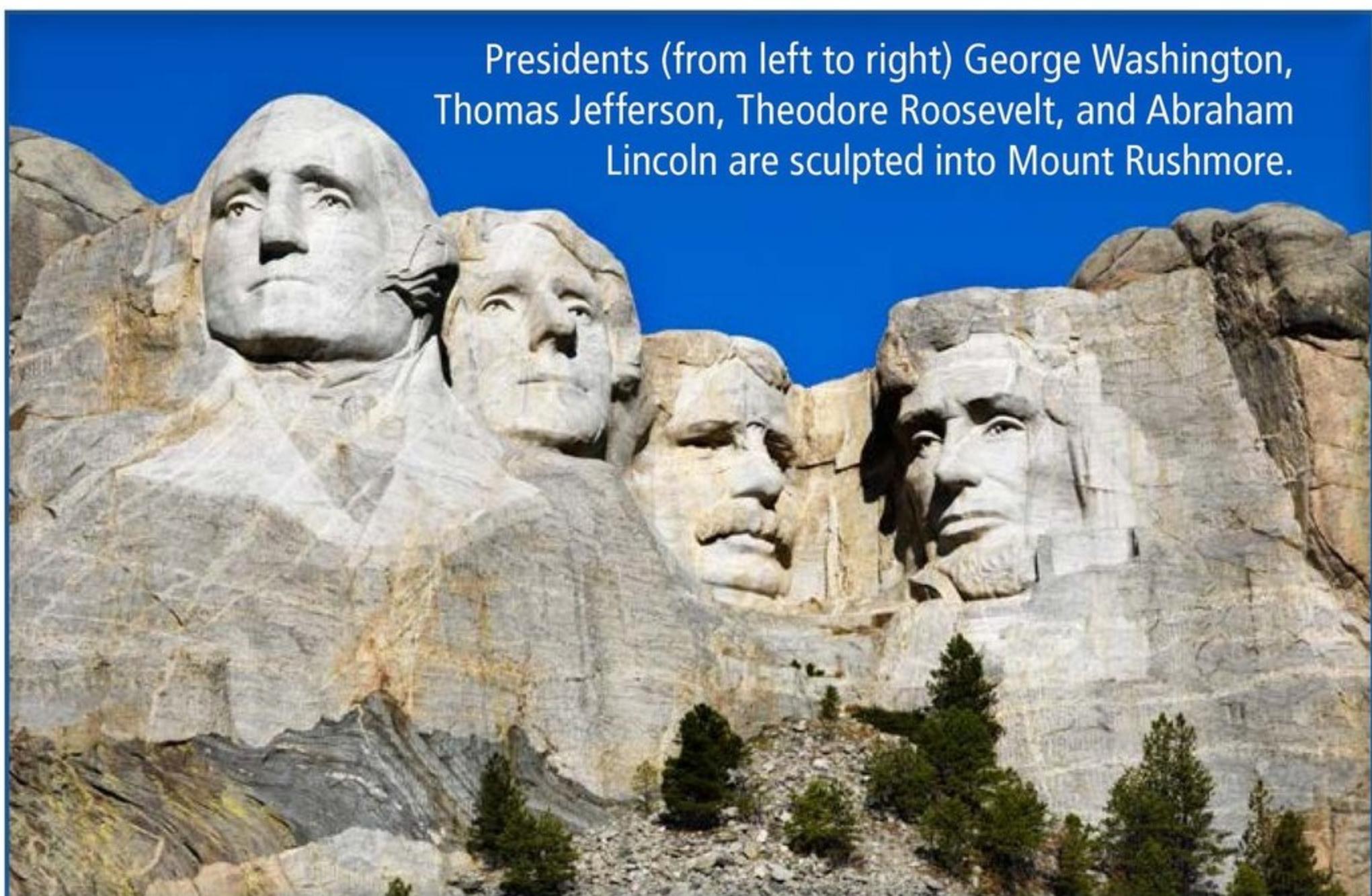
After retiring from public life, George Washington was able to spend more time with his family at Mount Vernon.



## Father of His Country

George Washington's many astounding accomplishments ranged from a superior military career to helping found a new nation. As commander of the Continental Army, he led the United States to independence from Britain. As America's first president, he set an example that every president since has tried to follow. He led with courage and confidence, and his style and personality demonstrated great personal character.

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



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

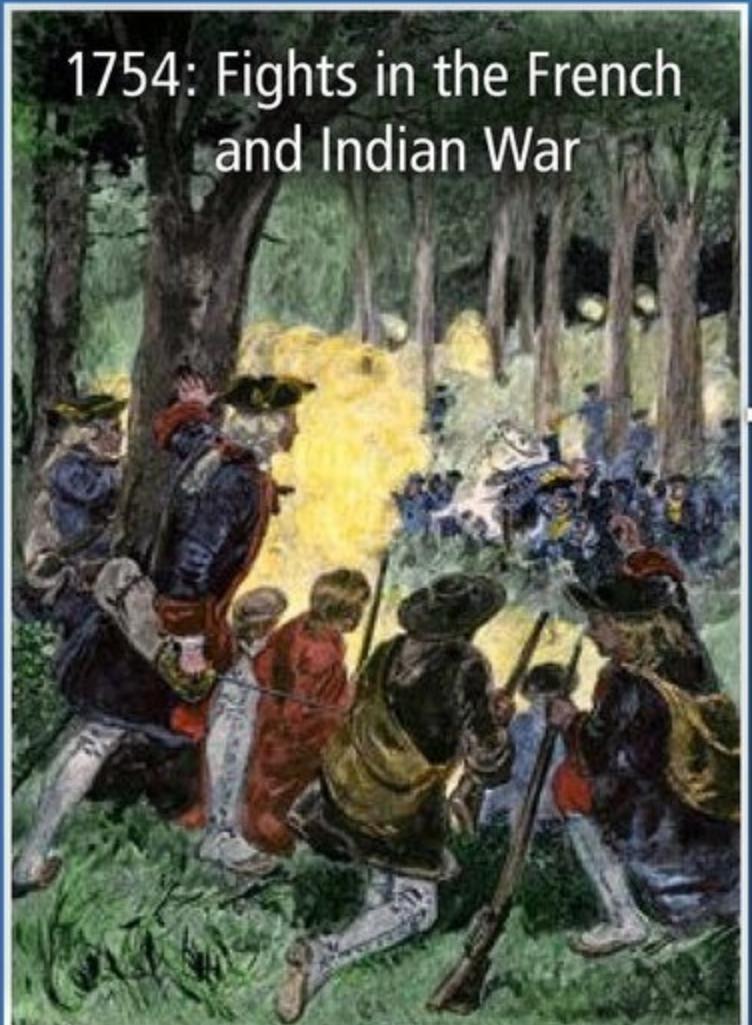
# The Life of George Washington

1732: Born in Westmoreland County, Virginia

1730

1735: The Washington family moves to Mount Vernon, Virginia

1735



1740

1754: Fights in the French and Indian War

1745



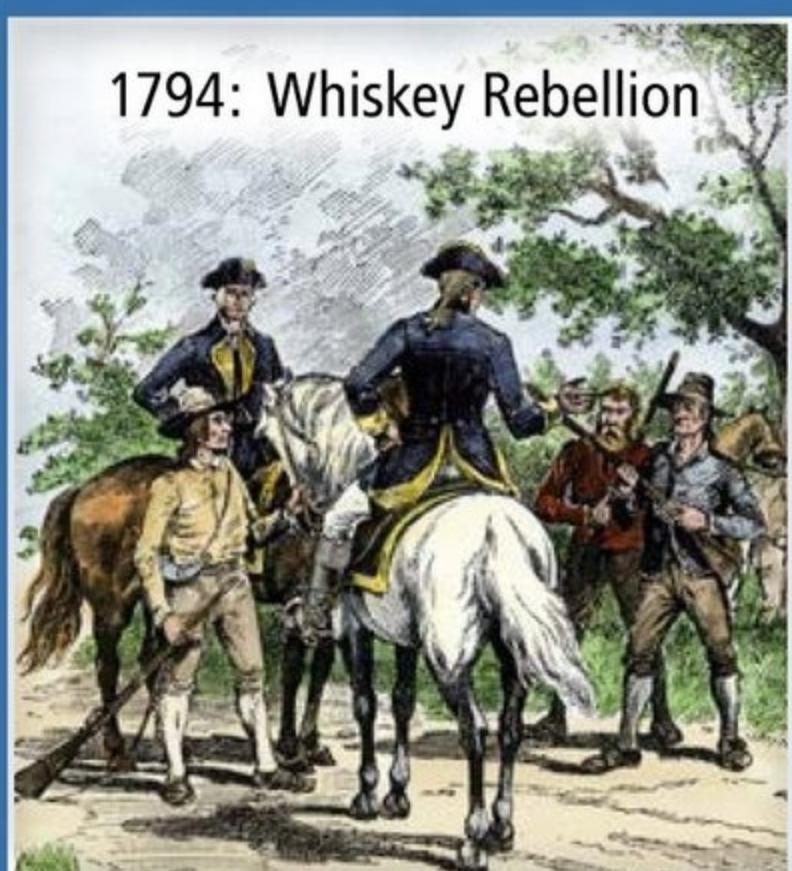
1750

1775: Appointed commander in chief of the Continental Army during the American Revolution

1755

1787: Presides over the Constitutional Convention

1760



1765

1794: Whiskey Rebellion

1770



1775

1797: Begins retirement at Mount Vernon

1780

1789: Elected first president of the United States

1785



1790

1799: Dies on December 14

1795

1800

## Glossary

<b>alliances</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	close associations between countries or other groups that work together (p. 13)
<b>Continental Congress</b>	the main governing body of the American colonies before, during, and for some time after the American Revolution (p. 7)
<b>delegates</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	chosen or elected people who represent and act on behalf of others (p. 7)
<b>inaugurated</b> ( <i>v.</i> )	admitted into office with a formal ceremony (p. 4)
<b>militia</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	an army made up of ordinary citizens instead of trained soldiers (p. 5)
<b>neutral</b> ( <i>adj.</i> )	not supporting either side in a conflict; not expressing thoughts or opinions on a subject (p. 12)
<b>precedents</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	acts or circumstances that serve as examples for later similar situations (p. 11)
<b>preserve</b> ( <i>v.</i> )	to take care of and save for the future (p. 4)
<b>revolt</b> ( <i>v.</i> )	to fight against a government or authority (p. 12)
<b>revolution</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	the removal of a government from power by force and its replacement with another (p. 7)
<b>term</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	a set or limited period of time in an official position (p. 12)
<b>unanimously</b> ( <i>adv.</i> )	with the complete agreement of everyone (p. 10)

# George Washington

A Reading A-Z Level Y Leveled Book

Word Count: 1,492

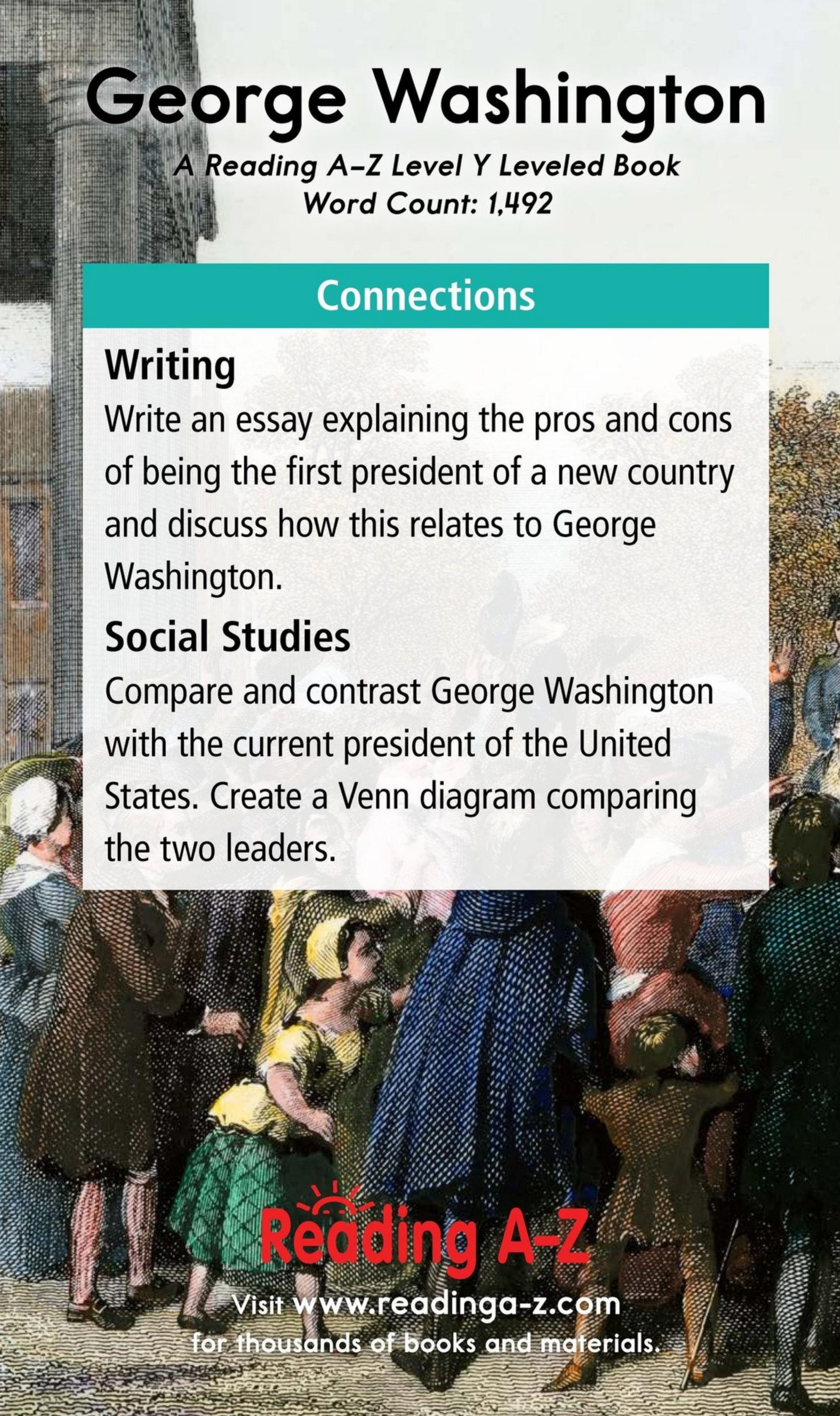
## Connections

### Writing

Write an essay explaining the pros and cons of being the first president of a new country and discuss how this relates to George Washington.

### Social Studies

Compare and contrast George Washington with the current president of the United States. Create a Venn diagram comparing the two leaders.



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