



The Man Who Made the Presidency

Intended Grade Level: High School

Lesson Purpose: Students will analyze George Washington's role in defining the role of the Presidency and how his legacy continues to impact the Presidency today.

Lesson Objectives:

- Students will analyze primary source images of George Washington, Louis XVI, Frederick the Great, and George III
- Students will compare and contrast the definition of the term "president" before and after the ratification of the U.S. Constitution.
- Students will identify and list the precedents established by George Washington as President, and note those which are still in effect today
- Students will write an argumentative essay.

National Standards:

NSS-USH.5-12.3 ERA 3: REVOLUTION AND THE NEW NATION (1754-1820s)

- Understands the causes of the American Revolution, the ideas and interests involved in forging the revolutionary movement, and the reasons for the American victory
- Understands the impact of the American Revolution on politics, economy, and society
- Understands the institutions and practices of government created during the Revolution and how they were revised between 1787 and 1815 to create the foundation of the American political system based on the U.S. Constitution and the Bill of Rights

NSS-C.9-12.2 FOUNDATIONS OF THE POLITICAL SYSTEM

What are the Foundations of the American Political System?

- What is the American idea of constitutional government?
- What are the distinctive characteristics of American society?
- What is American political culture?
- What values and principles are basic to American constitutional democracy?

NL-ENG.K-12.5 COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES



Students employ a wide range of strategies as they write and use different writing process elements appropriately to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes.

NL-ENG.K-12.7 EVALUATING DATA

Students conduct research on issues and interests by generating ideas and questions, and by posing problems. They gather, evaluate, and synthesize data from a variety of sources (e.g., print and nonprint texts, artifacts, people) to communicate their discoveries in ways that suit their purpose and audience.

NL-ENG.K-12.8 DEVELOPING RESEARCH SKILLS

Students use a variety of technological and information resources (e.g., libraries, databases, computer networks, video) to gather and synthesize information and to create and communicate knowledge.

Materials:

- Computer with internet access to find the following images
 - George Washington
 - http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Gilbert_Stuart_Williamstown_Portrait_of_George_Washington.jpg
 - King George III of England
 - http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:George_III_in_Coronation_Robes.jpg
 - King Louis XVI of France
 - http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Louis_xvi.jpg
 - Frederick the Great of Russia
 - <http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:FriedrichIIvonPreussenPesne1736.jpg>
- Handouts
- Student notebooks (can be made by stapling several sheets of notebook paper together)

Timeframe: Approximately two class sessions

Procedures:

Day 1

“Clothes make the man. Naked people have little or no influence on society.”

-Mark Twain

1. Pair and Share (2 students): working with a partner, students will discuss the quote, and rewrite it in their own words (8 - 10 min.).
2. Consider the following: What does clothing symbolize to Twain? What does Twain mean that a person is naked? How does this quote relate to today’s society?



3. Share responses with the class (5 - 7 min.)
4. Small Group Work (3 - 4 students): Using the internet, students will compare and contrast an image of George Washington with those of his contemporary world leaders (George III, Louis XVI, and Frederick the Great). Students will write their comments on a graphic organizer [("T" chart) 10 - 12 min.] handout A.
5. Students will present their observations to the class (5 - 8 min.).
6. Individual Practice: Using your notebook, copy down Twain's quote and respond to it. How does the quote apply to the images of the world leaders you examined in class, and in particular, what does it infer when applied to George Washington? Do you agree or disagree with Mark Twain? Be sure to support your response with specific evidence based on your knowledge of history.

Day 2

"Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely." -Lord Acton

1. Pair and Share (2 students): working with a partner, students will discuss this quote as it pertains to the presidency of the United States and rewrite it in their own words. (8 - 10 min.)
2. Consider the following: How much power does the President really have? Who does he answer to? How much power did George Washington have as President? How does that power compare with the President today?
3. Whole Group Instruction: Analysis and review of how the definition of the term president has changed over time (5 - 7 min.) handout B.
4. Small Group Work (3 - 4 students): Each group will receive excerpts from the Articles of Confederation and U.S. Constitution which outline the powers of the President. Using these documents they will complete a graphic organizer (13 - 15 min.) handout C.
5. Individual Practice: In your notebook copy down Lord Acton's quote and respond to it. Do you think the American presidency supports or refutes



Lord Acton's statement? Be sure to support your response with specific evidence based on your knowledge of history (8 - 10 min.).

6. Homework: The question still remains, who was the first President of the United States. George Washington or John Hanson? After analyzing excerpts from the Articles of Confederation and the United States Constitution, you will decide who truly deserves the title. For homework, you will write the rough draft of a persuasive essay in response to this question. Please write 35 - 40 lines in 45 - 50 minutes. You will be expected to cite at least 3 pieces of evidence to support your position. Additional research will earn bonus points.



*This has been adapted from a lesson by Frances Swain,
George Washington Teachers Institute, 2007.*



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Handout A

George Washington	George III



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George Washington	Louis XVI



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George Washington	Frederick the Great



Handout B

What is a President?

Some historians would argue that contrary to public belief, George Washington was not the first President of the United States. They believe that John Hanson, who was the first President of the United States in Congress assembled deserves that title. Over time, the definition of commonly used terms changes. This is definitely the case with the word "President."

Modern history of the designation

As an English word, the term was originally used to refer to the presiding officer of a committee or governing body in Great Britain. Later this usage was applied to political leaders, including the leaders of some of the Thirteen Colonies; in full, the "President of the Council"..^[1] Early examples are from the universities of Oxford and Cambridge (from 1464); the founding President of the Royal Society William Brouncker in 1660; heads of individual British colonies (originally Virginia in 1608); and chief officers of banks (from 1781). It was adopted as a title for the President of the United States of America.

As other countries followed the American Revolution, and deposed their monarchies, the term *president* was commonly adopted as the title for the new republican heads of state. The first European president was the president of France, a post created in the Second Republic of 1848. (The First Republic had begun with no separate executive, then established five directors, and finally echoed the ancient Roman Republic by appointing three consuls at its head.)

Current definition

President is a title held by many leaders of organizations, companies, trade unions, universities, and countries. Etymologically, a "president" is one who presides, who sits in leadership (from Latin *prae-* "before" + *sedere* "to sit"; giving the term *praeses*). Originally, the term referred to the presiding officer of a ceremony or meeting (i.e. chairman); but today it most commonly refers to an official with executive powers.

Among other things, **president** today is a common title for the head of state of most republics, whether popularly elected, or chosen by the legislature or a special electoral college. It is also often adopted by dictators.

Assignment: The question still remains, who was the first President of the United States: George Washington or John Hanson? After analyzing excerpts from the Articles of Confederation and the United States Constitution, you will decide who truly deserves the title. For homework, you will write the rough draft of a persuasive



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essay in response to this question. You will be expected to cite at least 3 pieces of evidence to support your position. Additional research will earn bonus points.



Handout C

Excerpts from the Articles of Confederation:

Article I

The Stile of this Confederacy shall be
"The United States of America".

Article II

Each state retains its sovereignty, freedom, and independence, and every power, jurisdiction, and right, which is not by this Confederation expressly delegated to the United States, in Congress assembled.

Article III

The said States hereby severally enter into a firm league of friendship with each other, for their common defense, the security of their liberties, and their mutual and general welfare, binding themselves to assist each other, against all force offered to, or attacks made upon them, or any of them, on account of religion, sovereignty, trade, or any other pretense whatever.

Article IX

The United States in Congress assembled shall have authority to appoint a committee, to sit in the recess of Congress, to be denominated 'A Committee of the States', and to consist of one delegate from each State; and to appoint such other committees and civil officers as may be necessary for managing the general affairs of the United States under their direction -- to appoint one of their members to preside, provided that no person be allowed to serve in the office of president more than one year in any term of three years.

<http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/artconf.htm>

Consider the following:

1. What type of government is a confederation?
2. What were the weaknesses of the Articles of Confederation that led to the Constitutional Convention?
3. Is the United States a confederation today?
4. Who was Commander in Chief of the armed forces under the Articles? Is that a relevant concern?
5. Is the President of the United States in Congress Assembled the same as our chief executive position today?



Excerpts from the United States Constitution:

Preamble:

We, the people of the United States, in order to form a more perfect Union, establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.

Article II: Section I

Section 1- President: his term of office. Electors of President; number and how appointed. Electors to vote on same day. Qualification of President. On whom his duties devolve in case of his removal, death, etc. President's compensation. His oath of office.

1. The Executive power shall be vested in a President of the United States of America. He shall hold office during the term of four years, and together with the Vice President, chosen for the same term.

4. No person except a natural born Citizen, or a Citizen of the United States, at the time of the adoption of this Constitution, shall be eligible to the office of President; neither shall any person be eligible to that office who shall not have attained to the age of thirty-five years, and been fourteen years a resident within the United States.

7. Before he enter on the execution of his office, he shall take the following oath or affirmation:

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

Section 2 - President to be Commander-in-Chief. He may require opinions of cabinet officers, etc., may pardon. Treaty-making power. Nomination of certain officers. When President may fill vacancies.

Section 3 - President shall communicate to Congress. He may convene and adjourn Congress, in case of disagreement, etc. Shall receive ambassadors, execute laws, and commission officers.

<http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/art2.htm>

Questions to Consider:

1. According to the preamble, is the United States a confederation under the Constitution?
2. How does the constitution change the definition of a president?
3. What powers does the President have that differ from the Articles?