**George Washington Teacher’s Institute**

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**Lesson Title** - “Why was the ability of George Washington to walk away from power

significant for our nation?”

**Intended Grade Level** – 7th Grade

**Lesson Purpose –** By analyzing primary documents the students will be able to learn the

importance of George Washington’s decisions to leave positions of power.

**Lesson Objectives –** Student will be able to analyze multiple primary documents to determine

what motivated George Washington to walk away from positions of power.

**Curriculum Standards -** Nevada Integrated Social Studies Standards H2.[6-8].11, C14.[6-8].8,

C14.[6-8].10

**Time Frame for Completing Lesson –** 2 to 4 class periods depending on the amount of time

spent introducing the subject, and the amount of time spent on the writing process of the final

essay.

**Materials –** Each students will need a copy of the DBQ packet with the primary sources and

the follow-up questions.

**Background Information –** Included in the DBQ packet.

**Procedures –** Day 1 – Pass out DBQ packets and review George Washington’s many roles

in the establishment and birth of the United States. Have the students read individually, or in

small groups to primary sources and answer the questions for each source.

Day 2 – Have the students write an essay answering the essential question, “Why was the ability of

George Washington to walk away from power significant for our nation?”

**Suggested Additional Activities –** Discuss with the class what it would have been like if George

Washington became king.

Discuss how Washington’s actions set standards for our leaders today.

**Document Based Questions**

**(Aka DBQs)**

by

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&

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“Why was the ability of George Washington to walk away from power significant for our nation?”

Write an essay explaining your answer to the question above. Make sure you justify your response using specific evidence from the sources provided.

**Document 1: Farewell Orders issued to the Armies**

**Vocabulary-**

Zeal – Enthusiastic, diligent in pursuit of a cause

Propriety – The quality of being proper

Adieu – Goodbye

Ample – Of large size, amount, extent, or capacity

**Document Note**: After Defeating the British in the American Revolution, George Washington was so admired that many Americans including his officers wanted him to become king. But instead of indulging himself in that power he issued his farewell orders to his army at his Rock Hill Headquarters near Princeton on November 2, 1783

***“….To the Commandants of Regiments and Corps, and to the other Officers for their great Zeal and attention in carrying his orders promptly into execution--To the Staff for their alacrity and exactness in performing the duties of their several Departments--And to the Non-commissioned officers and private Soldiers, for their extraordinary patience in suffering, as well as their invincible fortitude in Action--To the various branches of the Army, the General takes this last and solemn oppertunity of professing his inviolable attachment & friendship--He wishes more than bare professions were in his power, that he was really able to be usefull to them all in future life; He flatters himself however, they will do him the justice to believe, that whatever could with propriety be attempted by him, has been done. And being now to conclude these his last public Orders, to take his ultimate leave, in a short time, of the Military Character, and to bid a final adieu to the Armies he has so long had the honor to Command--he can only again offer in their behalf his recommendations to their grateful Country, and his prayers to the God of Armies. May ample justice be done them here, and may the choicest of Heaven's favors both here and hereafter attend those, who under the divine auspices have secured innumerable blessings for others: With these Wishes, and this benediction, the Commander in Chief is about to retire from service--The Curtain of seperation will soon be drawn--and the Military Scene to him will be closed for ever.”***

**Source:** <http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/index.asp?document=360>

**Document Analysis Questions –**

1. Who is General Washington addressing in this speech?
2. Why is Washington addressing his audience in such glowing terms?
3. What is Washington saying he is going to do?
4. What other options do you think Washington had?

**Document 2: George Washington's Resignation Address to the Continental Congress**

**Vocabulary –**

Resignation – An act or instance of giving up a position

Diffidence – Hesitant to assert oneself from lack of self-confidence

Arduous – Demanding great physical or mental care, effort, labor, or endurance

Rectitude – Moral integrity, the quality or state of being correct on intellectual judgment

Sanguine – Cheerfully confident

**Document Note**: On Saturday 20 December 1783 Washington wrote to the Continental Congress, notifying it of his arrival in Annapolis, Maryland, with the intention of "asking leave to resign the commission he has the honor of holding in their service, and desiring to know their pleasure in what manner it will be most proper to offer his resignation; whether in writing or at an audience." Upon reading the letter, Congress resolved that Washington "be admitted to a public audience, on Tuesday next, at twelve o'clock." [[1]](http://gwpapers.virginia.edu/documents/revolution/resignation.html#1) On the following Tuesday, 23 December 1783, Washington, "according to order . . . was admitted to a public audience, and being seated, the President, after a pause, informed him, that the United States in Congress assembled, were prepared to receive his communications." [[2]](http://gwpapers.virginia.edu/documents/revolution/resignation.html#2) Washington then arose and delivered the following address.

**Annapolis, Maryland  
23 December 1783**

[To the Continental Congress]

[Annapolis, Md. 23 December 1783]

Mr President

The great events on which my resignation depended having at length taken place; I have now the honor of offering my sincere Congratulations to Congress & of presenting myself before them to surrender into their hands the trust committed to me, and to claim the indulgence of retiring from the Service of my Country.

Happy in the confirmation of our Independence and Sovereignty, and pleased with the oppertunity afforded the United States of becoming a respectable Nation, I resign with satisfaction the Appointment I accepted with diffidence—A diffidence in my abilities to accomplish so arduous a task, which however was superseded by a confidence in the rectitude of our Cause, the support of the Supreme Power of the Union, and the patronage of Heaven.

The Successful termination of the War has verified the more sanguine expectations—and my gratitude for the interposition of Providence, and the assistance I have received from my Countrymen encreases with every review of the momentous Contest.

While I repeat my obligations to the Army in general, I should do injustice to my own feelings not to acknowledge in this place the peculiar Services and distinguished merits of the Gentlemen who have been attached to my person during the War. It was impossible the choice of confidential Officers to compose my family should have been more fortunate. Permit me Sir, to recommend in particular those, who have continued in Service to the present moment, as worthy of the favorable notice & patronage of Congress.

I consider it an indispensable duty to close this last solemn act of my Official life, by commanding the Interests of our dearest Country to the protection of Almighty God, and those Who have the superintendence of them, to his holy keeping.

Having now finished the work assigned me, I retire from the great theatre of Action—and bidding an Affectionate farewell to this August body under whose orders I have so long acted, I here offer my Commission, and take my leave of all the employments of public life.

**Source:** http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/index.asp?document=368

**Questions –**

1. Why did General Washington need to give a farewell statement to Congress?
2. How did Washington feel about their cause?
3. How did Washington recommend his officers to Congress?
4. Do you think that Washington planned to continue on in any public position after this?

**Document 3: Washington’s Farewell Address September 17, 1796**

**Vocabulary –**

Fervently – Having or exhibiting great emotion or warmth

Avert – To turn away

Mitigate – To make or become less intense or severe

Indulgence – Something granted as a favor or privilege

**Document Note**: After two terms as President of the United States, George Washington stepped down as President. These are the last two of the fifty-one points he made in his final message to the nation. He also addressed the issues of becoming mixed up with European Powers and the problem of political parties, among many other issues.

50) Though, in reviewing the incidents of my administration, I am unconscious of intentional error, I am nevertheless too sensible of my defects not to think it probable that I may have committed many errors. Whatever they may be, I fervently beseech the Almighty to avert or mitigate the evils to which they may tend. I shall also carry with me the hope, that my Country will never cease to view them with indulgence; and that, after forty-five years of my life dedicated to its service with an upright zeal, the faults of incompetent abilities will be consigned to oblivion, as myself must soon be to the mansions of rest.

51) Relying on its kindness in this as in other things, and actuated by that fervent love towards it, which is so natural to a man, who views it in the native soil of himself and his progenitors for several generations; I anticipate with pleasing expectation that retreat, in which I promise myself to realize, without alloy, the sweet enjoyment of partaking, in the midst of my fellow-citizens, the benign influence of good laws under a free government, the ever favorite object of my heart, and the happy reward, as I trust, of our mutual cares, labors, and dangers.

***George Washington  
United States - September 17, 1796***

**Source:** <http://gwpapers.virginia.edu/documents/revolution/resignation.html>

**Questions –**

1. Who is President Washington addressing in his Farewell Address?
2. What is Washington asking forgiveness for?
3. Do you think Washington plans to run for office again?
4. What is Washington looking forward to?

**Document 4: Washington's Farewell - Officers at Fraunces Tavern**

On December 4, 1783 George Washington invited his officers to meet him at Fraunces Tavern. He wanted to say his good-byes before he officially offered his resignation to Congress. Written accounts of this meeting describe the raw emotions that was felt threw out the room and observing this drawing also show the feelings of many of his officers.

**[](http://www.awesomestories.com/images/user/1222782739.55.jpg)**

**Source:** http://www.frauncestavernmuseum.org/mus\_farewell.html

**Questions –**

1) Who do you see in the picture above?

2) Why do you think some of the men look so formal?

3) What emotions do you think that General Washington and his officers are feeling?

4) Why would these emotions be so strong?

**Document 5: George Washington’s Response to the Newburgh Letter**

**Vocabulary –**

Sentiments – An idea, opinion, or attitude based on feeling or emotion rather than reason

Abhorrence – To reject vehemently

Utmost – Of the highest or greatest degree, amount, or intensity

Posterity – Future generations

**Document Note** - George Washington is responding to the letter sent to him by Colonel Lewis Nicola of the American Army and supported by his officers that suggested George Washington become King of the United States.

*To Lewis Nicola   
George Washington   
Newburgh, May 22, 1782   
  
Sir: With a mixture of great surprise and astonishment I have read with attention the Sentiments you have submitted to my perusal. Be assured Sir, no occurrence in the course of the War, has given me more painful sensations than your information of there being such ideas existing in the Army as you have expressed, and I must view with abhorrence, and reprehend with severety. For the present, the communication of them will rest in my own bosom, unless some further agitation of the matter, shall make a disclosure necessary.   
  
I am much at a loss to conceive what part of my conduct could have given encouragement to an address which to me seems big with the greatest mischiefs that can befall my Country. If I am not deceived in the knowledge of myself, you could not have found a person to whom your schemes are more disagreeable; at the same time in justice to my own feelings I must add, that no Man possesses a more sincere wish to see ample justice done to the Army than I do, and as far as my powers and influence, in a constitutional way extend, they shall be employed to the utmost of my abilities to effect it, should there be any occasion. Let me conjure you then, if you have any regard for your Country, concern for yourself or posterity, or respect for me, to banish these thoughts from your Mind, and never communicate, as from yourself, or any one else, a sentiment of the like Nature. With esteem I am.*

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**Source:** <http://www.pbs.org/georgewashington/multimedia/heston/lewis_nicola.html>

**Questions –**

1. Who wrote this letter to General Washington?
2. What do they want him to become?
3. What is Washington’s response to this request?
4. What are Washington’s reasons for his opinion?

**Essay Rubric**

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| --- | --- | --- |
| Requirement: | Points Possible: | Points Earned: |
| Clearly states thesis |  |  |
| At least 3 documents were used in the essay |  |  |
| Documents support thesis |  |  |
| Essay is organized ~ 5 paragraphs |  |  |
| Information in essay is relevant to the topic |  |  |
| Minimal grammatical and spelling errors |  |  |

Total Points Earned: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_/