

# U.S. Presidents: Past and Present

BY  
GEORGE R. LEE

COPYRIGHT © 2010 Mark Twain Media, Inc.

ISBN 978-1-58037-984-7

Printing No. 404136-EB

Mark Twain Media, Inc., Publishers  
Distributed by Carson-Dellosa Publishing LLC



Visit us at [www.carsondellosa.com](http://www.carsondellosa.com)

The purchase of this book entitles the buyer to reproduce the student pages for classroom use only. Other permissions may be obtained by writing Mark Twain Media, Inc., Publishers.

*All rights reserved. Printed in the United States of America.*

## Table of Contents

Introduction: The Making of a President .....	1	William Howard Taft.....	81
Why Might a Person Want to		Woodrow Wilson .....	83
Be President?.....	3	Warren Harding .....	88
Why Might a Person <i>Not</i> Want to		Calvin Coolidge .....	90
Be President?.....	4	Herbert Hoover.....	93
Campaign Activity.....	5	Franklin D. Roosevelt.....	95
Presidential Profiles:		Harry S Truman .....	102
George Washington .....	6	Dwight Eisenhower .....	105
John Adams .....	10	John F. Kennedy.....	110
Thomas Jefferson .....	12	Lyndon B. Johnson.....	113
James Madison .....	16	Richard Nixon.....	118
James Monroe .....	20	Gerald Ford .....	121
John Quincy Adams.....	24	Jimmy Carter.....	125
Andrew Jackson.....	27	Ronald Reagan .....	127
Martin Van Buren .....	32	George H.W. Bush .....	132
William Henry Harrison .....	35	William (Bill) Clinton .....	135
John Tyler .....	37	George W. Bush .....	140
James K. Polk.....	39	Barack H. Obama .....	144
Zachary Taylor.....	42	Quiz: Who Was President? .....	147
Millard Fillmore.....	44	List of Presidential Firsts .....	151
Franklin Pierce .....	46	Answer Keys.....	153
James Buchanan .....	48		
Abraham Lincoln .....	51		
Andrew Johnson .....	56		
Ulysses S. Grant .....	58		
Rutherford B. Hayes .....	60		
James Garfield.....	64		
Chester Arthur.....	66		
Grover Cleveland .....	68		
Benjamin Harrison .....	71		
Grover Cleveland .....	73		
William McKinley .....	75		
Theodore Roosevelt.....	77		



## GEORGE WASHINGTON

(1732–1799, P. 1789–1797).

When the electors cast their ballots in 1789, they unanimously chose George Washington for president. He was already a legend and was determined not to let his reputation be tarnished. He was the most famous American of his time and was noted for his courage and character. The old saying goes: “As the twig is bent, so the tree is inclined.” He intended for his “tree,” the presidency, to stand straight, tall, and proud.

Washington was the son of Augustus and Mary. His father was often away taking care of his iron ore business, so young George was with his mother most of the time. Mary was a very insecure woman; her parents had died when she was 13 years old and had left her with a small fortune. She had always been frugal with money, and she complained about being poor. Augustus was much more generous with the children born to his first marriage than to Mary and her children, which also disturbed her.

Little schooling was available in the area, and George Washington had only seven or eight years in classrooms. He was best at mathematics, but he studied other subjects too. He kept a diary and wrote out rules to live by. He learned the social skills required of a person in the upper class. There were strict rules of courtesy to learn and skills to master. Perhaps the part he enjoyed most was dancing. Much of his time was spent outdoors working, hunting, and fishing. He loved riding horses and exploring the woods. When he was 11 years old, his father died, and more responsibility fell to him as the oldest son of his mother. Running a plantation was hard work, and he became an excellent farmer.

George’s half-brother, Lawrence, was his hero. Lawrence had been a militia captain, and he taught George about military subjects. Lawrence named his home Mount Vernon, in honor of a British naval hero. George wanted to join the navy, but his mother refused to give permission. He became a surveyor at the age of 16, a job that gave him the opportunity to buy land on the frontier with very little money. In 1751, he went with Lawrence to the British West Indies, where George contracted smallpox. After he recovered, he returned to Virginia. His brother died in 1752 of tuberculosis, and after the death of Lawrence’s wife and daughter, George inherited the plantation at Mount Vernon.

By the time he was a young man, George was 6 feet 2 inches tall, very strong, and a great horseman. He wore size 13 shoes and had gray-blue eyes and brown hair. He kept very careful records of everything; he even calculated that there were 71,000 seeds in a pound of red clover.

In 1753, Washington was made a major in the Virginia militia. He started studying books on military affairs and tactics. In October, the governor sent Major Washington to the forks of the Ohio River where the French were building Fort Duquesne (at Pittsburgh). It was a very rough trip through wilderness. The French refused to stop building the fort, and Washington and his companions returned through heavy snow and bitterly cold weather to give their report. The governor sent him to build a fort and promoted him to lieutenant-colonel. When the French at-

tacked his “Fort Necessity,” Washington wrote: “I heard the bullets whistle, and believe me there is something charming in the sound.” His poorly-trained men were surrounded and forced to surrender.

In the French and Indian War that followed, Washington went with the British General Braddock’s expedition, and he saw British regulars break and run. Washington left the army angry at the way he had been treated as merely a militia officer. He was later assigned the job of protecting Virginia’s frontier. Most of his troops were a ragged collection of men, but they successfully held off attacks. His experience with these types of men was important later in his life.

He married Martha Custis in 1759; she was a widow with two children and a large estate. He then served in the colonial legislature. There he learned how difficult it was to get bills passed. He also met many future leaders like Patrick Henry and Thomas Jefferson. He watched as the colonies and England drifted toward war. He dreaded a war, but when the need for independence became more clear to him, he was ready.

In 1775, Congress chose him to lead its army. He refused to take a salary, and Congress only paid for his expenses. “These are times that try men’s souls,” Thomas Paine wrote, and certainly that was true for Washington. Defeated in battle many times, he refused to quit. He suffered through cold winters with his men, saw men desert, and complained to Congress about their need for shoes and blankets. It has been said that Washington was at his best when conditions were at their worst. He never considered giving up. He would rather have died than surrendered. His efforts paid off at Yorktown, Virginia, with a major victory. Great Britain finally gave the United States its independence.

Washington returned to Mount Vernon, expecting to spend the rest of his life as a farmer. However, he left retirement again when the Constitutional Convention was held in 1787. He was elected president of the Convention, and then he was chosen president of the United States in 1789. It was a job he did not want or ask for, but he put public interest before personal desire.

**WASHINGTON AS PRESIDENT.** Washington faced five important problems. Problem 1 was organizing the executive branch; he did that by choosing a cabinet. At the time it had only three members: the secretary of state, secretary of the treasury, and secretary of war.

Problem 2 was putting the government on a sound financial basis. That was done by the policies of Secretary of the Treasury Alexander Hamilton. The Bank of the United States was created to handle government funds. When frontier farmers protested against the Whiskey Tax, Washington sent an army to enforce it. When the farmers surrendered, he pardoned them.

Problem 3 was getting the British to leave forts in the West, which was finally accomplished by the Jay Treaty. When wars broke out in Europe between Great Britain and France, Washington stayed neutral. The country was not yet strong enough to get involved in world affairs, and he was able to stay neutral, despite the general opinion that we should help France.

Problem 4 was Indian troubles on the frontier. Three expeditions were sent to fight Indians. The first two ended in humiliating disasters. The third was led by General Anthony Wayne, and the Indians were defeated at Fallen Timbers.

Problem 5 was to create an image for the United States. Remember, at that time we were a very small nation with a weak army and navy. The president was always dignified, holding fancy levees (receptions) and dinners. He said: “There is a rank due to the United States among nations which will be withheld, if not absolutely lost, by the reputation of weakness.” He gave every appearance that the United States was in strong hands.

Many issues came up where Washington had to take an unpopular stand, but he always made difficult decisions without concern for personal glory. He knew as much about war and foreign affairs as anyone, so he kept a close eye on the War and State Departments. Economic affairs were more difficult for him to understand, so he gave the secretary of the treasury more freedom to make decisions in that area. He expected honesty and integrity from everyone in government, and would accept nothing less.

Washington was often attacked by writers, and like every president since, he was angry with the press at times. While he was usually able to hold his temper, these attacks sometimes aroused his wrath. One newspaper said he secretly wanted to be a king. At a cabinet meeting, Washington exploded that he would rather be back at Mount Vernon than to be emperor of the world. These attacks no doubt affected his decision not to run for a third term. He voluntarily did what few people with great power had ever done before; he gladly gave up power for a quiet life with his family.

After eight years as president, and despite many pleas that he serve another term, he retired and gladly returned to his plantation at Mount Vernon. His main activity now was raising crops and supervising his workers.

When Washington died in 1799, the nation mourned its loss. He was praised by Richard Henry Lee as being "First in war, first in peace, and first in the hearts of his countrymen." He had performed well every job he had been given and had fearlessly done what he thought was in the best interests of his people.

Washington has been honored by the nation in many ways. He is the only president to have a state named after him, and the nation's capital bears his name. The Washington Monument is by far the tallest structure in the District of Columbia. His face appears on the quarter and the \$1 bill. Many counties, cities, schools, and streets bear his name.



Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Points to Ponder (Washington)

1. Name three qualities Washington had that caused others to admire him so much.

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2. Name four things that happened during his younger days that helped him when he became a general and the first president.

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

3. Washington had less education than Jefferson, Madison, Hamilton, and other leaders. Why did they all respect him so much?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

4. Washington is not as popular now as he was a century ago. Why do you think that is?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

5. What qualities might a general have that would be helpful as president?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

What qualities might a general have that would hurt him as president?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



### Explore History



1. Draw a picture or construct a model of a fort.
2. Make a time line of Washington's military and political career.
3. Research Washington's home, Mount Vernon. Design a travel brochure, including pictures, describing both his home and the area. Convince people to visit.
4. Pretend you were a soldier serving under Washington. Describe his qualities as a good leader. Tell about some of the hardships you endured, especially in the winter.