

# GEORGE WASHINGTON AND FDR

## LEVEL:

High School

## TIMEFRAME:

One class period

## OBJECTIVES:

Students will evaluate the practice of term limits for the American presidency.

Students will use context clues to determine the meaning of academic vocabulary in a primary source

Students will debate the merits of presidential term limits

Students will analyze the content and message of a political cartoon

## STANDARDS:

Reading and Writing Literacy in  
History/Social Studies

Integrate and Evaluate Content in Diverse  
Formats.

Writing Standards

Speaking and Listening

Principles of Democracy

Power, Authority, and Governance

Time, Continuity, and Change

## PRECEDENTS: GEORGE WASHINGTON'S LEGACY AND FDR'S DECISION

1. Display George Washington's May 5, 1789, letter to James Madison using classroom projection technology: <http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/05-02-02-0157>
2. Have a student volunteer read this short letter aloud.
3. Have the class work together to define the word "precedent" based on context clues in the letter. (Merriam-Webster, for example, offers the following definition: "something done or said that may serve as an example or rule to authorize or justify a subsequent act of the same or an analogous kind")

## BREAKING THE PRECEDENT:

1. Background: an important precedent that George Washington set was the two-term tradition for presidents. Even though there was no rule in the Constitution about how many times a person could be president, Washington and the next 30 presidents after him each served two or fewer

terms. Franklin Delano Roosevelt, however, was successfully elected to a third and even fourth term as president.

2. Distribute a copy of the “Breaking the Precedent” packet to each student.
3. Have students read Richard Moe’s article “Why (and How) FDR Ran for His Third Term” on George Mason University’s History News Network site (<http://hnn.us/article/152895>) and answer the corresponding questions in the attached sheet:
4. Display Fred O. Seibel’s Feb. 22, 1940, political cartoon “The First President” (<http://findingaids.princeton.edu/collections/MC180/c00939>) using classroom projection technology and ask students a series of questions to help them analyze this source:
  - a. Whose image is portrayed here? (George Washington’s)
  - b. Which of Washington’s political philosophies does Seibel choose to highlight? (Serving only two terms, staying neutral in foreign wars)
  - c. What foreign war was raging at the time this political cartoon was created? (World War II)
  - d. What is the message of this political cartoon? (FDR is going against the wishes of Washington, who many consider to be among the best or most respected presidents)

#### **EXTENSION ACTIVITY SUGGESTION:**

- Have students create their own political cartoons about term limits.
- Their political cartoons should communicate a clear message about the strengths or weaknesses of term limits.
- Have students present and explain their political cartoons to the class. Then, display student work in the classroom.

# BREAKING THE PRECEDENT

Read Richard Moe's article "Why (and How) FDR Ran for His Third Term" on George Mason University's History News Network site: <http://hnn.us/article/152895>

Then, answer the following questions:

1. What specific plans had Franklin Delano Roosevelt (FDR) made for after his retirement, originally scheduled for January 1941?
2. Why did FDR begin to waver on his resolution to retire in 1940?
3. What became FDR's "loophole" to his resolution to retire in 1940?

4. Describe FDR's general decision-making method.

5. What were the possible outcomes of this method?

6. Do you think this is a valid method of making decisions? Why or why not?

7. Describe your decision-making method.

8. How did staying silent on his decision whether or not to retire benefit FDR?

9. How did FDR's "solitary nature" impact his decision making?

10. Describe the circumstances under which FDR eventually resolved to run again.

11. When did he finally tell someone that he was going to run for a third term?

12. How did Felix Frankfurter feel about FDR's running for a third term?

13. How does Frankfurter's response align with the arguments over "re-eligibility" at the Constitutional Convention?

14. Do you agree with Frankfurter's analysis of the situation in 1940? Why or why not?

15. Should FDR have broken the two-term precedent set by Washington?