

# GEORGE WASHINGTON AND CIVIC VIRTUE

---

**LEVEL:**

Middle School

**TIMEFRAME:**

Approximately one class session

**OBJECTIVES:**

Students will analyze Washington-related primary source documents, including the *Rules of Civility and Decent Behavior*, *Washington's First Inaugural Address, April 30, 1789* and *Washington's Farewell Address, 1796*.

Student will examine the concept of civic virtues as written and exemplified by George Washington, and how civic virtues foster democracy.

Students will discuss how the relationship between citizens and civic virtue helps to preserve a strong democracy.

**STANDARDS:**

- Reading and Writing Literacy in History/Social Studies
  - Explain how and why perspectives of people change over time
  - Using multiple historical sources to further inquiry
  - Speaking and Listening
- 

**PROCEDURE:**

1. As a class, define *good character*, *manners*, *civic virtue*, and *civic knowledge*. Discuss how George Washington believed in the importance of character and civic virtue. Throughout his life, Washington was known for his strong character and as a “man of action.” Have students list on the board what they know about George Washington. After the list is complete, discuss character traits that are reflected by each item on the list (example: Washington’s role as Commander-in-Chief during the American Revolution might lead students to identify character traits of: strong leader, courageous, good reputation, et cetera).
2. Distribute *Rules of Civility and Decent Behavior*, *Washington's First Inaugural Address*, and *Washington's Farewell Address* for students to read (included in the ZIP file download). Have each student analyze the documents and record their impressions on the *Document Analysis Table* (included in the ZIP file download). Review student answers as a class.

- a. Note: these documents are excerpts of the actual papers. To access the entire text, please visit
  - i. For Rules of Civility: <https://www.mountvernon.org/george-washington/rules-of-civility>
  - ii. For the Inaugural Address: <https://www.mountvernon.org/education/primary-source-collections/primary-source-collections/article/washington-s-first-inaugural-address-april-30-1789/>
  - iii. For the Farewell Address: <https://www.mountvernon.org/education/primary-source-collections/primary-source-collections/article/washington-s-farewell-address-1796/>
3. Have each student choose the three Rules of Civility and Decent Behavior that they think are the most important in today's society and share their choices with the class. As a class, discuss why certain rules were chosen more than others.
4. Look at the poll on Mount Vernon's website to see if others agree or disagree with the class's choices.  
[www.mountvernon.org/rules](http://www.mountvernon.org/rules)
5. For further class discussion, have students consider the following questions:
  - a. Why is it important that citizens participate in a democratic society?
  - b. If participation by citizens is important to a democratic society, why are civic virtues important?
  - c. What is the relationship between a citizen's societal roles and responsibilities and his or her character and virtues?
  - d. How might civic virtues foster and support democracy?
  - e. Can you provide instances of civic virtue in today's society and from current events?

WORKSHEET: GEORGE WASHINGTON  
AND CIVIC VIRTUE

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

DATE \_\_\_\_\_

---

	Rules of Civility	Inaugural Address	Farewell Address
When was the document written?			
Who is the audience for the document?			
What is the purpose of the document?			
What civic virtues are mentioned in the document?			
What is important to learn from the document?			

**The Rules of Civility and Decent Behavior**

1st Every Action done in Company, ought to be with Some Sign of Respect, to those that are Present

2d When in Company, put not your Hands to any Part of the Body, not usually Discovered.

3d Shew Nothing to your Freind that may affright him.

4th In the Presence of Others Sing not to yourself with a humming Noise, nor Drum with your Fingers or Feet.

5th If you Cough, Sneeze, Sigh, or Yawn do it not Loud but Privately; and Speak not in your Yawning, but put your handkercheif or Hand before your face and turn aside.

6th Sleep not when other Speak, Sit not when others stand, Speak not when you Should hold your Peace, walk not on when others Stop.

7th Put not off your Cloths in the presence of Others, nor go out your Chamber half Drest.

8th At Play and at Fire its Good manners to Give Place to the last Commer, and affect not to Speak Louder than Ordinary.

9th Spit not in the Fire, nor Stoop low before it neither Put your Hands into the Flames to warm them, nor Set your Feet upon the Fire especially if there be meat before it.

10th When you Sit down, Keep your Feet firm and Even, without putting one on the other or Crossing them.

**1. Washington's Farewell Address, 1796**

**2. FRIENDS AND FELLOW CITIZENS:**

3. The period for a new election of a citizen, to administer the executive government of the  
4. United States, being not far distant, and the time actually arrived, when your thoughts  
5. must be employed designating the person, who is to be clothed with that important trust,  
6. it appears to me proper, especially as it may conduce to a more distinct expression of the  
7. public voice, that I should now apprise you of the resolution I have formed, to decline  
8. being considered among the number of those out of whom a choice is to be made.

.....

9. Here, perhaps I ought to stop. But a solicitude for your welfare which cannot end but with  
10. my life, and the apprehension of danger, natural to that solicitude, urge me, on an  
11. occasion like the present, to offer to your solemn contemplation, and to recommend to  
12. your frequent review, some sentiments which are the result of much reflection, of no  
13. inconsiderable observation, and which appear to me all-important to the permanency of  
14. your felicity as a people. These will be offered to you with the more freedom, as you can  
15. only see in them the disinterested warnings of a parting friend, who can possibly have no  
16. personal motive to bias his counsel. Nor can I forget, as an encouragement to it, your  
17. indulgent reception of my sentiments on a former and not dissimilar occasion.

18. Interwoven as is the love of liberty with every ligament of your hearts, no  
19. recommendation of mine is necessary to fortify or confirm the attachment.

20. The unity of Government, which constitutes you one people, is also now dear to you. It is  
21. justly so; for it is a main pillar in the edifice of your real independence, the support of  
22. your tranquility at home, your peace abroad; of your safety; of your prosperity; of that

23. very Liberty, which you so highly prize. But as it is easy to foresee, that, from different  
24. causes and from different quarters, much pains will be taken, many artifices employed, to  
25. weaken in your minds the conviction of this truth; as this is the point in your political  
26. fortress against which the batteries of internal and external enemies will be most  
27. constantly and actively (though often covertly and insidiously) directed, it is of infinite

28. moment, that you should properly estimate the immense value of your national Union to  
29. your collective and individual happiness; that you should cherish a cordial, habitual, and  
30. immovable attachment to it; accustoming yourselves to think and speak of it as of the  
31. Palladium of your political safety and prosperity; watching for its preservation with  
32. jealous anxiety; discountenancing whatever may suggest even a suspicion, that it can in  
33. any event be abandoned; and indignantly frowning upon the first dawning of every  
34. attempt to alienate any portion of our country from the rest, or to enfeeble the sacred ties  
35. which now link together the various parts.

36. For this you have every inducement of sympathy and interest. Citizens, by birth or choice,  
37. of a common country, that country has a right to concentrate your affections. The name of  
38. american, which belongs to you, in your national capacity, must always exalt the just  
39. pride of Patriotism, more than any appellation derived from local discriminations. With  
40. slight shades of difference, you have the same religion, manners, habits, and political  
41. principles. You have in a common cause fought and triumphed together; the  
42. Independence and Liberty you possess are the work of joint counsels, and joint efforts, of  
43. common dangers, sufferings, and successes.

44. But these considerations, however powerfully they address themselves to your sensibility,  
45. are greatly outweighed by those, which apply more immediately to your interest. Here  
46. every portion of our country finds the most commanding motives for carefully guarding  
47. and preserving the Union of the whole.

.....

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

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

62. George Washington

63. United States - September 17, 1796

**Washington's First Inaugural Address, April 30, 1789**

1 Fellow Citizens of the Senate and the House of Representatives.  
2 Among the vicissitudes incident to life, no event could have filled me with greater anxieties than  
3 that of which the notification was transmitted by your order, and received on the fourteenth day of  
4 the present month. On the one hand, I was summoned by my Country, whose voice I can never  
5 hear but with veneration and love, from a retreat which I had chosen with the fondest predilection,  
6 and, in my flattering hopes, with an immutable decision, as the asylum of my declining years: a  
7 retreat which was rendered every day more necessary as well as more dear to me, by the addition  
8 of habit to inclination, and of frequent interruptions in my health to the gradual waste committed  
9 on it by time. On the other hand, the magnitude and difficulty of the trust to which the voice of  
10 my Country called me, being sufficient to awaken in the wisest and most experienced of her  
11 citizens, a distrustful scrutiny into his qualifications, could not but overwhelm with dispondence,  
12 one, who, inheriting inferior endowments from nature and unpractised in the duties of civil  
13 administration, ought to be peculiarly conscious of his own deficiencies. In this conflict of  
14 emotions, all I dare aver, is, that it has been my faithful study to collect my duty from a just  
15 appreciation of every circumstance, by which it might be affected. All I dare hope, is, that, if in  
16 executing this task I have been too much swayed by a grateful remembrance of former instances,  
17 or by an affectionate sensibility to this transcendent proof, of the confidence of my fellow-  
18 citizens; and have thence too little consulted my incapacity as well as disinclination for the  
19 weighty and untried cares before me; my error will be palliated by the motives which misled me,  
20 and its consequences be judged by my Country, with some share of the partiality in which they  
21 originated.

22 Such being the impressions under which I have, in obedience to the public summons, repaired to  
23 the present station; it would be peculiarly improper to omit in this first official Act, my fervent  
24 supplications to that Almighty Being who rules over the Universe, who presides in the Councils  
25 of Nations, and whose providential aids can supply every human defect, that his benediction may



26 consecrate to the liberties and happiness of the People of the United States, a Government  
27 instituted by themselves for these essential purposes: and may enable every instrument employed  
28 in its administration to execute with success, the functions allotted to his charge. In tendering this  
29 homage to the Great Author of every public and private good I assure myself that it expresses  
30 your sentiments not less than my own; nor those of my fellow-citizens at large, less than either.  
31 No People can be bound to acknowledge and adore the invisible hand, which conducts the Affairs  
32 of men more than the People of the United States. Every step, by which they have advanced to the  
33 character of an independent nation, seems to have been distinguished by some token of  
34 providential agency. And in the important revolution just accomplished in the system of their  
35 United Government, the tranquil deliberations and voluntary consent of so many distinct  
36 communities, from which the event has resulted, cannot be compared with the means by which  
37 most Governments have been established, without some return of pious gratitude along with an  
38 humble anticipation of the future blessings which the past seem to presage. These reflections,  
39 arising out of the present crisis, have forced themselves too strongly on my mind to be  
40 suppressed. You will join with me I trust in thinking, that there are none under the influence of  
41 which, the proceedings of a new and free Government can more auspiciously commence.

42 By the article establishing the Executive Department, it is made the duty of the President "to  
43 recommend to your consideration, such measures as he shall judge necessary and expedient." The  
44 circumstances under which I now meet you, will acquit me from entering into that subject, farther  
45 than to refer to the Great Constitutional Charter under which you are assembled; and which, in  
46 defining your powers, designates the objects to which your attention is to be given. It will be more  
47 consistent with those circumstances, and far more congenial with the feelings which actuate me,  
48 to substitute, in place of a recommendation of particular measures, the tribute that is due to the  
49 talents, the rectitude, and the patriotism which adorn the characters selected to devise and adopt  
50 them. In these honorable qualifications, I behold the surest pledges, that as on one side, no local  
51 prejudices, or attachments; no separate views, nor party animosities, will misdirect the

52 comprehensive and equal eye which ought to watch over this great assemblage of communities  
53 and interests: so, on another, that the foundations of our National policy will be laid in the pure  
54 and immutable principles of private morality; and the pre-eminence of a free Government, be  
55 exemplified by all the attributes which can win the affections of its Citizens, and command the  
56 respect of the world.

57 I dwell on this prospect with every satisfaction which an ardent love for my Country can inspire:  
58 since there is no truth more thoroughly established, than that there exists in the economy and  
59 course of nature, an indissoluble union between virtue and happiness, between duty and  
60 advantage, between the genuine maxims of an honest and magnanimous policy, and the solid  
61 rewards of public prosperity and felicity: Since we ought to be no less persuaded that the  
62 propitious smiles of Heaven, can never be expected on a nation that disregards the eternal rules of  
63 order and right, which Heaven itself has ordained: And since the preservation of the sacred fire of  
64 liberty, and the destiny of the Republican model of Government, are justly considered as deeply,  
65 perhaps as finally staked, on the experiment entrusted to the hands of the American people.

66 Besides the ordinary objects submitted to your care, it will remain with your judgment to decide,  
67 how far an exercise of the occasional power delegated by the Fifth article of the Constitution is  
68 rendered expedient at the present juncture by the nature of objections which have been urged  
69 against the System, or by the degree of inquietude which has given birth to them. Instead of  
70 undertaking particular recommendations on this subject, in which I could be guided by no lights  
71 derived from official opportunities, I shall again give way to my entire confidence in your  
72 discernment and pursuit of the public good: For I assure myself that whilst you carefully avoid  
73 every alteration which might endanger the benefits of an United and effective Government, or wh  
74 ich ought to await the future lessons of experience; a reverence for the characteristic rights of  
75 freemen, and a regard for the public harmony, will sufficiently influence your deliberations on the  
76 question how far the former can be more impregably fortified, or the latter be safely and

77 advantageously promoted.

78 To the preceeding observations I have one to add, which will be most properly addressed to the  
79 House of Representatives. It concerns myself, and will therefore be as brief as possible. When I  
80 was first honoured with a call into the Service of my Country, then on the eve of an arduous  
81 struggle for its liberties, the light in which I contemplated my duty required that I should renounce  
82 every pecuniary compensation. From this resolution I have in no instance departed. And being  
83 still under the impressions which produced it, I must decline as inapplicable to myself, any share  
84 in the personal emoluments, which may be indispensably included in a permanent provision for  
85 the Executive Department; and must accordingly pray that the pecuniary estimates for the Station  
86 in which I am placed, may, during my continuance in it, be limited to such actual expenditures as  
87 the public good may be thought to require.

88 Having thus imported to you my sentiments, as they have been awakened by the occasion  
89 which brings us together, I shall take my present leave; but not without resorting once more to the  
90 benign parent of the human race, in humble supplication that since he has been pleased to favour  
91 the American people, with opportunities for deliberating in perfect tranquility, and dispositions  
92 for deciding with unparelled unanimity on a form of Government, for the security of their  
93 Union, and the advancement of their happiness; so his divine blessing may be equally  
94 conspicuous in the enlarged views, the temperate consultations, and the wise measures on which  
95 the success of this Government must depend.

96

George Washington