



Bio4Kids: George Washington (1732-1799)

Brief Outline

His name is everywhere. Our nation's capital is named after him and so is the state of Washington. His face appears on the quarter and the dollar bill. But who exactly was George Washington? He was an important member of the American Revolution. He led the American troops during the war for independence from Great Britain and became the first president of the United States.

George Washington was born on February 22, 1732, in Westmoreland County, Virginia. After his father died when he was eleven, Washington helped his mother with the family's plantation called Ferry Farm. He had some education, learning the basics of reading, writing, and mathematics. But Washington's formal schooling ended around the age of 14 or 15. His first job was as a surveyor. A surveyor measures land to establish boundaries and figure out its worth. This work gave him the opportunity to explore the lands around him and even see some of the Virginia wilderness.

In 1752, Washington decided to pursue a career in the military. Chosen by the governor of Virginia, he became a major in the state's militia. At this time, Virginia was an English colony and the colonies had their own local troops. Washington served during the French and Indian War, which lasted from 1754 to 1760. During this time, he proved to be courageous in battle and learned a lot about how to be a military leader.

Beginning in 1758, Washington spent many years as a member of the House of Burgesses, which was a part of the colonial government. He became aware of the unfair treatment of the colonists by the British government. When new taxes were imposed, Washington and his fellow legislators angrily protested. The British governor ignored their outcry. He helped organize a boycott of goods imported from Britain in response.

Washington was chosen to be one of the delegates to the first meeting of the Continental Congress in 1774. This meeting brought together leaders from the thirteen colonies to discuss their problems with Great Britain. Another meeting of the congress was held the next year. This time the representatives talked about setting up their own government. Washington was also selected to be the commander in chief of the Continental Army at this meeting.

For eight years, Washington led the Revolutionary forces, inspiring the colonists to continue to fight for their freedom. With his troops, he faced many challenges—bitter cold weather, hunger, and a lack of gunpowder among other hardships. But Washington was smart and knew how to stay ahead of the British troops. In 1781, he helped win an important victory at Yorktown, Virginia. Two years later, the Treaty of Paris was signed, marking the official end of the war.

In 1787, Washington was again selected to represent the people of Virginia. This time, he met with other American leaders at the Constitutional Convention to create the United States Constitution. Two years later, Washington became the first president of the United States, taking office on April 30, 1789.

As president, Washington guided the young nation through its first eight years. He helped create a strong federal government. When trouble arose, Washington responded quickly. He put a stop to an uprising by farmers in western Pennsylvania over a tax on whiskey in 1794—an event that became known as the Whiskey Rebellion. Washington also helped keep the nation out of the conflict between France and England in 1790s. At the end of his second term in office, Washington was tired of politics. He retired to his family home called Mount Vernon in Virginia.

Washington died on December 14, 1799, at Mount Vernon. Even before he died, the people of the United States celebrated George Washington's birthday as a national holiday to honor all that he had done for the country. Today his birthday and the February 12 birthday of another great American president, Abraham Lincoln, are honored together as Presidents' Day. This special day is held on the third Monday in February.

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