



Washington's resignation was important for the American principle that we are governed by civilians, and not the military.

The U.S. and the World—War and Peace

Civilian Control of the Military

CCC

1805

Standards

CCE (5-8): IV.A.2

Key Term

► Transfer of Power

Teacher Background

Many governments throughout world history and up to our present day have been based on the use of force. The U.S. is special for many reasons, including that civilians have control over the military, we have a peaceful transfer of power from one president to another every four or eight years, and a similar transfer of power every two or six years in Congress.

To do with your students:




Project an image of General George Washington Resigning His Commission, by John Trumbull, available at the following link: [SophiaOnline.org/Washington](https://www.sophiaonline.org/Washington).




Ask the class what they know about George Washington, in addition to the fact that he was our first president. If need-ed, explain that he was the general of the Continental Army that defeated the British in the Revolutionary War.



Ask why they think it would be unexpected for a general to resign his commission—to voluntarily give up power. *Historically, almost all people with power had sought to gain more power, rather than give up what they had.*

 Wrap up by sharing the information from the teacher background, and how Washington's resignation was important for the American principle that we are governed by civilians, and not the military. Further, the military is under civilian control.

 Ask the class what virtues Washington displayed by resigning his commission. What vices did he NOT give into? *He displayed prudence and temperance (accept additional reasoned answers.) He did not give into avarice or greed for power.*

 Close in prayer over Daniel 2:20-21:

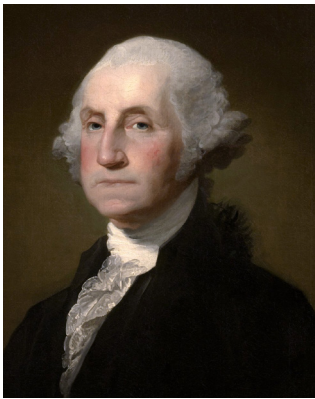
Blessed be the name of God forever and ever,
for wisdom and power are his.
He causes the changes of the times and seasons,
establishes kings and deposes them.
He gives wisdom to the wise
and knowledge to those who understand.

The U.S. and the World—War and Peace

Peaceful Transfer of Power

CCC
1805

Standards
CCE (5-8): IV.A.2







Washington refused a third term in part because he was concerned he might die in office. He wanted to avoid setting the expectation that U.S. presidents would serve for life.

Teacher Background

Washington's leadership provides another example for American government. Washington resigned his commission after the Revolutionary War, and he again gave up power when he was president. He was elected unanimously in 1788, and won in a landslide four years later. He could have kept running for president until he died, but he chose to refuse a third term. Why was this an important precedent? Because Washington began a tradition that presidents would limit themselves to two terms, ensuring that presidents did not govern for life. This tradition continued until FDR ran and was elected to four terms. The 22nd Amendment was added to the Constitution in 1957, preventing presidents from being elected to more than two terms.

To do with your students:

-  Share the information above with your students.
-  Explain how while it seems ordinary to us, the peaceful transfer of power from one head of state to another is quite rare in world history.
-  Recall the previous discussion on the virtues displayed by Washington, and ask how his refusal to run for a 3rd term affects their assessment of the virtues he displayed.
-  Wrap up by explaining that two key principles of the U.S. government are a) civilian control of the military and b) the peaceful transfer of power. Why would these be important for preserving liberty and justice for all? *These principles ensure we are governed by civil institutions and not by the threat or use of military force.*