George Washington
– Modest Man and Model President

- Student Activity: Why Washington for President?
- Teacher Resource: GW Letters and Other Documents
- Student Activity: George Washington — A Model Leader for Others?
- Further Reading: “They got him what!? A look into the art of presidential gift-giving”
- Further Reading: “Move over, Trump. This president’s two lions set off the greatest emoluments debate.”
This special issue, presented by The Washington Post’s Newspaper In Education (NIE) program and Digital Department, has been created for use with The Post’s “Presidential” podcast series. It particularly focuses on the episode “George Washington: The man, the myth, the legend.”

“Presidential” is a series of 44 podcasts, one for each president, hosted by Post reporter Lillian Cunningham. For every episode, she interviewed historians, biographers, reporters and other experts who were uniquely positioned to explain and explore the presidents’ lives and their time periods, the influences on their personalities and skills, and the contributions each made to presidential leadership.

Some of the suggested activities indicate time markers; others do not. We have provided approximate times to begin and end listening to certain segments. The exact time can vary depending on the device used or the length of ads served on different streaming sites. Transcripts for all podcasts are also available at wapo.st/presidential.

Some teachers have 45-minute class periods, others much longer blocks. Some of you will use the podcasts with KidsPost readers, others with high-school or college students. We have tried to vary the questions, activities and reprints to give you flexibility for in-class and homework assignments and discussion. They will serve as springboards as you use the 44 “Presidential” podcasts to meet your educational goals. Students can listen to the episodes referenced in this guide at wapo.st/presidential.
Why Washington for President?

When addressing presidential leadership, it is natural to begin with George Washington. In 1789, the 69 members of the Electoral College elected him unanimously to be president. Lillian Cunningham, former editor of The Post’s “On Leadership” section and host of the “Presidential” podcast, interviewed Post reporter Joel Achenbach and historian Julie Miller about the real George Washington and his leadership. Listen to the episode “George Washington: The man, the myth, the legend.”

1. Cunningham asks Joel Achenbach what he thinks gets overlooked or forgotten today about George Washington. Listen to Achenbach’s response in the first “Presidential” podcast episode (listen from approx. 12 to 17 minutes). List three ideas he presents:
   a) 
   b) 
   c) 

2. How might these experiences have formed Washington’s character and informed his future decisions?

3. Achenbach says that Washington thought America had a destiny to become a great country and that he himself had a “providential personal destiny” (listen from approx. 16 to 23 minutes).
   a) What is meant by “providential destiny”?
   b) In what ways did Washington’s travels and work influence him to think that they needed to be more than a group of loosely associated colonies -- they needed to be “united” states?

4. The Library of Congress holds original papers of almost every president. What are some of the best sources for figuring out who a president was as a person, a political leader and a president? (Listen from approx. 23 to 24 minutes, and from approx. 36 to 38 minutes).

5. Miller states that Washington had a “very limited education” and that he “had no trouble surrounding himself with people who had a better education and received their guidance when he needed it.” She also provides examples (listen from approx. 30 to 32 minutes, and from approx. 40 to 46 minutes).
   a) Who were some of the educated people who gave him guidance? Who headed his cabinet departments, for example?
   b) What does it say about people who don’t have to be the smartest in the room, but appreciate the advice others can give?
   c) Which other presidents sought to surround themselves with brain trusts and intellectuals as advisers? Did they prove to be helpful for the president? For the country?
6. Historian Julie Miller discusses how Washington was very modest. Listen to the sections where she presents this trait (listen from approx. 24 to 26 minutes, and from approx. 30 to 36 minutes).

   a) Explain what “modesty” meant to people in the 18th century.
   b) Washington states in his diary on his way to New York to take the oath of office that “[a]bout ten o’clock, I bade adieu to Mount Vernon, to private life, and to domestic felicity and, with a mind oppressed with more anxious and painful sensations than I have words to express, set out for New York...with the best dispositions to render service to my country in obedience to its call, but with less hope of answering its expectations.” How is this an example of his modesty?

7. Why would people admire Washington for being modest?

8. Do you think presidents today should be modest as well? In your response, explain your concept of modesty. Why would you or would you not want a president who strives to be modest?

9. Lillian Cunningham indicates that journalists have “often been first on the ground to record and assess a president’s decisions and his actions.” The George Washington episode begins with an interview of Bob Woodward. He has covered and written books about presidents from Richard Nixon to Donald Trump. Listen to Woodward’s advice on looking at the American presidency (listen from approx. 5 to 9 minutes).

   a) What is Woodward’s definition of the job of the president?
   b) List three examples of the varied strategic plans presidents have set as goals.

10. Woodward indicates that after identifying the strategic plan of the president, “it is a matter of ascertaining what the will of the president is. What does the president really want to do, and then to what extent do they succeed or fail at working their will?” If this approach is applied to George Washington:

    a) What was Washington’s strategic plan?
    b) What did Washington really want to do?
    c) To what extent did he succeed or fail at accomplishing his plan?

11. Does Woodward think there are universal leadership skills or talents that apply to all who would be president (listen from approx. 8 to 11 minutes)? Explain his point of view.

12. Woodward provides an example of how his assessment of Gerald Ford’s decisions changed over time, particularly after interviewing President Ford.

    a) Summarize the situation the Ford faced and why Woodward changed his assessment.
    b) Is it fair for journalists to make an assessment of a presidency during the term of office?
    c) What does Woodward mean that “there’s never a final assessment”?
    d) How do you view the work of journalists, historians and biographers who write about the president and the presidency?
**TEACHER RESOURCE**

**GW Letters and Other Documents**

Julie Miller, a historian at the Library of Congress who specializes in early American history, makes reference in the “Presidential” podcast to George Washington’s letters, political writings and diary entries. Teachers who want students to use primary sources may find the following resources helpful.

On April 28, 2015, Susan Svrluga reported in “After George Washington died, his wife burned her letters. Except these.” She wrote:

> [R]esearchers are launching a major new initiative to track down, transcribe, research and publish all of the Washington family’s papers. It’s an effort to deepen the understanding of George Washington and those close to him as a lens on the cultural life and dramatic change taking place in the nascent country almost two and a half centuries ago. …

> “It’s very exciting,” said Douglas Bradburn, the founding director of the library at Mount Vernon. Martha Washington “was a crucial actor in the revolution in her own right, in addition to being a supporter of George Washington. Getting to know her better is extremely important to understanding the founding of the country, women’s history.”

> The first president remains a little distant, he said.

> “He’s the monument, the capitol city, the bust, there he is on the quarter looking very awesome,” Bradburn said. “He’s still abstract. The more we can learn about his family, the intimate relations, the human being can come out.”

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**Letter, George Washington to Martha Washington, June 18, 1775**

http://marthawashington.us/items/show/87

**A Love Letter from General Washington, June 23, 1775**


**The Correspondence of George and Martha Washington**

http://gwpapers.virginia.edu/history/articles/the-correspondence-of-george-and-martha-washington/

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Select **Documents tab** for additional correspondence. Select **Resources** for collections of the papers of George Washington.

**Founders Online: The Papers of George Washington**

https://founders.archives.gov/about/Washington and Washington Papers

**Miller Center** http://millercenter.org/president/washington
George Washington — A Model Leader for Others?

In *George Washington’s Leadership Lessons: What the Father of Our Country Can Teach Us About Effective Leadership and Character*, James Rees, executive director of Mount Vernon, and Stephen Spignesi present 15 qualities. They assert that each of these was displayed in Washington’s life and the decisions he made. Review the qualities listed below.

Now listen to “George Washington: The Man, the Myth, the Legend,” the first of *The Washington Post*’s “Presidential” podcasts. Underline the qualities in the list below that are presented and explained in host Lillian Cunningham’s interviews with journalist Bob Woodward, Library of Congress historian Julie Miller and reporter Joel Achenbach.

1. The chart, below left, lists those 15 qualities exhibited by Washington. In the right column, on a scale from 1 to 5, indicate how important you think each of those qualities should still be for presidents today.

5 A trait that you think is essential for today’s leaders
4 A highly desirable, but not essential quality
3 A trait that is important, but does not significantly impact today’s leaders
2 Characteristics that are admirable, but are not needed to be a leader today
1 A trait that has no relevance to today’s leaders

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<tr>
<th>Qualities Held by George Washington</th>
<th>Today’s Leaders</th>
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<td>A Leader Has Vision</td>
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<td>A Leader Is Honest</td>
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<td>A Leader Uses Good Judgment</td>
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<td>A Leader Learns from Mistakes</td>
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<td>A Leader Is Humble</td>
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<td>A Leader Values Presentation</td>
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<td>A Leader Exceeds Expectations</td>
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<td>A Leader Has Heartfelt Faith</td>
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2. Now select another president from the “Presidential” podcast series. Which of those 15 qualities from George Washington’s Leadership Lessons would you say were evident in this other president?

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3. In the first “Presidential” podcast, Bob Woodward states: “Are there universal leadership skills or talents that apply in each case? The answer, when you look at this, is no. Sometimes, the president needs to be really tough. And other times, the president needs to be a great listener. Presidents also need to be creatures of instinct because they are in politics.”

   a) Which president does he provide as an example of this idea?
   b) What changed Woodward’s view of this president’s action?
   c) What do you think are the universal leadership skills and talents that presidents should embody and exhibit?

4. Explain why you do/do not think each of the 15 traits held by George Washington might be important for today’s leaders.

5. What additional traits would you add for today’s leaders? Explain why you would want presidents to have these qualities.
They got him what!? A look into the art of presidential gift-giving.

When foreign leaders visit our presidents, the presents are symbolic, often personal and sometimes strange.

What kind of gift do you give the leader of the free world?

French President Emmanuel Macron, who arrived in Washington on Monday for a state visit, gave President Trump an oak tree sapling from the Belleau Wood, the site of a 1918 World War I battle where 9,000 Americans died. The gift was an appreciation for U.S. sacrifice.

Throughout history, when foreign leaders visited our presidents, they gifted them with something symbolic and often personal. But there have been times when the gifts have been a bit odd.

During a 2011 visit to Australia, President Barack Obama received crocodile insurance from the head of the Northern Territory. You know, in case the president got in a terrible accident while visiting the croc hot spot.

“I have to admit, when we reformed health care in America, crocodile insurance is one thing we left out,” Obama said with a chuckle.

President George W. Bush got a stuffed dead lion and leopard from Tanzania. In 1984, President Ronald Reagan received a baby elephant on the White House lawn dressed in traditional clothing when Sri Lanka’s president visited. While that may be over-the-top, the animal represented the friendship and similarities between the countries. The elephant is the symbol of Reagan’s political party (Republican) and was the same for the Sri Lankan ruling political party at the time.

“She is a cute little thing only 34 inches high,” Reagan noted in a 1984 diary entry. (Sadly, the elephant died just a few months later at the National Zoo after a short illness.)

Just like on birthdays and anniversaries, the official exchange of gifts symbolizes the friendship and journey shared between countries. It’s part of diplomacy, the managing of international relationships in a respectful and thoughtful way. Through diplomacy, the United States has been able to fix international relationships that may have started on the wrong foot.

“We fought a revolution with England, but now we refer to them as a ‘special friend.’ And we
exchange wonderful gifts with them back and forth between the queen and several presidents,” says Stewart McLaurin, the president of the White House Historical Association.

But let’s face it: It must be difficult coming up with a cool present for someone who has it all. Leaders from Bermuda might have had a hard time when they gave President John F. Kennedy a multicolored statue of a tropical fish in 1961. He also got a drinking horn from the leader of the Soviet Union. When George W. Bush was in office, he received a vocabulary-building game from the sultan of Brunei.

“There are often gifts that are interesting,” says Kirstin Holm, a registrar of the Presidential Materials division at the National Archives. “Sometimes it’s not quite clear what the message was with the gifts given. But we treat everything as an artifact.”

Technically, all gifts given to the president from foreign nations are dedicated to the people of the United States. Each president can keep and use the presents until the next president is inaugurated. The National Archives picks up the gifts at noon, before the next president takes the new job at the White House. You can see the gifts presidents receive from foreign leaders at their presidential libraries across the country.

The Archives isn’t picking up the new tree, however. The oak was to be planted late Monday at the White House. Trump and future presidents won’t have to look far for a reminder of France’s friendship.

— Dara Elasfa, April 23, 2018
Move over, Trump. This president’s two lions set off the greatest emoluments debate.

BY ERIK TRICKEY

"Originally Published July 25, 2018"

Benjamin Franklin sailed home from France in 1785 carrying an awkward goodbye gift from King Louis XVI: an oval-shaped gold box that held a miniature portrait of the king, surrounded by 408 diamonds.

The extravagant box created a dilemma for Franklin. Goodbye presents to diplomats, customary in France, were banned by the United States. Fearful of the corrupting influence of wealthy Europe, the young country had adopted a strict rule: American officials could not accept gifts or second incomes from foreign governments. Careful not to violate the rule, Franklin offered the box to Congress, which let him keep it.

Today, 233 years later, the same rule that bound Franklin threatens to ensnare President Trump. He’s facing three lawsuits alleging that foreign governments’ payments to his businesses are the modern version of Louis XVI’s gold boxes.

On Wednesday, a federal judge in Maryland allowed one of those lawsuits — brought by the attorneys general of Maryland and the District — to move forward, rejecting an effort by the president to have the case dismissed.

The attorneys general contend the Trump Organization’s business dealings with foreign governments, including diplomats who have stayed at Trump International Hotel blocks from the White House, violate the foreign emoluments clause of the Constitution. The Trump Organization and the Justice Department argue the clause is aimed at preventing officials from taking bribes, not from running a business.

Until Trump’s election, few
Americans were familiar with the term “emolument.” But the Founding Fathers saw the foreign emoluments clause as a key defense against other nations corrupting their new government. Part of the Constitution’s Article 1, Section 9, it reads, “No Person holding any Office of Profit or Trust under [the United States], shall, without the Consent of the Congress, accept of any present, Emolument, Office, or Title, of any kind whatever, from any King, Prince, or foreign State.” The law, which guards against conflicts of interest and potential bribes, was invoked often in early American history.

The ban dates back to America’s first constitution, the Articles of Confederation. (Its inspiration was a 1651 Dutch requirement that foreign ministers reject diplomatic gifts.) The delegates at the 1787 Constitutional Convention included the ban in the new Constitution after Charles Pinckney of South Carolina “urged the necessity of preserving foreign ministers and other officers of the U.S. independent of external influence.”

At Virginia’s 1788 convention to ratify the Constitution, framer Edmund Randolph cited foreign temptations and Franklin’s dilemma as reasons for the clause. “A box was presented to our ambassador by the king of our allies,” Randolph told the delegates. “It was thought proper, in order to exclude corruption and foreign influence, to prohibit any one in office from receiving or holding any emoluments from foreign states.”

When another founder, George Mason, warned that “the great powers of Europe” might corrupt the president the way Russia had corrupted Poland, Randolph had a ready answer. “There is another provision against the danger … of the president receiving emoluments from foreign powers,” Randolph declared. “If discovered, he may be impeached.”

Because of the foreign emoluments clause, presidents including Andrew Jackson and Abraham Lincoln turned to Congress for instructions when foreign governments sent them gifts. Congress denied Jackson’s 1830 request to keep a gold medal from Colombian President Simón Bolívar. Lincoln alerted Congress after King Mongkut of Siam sent him a sword, two elephant tusks, and pictures of the king and his daughter. In 1862, Congress ordered Lincoln to deposit the gifts with the Interior Department.

Martin Van Buren, the nation’s eighth president, dealt with the 1800s’ largest, liveliest emoluments-clause dilemma. In summer 1839, at the American Consulate in Tangier, trumpets announced the arrival of a procession of soldiers, sent by Abd ar-Rahman, the sultan of Morocco. The soldiers came bearing gifts: an “enormous, magnificent” lion and lioness.

The harried American consul, Thomas N. Carr, tried to refuse the lions, protesting that he — and the president — were barred by law from accepting them. The sultan’s emissary did not take no for an answer. “It will cost my head if I disobey,” the emissary said, according to Carr’s beleaguered letter to the secretary of state. “I shall leave them in the street.” Stuck, Carr put the lions up in a room in the consulate and wrote home, saying he would “anxiously await instructions.”

While the lions paced in the consulate, in spring 1840, the ship Sultanee sailed into New York City, bearing presents for Van Buren from Seyyid Said, the sultan of Oman: two Arabian horses, a Persian rug, some cashmere shawls, pearls and a sword. Apologetically, Van Buren wrote to the sultan (also known as the imam of Muscat) that “a fundamental law of the Republic … forbids its servants from accepting
presents from foreign States or princes.” The ship’s captain insisted that the gifts should go to the U.S. government instead.

“I deem it my duty to lay the proposition before Congress,” Van Buren wrote to the Senate, “for such disposition as they may think fit to make of it.”

John Quincy Adams, the former president turned congressman, protested that Congress should refuse to consent to the gifts. “The president should receive no presents from any foreign power,” Adams argued on the House floor in June 1840. Despite Adams’ opposition, Congress authorized Van Buren to accept and sell the gifts from both sultans. The lions, shipped from Morocco to Pennsylvania, were auctioned off in Philadelphia’s Navy Yard in August 1840 for $375. The pearls, which weren’t sold, are in the Smithsonian’s National Museum of Natural History.

Today, federal law prohibits U.S. government employees, including the president, from accepting gifts worth more than $390 from foreign officials. Justice Department opinions warn that the foreign emoluments clause prohibits most federal employees from earning second incomes from foreign governments.

Before President Barack Obama accepted the Nobel Peace Prize in 2009, he got clearance from Justice Department lawyers who concluded that it wouldn’t violate the emoluments clause. (The Norwegian parliament appoints the nonprofit Nobel Committee, but Justice lawyers found that Norway’s government has “no meaningful role” in funding the prize or choosing its recipients. Obama gave the prize’s $1.4 million award to charity.)

Can federal officials, including the president, do business with foreign governments? The three lawsuits against Trump argue that the emoluments clause prohibits that, too. The case filed by Maryland and the District of Columbia has proceeded the furthest so far. Lawyers debated 18th-century dictionary definitions of “emolument” in court in Greenbelt in June. Trump’s lawyers argued for definitions that refer to profit from employment, while Maryland and D.C.’s lawyers argued that the more prevalent definition in the late 1700s included any profit or advantage.

In court, Trump’s lawyers also brought up a 225-year-old land deal struck by George Washington. In 1793, while Washington was president, he bought four plots of land in the District of Columbia from the federal government, in a land sale conducted by the D.C. commissioners, his appointees. “I had no desire … to stand on a different footing from every other purchaser,” Washington wrote to them.

Trump’s lawyers argued that Washington’s land deal is relevant to understanding the constitutional definition of an emolument. There’s also a domestic emoluments clause in the Constitution, which says that the president can’t receive “any other emolument” besides his salary from the U.S. or state governments. No one in 1793 treated Washington’s land deal as an emolument, Trump’s lawyers argue. So, they say, rent from a Chinese state-owned bank at Trump Tower isn’t an emolument either, nor are foreign diplomats’ bookings at the Trump International Hotel. (Still, just in case, the Trump Organization donated $151,000 to the U.S. Treasury in March, for unidentified “profits from foreign government patronage at our hotels and similar business” in 2017.)

But Washington’s example can go both ways. The first president often used the term “private emolument” in his letters, to mean personal profit. In April 1776, as the American commander in the Revolutionary War, Washington issued a proclamation warning that colonial merchants who furnished British warships with “supplies of provision” would be treated as enemies. In doing so, Washington evoked the same fears of divided loyalties and private gain that would soon give rise to the Constitution’s emoluments ban. “Sundry base and wicked persons,” Washington called the merchants, “preferring their own, present private emolument to their country’s weal.”

Erick Trickey is a Boston-based freelance writer who teaches magazine journalism at Boston University.