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George Washington – Precedents Worksheet



Washington was one of the Founding Fathers who helped decide what the government of the new United States would be like. He oversaw the Constitutional Convention, a meeting to decide what the new United States Constitution should say. It was a lively meeting with lots of disagreement, but Washington led the meeting without getting involved in the debates.

One important issue was who should lead the United States. Some people were nervous about putting only one person in the executive office because they feared that person might become too powerful. But many also assumed that Washington would become the first president, and that helped ease their fears. When the Constitution was finished, and Washington was unanimously elected president. They even offered to call him "Your Highness," but he refused.



When Washington became President, nobody had ever been president before. Basic presidential powers were written in the Constitution, but many issues came up that the Constitution did not address. For example, the Constitution requires the president to give Congress information "from time to time" about how the country is doing but doesn't say how the president should deliver this information. Washington decided that once a year he would talk to Congress by giving a "State of the Union" speech.



The Constitution also says the president may ask the heads of government departments to give their opinion on different subjects but does not say how closely the president should work with the department heads. Washington decided to make them his group of advisors. He met with them regularly to discuss what was going on in each department. The decisions Washington made about how to handle these situations created **precedents**, or examples that were followed by presidents in the future. Presidents today still give a State of the Union

speech and work closely with the heads of government departments.

Part 1: Setting the Precedent

Washington wanted to form an executive branch that reflected republican and democratic ideals. Match the precedents that Washington established (#1-4) with the democratic principle that it represents (A-D).

#1 Gave State of the Union address in person.

A - Limit the power of any one person in office

#2 Consulted with a Cabinet of advisors.

B – Reject the fancy ways of royalty.

#3 Title shall be "President" instead of "Your Highness".

C – Interact with the other branches of government

#4 Stepped down after two terms in office.

D – Share the decision-making with others.