

Nationbuilder in Chief

Time Needed: 1—2 class periods

Materials Needed:

Student worksheets

Copy Instructions:

Reading (2 pages; class set)

Activity (2 pages; class set)

Learning Objectives. Students will be able to:

- Explain how actions of early U.S. presidential administrations established a strong federal government.
- Identify actions that helped stabilize the early nation's finances.
- Identify actions that helped strengthen the early nation's military.
- Describe ways in which the early changes in leadership were peaceful transitions of power.
- Understand both the importance of the central government to the early nation and the tension it created.

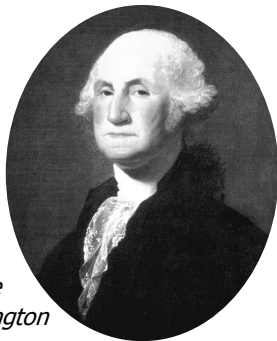
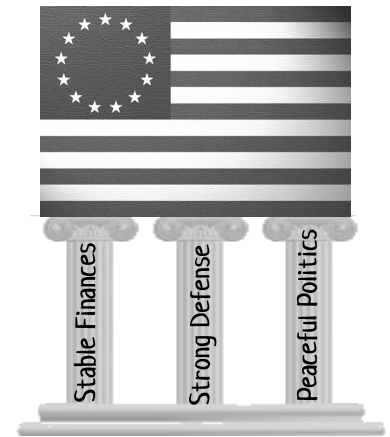
STEP BY STEP

- ☐ **ANTICIPATE** by having students imagine that they are starting a brand new country. Ask them to identify the top three things the country would need in order to be successful. List students' ideas on the board.
- ☐ **DISTRIBUTE** the reading pages to the class.
- ☐ **READ** with the class, pausing to discuss and explain as appropriate.
- ☐ **CHECK** for understanding using the Yes/No informal assessment. Pause to quickly discuss each answer before moving on.
- ☐ **DISTRIBUTE** the activity pages to the class. Review the directions.
- ☐ **ASSIGN** the class to complete the activities. You may wish to do Activity A together to help the class understand George Washington's language.
- ☐ **REVIEW** the answers with the class if you wish.
- ☐ **CLOSE** by comparing the students' ideas from the anticipation activity to the three "pillars" in the lesson. How are the pillars the same or different from what students came up with? Do students think there are additional pillars for a successful nation?

Have each student think of one question they could still ask about building the early nation based on the lesson. Have students write their question on a scrap of paper and hand it to you as an exit ticket, or have students write both their question and the internet search phrase they would use if they were to look up the answer to their question. (Optional: Have students actually research the answer.)

Warning: New Nation Could Self-Destruct!

What are the chances that thirteen fiercely independent states could band together strongly enough to become the most powerful nation in the world in less than two hundred years? A strong nation needs stable finances, effective self-defense, and a peaceful political system. But when the first president of the United States took office, America had major money problems, no effective military, and a brand new political system nobody had ever tried before. As if that weren't enough, many Americans actually *feared* the United States becoming a strong nation. They'd just won their freedom from an abusive government and didn't want to go through that again!



George Washington

President of the Not-So-United States

When George Washington became America's first president in 1789, he faced a difficult challenge: He led a government lots of people didn't want. The U.S. Constitution created a central government, but many Americans thought individual states should have most of the power. They were afraid to let the new government actually use the powers the Constitution gave it. Tensions ran high between those who thought America needed a strong federal government to solve its problems and those who wanted state-based solutions.

Goal: A Debt-Free America

When Washington took office, solving the nation's money problems was the number one priority. The United States had borrowed lots of money to pay for the war against Great Britain. Afterward, the nation's finances got so bad that America actually stopped paying back the money it owed to other countries. This made America look irresponsible and hurt its chances of getting loans again in the future. Most states had taken out loans, too, and they also owed money. The nation's debt was a big, disorganized mess that dragged down everyone's ability to be successful.



Even in the 1700s, war was expensive!
What do you see that cost money?



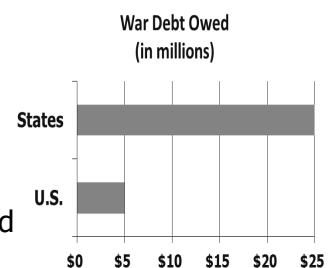
Department of the Treasury,
original seal, 1778.

It's a Federal Thing

President Washington put Alexander Hamilton in charge of the Department of the Treasury. Hamilton believed America couldn't be successful without a strong central government. Under Washington's leadership, Hamilton arranged for the U.S. government to take responsibility for all the states' individual loans. Ho-hum, right? Wrong! This was a smart move that let America speak as one nation when talking money with foreign countries. Not only that, if the federal government was responsible for paying back all the loans, then it had a good reason to use its new power to collect taxes.

Now Wait Just a Minute...

Imposing taxes was another constitutional power many people didn't want the government to actually use. But times were desperate. Washington convinced Congress to pass a law taxing certain kinds of liquor made in America. It was the first time the U.S. government taxed Americans in addition to foreign products, and it caused an outrage! But by the time the third president took office and asked Congress to repeal the tax, money from this tax had stabilized America's finances.



Defense? Do We Need That?

After the Revolutionary War ended, those in the U.S. government felt there was no need to keep a military standing around. Many states feared that keeping a military during peacetime would be really expensive—and really scary! What if the federal government used the military against the states? In the early years, many Americans opposed any kind of permanent United States military.



3rd New York Regimental Flag.

During the war, each state provided its own soldiers.



Army soldiers carried muskets like this one. With the flintlock mechanism, the soldier loaded gun powder and a lead ball separately.

Okay, Maybe an Army Would Be Good

At first, the U.S. kept a tiny army and mainly relied on volunteers from each state to be prepared to fight if necessary. But these militiamen were not trained soldiers. Americans were quickly settling new territory—and facing resistance from the Native Americans who lived there. As conflicts grew, the untrained militia failed at furthering U.S. goals on the frontier. Washington's Secretary of War got Congress to approve a plan to reorganize and train the army. The plan worked, but as soon as it wasn't needed anymore, Congress went back to the old way. Americans still feared a permanent military, but the army would never again be as small as it was when Washington took office.

Um... Maybe a Navy, Too

Security on the frontier wasn't the only problem America faced in the early years. While Washington was president, Barbary pirates off the coast of North Africa were attacking American ships. The American naval force had been disbanded after the Revolutionary War, but now, Washington convinced Congress to authorize a new force of six ships. When John Adams took office as America's second president, France was upset because of an agreement America had made with Britain. To retaliate, France was attacking American ships, too! Under President Adams, Congress created the Navy Department. It was President Jefferson who finally used the Navy to fight the Barbary pirates.



The USS Chesapeake, one of America's first six frigates.



John Adams

Threats on the Inside

The early Americans had their roots in Great Britain, which had always been ruled by a king or queen. Throughout history, a change of power from one ruler to the next often brought violence, such as plots to overthrow or even murder the new leader. Americans didn't want that. It helped that the United States had a system for electing leaders—not choosing them based on their family line. Even so, it was an important step when President Washington stepped down after two terms in office and America peacefully elected John Adams to be the next president.

Not Pretty, But It Works

Everything changed when Adams ran for president again. He and Thomas Jefferson represented two political parties with very different views about the balance of power between states and the federal government. The presidential campaign was nasty, with each side launching personal attacks and accusations. Despite all this drama, once Thomas Jefferson won the election and Adams lost, everything calmed down—proving that America could transfer power peacefully even with deep disagreements among citizens.



Banner from Jefferson's inauguration. Courtesy Smithsonian Nat'l Museum.

Reading p.2

Informal Assessment: Yes or No

Directions: After working through the reading pages with the class, read each Yes/No question out loud. Have the class respond as a group by...

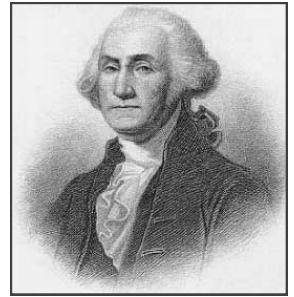
- Showing thumbs-up for yes or thumbs-down for no
- Saying "Yes" or "No" as a chorus

Watch or listen for wrong or mixed answers. Use each statement as a springboard for quick review/discussion before moving on.

1. Were all early Americans excited about United States becoming a strong nation? (**no** — *some feared a strong government would be abusive*)
2. Did the United States have all its problems worked out as soon as it became independent? (**no** — *it was deep in debt, had no effective military, and was starting a new type of government*)
3. Did the U.S. Constitution create a central government? (**yes**)
4. Did all Americans think America needed a central government? (**no** — *many thought state governments could handle everything*)
5. Did the U.S. government owe money because of the war? (**yes**)
6. Were all the individual states debt-free? (**no** — *states had also borrowed money to pay for the war*)
7. Was Alexander Hamilton the second president of the United States? (**no** — *he was Secretary of the Treasury under George Washington*)
8. Did the federal government take responsibility for all the states' loans? (**yes**)
9. Did Congress agree to pass a tax on certain American-made liquor? (**yes**)
10. Did the tax on liquor help fix America's financial problems? (**yes**)
11. Did everyone agree we needed a standing military during peacetime? (**no** — *some believed it would be expensive and might threaten citizens' liberty*)
12. Was the early army a highly-trained fighting force? (**no** — *it relied on untrained volunteers*)
13. Did Congress authorize building any ships for the U.S. Navy? (**yes** — *6 ships*)
14. Throughout history, were changes from one ruler to another always peaceful? (**no** — *transfers of power often came with violence*)
15. Did President Washington run for a third term as president? (**no** — *he stepped down after two terms*)
16. Did the U.S. transfer power peacefully because all Americans agreed about things? (**no** — *it was peaceful despite bitter disagreements*)

A. Union of States. When George Washington decided not to run for a third term as president, he gave a speech to the nation. In his "Farewell Address," Washington was clearly worried that critics would convince people that America did not need its new government. He wanted Americans to value the union.

Read each quote from Washington's speech and each paraphrase. Write the letter of each quote next to what Washington meant.



What Washington Said...

- A. "Unity of government... is a main pillar in the edifice of your real independence, the support of your tranquility at home, your peace abroad..."
- B. "It is of infinite moment that you should properly estimate the immense value of your national union to your collective and individual happiness..."
- C. "The name of American, which belongs to you in your national capacity, must always exalt the just pride of patriotism more than any appellation derived from local discriminations."
- D. "Your union ought to be considered as a main prop of your liberty, and that the love of the one ought to endear to you the preservation of the other."
- E. "To the efficacy and permanency of your Union, a government for the whole is indispensable. No alliance, however strict, between the parts can be an adequate substitute..."
- F. "Respect for [the Constitution's] authority, compliance with its laws, acquiescence in its measures, are duties enjoined by the fundamental maxims of true liberty."

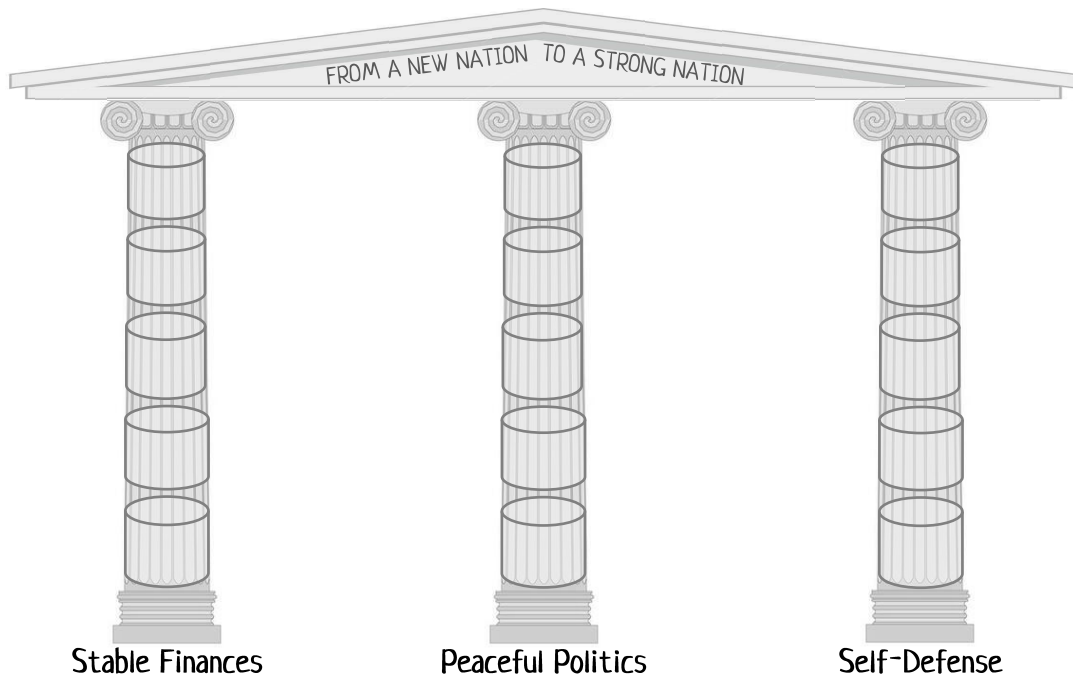
What Washington Meant...

- ____ 1. You should always feel more pride because you're an American than because of the local area where you live.
- ____ 2. If you want real liberty, you have to respect and obey the Constitution.
- ____ 3. The union needs a central government in order to survive and work well. Just an agreement among the states cannot substitute for a central government.
- ____ 4. It is super important to realize how valuable the union is to your happiness, both as individuals and as a nation.
- ____ 5. You should see the union as the main thing preserving your liberty, and you should love the union because you love your liberty.
- ____ 6. A central government is the main thing keeping the nation independent and peaceful.

Nationbuilder in Chief

Name: _____

B. Strengthen That Nation! Each card gives an example of an action that represents one of the three pillars of a strong nation. Write the letter of each card on the pillar it supports.



A. After losing the election of 1800, President Adams moved home and spent his time writing.

B. President Jefferson sent the Navy to the coast of North Africa to fight pirates and make shipping safe for U.S. vessels.

C. As Secretary of the Treasury, Alexander Hamilton led creation of a national bank to take care of the government's money.

D. When Jefferson won the election in 1800, his opponents accepted the decision and stepped aside.

E. President Washington got Congress to impose a tax on liquor made in the U.S. so the government could pay off its war debts.

F. When the 1800 election was a tie, they followed the Constitution to decide who would win.

G. When violent protests broke out over President Washington's "Whiskey Tax," he led a national army to stop the rebellion.

H. To cut government spending and reduce the debt, President Jefferson made the military smaller during peacetime.

I. When the French Revolution began to affect America, Congress created the Navy Department and the Marine Corps.

J. When a financial panic happened in 1792, Alexander Hamilton had the Department of the Treasury take steps to help solve the problems.



K. In his last days as president, the worst thing Adams did was appoint a bunch of his favorite people to different positions.

L. During the election of 1800, presidential candidates spread nasty rumors but did not plot to physically harm each other.

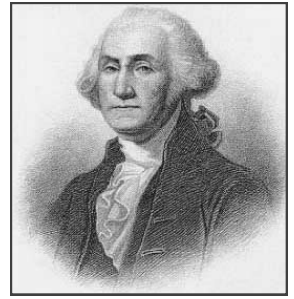
M. After having some success against Barbary pirates, President Jefferson decided the navy should be increased.

N. President Washington signed a law that created the U.S. Mint for making coins and established the dollar as the unit of money.

O. President Washington recognized America's limits and kept the nation from getting involved when war broke out in Europe.

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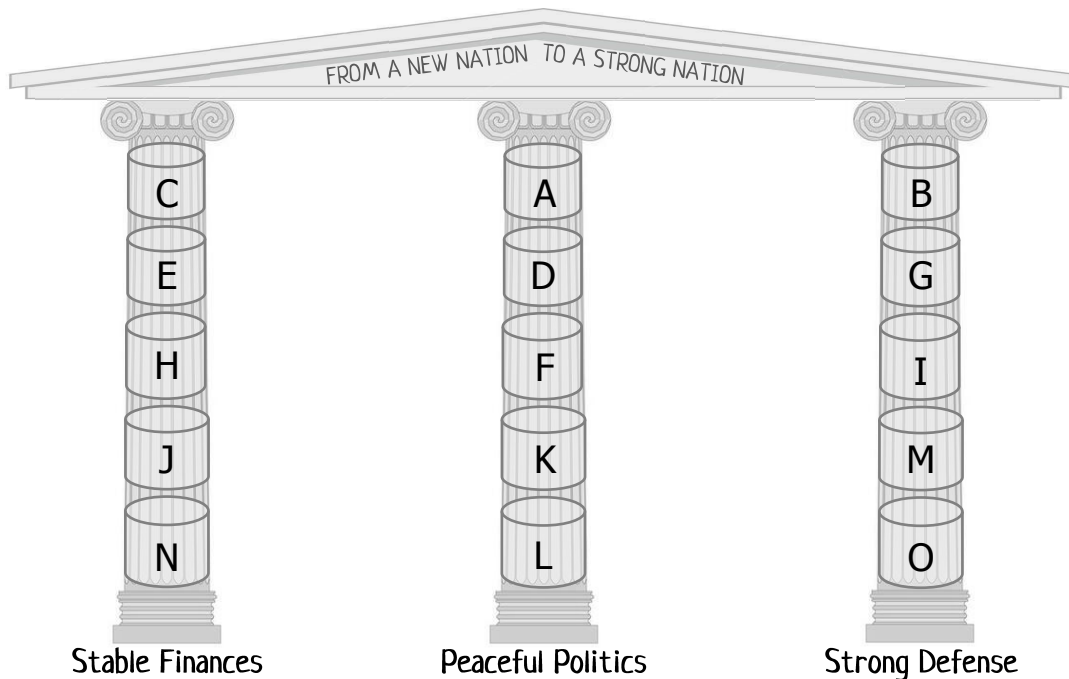
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