

# Virtue In Action: Class Activity



With your partner(s), highlight the section of the Farewell Address that your teacher assigns to you. Then, read and discuss that section and answer the questions at the end of the handout. Be prepared to report on your responses to those questions.

## *Excerpts from Washington's Farewell Address (1796)*

The period for a new election of a citizen to administer the executive government of the United States being not far distant... it appears to me proper, especially as it may conduce to a more distinct expression of the public voice, that I should now apprise you of the resolution I have formed, to decline being considered among the number of those out of whom a choice is to be made.

...be assured that this resolution has not been taken without a strict regard to all the considerations appertaining to the relation which binds a dutiful citizen to his country; and that in withdrawing the tender of service, which silence in my situation might imply, I am influenced by no diminution of zeal for your future interest, no deficiency of grateful respect for your past kindness, but am supported by a full conviction that the step is compatible with both.

...The impressions with which I first undertook the arduous trust were explained on the proper occasion. In the discharge of this trust, I will only say that I have, with good intentions, contributed towards the organization and administration of the government the best exertions of which a very fallible judgment was capable. ...Satisfied that if any circumstances have given peculiar value to my services, they were temporary, I have the consolation to believe that, while choice and prudence invite me to quit the political scene, patriotism does not forbid it.

In looking forward to the moment which is intended to terminate the career of my public life, my feelings do not permit me to suspend the deep acknowledgment of that debt of gratitude which I owe to my beloved country for the many honors it has conferred upon me; still more for the steadfast confidence with which it has supported me; and for the opportunities I have thence enjoyed of manifesting

## *Notes on Washington's Farewell Address (1796)*

*Washington delivers the Farewell Address to tell the American people that he would not seek a third term as president.*

*Although he is leaving he still has the nation's future interest in mind.*

*He contributed to the organization and administration of the government with the best judgment possible even though he felt his qualifications were inferior.*

*His services were temporary.*

*He believes he that he owes a debt of gratitude to the country and the honors and confidence it bestowed upon him.*

my inviolable attachment, by services faithful and persevering, though in usefulness unequal to my zeal.

... 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. With slight shades of difference, you have the same religion, manners, habits, and political principles. You have in a common cause fought and triumphed together; the independence and liberty you possess are the work of joint counsels, and joint efforts of common dangers, sufferings, and successes.

...Liberty itself will find in such a government, with powers properly distributed and adjusted, its surest guardian. It is, indeed, little else than a name, where the government is too feeble to withstand the enterprises of faction, to confine each member of the society within the limits prescribed by the laws, and to maintain all in the secure and tranquil enjoyment of the rights of person and property.

... Let me now take a more comprehensive view, and warn you in the most solemn manner against the baneful effects of the spirit of party generally. ... This spirit, unfortunately, is inseparable from our nature, having its root in the strongest passions of the human mind. It exists under different shapes in all governments, more or less stifled, controlled, or repressed; but, in those of the popular form, it is seen in its greatest rankness, and is truly their worst enemy.

The alternate domination of one faction over another, sharpened by the spirit of revenge, natural to party dissension... is itself a frightful despotism. But this leads at length to a more formal and permanent despotism. The disorders and miseries which result gradually incline the minds of men to seek security and repose in the absolute power of an individual; and sooner or later the chief of some prevailing faction... turns this disposition to the purposes of his own elevation, on the ruins of public liberty. ... the common and continual mischiefs of the spirit of party are sufficient to make it the interest and duty of a wise people to discourage and restrain it.

...It is important, likewise, that the habits of thinking in a free country should inspire caution in those entrusted with its administration, to confine themselves within their respective constitutional spheres, avoiding in the exercise of the powers of one

*Americans must have pride in patriotism despite differences in religion, manners, habits, and political principles.*

*Liberty will be protected in a government with divided powers. The government needs to be able to withstand the whims of factions, the people need to be limited by the prescribe laws, and security and tranquility must be maintained in order to protect the rights of people and property.*

*All types of governments must deal with the passions of the human mind.*

*Problems will increase and men will seek security in the absolute power of one individual.*

*It is the interest and duty of the people to discourage and restrain these issues.*

*Government officials should confine themselves to their constitutional powers and avoid overstepping into other departments.*

department to encroach upon another. The spirit of encroachment tends to consolidate the powers of all the departments in one, and thus to create, whatever the form of government, a real despotism. A just estimate of that love of power, and proneness to abuse it, which predominates in the human heart, is sufficient to satisfy us of the truth of this position. The necessity of reciprocal checks in the exercise of political power, by dividing and distributing it into different depositaries, and constituting each the guardian of the public weal against invasions by the others, has been evinced by experiments ancient and modern; some of them in our country and under our own eyes. To preserve them must be as necessary as to institute them.

...Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, religion and morality are indispensable supports. In vain would that man claim the tribute of patriotism, who should labor to subvert these great pillars of human happiness, these firmest props of the duties of men and citizens. The mere politician, equally with the pious man, ought to respect and to cherish them... Whatever may be conceded to the influence of refined education on minds of peculiar structure, reason and experience both forbid us to expect that national morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principle.

It is substantially true that virtue or morality is a necessary spring of popular government. The rule, indeed, extends with more or less force to every species of free government.

...In offering you, my countrymen, these counsels of an old and affectionate friend, I dare not hope they will make the strong and lasting impression I could wish; that they will control the usual current of the passions, or prevent our nation from running the course which has hitherto marked the destiny of nations. But, if I may even flatter myself that they may be productive of some partial benefit, some occasional good; that they may now and then recur to moderate the fury of party spirit, to warn against the mischiefs of foreign intrigue, to guard against the impostures of pretended patriotism; this hope will be a full recompense for the solicitude for your welfare, by which they have been dictated.

...How far in the discharge of my official duties I have been guided by the principles which have been delineated, the public records and other evidences of my conduct must witness to you and to the world. To myself, the assurance of my own conscience is, that I have at least believed myself to be guided by them.

*If not, the powers may end up being consolidated into one department, causing despotism.*

*Checks on the exercise of political power by dividing it and distributing it among many departments are necessary. The people should be cautious and prevent encroachments on power between the departments of government.*

*Religion and morality are crucial in protecting political prosperity. People cannot be true patriots if they try to subvert human happiness.*

*All people (including politicians) should respect these habits.*

*Even without religion, morality can prevail through education, reason, and experience.*

*He does believe that his recommendations will be beneficial to moderate factions or parties, warn against foreign powers, warn against false patriotism and protect the welfare of the people.*

*Washington believes that he has been guided by principles.*