

Ronald Reagan Presidential Library and Museum

National Archives and Records Administration

George Washington's Cabinet:
The United States and Foreign Relations

Lesson Plan POST-VISIT

Objectives:

Students will analyze the given primary source documents to gain an understanding of the United States' stance on foreign relations in the 1790's, particularly in regards to the French Revolution.

Students will draw conclusions about the continuity and change of different attitudes towards foreign policy under various presidents.

Students will examine how Washington's decisions about foreign policy were shaped by the unique circumstances of the time and how the significance of these choices has changed over time.

Materials:

- Background Information
- Primary Source Documents
- Analysis Handouts
- Activity Worksheets

Background:

Having won its independence from the British and established its own government under the Constitution, the United States soon faced new challenges as its own country. The rise of political parties, the start of the French Revolution, and great uncertainty about relations with Great Britain and France all threatened to tear the young nation apart. The following documents highlight the United States' struggles with these issues from 1792 and onward, giving students insight into the turbulence surrounding early American foreign policy.

Primary Source Analysis:

1. Distribute *Primary Source Documents* to students and allow them time to review. You may decide to limit the number of documents or allow students to work in groups or as a class.

2. Once students have reviewed the provided documents, engage in a conversation as a whole group or in small groups. You may use the document analysis handout provided as a guide for discussion.
3. Students can complete the document analysis handout while reading or with a group. Once students have completed the handout, they can discuss the new information.
4. Allow for students to make connections to how other presidents, including the current president, handle foreign relations.

Assessment Options:

Socratic Seminar:

1. Prepare students to participate in a seminar discussion. Review Socratic seminar guidelines (<https://www.facinghistory.org/resource-library/teaching-strategies/socratic-seminar>) and define the roles for facilitator and participants. Have students develop norms and goals for the seminar as a group.
2. Open the seminar by asking students to reflect on one of the following guiding questions. Use the other questions to help the conversation if it stalls.
 - a. What details did you find most important?
 - b. Describe George Washington's foreign relations policy in one-two sentences.
 - c. How do George Washington's foreign policy objectives differ from current foreign policy goals? Explain.
3. Following the seminar, allow students to discuss if the goals were achieved and how the seminar could be improved in the future.
4. Allow students to write about their discussion. You may use the document based questions below or have students form an opinion and write about it.

DBQ:

Students complete a DBQ using the Appendix of Documents.

Question 1: Using two documents, compare and contrast the authors' stances towards American Foreign policy in the late 1700s.

Question 2: Using the documents provided, explain Washington's stance towards relations with other countries. Describe the events and circumstances that have led to this position.

Discussion:

1. Have students examine the specified documents and discuss in small groups the following questions. They may write down notes of what they discuss.
 - a. How responsible is the government for the acts of individual citizens? How do you balance the right of citizens to express their own opinions with the safety of the nation? Is it the role of a national leader to prioritize their own opinions or

those of their constituents? (From Thomas Jefferson to George Hammond, 29 May 1792)

- b. What is the writer's position towards the French Revolution? How does the writer use language (particularly, his diction and use of religious allusions) to indicate this position? In addition, how does sensing public opinion and doing as the public desires relate to democracy? (To John Adams from Samuel Allyne Otis, 17 April 1793)
 - c. Why is there a consistent emphasis on neutrality throughout the text? Why would Washington want to be neutral? Is it possible to stay neutral if the United States had already developed connections to Great Britain and France? Should this neutrality to be maintained in all affairs? (From George Washington to the Cabinet, 18 April 1793)
 - d. What are the possible parallels between the French Revolution and the American Revolution? Where did France and the United States diverge in terms of decisions made? In your opinion, which method was "more successful?" Where do we draw the line in terms of the violent tactics used? When is warring for democracy no longer democratic? (To George Washington from Gouverneur Morris, 18 October 1793)
2. Reconvene the class and allow students to share the main points of their discussion. Afterwards, give students time to write a short response to the other discussions they just heard about.

Additional Resources:

<https://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/worksheets>

<https://www.docsteach.org>

<https://founders.archives.gov/>