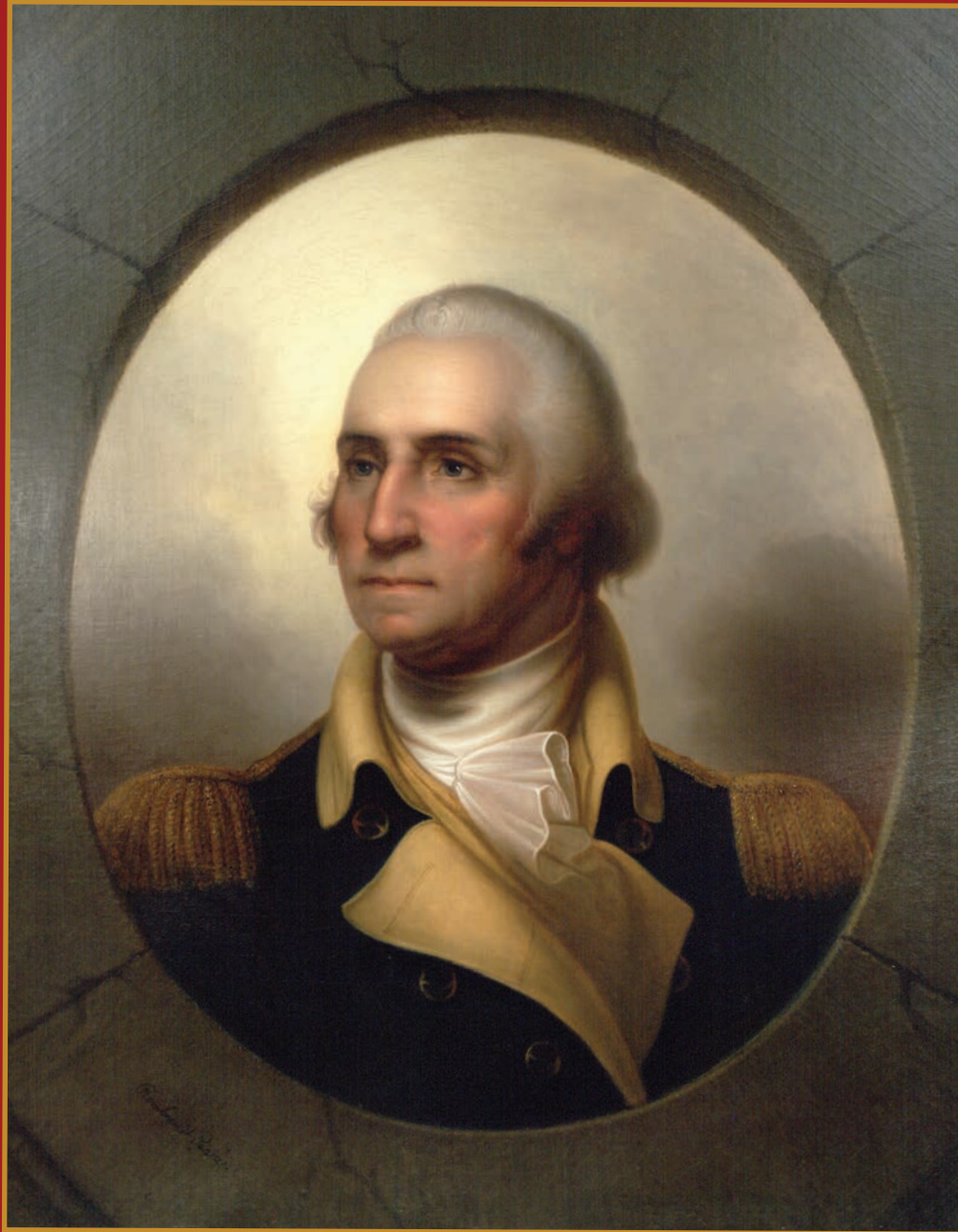


Washington's Farewell Address



*George Washington by Rembrandt Peale, ca. 1852 (The Gilder Lehrman
Institute of American History, GLC09119.01)*

Washington's Farewell Address

BY TIM BAILEY

UNIT OVERVIEW

This unit is one of the Gilder Lehrman Institute's Teaching Literacy through History resources, designed to align with the Common Core State Standards. These units were developed to enable students to understand, summarize, and evaluate original materials of historical significance. Through a step-by-step process, they will acquire the skills to analyze, assess, and develop knowledgeable and well-reasoned viewpoints on primary sources.

Over the course of five lessons, students will read, analyze, and gain a clear understanding of George Washington's Farewell Address, which was published on September 19, 1796. The first four lessons require students to read excerpts from the address "like a detective." Employing summary organizers, practice, review, and discussion, they will master the technique of identifying key words, creating summaries of excerpts and, as an assessment in the final lesson, writing an argumentative essay.

UNIT OBJECTIVES

Students will be able to

- Read and demonstrate understanding of a complex document
- Identify the main ideas and synthesize and draw logical inferences from the text
- Summarize the author's words and restate the author's meaning in their own words
- Collaborate effectively with classmates
- Write an argumentative essay using evidence from the text to support their ideas

NUMBER OF CLASS PERIODS: 5

The unit is structured for five class sessions, but after modeling the summary organizer format in Lesson 1, you may choose to continue with the second lesson and assign one or more for homework. In addition, the essay could be assigned as a take-home exercise.

GRADE LEVEL(S): 7–12

COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.9-10.1: Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, attending to such features as the date and origin of the information.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.9-10.2: Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of how key events or ideas develop over the course of the text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.9-10.4: Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including vocabulary describing political, social, or economic aspects of history/social studies.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.WHST.9-10.4: Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

LESSON 1

OVERVIEW

Students will be asked to “read like a detective” and discover what George Washington was writing about in his Farewell Address by understanding what is explicitly stated and drawing logical inferences. They will demonstrate these skills by writing a succinct summary of the text and then restating that summary in their own words. Lesson 1 is a whole-class exercise.

OBJECTIVES

Students will be able to

- Close-read informational text proficiently (“like a detective”)
- Identify and explain the meaning of “key words” and important phrases in the text
- Summarize the meaning of the text, on both literal and inferential levels, through the proficient completion of the summary organizer
- Collaborate effectively with classmates

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

George Washington’s Farewell Address

by Denver Brunsman

Associate Professor of History, The George Washington University

On September 19, 1796, the *American Daily Advertiser* newspaper in Philadelphia published George Washington’s Farewell Address to the American people. On the same day, President Washington rode from the city back to his Mount Vernon home in Virginia. He would not let anyone convince him to serve another term as president, as his advisors and fellow leaders had in 1792. The Farewell Address would become one of the most influential documents in American history as a statement of American founding principles by its most indispensable founder.

The 1796 address actually counted as Washington’s third farewell to the American people. Contemporaries deemed his circular letter to the states in June 1783, at the close of the American Revolutionary War, as Washington’s original farewell address. In 1792, with the help of James Madison, Washington composed his second farewell address to mark his intended retirement at the end of his first presidential administration. However, the president never published the address, instead agreeing to serve a second term given the domestic and foreign crises that threatened the young American republic. As political factions developed into America’s first political parties, the Federalists and Democratic-Republicans, the French Revolution evolved into a global war. Finally, in 1796, content with the stability of the new United States, Washington sought the help of his first treasury secretary, Alexander Hamilton, to compose his third and final farewell address.

Washington’s Farewell Address expresses an overarching message of American unity in the face of domestic and global divisions. The address urges Americans to place the common good of the country above their geographical and self-interests. Similarly, it warns about the dangers of partisanship, for political parties, in Washington’s estimation, sought benefits for factions or interests at the expense of the whole. As Europe was embroiled in the French Revolutionary Wars, Washington also warned America against forming permanent alliances that would draw the

country into foreign conflicts. Sometimes misinterpreted as isolationism, Washington instead presented a vision of foreign affairs in which the United States should foremost pursue its own interests, including by engaging in peaceful commerce with other nations.

Into the twentieth century, Washington's Farewell Address was celebrated as civic scripture, a document that was as widely printed as the Declaration of Independence and studied by generations of schoolchildren. Today, although the influence of the Farewell Address has waned, it is still read annually on the floor of the US Senate to coincide with Washington's birthday (February 22). Democratic and Republican members of the Senate alternate in the reading each year to signify Washington's commitment to union over political party. Washington's decision to retire, as explained in the Farewell Address, also set a long precedent of no president serving more than two terms until the crisis of World War II and Franklin Roosevelt's election as president four times. In 1951, the ratification of the Twenty-second Amendment to the US Constitution ensured that all future presidents would follow Washington's example and serve no more than two terms.

MATERIALS

- Excerpts from President George Washington's Farewell Address, 1796, *100 Milestone Documents*, ourdocuments.gov.
- Summary Organizer #1
- Overhead projector, Elmo projector, or similar device

PROCEDURE

1. Distribute copies of the excerpts from President George Washington's Farewell Address of 1796 and ask the students to read it silently to themselves. Do not provide additional historical background at this point as the goal is for the students to develop ideas and draw conclusions based solely on Washington's words.
2. "Share read" the document with the students. This is done by having the students follow along silently while you begin to read aloud, modeling prosody, inflection, and punctuation. Then ask the class to join in with the reading after a few sentences while you continue to read aloud, still serving as the model. This technique will support struggling readers as well as English language learners (ELL).
3. Explain that the students will learn how to do in-depth analysis for themselves by reading, understanding, and summarizing President Washington's words. In this first lesson, the whole class will work together to summarize the first selection from the text.
4. Distribute copies of Summary Organizer #1 and display it in a format large enough for the whole class to see. This activity sheet contains the first section of Washington's Farewell Address.
5. Describe the process for the class: The first objective is to select "Key Words" from the text and use those words to create a summary sentence that gets at the gist of what Washington wrote in the first section of the document.
6. Guidelines for Selecting the Key Words: Key Words are important contributors to the meaning of the text. They are usually nouns or verbs. Advise students not to pick "connector" words (*are, is, the, and, so, etc.*). The number of Key Words depends on the length of the paragraph. This selection is 176 words in length; therefore, students should select 9 to 10 key words from the reading. Since the students must know the meaning of the words they choose, you will have opportunities to teach students how to use context clues, word analysis, and dictionary skills to discover word meanings.

7. Students will now select 9 or 10 words from the text and write them in the Key Words section of their organizers.
8. Survey the class to find out what the most popular choices were. You can write them down and have the class discuss the options and vote on the final choice, based on guidance from you. For example, the class could select the following words: *election*, *executive*, *government*, *decline*, *danger*, *recommend*, *much reflection* (two words may occasionally be allowed when they represent a single idea), *observation*, *all-important*, and *permanency*. Now, no matter which words the students had selected previously, have them write the words agreed upon by the class or chosen by you into the Key Word section.
9. Explain to the class that they will use these key words to write a sentence that summarizes the meaning of the first section of Washington's Farewell Address. This summary sentence should be developed through a whole-class process of discussion and negotiation. For example, "In the upcoming election for the executive branch of the government I will decline to run, but I see danger ahead and would like to recommend to you some thoughts after much reflection and observation." The students might decide they don't need some of the words to make the sentence even more streamlined. In this case the words "all-important" and "permanency" were left out of the summary sentence. This is part of the negotiation process. The students will copy the final negotiated sentence into the Summary section of the organizer.
10. Guide the students in restating the summary sentence in their own words, not having to use Washington's key words from the text. Again, this is a class negotiation process. For example, "I will not be running for reelection as president but I would like to give you some advice."
11. Wrap-up: Discuss vocabulary that the students found confusing or difficult. The students can record these words and their meaning on the back of the organizer or on a separate vocabulary form.

LESSON 2

OVERVIEW

Students will be asked to “read like a detective” and discover what George Washington was writing about in his Farewell Address by understanding what is explicitly stated and drawing logical inferences. They will demonstrate these skills by writing a succinct summary of the second selection from the text and then restating that summary in their own words. Students will work with partners and in small groups for this lesson.

OBJECTIVES

Students will be able to

- Close-read informational text proficiently
- Identify and explain the meaning of “key words” and important phrases in the text
- Summarize the meaning of the text, on both literal and inferential levels, through the proficient completion of the summary organizer
- Develop and draw conclusions based on the textual evidence in the document
- Collaborate effectively with classmates

MATERIALS

- Summary Organizer #2
- Overhead projector, Elmo projector, or similar device (optional)

PROCEDURE

1. Lead a discussion of what the class learned in the previous lesson and what they decided was the gist of the first selection from President Washington’s Farewell Address. Explain that the class will be continuing with the second selection from Washington’s address with partners and in small groups.
2. Distribute Summary Organizer #2 with the second selection from Washington’s address, and share read the text with the class as described in Lesson 1. You may display the Summary Organizer in a format large enough for the whole class to see.
3. Review the procedure from Lesson 1, reminding students that they will select key words from the text, use those words to summarize the text, and then restate the summary in their own words. Because this paragraph is longer (228 words) than the last one, they can pick 10 key words.
4. Pair students up to complete the first task. After the students in each pair have chosen their 10 words, they should write those words in the Key Words section of the organizers.
5. Now put each pair of students into a group of four. Be strategic in how you form the groups to ensure active participation by all group members. These groups should then repeat the same negotiation process to finalize their selection of 10 Key Words. Circulate to ensure that all groups are negotiating successfully and choosing appropriate words.

6. Each group will use the selected words to build a sentence that summarizes Washington's message in this part of the text. Circulate among the groups to monitor their progress and to make sure that all students are contributing to this learning activity.
7. Ask the groups to share out their summary sentences. This should serve as a catalyst for a discussion that will provide evaluative feedback on two matters: How successful were the students in recognizing Washington's main idea(s)? How careful were the students to use Washington's key words in the summary?
8. Each group will now restate the summary sentence in their own words. Again, this is a group negotiation process. After they have decided on a sentence, they should write the final version into their organizers.
9. Have the groups share out and discuss the clarity and quality of the restatements.
10. Wrap-up: Discuss vocabulary that the students found confusing or difficult. The students can record these words and their meaning on the back of the organizer or on a separate vocabulary form.

LESSON 3

OVERVIEW

Students will be asked to “read like a detective” and discover what George Washington was writing about in his Farewell Address by understanding what is explicitly stated and drawing logical inferences. They will demonstrate these skills by writing a succinct summary of the text and then restating that summary in their own words. In this lesson the students will work individually unless you believe they need another day of additional support from a partner or small group.

OBJECTIVES

Students will be able to

- Close-read informational text proficiently
- Identify and explain the meaning of “key words” and important phrases in the text
- Summarize the meaning of the text, on both literal and inferential levels, through the proficient completion of the summary organizer
- Develop and draw conclusions based on the textual evidence in the document
- Collaborate effectively with classmates

MATERIALS

- Summary Organizer #3

PROCEDURE

1. Discuss the text summaries the students came up with for the first and second selections from the text in the previous lessons.
2. Hand out Summary Organizer #3, which contains the third selection from President Washington’s Farewell Address, and share read the text with the students as described in Lesson 1.
3. Review the process of selecting key words, writing a summary using those key words, and then restating the summary in their own words. Tell the students that they will be working independently on this part of the text.
4. Because this paragraph is 229 words in length, the students can pick 10 key words.
5. Have the students share out their restated summaries and discuss the clarity and quality of the different interpretations of Washington’s views.
6. Wrap-up: Discuss vocabulary that the students found confusing or difficult; the students can record these words and their meaning on the back of the organizer or a separate vocabulary form.

LESSON 4

OVERVIEW

Students will be asked to “read like a detective” and discover what George Washington was writing about in his Farewell Address by understanding what is explicitly stated and drawing logical inferences. They will demonstrate these skills by writing a succinct summary of the text and then restating that summary in their own words. In this lesson the students will be working individually.

OBJECTIVES

Students will be able to

- Close-read informational text proficiently
- Identify and explain the meaning of “key words” and important phrases in the text
- Summarize the meaning of the text, on both literal and inferential levels, through the proficient completion of the summary organizer
- Develop and draw conclusions based on the textual evidence in the document
- Collaborate effectively with classmates

MATERIALS

- Summary Organizer #4

PROCEDURE

1. Discuss the text summaries the students came up with for the first, second, and third sections of the text in the previous lessons.
2. Hand out Summary Organizer #4, which contains the fourth selection from President Washington’s Farewell Address, and share read the text with the students as described in Lesson 1.
3. Review the process of selecting Key Words, writing a summary using those Key Words, and then restating the summary in their own words. Tell the students that they will be working on their own again to summarize this part of the text.
4. Because this paragraph is 208 words in length, the students can pick 10 key words.
5. Have the students share out their restated summaries and discuss the clarity and quality of the different interpretations of Washington’s views.
6. Wrap-up: Discuss vocabulary that the students found confusing or difficult. The students can record these words and their meaning on the back of the organizer or a separate vocabulary form.

LESSON 5

OVERVIEW

This lesson has two objectives. First, the students will synthesize the work of the last four lessons and demonstrate that they understand President George Washington's Farewell Address of 1796. Second, they will answer a question in a short persuasive or argumentative essay that requires them to make inferences and support their conclusions with explicit information from the text.

OBJECTIVES

Students will be able to

- Synthesize their work of the last four days and demonstrate their understanding of the main concepts and ideas in the text
- Write a short persuasive or argumentative essay in response to a prompt using evidence from the text

MATERIALS

- Excerpts from President George Washington's Farewell Address, 1796
- Completed Summary Organizers #1–4
- Overhead projector, Elmo projector, or similar device (optional)

PROCEDURE

1. Distribute the excerpts from President George Washington's Farewell Address of 1796 and ask the students to read it silently to themselves.
2. Ask the students for their best summary of selection one. This is done as a class discussion. You may write this short sentence on the overhead or similar device. The same procedure is used for selections two, three, and four. When you are finished, the students should have a summary of President George Washington's Farewell Address of 1796 in a few sentences to help them organize their essay.
3. Each student will write a short persuasive or argumentative essay addressing one of the prompts below. If the students are not familiar with writing an argumentative essay, you can lead a short lesson on the process, and then assign the essay for homework or for the next lesson. Remind the students that any arguments they make must be backed up with words taken directly from President George Washington's Farewell Address. The first prompt is designed to be the easiest.

Prompts

- a. What does President Washington see as a danger to the success of the newly formed United States of America?
- b. What arguments does Washington use to support his statement that the government is the "main pillar" of independence? Why is the government so important, and how can it be protected?
- c. Washington writes that in foreign policy "our detached and distant situation invites and enables us to pursue a different course." What course of action does he argue the nation should take?

President George Washington's Farewell Address, 1796 (Excerpts)

Friends and Fellow Citizens:

The period for a new election of a citizen to administer the executive government of the United States being not far distant, and the time actually arrived when your thoughts must be employed in designating the person who is to be clothed with that important trust, 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. . . . Here, perhaps, I ought to stop. But a solicitude for your welfare, which cannot end but with my life, and the apprehension of danger, natural to that solicitude, urge me, on an occasion like the present, to offer to your solemn contemplation, and to recommend to your frequent review, some sentiments which are the result of much reflection, of no inconsiderable observation, and which appear to me all-important to the permanency of your felicity as a people.

The unity of government which constitutes you one people is also now dear to you. It is justly so, for it is a main pillar in the edifice of your real independence, the support of your tranquility at home, your peace abroad; of your safety; of your prosperity; of that very liberty which you so highly prize. But as it is easy to foresee that, from different causes and from different quarters, much pains will be taken, many artifices employed to weaken in your minds the conviction of this truth; as this is the point in your political fortress against which the batteries of internal and external enemies will be most constantly and actively (though often covertly and insidiously) directed, it is of infinite moment that you should properly estimate the immense value of your national union to your collective and individual happiness; that you should cherish a cordial, habitual, and immovable attachment to it; accustoming yourselves to think and speak of it as of the palladium of your political safety and prosperity; watching for its preservation with jealous anxiety; discountenancing whatever may suggest even a suspicion that it can in any event be abandoned; and indignantly frowning upon the first dawning of every attempt to alienate any portion of our country from the rest, or to enfeeble the sacred ties which now link together the various parts.

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 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 depositories, 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. If, in the opinion of the people, the distribution or modification of the constitutional powers be in any particular wrong, let it be corrected by an amendment in the way which the Constitution designates. But let there be no change by usurpation; for though this, in one instance, may be the instrument of good, it is the customary weapon by which free governments are destroyed.

Observe good faith and justice towards all nations; cultivate peace and harmony with all. . . . Antipathy in one nation against another disposes each more readily to offer insult and injury, to lay hold of slight causes of umbrage, and to be haughty and intractable, when accidental or trifling occasions of dispute occur. . . . So likewise, a passionate attachment of one nation for another produces a variety of evils. Sympathy for the favorite nation, facilitating the illusion of an imaginary common interest in cases where no real common interest exists. . . . Against the insidious wiles of foreign influence (I conjure you to believe me, fellow-citizens) the jealousy of a free people ought to be constantly awake, since history and experience prove that foreign influence is one of the most baneful foes of republican government. . . . Our detached and distant situation invites and enables us to pursue a different course. If we remain one people under an efficient government. . . . In offering to 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. . . .

United States 19th September, 1796

Geo. Washington

Source: President George Washington's Farewell Address, 1796, *100 Milestone Documents*, [ourdocuments.gov](https://www.ourdocuments.gov).

NAME

PERIOD

DATE

Summary Organizer #1: President Washington's Farewell Address, 1796

Original Text:

Friends and Fellow Citizens: The period for a new election of a citizen to administer the executive government of the United States being not far distant, and the time actually arrived when your thoughts must be employed in designating the person who is to be clothed with that important trust, 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. . . . Here, perhaps, I ought to stop. But a solicitude for your welfare, which cannot end but with my life, and the apprehension of danger, natural to that solicitude, urge me, on an occasion like the present, to offer to your solemn contemplation, and to recommend to your frequent review, some sentiments which are the result of much reflection, of no inconsiderable observation, and which appear to me all-important to the permanency of your felicity as a people.

Key Words:

Summary:

In Your Own Words:

NAME _____

PERIOD _____

DATE _____

Summary Organizer #2: President Washington's Farewell Address, 1796

Original Text:

The unity of government which constitutes you one people is also now dear to you. It is justly so, for it is a main pillar in the edifice of your real independence, the support of your tranquility at home, your peace abroad; of your safety; of your prosperity; of that very liberty which you so highly prize. But as it is easy to foresee that, from different causes and from different quarters, much pains will be taken, many artifices employed to weaken in your minds the conviction of this truth; as this is the point in your political fortress against which the batteries of internal and external enemies will be most constantly and actively (though often covertly and insidiously) directed, it is of infinite moment that you should properly estimate the immense value of your national union to your collective and individual happiness; that you should cherish a cordial, habitual, and immovable attachment to it; accustoming yourselves to think and speak of it as of the palladium of your political safety and prosperity; watching for its preservation with jealous anxiety; discountenancing whatever may suggest even a suspicion that it can in any event be abandoned; and indignantly frowning upon the first dawning of every attempt to alienate any portion of our country from the rest, or to enfeeble the sacred ties which now link together the various parts.

Key Words:

Summary:

In Your Own Words:

NAME

PERIOD

DATE

Summary Organizer #3: President Washington's Farewell Address, 1796

Original Text:

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 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 depositories, 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. If, in the opinion of the people, the distribution or modification of the constitutional powers be in any particular wrong, let it be corrected by an amendment in the way which the Constitution designates. But let there be no change by usurpation; for though this, in one instance, may be the instrument of good, it is the customary weapon by which free governments are destroyed.

Key Words:

Summary:

In Your Own Words:

NAME

PERIOD

DATE

Summary Organizer #4: President Washington's Farewell Address, 1796

Original Text:

Observe good faith and justice towards all nations; cultivate peace and harmony with all. . . . Antipathy in one nation against another disposes each more readily to offer insult and injury, to lay hold of slight causes of umbrage, and to be haughty and intractable, when accidental or trifling occasions of dispute occur. . . . So likewise, a passionate attachment of one nation for another produces a variety of evils. Sympathy for the favorite nation, facilitating the illusion of an imaginary common interest in cases where no real common interest exists. . . . Against the insidious wiles of foreign influence (I conjure you to believe me, fellow-citizens) the jealousy of a free people ought to be constantly awake, since history and experience prove that foreign influence is one of the most baneful foes of republican government. . . . Our detached and distant situation invites and enables us to pursue a different course. If we remain one people under an efficient government. . . . In offering to 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. . . .

Key Words:

Summary:

In Your Own Words:
