

The Importance of Leadership

MAIN IDEA George Washington's excellent leadership as the first president of the United States helped the young nation survive.

WHY IT MATTERS NOW Leadership remains an important factor in the success of any nation or organization.

Read the following text and complete the questions and activities on the next sheet.

It is difficult to overestimate the importance of George Washington in U.S. history. When Washington was sworn in as president in 1789, the nation was new and its future was uncertain. He was the nation's first president. He had no example to follow. Yet, he effectively steered the nation through the dangers it faced in its early years. Had he not been a sensible and well-respected man, the newly created United States may not have survived.

George Washington provides an excellent example of the importance of good leadership. To be a good leader, a person does not need to be perfect. Indeed, one criticism of Washington was that he did not free his slaves during his lifetime, even though he believed slavery was wrong.

Nevertheless, good leaders can find solutions to problems. And they can inspire others to work together to overcome challenges. Washington inspired confidence in his fellow Americans. They respected his integrity and judgment. They willingly followed his lead.

Abraham Lincoln was another great American leader. Lincoln managed to hold the Union together through the Civil War. This was an incredible task. Some Northerners opposed the war effort, especially when the South appeared to be winning the war. Other people criticized Lincoln for acting too slowly in freeing the slaves. Nevertheless, Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation, guided the Union to victory, and won reelection.

Franklin Delano Roosevelt provided another example of fine leadership. He guided the nation through the Great Depression and World War II.

Like Washington and Lincoln, Roosevelt had his critics. Some people felt that the New Deal made the federal government too big. Others argued that he did not do enough to solve the problems of capitalism.

But Roosevelt gave hope to millions of Americans during times of great economic hardship. And, although the New Deal did not end the Depression, it helped millions of Americans survive until better times arrived.

But nations are not the only things that need leaders. Groups and organizations within nations also need strong leaders. The leadership of the U.S. civil rights movement provides an example of this kind of leadership. Many great leaders emerged from the African-American struggle for equality.

Booker T. Washington, W. E. B. Du Bois, and Ida B. Wells, among others, were all important civil rights leaders. But the most famous civil rights leader, Martin Luther King, Jr., provides one of the best examples of leadership in U.S. history. King's vision and eloquence inspired many Americans to support the civil rights movement. His bravery in the face of violence encouraged other Americans to stand up to oppression.

Not all civil rights supporters agreed with all of King's decisions on when, where, and how to demonstrate. But his inspiration and courage helped lead Americans of many different backgrounds to overturn segregation.

From the American Revolution to today, leaders have had a tremendous impact on the United States. They will continue to shape the nation in the 21st century.

Name: _____

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1. Based on this article, what do you consider to be the qualities of a good leader?
2. Use the chart below to list how these leaders affected the United States.

Leader	Impact
George Washington	
Abraham Lincoln	
Franklin D. Roosevelt	
Martin Luther King, Jr.	

3. Use these questions to evaluate George Washington's leadership. Support your opinion with examples from his presidency.

- ❖ What are the unique challenges facing Washington as the first President of the United States?
- ❖ Did he live up to the responsibilities delegated to him in the Constitution?
- ❖ Was he a good decision maker?
- ❖ Was Washington's advice in his Farewell Address appropriate for the time and would his advice be applicable today?