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RH.6-8.2: Reading for Main Idea

### Washington Heads a New Government

Title:	
<p>George Washington had no desire to be president after the Constitutional Convention. His dream was to settle down to a quiet life at his Virginia estate, Mount Vernon. The American people had other ideas, though. They wanted a strong national leader of great authority as their first president. As the hero of the Revolution, Washington was the unanimous choice in the first presidential ballot. When the news reached him on April 16, 1789, Washington reluctantly accepted the call to duty. Two days later he set out for New York City to take the oath of office.</p> <p>“About ten o’clock I bade adieu [farewell] to Mount Vernon, to private life, and to domestic felicity [happiness];</p>	<p>and with a mind oppressed with more anxious and painful sensations than I have words to express, set out for New York . . . with the best dispositions [intentions] to render service to my country in obedience to its call, but with less hope of answering its expectations.” – <i>Diary of George Washington</i></p> <p>When Washington took office as the first president of the United States under the Constitution, he and Congress faced a daunting task—to create an entirely new government. The momentous decisions that these early leaders made have resounded through American history.</p>
Main Idea:	

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<p>Washington took charge of a political system that was a bold experiment. Never before had a nation tried to base a government on the Enlightenment ideals of republican rule and individual rights. No one knew if a government based on the will of the people could really work.</p> <p>Although the Constitution provided a strong foundation, it was not a detailed blueprint for governing. To</p>	<p>create a working government, Washington and Congress had to make many practical decisions—such as how to raise revenue and provide for defense—with no precedent, or prior example, for American leaders to follow. Perhaps James Madison put it best: “We are in a wilderness without a single footstep to guide us.”</p>
Main Idea:	

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<p>One of the first tasks Washington and Congress tackled was the creation of a judicial system. The Constitution had authorized Congress to set up a federal court system, headed by a Supreme Court, but it failed to spell out the details. What type of additional courts should there be and how many? What would happen if federal court decisions conflicted with state laws?</p> <p>The Judiciary Act of 1789 answered these critical questions, creating a judicial structure that has remained essentially intact. This law provided for a Supreme Court</p>	<p>consisting of a chief justice and five associate justices. It also set up 3 federal circuit courts and 13 federal district courts throughout the country. (The numbers of justices and courts increased over time.) Section 25 of the Judiciary Act, one of the most important provisions of the law, allowed state court decisions to be appealed to a federal court when constitutional issues were raised. This section guaranteed that federal laws remained “the supreme Law of the Land,” as directed by Article 6 of the Constitution.</p>
Main Idea:	

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<p>At the same time that Congress shaped the judiciary, Washington faced the task of building an executive branch to help him make policies and carry out the laws passed by Congress. In 1789, when Washington took office, the executive branch of government consisted of two officials, the president and the vice-president. To help these leaders govern, Congress created three executive departments: the Department of State, to deal with foreign affairs; the Department of War, to handle military matters; and the Department of the Treasury, to manage finances.</p>	<p>To head these departments, Washington chose capable leaders he knew and trusted. He picked Thomas Jefferson as secretary of state, Alexander Hamilton as secretary of the treasury, and Henry Knox, who had served as Washington's general of artillery during the Revolution, as secretary of war. Finally, he chose Edmund Randolph as attorney general, the chief lawyer of the federal government. These department heads soon became the president's chief advisers, or Cabinet.</p>
Main Idea:	

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<p>Hamilton and Jefferson were brilliant thinkers, but they had very different political ideas. The differences between the two also caused bitter disagreements, many of which centered on Hamilton's plan for the economy.</p> <p>Political divisions in the new nation were great. No two men embodied these differences more than Hamilton and Jefferson. Hamilton believed in a strong central government led by a prosperous, educated elite of upper-class citizens. Jefferson distrusted a strong central government and the rich. He favored strong state and local governments rooted</p>	<p>in popular participation. Hamilton believed that commerce and industry were the keys to a strong nation. Jefferson favored a society of farmer-citizens.</p> <p>Overall, Hamilton's vision of America was that of a country much like Great Britain, with a strong central government, commerce, and industry. His views found more support in the North, particularly New England, whereas Jefferson's views won endorsement in the South and the West.</p>
Main Idea:	

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<p>As secretary of the treasury, Hamilton's job was to set in order the nation's finances and to put the nation's economy on a firm footing. To do this, he proposed a plan to manage the country's debts and a plan to establish a national banking system.</p> <p>According to Hamilton's calculations in his Report on the Public Credit, the public debt of the United States in 1790 (most of it incurred during the Revolution) was many millions of dollars. The national government was responsible for about two-thirds of this debt, and individual states were responsible for the rest. The new nation owed some of the debt to foreign governments and some to private citizens, including soldiers who had received bonds — certificates that promised payment plus interest —</p>	<p>as payment for their service during the war.</p> <p>Hamilton proposed to pay off the foreign debt and to issue new bonds to cover the old ones. He also proposed that the federal government assume the debts of the states. Although this would increase the federal debt, Hamilton reasoned that assuming state debts would give creditors — the people who originally loaned the money — an incentive to support the new federal government. If the government failed, these creditors would never get their money back. However, this proposal made many people in the South furious. Some Southern states had already paid off most of their debts. Southerners resented assumption of state debts because they thought that they would be taxed to help pay the debts incurred by the Northern states.</p>
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