Stepping Aside

How one president's choice shaped an expectation

8.C.5.1.D "Explain the intent and impact of Washington's decision not to seek a third term in office."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two reasons Washington stepped aside, circle an immediate effect of his decision, and put a box around the sentence that tells how later presidents responded.

Washington's Choice

1 In 1796, President George Washington faced a choice no American president had faced before: should he seek a third term? The Constitution set a four-year term but, at that time, did not limit how many times a president could be elected. Many Americans trusted Washington, the leader of the Revolutionary War, and might have supported him again. Yet he had spent eight demanding years in office and longed to return to Mount Vernon, his home in Virginia. His decision would help answer a larger question: could a popular leader give up power willingly?

2 Washington chose not to run in the 1796 election. He wanted to retire, but his choice also showed that the presidency did not belong to one person. Americans had fought a king whose power lasted for life. By stepping aside while he was still widely respected, Washington offered an example of limited power in the new republic. In his published Farewell Address, he announced his retirement and shared advice for the nation's future. His decision left the country to choose someone else through its election process.

3 In the election of 1796, John Adams won the presidency and took office in 1797. Washington's peaceful departure showed that the nation could change leaders without a president holding on to office. Later presidents treated his two terms as a powerful example, although the Constitution still allowed more. Franklin D. Roosevelt eventually won a third term in 1940 and a fourth in 1944. In 1951, the Twenty-second Amendment set a two-election limit for presidents. Washington's personal choice had shaped expectations long before that limit became law.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. Why might Washington have wanted to leave office, and what did stepping aside show about his view of the presidency?

2. Why did the Constitution make Washington's choice to leave office especially meaningful?

3. How did Washington's decision affect who led the country in 1797, and what did the change show?

4. How did Washington's choice influence later presidents before a term limit became law?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

A classmate says, "Washington made a law against third terms in 1796." Write five sentences correcting the claim and explaining how Washington's choice could influence future leaders without being a law. Include a comparison to a custom outside government.

ANSWER KEY

Stepping Aside

GRADE 8 · 8.C.5.1.D

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two reasons Washington stepped aside, circle an immediate effect of his decision, and put a box around the sentence that tells how later presidents responded. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Why might Washington have wanted to leave office, and what did stepping aside show about his view of the presidency?	**He wanted to retire after eight demanding years and return to Mount Vernon. Stepping aside showed that he did not view the presidency as belonging to one person.**
2	Why did the Constitution make Washington's choice to leave office especially meaningful?	**The Constitution did not then limit the number of times a president could be elected, so Washington gave up the chance to seek another term voluntarily.**
3	How did Washington's decision affect who led the country in 1797, and what did the change show?	**John Adams won the election and took office in 1797. The change showed that the nation could choose a new leader without the president holding on to office.**
4	How did Washington's choice influence later presidents before a term limit became law?	**Later presidents treated his two terms as an example to follow, even though the Constitution still allowed them to seek more terms.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Washington did not make a law against third terms in 1796. At the time, the Constitution did not limit how many times a president could be elected. He chose to retire and showed that a president could give up power willingly. Later presidents treated his two terms as an example, even though Roosevelt eventually served more than two terms. It is like a team captain who passes the role to someone new, starting a custom that other captains follow without a written rule.

Accept answers that distinguish Washington's voluntary example from the legal limit adopted in 1951. For the open task, accept any clear, accurate comparison between an influential custom and a rule.