



Study Guide on George Washington's *Farewell Address*

QUESTIONS ON THE WHOLE WORK

1. Is Washington an isolationist? What governs and tempers his recommendations for foreign policy?
2. What are the motives for national unity? What endangers national unity? What preserves national unity?
3. Of all the preservers of unity, what preserves national unity the most, according to Washington?
4. Why is it that Washington's audience is first regarded by their natural connection to him as friends, and only secondarily in their overt political relationship as citizens?
5. Consider what Washington teaches his reader in paragraphs 1-6 regarding representative government, a thing still very new to them, reminding them that they are the body who designates and then clothes one of their own with their trust to execute government, that he is a public servant acting on their behalf and at their urging. How does this differ from a European, monarchical understanding and image of the power of the executive? Why does he need to so carefully educate them about this? Why do we still need to hear this reminder about the President in our day?
6. How does Washington teach, through an example of modesty or humility, an American executive should present himself after periods of socio-political tension have wracked the nation?
7. How do the images of the "unity of government" in paragraph 9, both pillar and palladium, support his argument about the power of conventional union? Consider how representative government, as an artificial arrangement among people who consent to hand over certain elements of their natural authority, can support a natural end or goal: security, liberty, prosperity. You ought to look up what a palladium (as in Pallas Athena) is. From the paragraphs that follow, list the strengths he foresees coming from a strong, practiced union and the dangers he foresees in sectionalism already alive in the USA.
8. In paragraph 17, Washington explains the basis of this particular system of Constitutional government, that it is revocable, it can be amended, but while it is in place, it becomes "sacredly obligatory." How does this understanding of the right to convene plus the responsibility to uphold allow for true freedom to flourish in a state? Responsibility sounds like a requirement, which would impede on freedom, wouldn't it?
9. Introducing the opposite of freedom in paragraphs 18-26, Washington speaks to the fatal tendency associated with faction, what we would simply call political parties. Examine how he employs his metaphors of engine (another example of a human machination, as opposed to something that naturally occurs) and fire which tend to, in terrifying tandem, subvert the power of people and then, rather than warming them, simply consume them. We know the Civil War is ahead, but are there other future woes one could call to mind here? How about present ones?
10. How, in paragraph 34 ff., does Washington suppose that a practiced policy of nationalism and entering the fray of foreign influence would be adopted to our national and personal hurt? Especially the hurt of a government that is republican in form? List his fears. Does this still hold true today?



11. Framing his Address with more emphasis on tone than on purpose, how does Washington rely on an appeal to both ethos and pathos at the beginning and end? Yes, he's an "affectionate friend" (paragraph 44) who has exercised his authority (paragraphs 45-50) in a manner that won him less than universal acclaim. How do the final touches to his argument in paragraph 51 win over Americans during a time of international crisis such that they might follow his advice? List the phrases or points that you think really hit the target.
12. How, following upon the entirety of the *Farewell Address*, is it fitting or appropriate for Washington to end in paragraph 51-52 with a plea to the Almighty? What does it mean when he "beseeches [the Almighty] to avert or mitigate the evils to which [Washington's errors as President] may tend?" If Providence is seeing the nation through, do we need to generate laws that are in concert with His "higher laws?" What does that mean for men striving to be free, to be virtuous in order to achieve happiness? Draw out the logic Washington has established here.

QUESTIONS ON THE OUTLINED PARTS

1. Introduction (§1-7)
 - a. Reasons for leaving: Why won't Washington run again? What kind of ethos does he establish in the beginning?
 - b. **Reasons for writing:** For what purpose does he write this Farewell Address?
2. National Unity (§8-10)
 - a. **Love of Liberty:** Does liberty uphold unity or does unity uphold liberty, according to Washington?
 - b. Unity of Government: What are the advantages of national unity?
 - c. Common religion, manners, habits, political principles, and fights: Do these hold true today?
3. Motives to Unity (§11-13)
 - a. Helping the interests of others helps your interests: Why should the states remain united?
 - b. **Stronger together:** Why should the states remain united?
4. Dangers to Unity (§14-24)
 - a. Geographical discrimination: How could partiality endanger unity?
 - b. **Factions:** How do factions endanger unity?
5. Preservation of Unity (§25-41)
 - a. **Checks and Balances**
 - b. **Religion, Morality, Education**
 - c. Public Credit
 - d. **Good Faith and Justice in Foreign affairs**
 - e. Impartiality in Foreign affairs
 - f. Internal before Foreign affairs
 - g. Temporary before Permanent Alliances
 - h. Impartiality in Commercial Policy



6. Conclusion (§42-50)

- a. Summary
- b. Clarifies executive choices about the Neutrality Act of 1793
- c. Appeal to God the Almighty
- d. **Anticipation of enjoying good laws of a free government**

Suggested use: This study guide includes a few questions and observations about George Washington's *Farewell Address*. Among possible uses, one could consider these comments while reading the work; or one could use them as starting points for a classroom discussion.