George Washington was born at his father's plantation on Pope's Creek in Westmoreland County, Virginia, on February 22, 1732. His father, Augustine Washington, was a leading planter in the area and also served as a justice of the county court. Augustine's first wife, Janet Butler, died in 1729, leaving him with two sons, Lawrence and Augustine, Jr., and a daughter, Jane. The elder Augustine then married George's mother, Mary Ball, in 1731. George was the eldest of Augustine Washington's and Mary Ball's six children.

In 1735 Augustine moved the family up the Potomac River to another Washington home, Little Hunting Creek Plantation (later renamed Mount Vernon). In 1738 they moved again to Ferry Farm, a plantation on the Rappahannock River near Fredericksburg, Virginia, where George spent much of his youth. Little is known of Washington's childhood, and it remains the most poorly understood part of his life.

When George was eleven years old, Augustine died, leaving most of his property to George's older half brothers. The income from what remained was just sufficient to maintain Mary Washington and her children. As the oldest child remaining at home, George undoubtedly helped his mother manage the Rappahannock River plantation where they lived. There he learned the importance of hard work and efficiency.

Little is known about George's formal education. Commonly the children of Virginia gentry were taught at home by private tutors or in local private schools. Boys generally began their formal education around the age of seven with lessons in reading, writing, and basic arithmetic. Later they were taught Latin and Greek, as well as such practical subjects as geometry, bookkeeping, and surveying. Wealthy planters often sent their sons to England to finish their schooling, as was done with George's two elder half brothers, Lawrence and Augustine.

The death of his father, however, made schooling abroad an impossibility for George Washington. He may have attended a school near his home for the first few years. Later he went to another school. But he was not taught Latin or Greek like many gentlemen's sons, and he never learned a foreign language. Nor did he attend college. His formal education ended around the age of 15.

He learned social graces such as good conversation, correct table manners, and proper entertaining from his mother, his half-brother and sister-in-law, Lawrence and Ann, and their neighbors, the Fairfaxes, who lived at Belvoir.

His career started at the age of the age of 17. He became a county surveyor.

Tragedy struck the young man with the death of his half brother Lawrence, who had guided and mentored George after his father's death. George inherited Mount Vernon from his brother, living there for the rest of his life.

In 1753 the French and British empires both tried to expand into the "Ohio Country". Their conflict led to a world war 1756-63 and Washington was in the center of it. Washington led a poorly trained and equipped force of 150 men to build a fort on the banks of the Ohio River. On the way, he encountered and attacked a small French force, killing a French minister in the process. The incident touched off open fighting between the British and the French,.

Although hailed as a hero in the colonies when word spread of his heroic valor and leadership against the French, the Royal government in England blamed the colonials for the defeat. Angry at the lack of respect and appreciation shown to him, Washington resigned from the army and returned to farming in Virginia.

In 1759, he married Martha Custis, a wealthy widow, and thereafter devoted his time to running the family plantation. Martha Washington had two young children from her first marriage, Martha and John. She had no children with George Washington.

By 1770, Washington had emerged as an experienced leader—a justice of the peace in Fairfax County, a member of the Virginia House of Burgesses, and a respected vestryman (a lay leader in his church). He also was among the first prominent Americans to openly support resistance to England's new policies of taxation and strict regulation of the colonial economy (the Navigation Acts) beginning in the early 1770s.

Washington was elected by the Virginia legislature to both the First and the Second Continental Congress, held in 1774 and 1775. In 1775 the Second Continental Congress appointed Washington commander of all the colonial forces. Showing the modesty that was central to his character Washington proclaimed, "I do not think myself equal to the command I am honored with."

After routing the British from Boston in the spring of 1776, Washington fought a series of humiliating battles in a losing effort to defend New York. But on Christmas Day that same year, he led his army through a ferocious blizzard and defeated the Hessian forces at Trenton. In October 1781, Washington's troops, assisted by the French Navy, defeated Cornwallis at Yorktown.

He returned to Mount Vernon and the genteel life of a tobacco planter, only to be called out of retirement to preside at the Constitutional Convention in 1787. His great stature insured his election as the first President of the United States. Keenly aware that his conduct as President would set precedents for the future of the office, he carefully weighed every step he took. He appointed Thomas Jefferson and Alexander Hamilton to his cabinet. Almost immediately, these two men began to quarrel over a wide array of issues, but Washington valued them for the balance they lent his cabinet. Literally the "Father of the Nation," Washington almost single-handedly created a new government.

Although he badly wanted to retire after the first term, Washington was unanimously supported by the electoral college for a second term in 1792. Throughout both his terms, Washington struggled to prevent the emergence of political parties, viewing them as factions harmful to the public good. Nevertheless, in his first term, the ideological division between Jefferson and Hamilton deepened, forming the outlines of the nation's first party system. This system was composed of Federalists, who supported expansive federal power and Alexander Hamilton, and the Democratic-Republicans, followers of Thomas Jefferson's philosophy of states' rights and limited federal power.

Throughout his two terms, Washington insisted on his power to act independent of Congress in foreign conflicts, especially when war broke out between France and England in 1793 and he issued a Declaration of Neutrality on his own authority. After he left office, exhausted and discouraged over the rise of political factions, Washington returned to Mount Vernon, where he died almost three years later.

On December 12, 1799, Washington was caught out in sleet and snow while riding over his farms. The resulting illness progressed rapidly, and Washington suffered with a throat inflamation that made breathing extremely painful. Doctors arrived early on the morning of December 14 but could do little to ease his pain. He faced death with characteristic courage, saying, *I die hard, but I am not afraid to go*. With his wife at his side, George Washington died at around 10:00 p.m. on December 14, 1799. Four days later a solemn funeral was held at Mount Vernon.

As news of Washington's death spread, the nation plunged into mourning. Major cities and small towns alike held mock funerals.