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CLASSROOM



George Washington: American Revolutionary Classroom Guide

As the nation's first President, George Washington is considered by many to be the "father" of the United States. His image is everywhere in American society and he is considered one of the nation's most important leaders. Yet in many ways, Washington remains an icon shrouded in myth, his actual life overshadowed by his image. How did one man come to exemplify the spirit of revolution, and the noble experiment of democracy? This 1-hour documentary presents the life and career of George Washington. Emphasizing Washington's contributions to the American Revolution, it examines his role in leading the military victory against the British. This program also explores Washington's Presidency and his life at Mount Vernon. It would be a useful addition to course units and lectures on the American Revolution and the early years of the republic.

Curriculum Links:

George Washington: American Revolutionary would be useful for classes on America History, American Culture, Military History, Civics and Political Science. It is appropriate for middle school and high school.

Objective:

Students will examine the role of George Washington in the ideological as well as the political formation of the United States. They will analyze Washington's effect on the course of events leading up to and including the American Revolution, as well as the political genesis of republicanism.

Vocabulary:

Using a dictionary (www.merriamwebster.com) or an encyclopedia, students may want to define or explain the significance of the following terms from this program:

Acrostic
Audacious
Cosmopolitan
Demagogue
Exude

Annals
Charisma
Deity
Demise
Innovative

Discussion Questions:

1. During his lifetime, Americans considered George Washington the country's "most trusted man." Why? Compare the reputation of George Washington with some of today's politicians.
2. Why is George Washington considered the "father of our country?" What other figures in American history are counted among the "founding fathers?"
3. Many myths and legends surround the memory of George Washington. How do the man and myths differ? What other figures in American history have reached mythic proportions?
4. Discuss the role of social status in George Washington's world.
5. How did the death of Augustus Washington (Washington's father) affect George Washington?
6. George Washington led the Continental Army to victory against the British during the American Revolution. How did Washington begin his career as a soldier?
7. Washington always designed his own uniforms. Why?
8. George Washington married the wealthy widow Martha Custis. How did this marriage elevate Washington's social status?
9. Discuss the reasons for the American Revolution.
10. How did George Washington personally change the course of the Revolution?
11. The American form of republican government has been a blueprint for modern nations seeking a democracy. But in 1781, a republican form of government was revolutionary. Why?
12. Why was Washington elected as the first president of the United States?

Extended Activities:

1. *Portrait of a Leader.* This documentary discusses Washington's decision to dress in military costume for his first formal portrait. On your own, create a portrait or other artistic representation of Washington's first self-portrait. These projects can be creative and imaginative, but should reflect your own interpretation of Washington's personality, history, and leadership style.

2. *Commander-in-Chief.* This documentary discusses the decision-making process of the Continental Congress in appointing Washington Commander-in-Chief of the Army. Imagine that your role is to compose an official letter as a representative of the Continental Congress requesting that Washington take this position. Using what you have learned from viewing this documentary, write a short letter inviting Washington to take this role. Then, compose a response letter from Washington explaining his rationale for accepting the role.

3. *A Farewell to Arms.* Upon his retirement after securing victory in the American Revolution, Washington wrote an extensive farewell address to troops in 1783. In small groups, locate a copy of Washington's farewell address using either the internet or the library and analyze what became one of Washington's most eloquent and famous speeches. Then, select the sentence you feel is the most important or compelling in the address. Create a poster or PowerPoint emphasizing your selected sentence and choose a representative from your group to share your choice with the class in a short oral presentation.

4. *Political Cartoons: Then and Now.* Cartoons are a time-honored form of political dissent in America, even during the Revolution. Create your own cartoon depicting any important event or election in American history.

Additional Resources

Books

- Ellis, Joseph. *His Excellency: George Washington*. (Knopf, 2004).
Garrett, Wendell (ed). *George Washington's Mount Vernon*. (Monacelli, 1991).
Heilbroner, Joan. *Meet George Washington*. (Random House Books for Young Readers, 2001).
Washington, George and Dorothy Twohig. *George Washington's Diaries: An Abridgement*. (University of Virginia Press, 1999).

Websites

- Learn more about Washington on Bio.com:
<http://www.biography.com/articles/George-Washington-9524786>
Official Mount Vernon website:
<http://www.mountvernon.org/>
The History Channel's tour of George Washington's home:
<http://www.historychannel.com/classroom/workshop/>
The Gilder Lehrman Institution of American History
<http://www.gilderlehrman.org/>