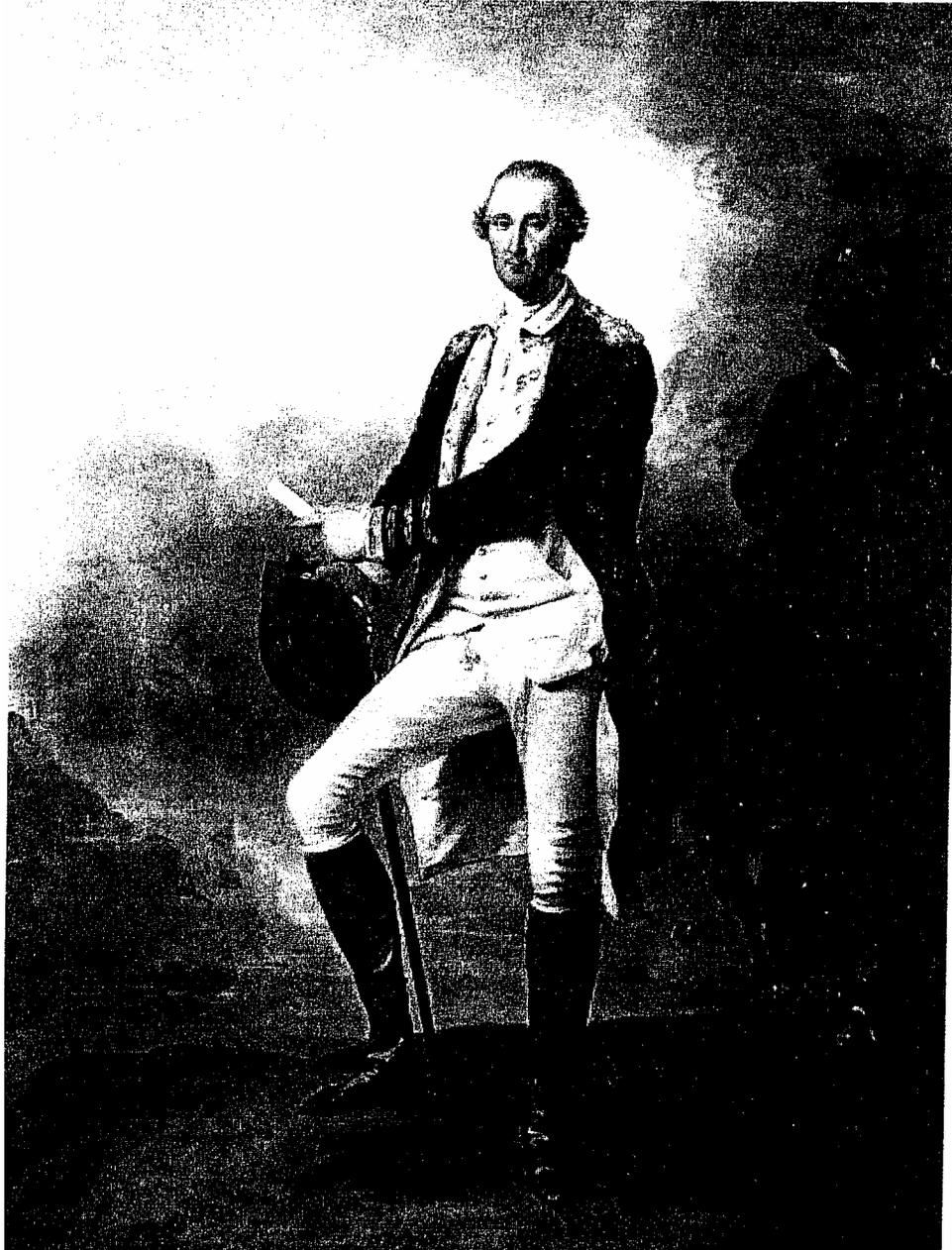


## George Washington Character Lessons



Jeff Dacus

Boston University  
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## The Character of George Washington

Materials needed: Dictionaries, six large pieces of construction paper or tag board, background readings on George Washington, computer access, and paper for individual students.

Background: This lesson is based on characteristics that George Washington exhibited throughout his life. Students will learn and remember by posting their work on each topic around the classroom, discussing the topics as a group and individually, and completing a unit notebook.

### Lesson One: Introducing Characteristics of George Washington

1. A good way to introduce George Washington is to ask students to reflect on the image we see everyday on the one-dollar bill. *What can you tell about George Washington by looking at this picture? Why is George Washington on the dollar and on the quarter?*
2. *What made Washington so memorable or important? Now* introduce six characteristics of George Washington's life. The six in this lesson are education, integrity, physical presence, patriotism, positive attitude, and charity.
3. Have the students look up the characteristics in a dictionary and write down the definitions in a unit notebook. Have volunteers give examples of each trait orally to the rest of the class.
4. Divide the class into six groups. Assign each group one of the characteristics. Have them read the short account of Washington's life found at the Mt. Vernon website. Using any source available, on the web, in the library, at home, or in the classroom, each group will find three ways or examples of events or quotes from George Washington's life that

demonstrate the characteristic listed. They will write these down on the tag board or poster paper displayed around the room, and present their findings to the rest of the class in a short oral presentation.

### **Lesson Two: Education**

1. Discuss George Washington's educational background. Students should be familiar with Washington's background from their previous research. Emphasize the following points:

- Washington's lack of a formal education, no chance to go to school in England
- Washington's continual reading
- Washington's self-education, i.e. learning mathematics to learn to survey
- Washington's life experiences: working on the farm, surveying, travels to the frontier, and military service
- Washington's mentors: Lord Fairfax, brother Lawrence, Sally Fairfax, mother

2. After reading Washington's life and discussing his education, divide the students up into groups of three or four. Ask each group to come up with one short piece that shows this characteristic of Washington's life. Examples might be a short skit, drawing a comic strip, writing a poem, making a poster, or doing a short Power Point demonstration. 3. One member of each group presents their project to the class.

4. Have the class discuss the presentations. *How did Washington's education or lack of education affect his life? What was different about his opportunities for an education than yours?*

George Washington said, "Education ...is one of the surest means of enlightening and giving just ways of thinking to our citizens." (To Alexander Hamilton, September 1, 1796)

5. Class discussion: *What is Washington trying to say to Mr. Hamilton?*

### **Lesson Three: Integrity**

James Madison wrote that Washington was "...the last man in the world to whom any measure whatever of deceptive tendency could be creditably attended." Thomas Jefferson said, "His integrity was most pure, his justice the most inflexible I have ever known, no motives of interest or consanguinity, of friendship, or hatred, being able to bias his decisions."

1. *Madison and Jefferson are two men considered our Founding Fathers. They have a high opinion of Washington. Name someone today who is a celebrity that is well known for his or her integrity.*

2. *In the unit notebook, list five people or groups of people you trust the most. List five people or groups of people you trust the least. Can you trust individual people of a group that doesn't seem to have integrity? An example would be that a stereotype of car salesmen is that they are sneaky and deceitful. Is it possible to be an honest and trustworthy car salesman?*

3. *Jefferson lists several things that some people allow to influence their decisions.*

Discuss the meanings of "no motives of interest or consanguinity, of friendship, or hatred." *Can you think of something else that influences our integrity?*

### **Lesson Four: Physical Presence**

Explain to the students that Washington was about 6'2" and weighed a little over 200 pounds. Tell the story of how he threw a bar of iron farther than younger men and challenged them to match it. He was also termed by Jefferson to be the finest horseman of his age.

*1. Think of someone you know that impresses you with his or her size or physical ability. Which celebrities today are impressive because of their size? Is there a person you know who attracts attention wherever they go without saying anything?*

Abigail Adams said when she first met Washington in 1775, "...but I thought the half was not told me. Dignity with ease and complacency, the gentleman and the soldier, look agreeable in him. Modesty marks every line and feature of his face."

*2. Adams doesn't mention Washington's physical size. Yet she is impressed with him. Can you think of someone today whose impressive physical presence doesn't depend on his or her size or athletic ability?*

*3. Are there personal characteristics that impress you about someone? (Hair, clothing, accessories such as tattoos or jewelry?)*

### **Lesson Five: Patriotism**

1. Discuss with the students all of the services Washington performed for his country such as a member of the House of Burgesses, military, and the presidency. George Washington said in 1797, "Every man who is in the vigor of life ought to serve his country in whatever line it requires and he is fit for." (To David Humphreys at Mt. Vernon)

*2. Are there other ways to serve our country besides politics and military service? In your notebook list three ways to serve our country outside of politics and the military.*

3. Washington served with the British Army and then fought against it. *Was he patriotic or a traitor?* Discuss with students limits of patriotism and civil disobedience. Include a discussion of the non-violent protests of the British policies.

4. *In your notebook, list three people you know personally that are serving the nation in some capacity.*

### **Lesson Six: Positive attitude**

1. Washington was often in tough spots. Discuss his journey through the Ohio Backcountry, his military defeats, and deaths of relatives. Despite these typical eighteenth century tragedies, he remained steady and even positive in his outlook. During the darkest days of the Revolution, Washington wrote these letters: "I flatter myself that a superintending Providence is ordering everything for the best and that, in due time, all will end well." (To Landon Carter, October 27, 1777) "I have no doubt but that everything happens so for the best; that we shall triumph over all our misfortunes and shall, in the end, be ultimately happy." (To Marquis de Lafayette, Valley Forge, December 31, 1777)

2. *Think of some event or time in your own life that things were going poorly. Think of how difficult it must be to write the things that Washington did. Is it always possible to have a positive attitude?*

3. *Think of our culture today. Do we emphasize the negative? Are we always critical of others? Is criticism often our way of joking?*

4. *Do you know of anyone who always seems to have a positive attitude? In your notebook, list three people who always seem to look at the good side of things.*

### **Lesson Seven: Charity**

1. George Washington and other wealthy landowners had little money. Explain to the students that wealth was not cash. His property was his wealth, especially land, slaves, and stocks.

2. In the colonies churches were given special lands and money called glebes that were used to provide for poor and widows. Many wealthy men were leaders in their churches in charge of providing and distributing these monies. Washington served in this capacity with his local parish.

3. Washington took in the orphaned children of his brothers and sisters. He provided money for the education of other children.

Even when he was not at home, Washington instructed his estate managers to provide for others:

"Let your heart feel for the afflictions and distresses of everyone, and let your hand give in proportion to your purse, remembering ... that it is not everyone who asketh that deserveth charity." (To Bushrod Washington, January 15, 1783) He also instructed his grandson:

"Never let an indigent person ask without receiving something, if you have the means." (To George Washington Parke Custis, November 15, 1796)

4. *In your notebook, list at least five ways we can help those less fortunate than ourselves.* Have members of the class present their ideas.

5. If possible, have students organize an activity to assist those less fortunate. Have them research a local organization such as Meals on Wheels, Loaves and Fishes, or Toys for Tots that provide meals, food, or other assistance to the needy. Have them do a penny

drive, canned food drive, Thanksgiving or Christmas baskets, or other creative ways to help others.

**Conclusion:**

In their notebooks, have the students write down their impressions of George Washington. *Who is the man on the dollar bill? Why is he honored by being on the dollar bill? Has their impression changed since they began the unit? Are there any other public figures that share these characteristics with Washington?* In their own life, are there adults like teachers or parents that have these characteristics? Do the students have these characteristics? Have students list any people today that they consider having all of these characteristics. Have students write in their notebooks their own list of five characteristics of a good citizen. Collect the notebooks.