

George Washington Writes!  
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Grade 5

The Indiana Department of Education adopted Social Studies Standards for grades 1-8 in 2000. The 5<sup>th</sup> grade standards focus on the American Revolution and the foundations of the United States government. In these standards, George Washington is mentioned in a grouping of "American leaders." It is obvious that neither the American Revolution nor the creation of our government could be fully taught or learned without studying George Washington. But because of the standards, and the requirements of state testing, Washington might not receive the time he once commanded in an elementary school classroom. Therefore, as a way to bring George Washington's words and actions to the front, the following lesson incorporates his words, letters, and documents into existing curriculum that support and fulfill state requirements.

In addition to the existing study of the American Revolution and the forming of our government:

1. Students and Teacher will read together the following quotation from George Washington in a letter to Nathanael Greene in 1783:

*If Historiographers should be hardy enough to fill the page of History with the advantages that have been gained with unequal numbers (on the part of America) in the course of this contest, and attempt to relate the distressing circumstances under which they have been obtained, it is more than probable that Posterity will bestow on their labors the epithet and marks of fiction; for it will not be believed that such a force as Great Britain has employed for eight years in this Country could be baffled in their plan of Subjugating it by numbers infinitely less, composed of Men oftentimes half starved; always in Rags, without pay, and experiencing, at times, every species of distress which human nature is capable of undergoing.*

2. Students will highlight key words and phrases such as: *for it will not be believed,*

*eight years in this country,* and *always in rags, without pay,*

A discussion will be held to help students gain an understanding of the meaning and context of the letter.

3. Students will give an oral summary of the quotation to another student to help check understanding.

4. Students will choose a smaller quotation from the passage that will be incorporated into a "practice" historical fiction letter they create.

These passages might include ones already discussed or students might want to select a phrase on their own from the above quotation.

5. Students will read their historical fiction letter to a small group and edit together based on the given rubric.

6. Students will rewrite their first attempt to make their letter stronger.

7. Students will choose their own letter or phrase from a small listing of George Washington's words to read and write about. The list might include:

To Israel Putnam in 1776:

*The distinction between a well-regulated army and a mob is the good order and discipline of the first and the licentious and disorderly behavior of the latter.*

A focus of student letters might discuss the challenges Washington faces with his young army, his temper, or the discipline of the British Army.

To John Augustine Washington in 1754:

*I fortunately escaped without a wound, thought the right wing where I stood was exposed to and received all the enemy's fire...I heard the bullets whistle, and believe me there was something charming in the sound.*

A focus of student letters might discuss Washington's interest in the army and how he thought about a military career in the British Army and later the Continental Army.

Circular to the States in 1783:

*At this auspicious period, the United States came into existence as a nation, and if their citizens should not be completely free and happy, the fault will be entirely their own.*

A focus of student letters might discuss the struggles of a new nation, the sacrifice of its soldiers, and the framework of its government.

To James Warren in 1779:

*Our cause is noble; it is the cause of mankind!*

A focus of student letters might discuss the overwhelming obstacles of the Continental Army and the reasons for the revolution.

To Catherine Macaulay Graham in 1790:

*That the government, though not absolutely perfect, is one of the best in the world, I have little doubt.*

A focus of student letters might discuss the framework of government, the Constitution, and the causes of the American Revolution.

8. Students will write/edit/rewrite their letter as George Washington might have.

Assessment will focus on:

Historical Content and Accuracy - How much historical content has been included, either from class work or readings, and how does it relate to the quotation.

Voice - How well does the quote fit into their historical fiction letter and other writings of Washington.

Historical Creativeness - Optional - allows students an artistic outlet when trying to recreate the look and style of Washington's writings.

9. Students will authenticate their final letter in the physical style George Washington would have used.

Language Arts Connection

Though the lesson is focused on history, students will have a great opportunity to strengthen skills learned in Language Arts.

Using context clues to gain meaning and understanding is a valuable skill that is modeled and practiced in this lesson. Using appropriate voice in writing is a challenging skill that is also practiced and assessed in this assignment.

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## Rubric

Student Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

	President	Commander of the Continental Army	Colonel	Soldier	New Recruit	Grade
Historical Content and Accuracy	Uses a great amount of information, all related to quote	Uses a good amount of information, most related to quote	Uses basic information, most related quote	Uses very little information, some relates to quote	Use no information that relates to quote	
Voice	Seamless integration of quote, no modern language	Integrated quote with very little modern language	Quote integrated with some modern language	Some integration of quote, more modern language	Very little integration of quote, mostly modern language	
Historical Creativeness	Letter looks original and authentic	Letter Looks authentic to time few errors	Letter looks authentic, some errors	Letter lacks authenticity some errors	Letter lacks authenticity, many errors	
Comments						

