

George Washington: Past, Present & Future
A Fifth Grade Unit on Characterizing a Leader

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This fifth grade unit will be taught in my classroom after we have already covered the French & Indian War, the Revolutionary War, the Constitution, and Washington's years as president. This will allow for a lot of prior knowledge for the students to use for this character analysis of Washington. This unit utilizes primary sources and current events for students to relate Washington's characteristics to themselves and the world around them. The lessons are of varying difficulty and length and can be adapted easily for different learning styles.

THE PAST

Lesson One:

Objective: Students will identify character traits of Washington using primary sources. They will explain the character traits to classmates and give examples of the traits being used by Washington from the primary source and from prior learnings.

Materials:

5 letters written by George Washington taken from:

www.pbs.org/georgewashington/collection

10 quotes from Washington from *The Quotable George Washington*

Highlighters

Paper/Pens

Length: 45 minutes

Procedure:

- 1.) Divide students into five small groups of 4 or 5 with one highlighter per group and a different letter and 2 quotes composed by Washington.
- 2.) Students read the letters and quotes in their group and identify and highlight phrases and words that show characteristics of Washington's personality and abilities. They discuss prior actions and words of Washington to support their findings.
- 3.) Students jigsaw into new groups so a person from each original group is represented. Students share their findings.
- 4.) As a whole group, discuss characteristics found and proof of them and write them on the board/overhead for students to write down for the next lesson.

Assessment: Evaluate student discussions and highlighting to look for understanding. Whole group discussion will also show understanding of correct analysis when coupled with their evidence that they explain.

NOTE: If the letters of Washington are too difficult for the students to understand, give them only certain sections, underline the important sections for them to focus on, or do not use a letter and instead use more of the quotations.

Lesson Two:

Objective: Students will compare and contrast the characteristics of George Washington to their own characteristics.

Materials:

Pens/Paper

List of characteristics from previous lesson

Length: 25 minutes

Procedure:

- 1.) Individual students will draw a Venn diagram on their paper with the labels of Washington's characteristics, similarities, and personal characteristics along the top of the 3 sections of the diagram.
- 2.) Students write the similarities and differences between Washington's characteristics and their own. They may refer to the list written from the previous lesson.
- 3.) Volunteers share their work and the paper is handed in for assessment purposes.

Assessment: The diagram itself will serve as an assessment tool to show the students' understanding.

THE PRESENT

Lesson One:

Objective: Students will read a current event from a newspaper and reply to the editor in the voice of Washington showing characteristics of how he would have replied to the situation.

Materials:

Newspapers
Pens/Paper

Length: 50 minutes

Procedure:

- 1.) Students choose an article in the newspaper that shows a current problem, solution or both.
- 2.) Students write a business format letter to the editor of the paper pretending they are George Washington. They will respond to the article how they feel Washington would and will give thoughts on how the problem should be addressed/solved according to Washington's characteristics.
- 3.) Volunteers share their letters and turn in for assessment. This might need to be finished as homework especially if you require a final draft of the letter.

Assessment: The letters will be used as an assessment tool to show the understanding of a business format letter, first person point of view through Washington's voice, and a correct understanding of how Washington might handle the situation according to the students' past learnings and discussions.

Lesson Two:

Objective: Students will identify a decision made recently by some person and predict what decision Washington would have made based on his character study.

Materials:

Pens/Paper

Length: 25 minutes

Procedure:

- 1.) Students think of a major decision made by any person recently. It could be a national, local, school decision, etc.
- 2.) Students contemplate and write what decision Washington would have made in that same situation and reasons why.
- 3.) Students pair up and share their thinking.
- 4.) Volunteers share their thinking with the whole class.

Assessment: Through student dialogue, the teacher will be able to make an informal assessment of ability of students to apply Washington's characteristics to decision making.

THE FUTURE

Lesson One:

Objective: Students will identify decisions they will be making in their future, analyze how they might make the decision, and predict what decision Washington might make based on his character study.

Materials:

Pens/Paper

Length: 25 minutes

Procedure:

- 1.) Students individually think of and write down three major decisions they might make in their life sometime. Ex: where to go to college, what career they want, etc.
- 2.) Students write down factors and strategies to consider in order to make these decisions.
- 3.) Students write down how Washington would respond to these decisions and give support from his quotations and correspondence to back up their prediction.
- 4.) Students get in groups of two or three to share one of their writings on a decision. Students turn in their writing for an informal assessment.

Assessment: The students turn in their writing to show understanding of how they might address a decision and compare it to how Washington would. The students must show accurate support from Washington's writings that correlate to their Washington prediction.

Lesson Two:

Objective: Students analyze future national problems and predict what advice Washington might give to future national leaders.

Materials:

None

Length: 10-15 minutes

Procedure:

- 1.) As a whole group, ask students to think of problems our nation will face in the future. Ex: nuclear war, global warming, fuel shortages, etc.
- 2.) Share the problems and discuss what advice Washington would give to national leaders to face these problems and give reasons why.

Assessment: Through the discussion, students will show their understanding of future national problems and appropriate advice Washington would give to the nation's leaders.