

TEACHING AMERICAN HISTORY PROJECT

Lesson Title – A Description of George Washington

Grade - 8

Length of class period – 50 min.

Inquiry – (What essential question are students answering, what problem are they solving, or what decision are they making?)

Having recently concluded our Revolutionary War Unit, should Thomas Jefferson be considered a reliable source of information in assessing the character and personal attributes of George Washington?

Objectives (What content and skills do you expect students to learn from this lesson?)

1. Students will gain a unique insight of George Washington as assessed by Thomas Jefferson in response to a questioning letter by Dr. Walter Jones.
2. Students will become familiar with several challenging vocabulary words.
3. Students will discern positive versus negative comments about Washington.
4. Students will give specific examples of why they feel Jefferson's account is or is not reliable.

Materials (What primary sources or local resources are the basis for this lesson? – (please attach)
-Each student will receive a copy of Thomas Jefferson's description of George Washington (as written to Dr. Walter Jones.)

Activities (What will you and your students do during the lesson to promote learning?)

1. As students follow along on their own papers, instructor will orally read Jefferson's brief account, stopping frequently to discuss challenging vocabulary words and many salient content points.
2. At these conversation points, students will be encouraged to share their observations, questions and opinions as the instructor will interact heavily with them, sharing examples, etc.

How will you assess what student learned during this lesson?

In a written essay, in response to the class discussion during the reading, students will be expected to infer whether any of Jefferson's words contain hyperbole or if his high praise was warranted. Students should also assess which passages could be considered negative and how that affects their own opinions of the piece. Students should further consider the poetic beauty of Jefferson's use of the written word. Finally, students will evaluate specific examples of why they do or do not think Jefferson gives an accurate portrayal of George Washington.

Connecticut Framework Performance Standards –

Standard 1- Historical Thinking

- formulate historical questions based on primary and secondary sources, including documents, eyewitness accounts, letters and diaries, artifacts, real or simulated historical sites, charts, graphs, diagrams and written texts
- examine data to determine the adequacy and sufficiency of evidence, point of view, historical context, bias, distortion and propaganda, and to distinguish fact from opinion;
- analyze data in order to see persons and events in their historical context, understand causal factors and appreciate changeover time;
- examine current concepts, issues, events and themes from historical perspectives and identify principle conflicting ideas between competing narratives or interpretations of historical events; and
- develop written narratives and short interpretative essays, as well as other appropriate presentations from investigations of source materials.

Standard 4- Applying History

- display empathy for people who have lived in the past



Document Analysis Worksheet

1. What type of document is this? (newspaper, map, report, advertisement, meeting minutes, census report, patent, letter, diary, etc.)
2. List any stamps, seals, watermarks, letterheads or other special markings that you see.
3. Circle any words you don't know. Look them up and write their meanings in the margins.
4. When was this document created?
5. Who created it?
6. Did this person have a position or title?
7. Who was the intended audience for this document?
8. What is the subject of this document? What ideas or topics are in it?
9. Why do you think this document was written? What did the author want readers to do?
10. What is the tone of the piece? Do you think the tone fits the message?
11. List three things the author said that you think are important:
12. List 2 things the document tells you about life in the US at the time it was written:
13. If you could, what question would you ask the author about this document?

Adapted from a form developed by the Education Staff, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC 20408



A Description of George Washington

by Thomas Jefferson

Thomas Jefferson, author of the Declaration of Independence, knew all the chief leaders of the Revolution and the new republic. He himself served as third President of the United States. He also wrote on many subjects ranging from philosophy, religion, and science to education and farming. As he grew older, he was often asked about leaders of the Revolutionary era. This excerpt is from a letter Jefferson wrote to Dr. Walter Jones, who had asked about George Washington.

I think I knew General Washington intimately and thoroughly; and were I called on to delineate his character, it should be in terms like these.

His mind was great and powerful, without being of the very first order; his penetration [keenness of mind] strong, though not so acute as that of a Newton, Bacon, or Locke; and as far as he saw, no judgment was ever sounder. It was slow in operation, being little aided by invention or imagination, but sure in conclusion. Hence the common remark of his officers, of the advantage he derived [gained] from councils of war, where hearing all suggestions, he selected whatever was best; and certainly no General ever planned his battles more judiciously. But if deranged [upset] during the course of the action, if any member of his plan was dislocated by sudden circumstances, he was slow in readjustment. The consequence was, that he often failed in the field, and rarely against an enemy in station, as in Boston and York.

He was incapable of fear, meeting personal dangers with the calmest unconcern. Perhaps the strongest feature in his character was prudence, never acting until every circumstance, every consideration, was

delineate describe
acute sharp
judiciously wisely
prudence the act of being careful or cautious and not taking chances
colloquial conversational
mediocrity the quality of being of ordinary ability

maturely weighed; refraining if he saw a doubt, but, when once decided, going through with his purpose, whatever obstacles opposed. . . .

His heart was not warm in its affections; but he exactly calculated every man's value, and gave him a solid esteem proportioned to it. His person, you know, was fine, his stature exactly what one would wish, his deportment [bearing] easy, erect and noble; the best horseman of his age, and the most graceful figure that could be seen on horseback. Although in the circle of his friends, where he might be unreserved with safety, he took a free share in conversation, his colloquial talents were not above mediocrity, possessing neither copiousness of ideas, nor fluency of words. In public, when called on for a sudden opinion, he was unready, short and embarrassed. Yet he wrote readily, rather diffusely [wordily], in an easy and correct style. . . .

On the whole, his character was, in its mass, perfect, in nothing bad, in a few points indifferent; and it may truly be said, that never did nature and fortune combine more perfectly to make a man great, and to place him in the same constellation with whatever worthies have merited from man an everlasting remembrance.

copiousness greatness in number
fluency the quality of speaking easily and clearly
indifferent neither good nor bad
constellation a group of stars; here: an elevated position
worthies very important people

Think It Over

1. Would you consider Thomas Jefferson to be a reliable source of information about George Washington? Why or why not?