

FROM EXECUTIVE PRODUCER DORIS KEARNS GOODWIN

# WASHINGTON

## Education Guide



3-NIGHT MINISERIES EVENT  
FEBRUARY 16 | 8P

**H**  
HISTORY



*Washington*, a six-hour HISTORY® miniseries event narrated by Emmy award-winning actor **Jeff Daniels** and executive produced by world-renowned presidential historian and Pulitzer Prize®-winning bestselling author **Doris Kearns Goodwin**, chips away at the bronzed and marbled image of America's first President and brings to life the man whose name is known to all, but whose epic story is understood by few. Most know the highlights of George Washington's life –he was a general, crossed the Delaware, led the Continental Army to victory over the British, was America's first President and is the face on the dollar bill –but there is so much more to his life than his accomplishments.

*Washington* explores the full arc of his journey and weaves together dramatic live action sequences, excerpts from Washington's letters and insights from a roster of notable experts, historians and scholars to tell a very personal story about the evolution of one of history's most iconic leaders. This is an excellent program for students to explore George Washington's leadership and life, and to discuss his legacy in our world today.

#### **CURRICULUM LINKS:**

***Washington*** would be useful for History, American History, Social Studies, Political Science and Government courses. The content is appropriate for advanced middle school through college students. *Washington* is rated TV-14V. Due to some violent scenes, we recommend that educators view the series before recommending it to students below 10th grade.

#### **TO THE EDUCATOR:**

***Washington*** explores the transformation of George Washington from a young man through the end of his life. It provides many opportunities for students to consider and discuss how Washington changed over time, how his decision-making affected others, and how he both shaped his time and was shaped by his own circumstances. We encourage educators to use this guide as a resource and to develop their own lesson plans or activities best suited to their students and their specific educational benchmarks.

## GENERAL DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

In addition to discussion questions included throughout this guide, below are some general questions students can keep in mind during or after they watch Washington.

1. If you had to describe George Washington in three words, what would they be?
2. How did Washington learn from his mistakes during the French and Indian War? Why do you think he continue to pursue leadership even after these challenges?
3. Who do you think were the most important people in Washington's life?
4. Why do you think so many people put their trust in George Washington?
5. What do you think were Washington's greatest strengths and weaknesses as a leader?

## QUICK LINKS:

### ***History.com:***

<https://www.history.com/topics/us-presidents/george-washington>

<https://play.history.com/list/washington-preview-list>

<https://www.history.com/george-washington-timeline-life-events/>

### ***George Washington's Mount Vernon:***

<https://www.mountvernon.org/education/>

### ***Be Washington: It's Your Turn to Lead Interactive game***

<http://play.bewashington.org/>

### ***American Battlefield Trust:***

<https://www.battlefields.org/learn/revolutionary-war>

<https://www.battlefields.org/learn/maps/revolutionary-war-animated-map>





# **PART ONE**



## ABOUT PART ONE

*A young George Washington hungers for fame and prestige as an officer in the British military. Sent by the British royal governor to deliver an ultimatum to the French in the West, the inexperienced young Washington learns a hard lesson about leadership when his failures in the field inadvertently kick off a world war. Washington emerges from this conflict as America's first folk hero, just as he begins to grow disenchanted with the empire he once aspired to serve. And with a wealthy new wife at his side and a lucrative business at Mount Vernon, Washington has put himself at the center of this country's story—chosen to lead the coming revolution.*

## TERMS TO DEFINE

- Colony
- Frontier
- Commission
- Assassination
- Alliance
- House of Burgesses
- Enlightenment
- Resource
- Surveyor



## PART ONE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why do you think historians describe Washington as a “stranger” and a “mystery”?
2. What impressions of Washington did you have before watching this episode? Did your impressions change? Why or why not?
3. How would you describe Washington as a young man?
4. How do you think the death of Washington's father affected him?
5. Was there anything you found surprising about Washington's early military career?
6. What was the French and Indian War, and why was it important?
7. What are some reasons Washington was so determined to rise in the ranks of the British military?
8. Why did Washington eventually turn against the British?
9. What kind of a leader do you think Washington was at this point in his career? Does his leadership style change over time?
10. In what ways does Washington's marriage to Martha Dandridge Custis affect his life?
11. Where do George and Martha Washington's wealth come from? What role does slavery and enslaved people play in their life and success?

## PRIMARY SOURCE ACTIVITY 1: WASHINGTON'S SURVEYS

### George Washington's First Job

As a young man, Washington was employed as a surveyor, first working on surveys with and for his friend and neighbor George Fairfax. In 1749, when he was 17, he began his professional surveying career. Over the course of his life, he completed hundreds of surveys, both of lands on the western frontier and of Mount Vernon.

Find out more about Washington's career as a surveyor from Mount Vernon: [www.mountvernon.org/library/digitalhistory/digital-encyclopedia/article/surveying/](http://www.mountvernon.org/library/digitalhistory/digital-encyclopedia/article/surveying/)

### Discussion Questions:

1. What is a surveyor and why were surveys important in the 18th century?
2. In what ways might Washington's understanding of the American colonies have been different from that of other colonists because of his experience as a surveyor in the West?
3. How might Washington's experience as a surveyor have been important to his military career?
4. Are surveys still prepared and used today?

### Related Activity:

**Be the Surveyor.** Task students with "surveying" their classroom, school grounds, homes or a neighborhood park or playground. These can be hand-written or computer-generated and should include physical landmarks and a distance scale. Distances can be measured by foot or with help from computer apps. In groups, compare and contrast students' surveys, and have each group report back to the class: What do the surveys reveal about similarities and differences between different areas surveyed? What might the surveys reveal about their community? What surprising information is uncovered? How was the landscape different in Washington's time, and what might it have been like to do this work in Washington's day on the Western frontier? What do you think he learned from it?



## PRIMARY SOURCE ACTIVITY 2: THE JOURNAL OF MAJOR WASHINGTON

### George Washington's Frontier Journal

In the fall of 1753, while he was a young major in the Virginia Regiment, Washington was asked by Virginia's royal governor Robert Dinwiddie to travel into what was then called the Ohio country (today's northwestern Pennsylvania) to deliver a letter to French Canadian forces. The French had recently begun to move troops south from the Great Lakes, building forts in preparation to move further into land that Dinwiddie believed belonged to Virginia and Pennsylvania. The letter that Dinwiddie sent with Washington asked the French to immediately stop this activity. When Washington returned from this expedition in early 1754, he wrote this account of his journey at the request of Dinwiddie, who had it printed. The journal was widely distributed and made Major George Washington one of the most well-known people in the American colonies.

The full text of the "Journal of Major George Washington," including a more complete introduction to the journal, can be found here, from the University of Nebraska at Lincoln : [digitalcommons.unl.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1033&context=etas](http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1033&context=etas)

Find out more about the historical significance of the "Journal of Major George Washington" from Mount Vernon here: [www.mountvernon.org/library/digitalhistory/digital-encyclopedia/article/the-journal-of-major-george-washington/](http://www.mountvernon.org/library/digitalhistory/digital-encyclopedia/article/the-journal-of-major-george-washington/)

### Discussion Questions:

1. What is the difference between a primary and a secondary source? What is bias? In what ways can both types of sources be biased?
2. What does this journal tell us about George Washington as a person? What do you think people of the time thought about him after reading it?
3. Why do you think Robert Dinwiddie had the journal printed and distributed to the public? What message was he trying to send to the public?
4. What effect do you think the printing of the journal may have had on George Washington's career? His personal life?

### Related Activity:

**George Washington, Action Hero.** Historians have often described George Washington as a sort of "action hero" during this period of his life. Ask students to read his frontier journal and make a list of events they feel were particularly interesting or exciting. Then, have each student design his or her own "comic strip" that tells the story of one or more of the events from his or her list. Visuals can be hand drawn or computer-generated. This list from CommonSense Education contains recommendations for "classroom-friendly" digital comic creation tools: [www.commonsense.org/education/top-picks/classroom-friendly-websites-and-apps-for-making-comics](http://www.commonsense.org/education/top-picks/classroom-friendly-websites-and-apps-for-making-comics)

**Fun Fact:** The Battle of Fort Necessity was the only battle of George Washington's career in which Washington surrendered.



## PRIMARY SOURCE ACTIVITY 3: WASHINGTON & THE FRENCH AND INDIAN WAR

### Surrender at Fort Necessity

On July 3, 1754, the Battle of Fort Necessity was fought between the English and French. It was an opening skirmish in what would become the French and Indian War (1754–1763). The battle came just after Indian allies of the British killed French commander Joseph Coulon de Villiers, Sieur de Jumonville, at what became known as the Battle of Jumonville Glen. The skirmish at Fort Necessity ended with the surrender of George Washington of the Virginia Regiment and John Mackay of the British regulars to the French, commanded by Louis Coulon de Villiers de Jumonville, who was the older half-brother of Joseph Coulon de Villiers. This document contains the articles of capitulation that were signed that night.

Find out more about what happened at Fort Necessity here: [www.nps.gov/articles/prelude-to-war.htm](http://www.nps.gov/articles/prelude-to-war.htm)

Text versions of the articles of capitulation in English and French can be found here: [www.nps.gov/fone/learn/historyculture/capitulation.htm](http://www.nps.gov/fone/learn/historyculture/capitulation.htm)

### Discussion Questions:

1. Why are the original Articles of Capitulation written in French?
2. How is the killing of Jumonville described in the second paragraph and in Article VII?
3. What is an assassination? How is it different from other deaths that occur in battle?
4. Why do you think the French wanted Washington to sign this document?
5. How do you think people in France felt about the news of this incident after reading this document?
6. How did George Washington attempt to “save face” when he realized what he had admitted to by signing the document?

### Related Activity:

**Two Sides to a Story.** The Battles of Jumonville Glen and Fort Necessity helped to spark the French and Indian War, and each side had a different interpretation of these events. In the spirit of Washington's frontier journal, ask students to prepare two journals chronicling these battles. One should be written from the French point of view, and the other from the British perspective. Students can create personas of a French and a British soldier observing the events. Each journal should include several entries discussing (1) the events at Jumonville Glen (2) the killing of Joseph Coulon de Villiers (3) the Battle of Fort Necessity and (4) the signing of the articles of capitulation.



# **PART TWO**



## ABOUT PART TWO

*The British are no longer coming, they're here. And as the American colonies make their final break from the British empire, their newly minted commander-in-chief George Washington realizes he's been handed a nearly impossible task—fighting the most powerful and seasoned armed forces in the world with a ragtag group of soldiers that is undisciplined, inexperienced and underfunded. With no formal military training or major victory to his name, Washington sets the course for achieving the unimaginable through cunning, ingenuity and sheer force of will. And he is transformed in the process, from a man driven by personal ambition and animus for the British, to a man called to lead a cause far larger—the cause of liberty.*

## TERMS TO DEFINE

- Commander-in-chief
- Militia
- Artillery
- Loyalists
- Redcoat
- Hessian
- Treason
- Traitor

## PART TWO DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why do you think Washington accepted the commission as commander-in-chief of the American army? Why do you think the Continental Congress chose him?
2. What are some of the challenges Washington faced when he took on this role?
3. How do you think the colonists felt when they saw the British fleet arrive in New York Harbor?
4. How was the Declaration of Independence important to the American war effort? What consequences did it have?
5. What personal qualities do you think made Washington a good leader?
6. In what ways could Washington have been a stronger leader?
7. How did the people Washington chose to surround himself with help him succeed?
8. Why do you think British commanders sometimes referred to Washington as the "old fox"? How does he use retreat as a strategy?
9. What was the "whisper campaign" and how did Washington respond to it? How about his aides?
10. Why was the victory at Saratoga important to the Patriot cause?



## PRIMARY SOURCE ACTIVITY 1: FROM SUBJECTS TO REBELS

### Declaring Independence

Even after the initial battles of what would become the Revolutionary War broke out, few colonists desired complete independence from Great Britain, and those who did—like John Adams—were considered radical. Things changed over the course of the next year, however, as Britain attempted to crush the rebels with all the force of its great army. In his message to Parliament in October 1775, King George III railed against the rebellious colonies and ordered the enlargement of the royal army and navy. News of this reached America in January 1776, strengthening the radicals' cause and leading many conservatives to abandon their hopes of reconciliation. In March 1776, North Carolina's revolutionary convention became the first to vote in favor of independence; seven other colonies had followed suit by mid-May. On June 7, the Virginia delegate Richard Henry Lee introduced a motion calling for the colonies' independence before the Continental Congress when it met at the Pennsylvania State House (later Independence Hall) in Philadelphia. Amid heated debate, Congress postponed the vote on Lee's resolution and called a recess for several weeks. Before departing, however, the delegates also appointed a five-man committee—Thomas Jefferson of Virginia; John Adams of Massachusetts; Roger Sherman of Connecticut; Benjamin Franklin of Pennsylvania; and Robert R. Livingston of New York—to draft a formal statement justifying the break with Great Britain. That document would become known as the Declaration of Independence.

Read the full text of the Declaration of Independence here: [www.archives.gov/founding-docs/declaration-transcript](http://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/declaration-transcript)

Read the full text of King George III's proclamation here: [teachingamericanhistory.org/library/document/proclamation-by-the-king-for-suppressing-rebellion-and-sedition/](http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/document/proclamation-by-the-king-for-suppressing-rebellion-and-sedition/)

### Discussion Questions:

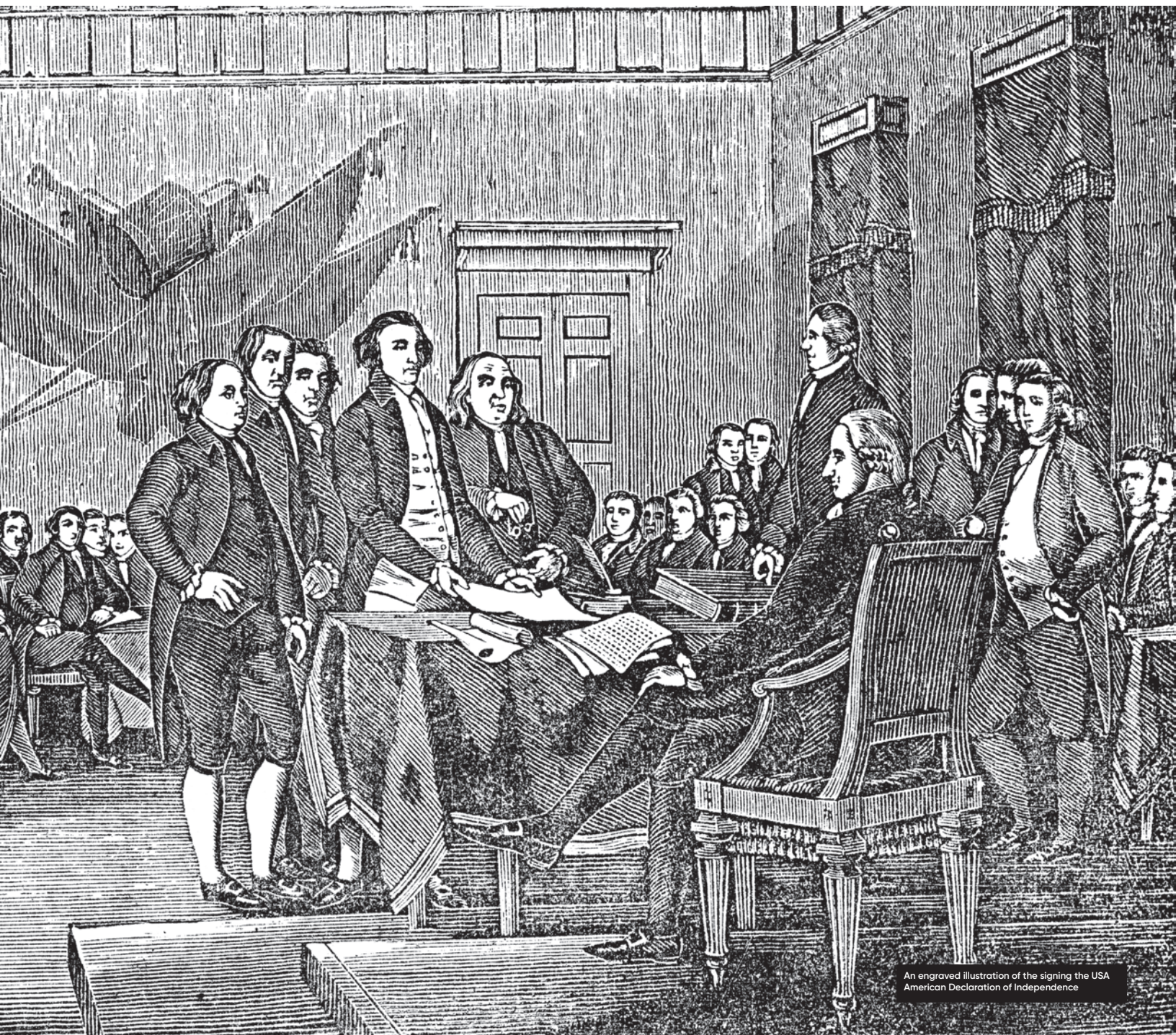
1. How do you think King George III and the people of Great Britain felt about the rebellion in the colonies? Why?
2. What are some of the reasons the delegates to the Second Continental Congress decided it was time to declare independence from Great Britain?
3. What does the wording of the Declaration of Independence tell you about what was important to its writers and signers?
4. Even as the founders of America were writing about the "unalienable" rights of "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness," some 450,000 men, women and children were enslaved in the colonies. Why do you think slavery wasn't mentioned in the Declaration of Independence? What are some of the reasons the founders didn't try to extend these same rights to the enslaved people in America?

The final text of the Declaration of Independence was approved on July 4, 1776, but it wasn't signed until August 2.  
Credit: National Archives



## Related Activity:

**Conflict Resolution.** It's easy to forget that communication between the American colonies and Great Britain was slow and cumbersome, as all messages had to be sent via ship over the Atlantic Ocean. After reading the text of King George III's proclamation and the Declaration of Independence, have students imagine this scenario: What if King George III and the colonists could have spoken face to face? Ask students to write a dialogue in which the colonists present three or four of their most pressing concerns and King George and his advisers respond. This could also be acted out. Is it possible to come to a peaceful resolution that honors both sides' points of view?



An engraved illustration of the signing the USA American Declaration of Independence



## PRIMARY SOURCE ACTIVITY 2: CROSSING THE DELAWARE

### A Risky Crossing

Late on Christmas night, 1776, General George Washington led his troops in crossing the Delaware River from Pennsylvania to New Jersey, hoping to surprise a British Hessian force celebrating Christmas at their winter quarters in Trenton, New Jersey. The unconventional attack came after several months of substantial defeats for Washington's army that had resulted in the loss of New York City and other strategic points in the region. At about 11 p.m., Washington's army commenced its crossing of the half-frozen river at three locations. The 2,400 soldiers led by Washington successfully braved the icy and freezing river and reached the New Jersey side of the Delaware just before dawn. The other two divisions, made up of some 3,000 men and crucial artillery, failed to reach the meeting point at the appointed time. At approximately 8 a.m. on the morning of December 26, Washington's remaining force, separated into two columns, reached the outskirts of Trenton and descended on the unsuspecting Hessians. Trenton's 1,400 Hessian defenders were groggy from the previous evening's festivities and underestimated the Patriot threat after months of decisive British victories throughout New York. Washington's men quickly overwhelmed their defenses, and by 9:30 a.m. the town was surrounded. Although several hundred Hessians escaped, nearly 1,000 were captured at the cost of only four American lives. However, because most of Washington's army had failed to cross the Delaware, he was without adequate artillery or men and was forced to withdraw from the town. The victory was not particularly significant from a strategic point of view, but news of Washington's initiative raised the spirits of the American colonists, who previously feared that the Continental Army was incapable of victory.

Find out more about the crossing of the Delaware from Mount Vernon:

[www.mountvernon.org/george-washington/the-revolutionary-war/the-trenton-princeton-campaign/10-facts-about-washingtons-crossing-of-the-delaware-river/](http://www.mountvernon.org/george-washington/the-revolutionary-war/the-trenton-princeton-campaign/10-facts-about-washingtons-crossing-of-the-delaware-river/)



Read text of Washington's account here by clicking "show text" in the upper right hand corner of the image window: [www.loc.gov/resource/](http://www.loc.gov/resource/)

## Discussion Questions:

1. What are some of the reasons Washington decided to cross the Delaware to engage the British? What was at stake for Washington and the Americans?
2. What impression of the crossing of the Delaware do you get from examining Leutze's painting?
3. What details in the painting do you notice and what do they tell you?
4. Why do you think Leutze portrayed Washington standing in the boat? Does it seem likely to you that he was standing?
5. After reading Washington's account of the crossing and the facts from the Mount Vernon website, what details of the Leutze painting seem accurate? What does not seem accurate?

## Related Activity:

**Drawing on History.** Ask students to read George Washington's account of the crossing of the Delaware and do additional research on that night, including weather conditions, the type of boats used, the attire and placement of the soldiers as they traveled and the geography and landscape features of the Delaware River near McKonkey's Ferry. Then, based on this research, instruct each student to create a drawing or painting of the crossing of the Delaware. Each student can also prepare a description of their artwork, pointing out details and explaining why they chose to portray the crossing as they did. Display the artwork around the room, and, as class, discuss how their work compares and contrasts with Leutze's painting.





### PRIMARY SOURCE ACTIVITY 3: THE UNSEEN ENEMY

#### George Washington and Smallpox

George Washington contracted smallpox during his one and only visit outside of America, a trip to Barbados when he was 19. He recovered and was left with slight scarring and something far more important: immunity from smallpox. Immunity was uncommon in America at the time, as most people lived rather isolated lives and rarely traveled long distances. As a result, when smallpox arrived from Europe with British and Hessian soldiers, it posed a major threat to Americans and their chances at victory. Washington responded by choosing to inoculate his troops in what was the first mass wartime inoculation effort in history.

Find out more about George Washington and how he handled the threat of smallpox from Mount Vernon: [www.mountvernon.org/library/digitalhistory/digital-encyclopedia/article/smallpox/](http://www.mountvernon.org/library/digitalhistory/digital-encyclopedia/article/smallpox/)

More information on George Washington's decision to inoculate his troops from the Library of Congress: [www.loc.gov/rr/scitech/GW&smallpoxinoculation.html](http://www.loc.gov/rr/scitech/GW&smallpoxinoculation.html)

Excerpt of a Letter from George Washington to John Hancock, February 5, 1777

*The small pox has made such Head in every Quarter that I find it impossible to keep it from spreading thro the whole Army in the natural way. I have therefore determined, not only to innoculate all the Troops now here, that have not had it, but shall order Doctr Shippen to innoculate the Recruits as fast as they come in to Philadelphia. They will lose no time, because they will go thro the disorder while their cloathing Arms and accoutrements are getting ready.*

Credit: National Archives

## Discussion Questions:

1. What is smallpox and why is it dangerous? What is immunity?
2. Why do you think George Washington considered smallpox to be such a big risk to his army?
3. What do you think were some risks associated with Washington's decision to inoculate his troops?
4. How might the British have used Americans' lack of immunity to smallpox as a weapon?
5. Aside from Washington's troops, who else do you think may have been affected by smallpox? What groups of people in America might have been most at risk to smallpox? Why?
6. How might the war have unfolded differently had Washington not decided to inoculate his troops?

## Related Activity:

**Risk Analysis.** Ask students to conduct research on smallpox, including causes, symptoms, treatment and immunity levels among colonists. Then, have students take on the persona of an advisor to General Washington and prepare a risk analysis on smallpox. The analysis can include information on the disease culled from student research; illustrations; and a recommendation on whether Washington should inoculate his troops, including associated risks.

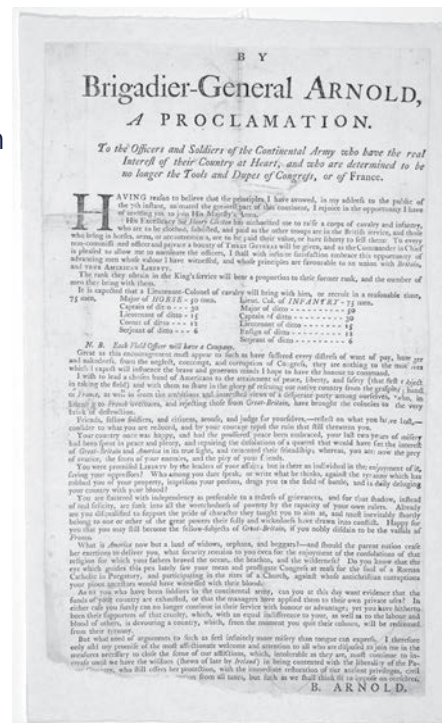




## PRIMARY SOURCE ACTIVITY 4: FROM HERO TO TRAITOR

### Benedict Arnold

Benedict Arnold was an early American hero of the Revolutionary War, who became one of the most infamous traitors in U.S. history after he switched sides and fought for the British. At the outbreak of the war, Arnold participated in the capture of the British garrison of Fort Ticonderoga in 1775. In 1776, he hindered a British invasion of New York at the Battle of Lake Champlain. The following year, he played a crucial role in bringing about the surrender of British General John Burgoyne's army at Saratoga, a critical victory that brought the French into the war on the American side. Yet Arnold never received the recognition he thought he deserved. In 1779, he entered into secret negotiations with the British, agreeing to turn over the U.S. post at West Point in return for money and a command in the British army. The plot was discovered, but Arnold escaped to British lines. His name has since become synonymous with the word "traitor." Afterward his plot was discovered, he was granted a British commission but was not liked by his colleagues and British soldiers were reluctant to fight under his command. When he later died in Great Britain, he was buried without military honors.



Read the full text of Benedict Arnold's Proclamation to Americans here:  
[www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/presentationsandactivities/presentations/timeline/amrev/homefrnt/arnold.html](http://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/presentationsandactivities/presentations/timeline/amrev/homefrnt/arnold.html)

### Discussion Questions:

1. Who was Benedict Arnold? What was he known for before he committed treason?
2. What were Benedict Arnold's reasons for turning his back on his country?
3. Why do you think the story of Arnold's treason is still so well-known nearly 250 years after the Revolution?
4. Why do you think Arnold wrote this letter? What was he trying to accomplish?
5. What are some of the arguments that Arnold makes in his letter?
6. Do you think he believed his pleas might be successful?
7. Do you find his argument convincing? Why or why not?

### Related Activity:

**Unlikely Penpals.** Ask students to compose a response to Benedict Arnold from the perspective of one of Washington's loyal aides or generals (for example, Alexander Hamilton, Marquis de Lafayette or Henry Knox). Students should refute at least three of Arnold's arguments, using evidence from their study of the American Revolution. The letter should also relay the author's personal feelings about Arnold's actions.



# **PART THREE**



## ABOUT PART THREE

*The Revolution has been won, but for Washington, the problems, even within his own army, are just beginning. With the fate of the young republic at stake, Washington once again rises to the moment, becoming the inevitable, though reluctant, hero his country needs. Having evolved from soldier to commander to victor, Washington does what no revolutionary leader has ever done before: He wills the power to the people. While warring nations attack America's borders and uprisings threaten from within, Washington builds the new United States up with his bare hands—enduring treachery and personal attacks—while setting the country on a course that still dictates much of the American experience to this day.*

## TERMS TO DEFINE

- Siege
- Redoubt
- Treaty
- Articles of Confederation
- Constitution
- Cabinet
- Partisan
- Legacy
- Abolition







## PART THREE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

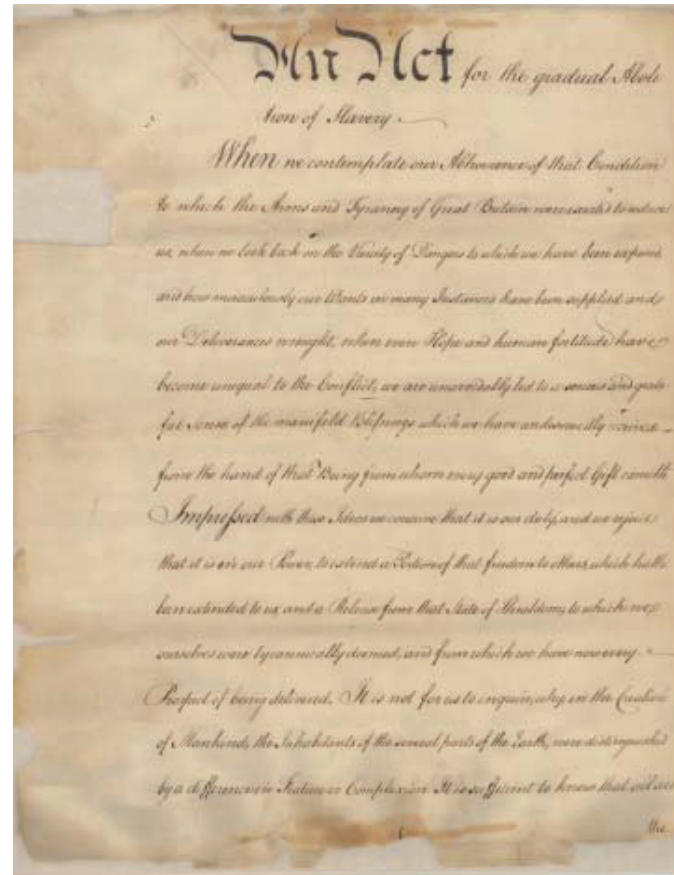
1. How did Washington deal with mutiny among his soldiers? Do you think he acted fairly?
2. Why was the alliance with France so important? What effect did it have on the war? Do you think the Americans would have won the Revolution without French support?
3. Why were soldiers in the Continental Army angry at the end of the war? Were their feelings justified? What was Washington's response, and why do you think it was effective?
4. Why was King George so surprised by Washington's decision to retire to Mount Vernon at the end of the war?
5. What were the weaknesses of the Articles of Confederation? Why did it fail?
6. Why were some Americans reluctant to form a strong federal government?
7. Why did Washington agree to serve as president? What challenges did Washington face as president?
8. What are some of the precedents and traditions begun by Washington that are still followed today?
9. What does Washington's response to Philadelphia's Gradual Abolition Act tell you about his feelings about slavery and racial equality?
10. Why were Washington and Hamilton's tax policies unpopular? Why did they believe these tax policies were important?
11. Why didn't Washington want to run for a second term?
12. Why did Washington believe neutrality was an important policy for the United States? Why was his decision so harshly criticized?
13. What is a partisan press? How did Washington react to the rise of a partisan press? Do you see any comparisons today to the partisan newspapers of Washington's time?
14. Why do you think his decision to free the other enslaved people he owned after Martha Washington's death reveals about his ideas about slavery?



## PRIMARY SOURCE ACTIVITY 1: GRADUAL ABOLITION ACT

### Philadelphia's Gradual Abolition Act of 1780

When Washington was elected president, he and his household—including several enslaved people—moved to New York City, home of the new nation's government. But the next year, in 1780, the federal capital was moved to Philadelphia, and the enslaved members of his household moved with him. Philadelphia was a hotbed for abolition, as well as home to a free black community of about 6,000 people, and in 1780, a new law had taken effect: the Gradual Abolition Act. This law dictated, among other things, that slaves belonging to non-residents could petition for their freedom after living in Philadelphia for six months. Although the law had exempted those enslaved by members of Congress, it did not explicitly exempt those belonging to members of the executive branch, leaving Washington with a dilemma. Rather than freeing those he enslaved in his household, or hiring paid servants, Washington made the decision to surreptitiously rotate his enslaved servants between Mount Vernon and Philadelphia so that none of them exceeded six months in Philadelphia. The meticulous nature of this rotation suggests a determination to maintain the enslavement of his household servants. One of the women the Washingtons enslaved, a personal attendant to Martha Washington named Ona Judge, ran away from their Philadelphia home to New Hampshire, where she built a life in Portsmouth's free black community. Although she was never captured, the Washingtons pursued Ona Judge until Washington's death in 1799.



Read more about the story of Ona Judge: [www.history.com/news/george-washington-and-the-slave-who-got-away](http://www.history.com/news/george-washington-and-the-slave-who-got-away)

Read more about the Gradual Abolition Act and get a transcript here: [www.phmc.state.pa.us/portal/communities/documents/1776-1865/abolition-slavery.html](http://www.phmc.state.pa.us/portal/communities/documents/1776-1865/abolition-slavery.html)





## Discussion Questions:

1. How would you describe the Washingtons' decision to rotate the people enslaved in their household in and out of Philadelphia? Why do you think they made that decision? What kind of planning would be required to execute such a plan?
2. Why do you think Washington was so determined to retain ownership of the people he enslaved?
3. Does his decision surprise you based on what else you've learned about Washington? Why or why not?
4. What words would you use to describe Ona Judge and her escape?
5. Has learning about Washington's response to the Gradual Abolition Act and Ona Judge's escape changed the way you think about Washington? Should it change the way Americans think about Washington? In what ways?

## Related Activity:

**Book Club.** In 2017, historian Erica Armstrong Dunbar published *Never Caught: The Washingtons' Relentless Pursuit of their Runaway Slave Ona Judge*. Based on painstaking historical research, *Never Caught* tells the story of Ona Judge, her life with the Washingtons and her escape to freedom in New Hampshire. As a class, or as homework, read *Never Caught* and discuss it as a class. (Helpful resources below.) Follow-up assignments might include: adapting sections of the book into a screenplay; reporting on Ona Judge's escape and the Washingtons' efforts to pursue her in a newspaper style; or creating a timeline of events that compares the timing of events in Washington's career to those in the history of slavery and in Judge's life.

### Never Caught Resources:

Interview with Erica Armstrong at the Aspen Institute:  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=XLJ8QdiQml4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XLJ8QdiQml4)

Erica Armstrong on *Never Caught* from Andrew W. Mellon Foundation:  
[mellon.org/shared-experiences-blog/freeing-history/](https://mellon.org/shared-experiences-blog/freeing-history/)





## PRIMARY SOURCE ACTIVITY 2: WASHINGTON STEPS DOWN

### Washington's Farewell

Washington's Farewell Address was printed in a Philadelphia newspaper on September 19, 1796. With its printing, Washington was officially notifying the American public that he would voluntarily step down as the nation's first president. The decision was extraordinary: Rarely, if ever, in the history of western civilization had a national leader voluntarily relinquished his title. The action set a model for successive U.S. administrations and future democracies. Washington wrote the address with help from his friend and aide Alexander Hamilton. Many Americans had hoped or assumed that Washington would serve another term or even until his death. As Washington's second term came to a close in early 1797, though, he was in poor health, exhausted from years of internal squabbling amongst members of his cabinet, battered by the partisan press and ready to retire to his beloved Mount Vernon.

Transcript of Washington's Farewell Address: [www.mountvernon.org/education/primary-sources-2/article/washingtons-farewell-address-1796/](http://www.mountvernon.org/education/primary-sources-2/article/washingtons-farewell-address-1796/)

### Discussion Questions:

1. What are some of the reasons Washington was ready to step down from the presidency?
2. Why do you think Washington thought it was important for the nation that he not serve as president indefinitely?
3. What do you think was the purpose of his farewell address?
4. What pieces of advice does he give Americans in his farewell address?
5. Do you think the United States has followed his advice? Can you think of some examples?
6. Do you think the ideas expressed in Washington's farewell address are still relevant and important today?

### Related Activity:

**Say What?** Ask students to read Washington's address and then, as a class, make a list of the advice Washington gave to the nation in his Farewell Address. Then divide key sections of the speech among 3-4 groups. Ask the groups to translate their assigned section into language we would use today. As a class, discuss the address. Does Washington offer sound advice? Why or why not? Can the class bring examples from their study of history of situations or events in which the United States did or did not follow Washington's advice? What was the outcome?





## PRIMARY SOURCE ACTIVITY 3: LEGACY

### George Washington's Will

George Washington died on December 14, 1799, of acute bacterial epiglottitis, a condition which likely could have been cured with antibiotics today. As Washington's condition worsened, he asked Martha to bring him the two versions of his will he had written. After reviewing them, he had one burned, and the other became his legal last will and testament. At the time of his death, Washington was one of the richest men in America, and had extensive land holdings in Washington, D.C.; Alexandria, Virginia; western Pennsylvania; and western Virginia, in addition to Mount Vernon. Under the terms of his will, although he made clear that his first priority was to provide for his "dearly beloved wife, Martha," Washington divided these lands among 23 other heirs. Washington also communicated his opposition to slavery in his will and said that it was his wish to free the people enslaved on his plantations. However, half of the enslaved people were actually the property of his wife's late husband's estate. Further complicating matters, these enslaved people had intermarried with the enslaved people owned by Washington. In the end, Washington decided to emancipate the people he enslaved upon Martha's death. He freed only one person immediately--his enslaved valet William Lee--for his faithful services during the Revolutionary War." Lee was also granted a \$30 annuity payment. Washington's will also directed his executors to care for the enslaved people of Mount Vernon who were too elderly, ill or young to support themselves, and provided that the young would be supported until the age of 25 and taught reading, writing and job skills. Less well-known aspects of Washington's will included a bequest of stocks to fund a school for orphans, as well as stock bequest that eventually helped fund the school that became Washington & Lee University.

Find out more about George Washington's will from Mount Vernon:

[www.mountvernon.org/library/digitalhistory/digital-encyclopedia/article/george-washingtons-will/](http://www.mountvernon.org/library/digitalhistory/digital-encyclopedia/article/george-washingtons-will/)

### Discussion Questions:

1. Given what you've learned about George Washington, how much thought and attention do you think he gave to the preparation of his will?
2. What are some of the reasons George Washington would have been thinking about his will in the last days of his life?
3. Does Washington's decision to emancipate William Lee surprise you? Why or why not?
4. What are some of the reasons that William Lee is the only enslaved person immediately emancipated by the terms of Washington's will?
5. Reputation and legacy were of the utmost importance to Washington. Do you think he did a good job of managing his reputation and legacy overall? What effect do you think his will had on his legacy?
6. Do you think Washington made the right decisions in his will? What might have he done differently? What effect on his family and nation might different decisions have had?





## Related Activity:

**A Complicated Legacy.** Epitaphs are the words etched onto a tombstone in memory of the person who has died. Introduce epitaphs to your students, and then have each student prepare a series of epitaphs that could have been written for George Washington. Each epitaph should be written from a different perspective: a political supporter, Martha Washington, an enslaved person living on Mount Vernon and the British government. Then, ask the students to consider these different perspectives and prepare one final epitaph that they feel fairly sums up Washington's legacy.

## Additional Activity:

Ask students to explain and provide context around one or more of the following quotes from historians interviewed in Washington. What information is the speaker trying to convey and what is the quote's meaning in the larger context of Washington's life? Students can begin by rephrasing the quote into their own words. Then, students can explain what they believe the speaker was attempting to convey and explain the importance of this information in reference to Washington's life, early American history and America today.

### Part One

"What makes us a nation? Two things: the Constitution and George Washington."  
Joseph Ellis

"The marriage to Martha is the single most important event in his early life, and it makes everything else possible."  
Joseph Ellis

"In Virginia, the key was to get land. But land is worthless without labor."  
Doug Bradburn

"You could argue that the British empire slowly built the man who would destroy them, from the inside out."  
Alexis Coe

"John Adams went to Harvard. Thomas Jefferson went to William & Mary. George Washington went to war."  
Joseph Ellis

### Part Two

"The declaration was an act of treason."  
Annette Gordon Reed

"If they'd captured him, they would have...put his head on a spit...and that's all you would remember about George Washington."  
Joseph Ellis



“Washington was an unconventional commander. He enjoyed the sneaky parts of war.”

Nathaniel Philbrick

“Trenton changed everything. And we owe it to Washington’s audacity.”

Nathaniel Philbrick

### **Part Three**

“The treason of Arnold was a lightning rod for Americans.”

Nathaniel Philbrick

“He’s so conscious of that responsibility, the power of being a president without precedent.”

John Avlon

“Washington believed a strong and coherent federal government was the best bulwark against disunion and chaos.”

Jon Meacham

“Woodrow Wilson once said that...words were more powerful than bullets and caused more pain.”

Bill Clinton

“Washington’s Farewell Address is a political last will and testament. This is the sum total of his hard-won wisdom, explicitly written for you. And if you keep these principles in mind, you’ll be fine. If you don’t, there could be real trouble ahead.”

John Avlon

“Ever since George Washington, people looking at us have been betting against America. So far, they’ve all lost money.”

Bill Clinton







## Related Content from History.com

Article: Biography of George Washington

[www.history.com/topics/us-presidents/george-washington](http://www.history.com/topics/us-presidents/george-washington)

Article: 11 Key People Who Shaped George Washington's Life

[www.history.com/news/who-was-important-to-george-washington](http://www.history.com/news/who-was-important-to-george-washington)

Article: 5 Myths About George Washington, Debunked

[www.history.com/news/top-george-washington-myths-cherry-tree-wooden-teeth](http://www.history.com/news/top-george-washington-myths-cherry-tree-wooden-teeth)

Video: Washington's Legacy

[www.history.com/topics/us-presidents/washingtons-legacy-video](http://www.history.com/topics/us-presidents/washingtons-legacy-video)

Article: George Washington's Final Years, and Sudden, Agonizing Death

[www.history.com/news/george-washington-final-years-death-mount-vernon](http://www.history.com/news/george-washington-final-years-death-mount-vernon)

Video: Revolution's Lasting Legacy

[www.history.com/topics/american-revolution/revolutions-lasting-legacy-video](http://www.history.com/topics/american-revolution/revolutions-lasting-legacy-video)

Video: Global Impact of the Revolution

[www.history.com/topics/american-revolution/global-impact-of-the-american-revolution-video](http://www.history.com/topics/american-revolution/global-impact-of-the-american-revolution-video)

## More Related Content

Resources: Educational Resources from Mount Vernon

[www.mountvernon.org/education/](http://www.mountvernon.org/education/)

Article: Biography of George Washington, from Mount Vernon

[www.mountvernon.org/george-washington/biography/](http://www.mountvernon.org/george-washington/biography/)

Article: George Washington, from WhiteHouse.gov

[www.whitehouse.gov/about-the-white-house/presidents/george-washington/](http://www.whitehouse.gov/about-the-white-house/presidents/george-washington/)

Exhibit: Life of George Washington, from the Library of Congress

[www.americaslibrary.gov/aa/wash/aa\\_wash\\_subj.html](http://www.americaslibrary.gov/aa/wash/aa_wash_subj.html)

Resource Guide: George Washington, from the Library of Congress

[www.loc.gov/rr/program/bib/presidents/washington/](http://www.loc.gov/rr/program/bib/presidents/washington/)

Articles about George Washington from The New York Times

[www.nytimes.com/topic/person/george-washington](http://www.nytimes.com/topic/person/george-washington)

Article: George Washington, from the National Park Service

[www.nps.gov/revwar/about\\_the\\_revolution/george\\_washington.html](http://www.nps.gov/revwar/about_the_revolution/george_washington.html)