

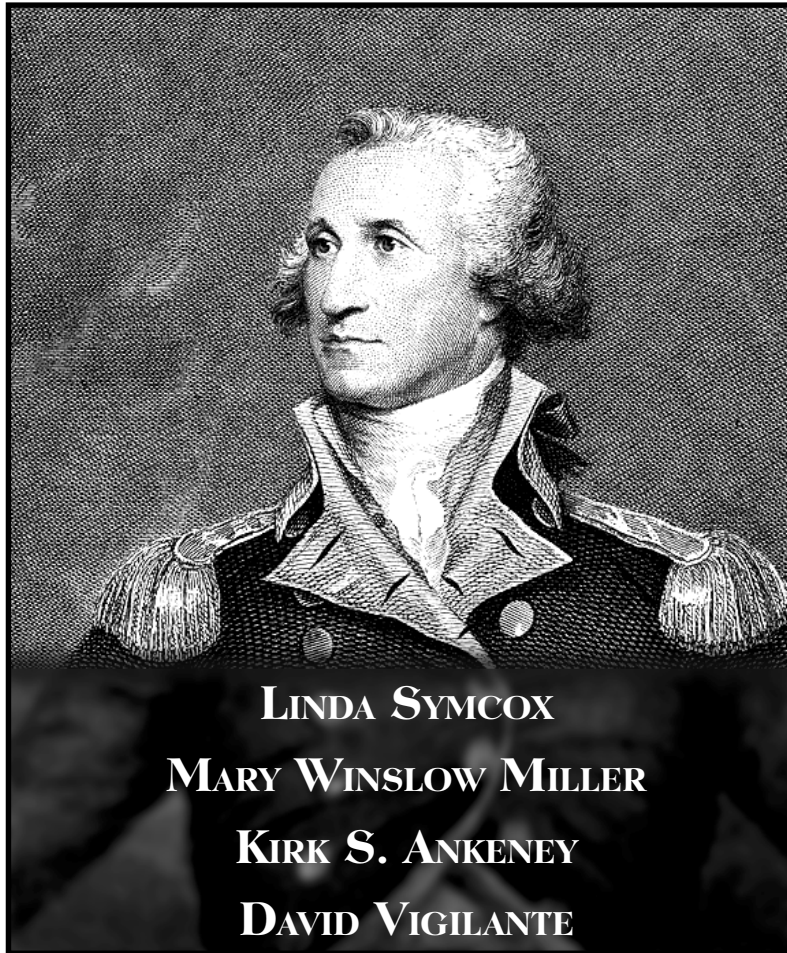
# **The Great Experiment**

## **George Washington**

### **and the**

## **American Republic**

**A Unit of Study for Grades 9–12**



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## TEACHER'S BACKGROUND

### I. UNIT OVERVIEW

For two centuries George Washington has been revered as the preeminent Founding Father. Although Washington met many defeats during his life time, and he has had detractors, the record of his extraordinary achievements as a leader remains unparalleled in our national memory. Thus long before his death on December 14, 1799, Washington's heroic legacy was already firmly fixed in the story of America, and Henry Lee eulogized him with the following epitaph, "first in war, first in peace, and first in the hearts of his countrymen."

Perhaps Washington's greatest legacy wasn't his brilliant leadership as a Revolutionary War hero or as first President, but rather his reluctance to abuse the power bestowed upon him in an age of absolute power. Washington's biographer, James Thomas Flexner, captured Washington's complexity in his book *Washington: The Indispensable Man*. Flexner wrote that Washington was "a fallible human being made of flesh and blood and spirit—not a statue of marble and wood. And inevitably—for that was the fact—I found a great and good man. In all history few men who possessed unassailable power have used that power so gently and self-effacingly for what their best instincts told them was the welfare of their neighbors and all mankind."

Separating Washington the man from Washington the legend is difficult for historians and students alike, because his fame complicates historical scrutiny. Washington owned slaves and ambitiously sought power, yet he freed his slaves upon his death and he used his power to forge a democratic nation. Abigail Adams was aware of Washington's legendary status and offered the following advice to those who would try to understand him: "Simple truth is his best and his greatest eulogy. She alone can render his fame immortal." Through this unit, students will examine Washington's letters, public papers, and addresses that reveal some of his personal traits and leadership qualities which characterized the man rather than the legend.

The unit consists of six lessons that have students work with primary source documents to investigate Washington's life and achievements. **Lessons 1–3** examine his early life, military leadership in the American Revolution, and his role in the Federal Convention of 1787. **Lesson 4** uses Washington's Farewell Address to provide a retrospective of his presidential administration. **Lessons 5 and 6** delve into Washington's dealings with Native Americans from his first venture into the Virginia frontier through his presidency and his changing attitudes toward the institution of slavery.

## II. UNIT CONTEXT

This unit, as a whole, may be used to supplement a study of the American Revolution and the early years of the Republic or can be taken as an in-depth study of George Washington and his role and influence on the development of the American nation. Individual lessons can be used to supplement a study of the Seven Years War, the Revolutionary War, Making of the Constitution, and Washington's presidency.

## III. CORRELATION TO NATIONAL STANDARDS FOR UNITED STATES HISTORY

*The Great Experiment: George Washington and the American Republic* provides teaching materials to support the *National Standards for History, Basic Edition* (National Center for History in the Schools, 1996). Lessons within this unit assist students in attaining **Standard 1B** of **Era 2**, the European struggle for control of North America by focusing on the causes, character and outcome of the Seven Years War and analyzing Native American involvement in the war and evaluating the consequences for their societies. The unit likewise supports **Standards 1, 2, and 3** of **Unit 3** "Revolution and the New Nation" by examining the ideas and interests involved in forging the American Revolution, the Revolution's effects on different social groups, the issues involved in the creation of the United States Constitution, the development of the first American party system, and the influence of the French Revolution on American politics.

The unit integrates a number of Historical Thinking Standards such as analyzing cause-and-effect relationships; assess the importance of the individual in history; explain the influences of ideas, human interests, and beliefs; and, support interpretations with historical evidence.

## IV. UNIT OBJECTIVES

- ◆ To analyze a variety of primary source materials.
- ◆ To evaluate the impact of Washington's military leadership in forging the American victory during the Revolutionary War.
- ◆ To examine evidence from letters and public papers that reveal Washington's character traits.
- ◆ To assess Washington's leadership in fashioning the office of the presidency.
- ◆ To examine Washington's attitude towards Native Americans and explain his position on the institution of slavery.

## V. LESSON PLANS

1. The Making of a Leader
2. George Washington as Military Leader
3. George Washington and the Constitution
4. George Washington as President
5. George Washington and Native Americans
6. George Washington and Slavery

## VI. USING PRIMARY SOURCE DOCUMENTS

Before beginning the unit you may wish to duplicate copies of the *Document Analysis Worksheet (Student Handout 1)* as a means of assisting students in working with the numerous documents that are included in the six lessons in this unit. Encourage students to examine the documents carefully. Caution students not to accept without question evidence presented in documents and to always examine documents in the context of the time in which they were written. Students should make a habit of testing the data presented in primary source materials with evidence gleaned from their study of history.

## Document Analysis Worksheet

1. **Type of Document:** (Check one)

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Image                       | <input type="checkbox"/> Report to Congress |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Private Letter              | <input type="checkbox"/> Map                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Political Cartoon           | <input type="checkbox"/> Artifact           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Speech or Public Address    | <input type="checkbox"/> Secondary Source   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other: please explain _____ |   |

2. **Date(s) of document:** \_\_\_\_\_

3. **Author** \_\_\_\_\_

4. **For what audience was the document written?** \_\_\_\_\_

5. Document Information

A. List important pieces of information presented in the document.

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

B. Why was the document written?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

C. What evidence in the document helped you to determine why it was written?  
(Quote from the document if appropriate.)

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

D. What historical events does this document refer to?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

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## DRAMATIC MOMENT

**I**n 1755 Major General Edward Braddock's army of some 2,000 British regulars and 500 colonials marched toward Fort Duquesne determined to expel the French from the Ohio Valley. Confident of victory because of his superior force, Braddock refused to heed George Washington's warning of a possible ambush by the French and their Indian allies. On July 9, a considerably smaller French force attacked. Braddock was mortally wounded and virtually every British officer was either killed or wounded. Colonel Washington had been in the heat of battle but, remarkably, was not wounded. The young colonel led the remnants of Braddock's army, now less than 500 men, back to Virginia. In a letter to his brother John Augustine Washington from Fort Cumberland on July 18, a few days after Braddock's death, Washington wrote:

**I**Dear Jack: As I have heard since my arriv'l at this place, a circumstantial acct. of my death and dying speech, I take this early oppertunity of contradicting both, and of assuring you that I now exist and appear in the land of the living by the miraculous care of Providence, that protected me beyond all human expectation; I had 4 Bullets through my Coat, and two Horses shot under me, and yet escaped unhurt.

We have been most scandalously beaten by a trifling body of men; but fatigue and want of time prevents me from giving any of the details till I have the happiness of seeing you at home; which I now most ardently wish for, since we are drove in thus far. A Weak and Feeble state of Health, obliges me to halt here for 2 or 3 days, to recover a little strength, that I may thereby be enabled to proceed homewards with more ease . . . .

I am Dr. Jack, y'r most Affect. Broth'r

—Source: George Washington Papers, Library of Congress

On August 17, Rev. Samuel Davies preached a sermon entitled 'Religion and Patriotism the Constituents of a Good Soldier' which was later published in Philadelphia and London. He concluded his sermon with the following words: "I may point out to the public that heroic youth, Colonel Washington, whom I cannot but hope Providence has hitherto preserved in so signal a manner for some important service to his country."