Early Influences on George Washington
By Dave Klippel - Discovery Academy

I. Lesson Summary

Summary
The work in this lesson is focused on expressive writing. Students are being asked to interpret and articulate their observations and impressions of the creative work of others. In turn, in a fun way, they will create a rebus poster project that expects them to take from a known domain: George Washington’s “Rules of Civility and Decent Behavior,” written in the 18th century, and to convert it into a 21st century concept. Through this process, students have a number of opportunities to work together in cooperative learning groups, as well as complete individual assignments. The culminating work is that they will learn to interpret the known George Washington a little better, through a creative means of understanding his upbringing. Above all, he was ambitious, diligent, and firm, but an officer and a gentleman.

Objective
Students will be able to accurately evaluate how the early influences on the life of George Washington impacted his manners and behaviors when he later commanded the world stage.

8th grade Florida Sunshine State Standards

Benchmark SS.A.1.3.1: The student understands how patterns, chronology, sequencing (including cause and effect), and the identification of historical periods are influenced by frames of reference.

1. understands ways patterns, chronology, sequencing (including cause and effect), and the identification of historical periods are influenced by frames of reference.

Benchmark SS.A.1.3.2: The student knows the relative value of primary and secondary sources and uses this information to draw conclusions from historical sources such as data in charts, tables, graphs.

1. extends and refines ability to analyze and draw conclusions from the events on timelines, charts, tables, and graphs.
2.evaluates sources of information for a purpose (for example, relevance, reliability, accuracy, objectivity).
3. knows ways to develop and support a point of view based on a historical even.

Benchmark SS.A.2.3.5: The student knows significant historical leaders who shaped the development of early cultures (e.g., military, political, and religious leaders in various civilizations).

Benchmark SS.A.3.3.5: The student understands the differences between institutions of Eastern and Western civilizations (e.g., differences in governments, social traditions and customs, economic systems and religious institutions).

1. compares and contrasts ways Eastern and Western political, economic, and social institutions impact life in the United States.

Benchmark SS.A.4.3.3: The student understands the impact of significant people and ideas on the development of values and traditions in the United States prior to 1880.

2. understands the impact of significant people, events and ideas on the development of the United States (for example, Thomas Jefferson, Manifest Destiny).

Strand C: Government and the Citizen [Civics and Government]

Standard 1: The student understands the structure, functions, and purposes of government and
how the principles and values of American democracy are reflected in American constitutional government.

Benchmark SS.C.1.3.1: The student knows the essential ideas of American constitutional government that are expressed in the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, the Federalist Papers, and other writings.
   1. knows the essential ideas of American constitutional government that are expressed in the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, the Federalist Papers, and other writings.

Benchmark SS.C.2.3.6: The student understands the importance of participation in community service, civic improvement, and political activities.
   1. understands the importance of participation in community service, civic improvement, and political activities (for example, becoming informed about qualifications of candidates).

U.S. History Event or Era
Pre-Revolutionary War (18th century Colonial America)

Grade Level
This lesson has been designed for the 8th Grade American History classroom.

Resources
Poster paper, computers, magazines, art materials, and glue (or glue sticks)

Lesson Time
This lesson is to be taught over a course of four class blocks, approximately 90 minutes each.
II. Lesson Procedures

Procedures

Day One – An Introduction to the Images of George Washington

*The goal of this lesson is to have students explore paintings in order to tell how a person may have lived their life—in this case, George Washington.

1.) Break the class into 3 groups (or 6 if the class is large). Students should be grouped as heterogeneously as possible (by race, gender, and ability). Provide one of the three portraits of George Washington to each of the three groups (again double this with a large class). Each group will be allowed 15 minutes to examine the portrait. During that time, members of the group will use the attached worksheet to analyze the elements of the portrait. For this exercise they are also allowed to bring in any prior knowledge toward completing their answers.

* For each group, the elemental question is the same: “What do you see in this portrait that describes for you elements of this person’s life?”

2.) After 15-20 minutes, each of the three groups will select a spokesperson. That spokesperson will then give a 5-10 minute presentation to the class about their observations from the character of George Washington. Afterwards, students will complete the attached worksheet (found in the “Activities” section of this lesson plan). What helped George Washington become “Father of His Country”? Collect these forms for review at the end of the next class.

3.) The facts of the portraits are as follows:

This, the earliest portrait of Washington, was painted in 1772 by Charles Willson Peale, and shows Washington in uniform as colonel of the Virginia Regiment. The original hangs in Lee Chapel at Washington and Lee University in Lexington, Virginia.¹

In 1779, Peale was again commissioned to paint Washington’s portrait. At this time, Washington was the Commander in Chief of the Continental Army, during the Revolutionary War. That full-length portrait is now at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts in Philadelphia.²
The final portrait is George Washington's Presidential portrait, painted in 1796 by Gilbert Stuart. It is commonly known as the Lansdowne portrait, as it was originally given to the Marquis of Lansdowne, an early American supporter from England.

Day Two – Clarifying How to Examine Our Past

1.) Review student worksheets from the end of the previous class (“What helped George become “Father of His Country?”). What are your students’ impressions? On what evidence are they basing those impressions on?

2.) Pass out their previous worksheets and discuss with the class their observations… What generalities did they come up with about George Washington? Where those based on fact… or on calculated guesses? Were they biased by the way the artist painted Washington? Were they biased by their preexisting knowledge of Washington? Without a doubt, they have to say yes… we can only interpret historical paintings from the information that is portrayed in the painting.

3.) Today’s lesson will focus on clarifying how to examine our past:
   a. What is critical thinking?
   b. What is a Rebus?
      -Identifying features of a rebus
      -Solving rebus puzzles
   c. Two constant maxims of history:
      -“History does not exist in a vacuum.”
      -“Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.” – Spanish historian & philosopher, George Santayana.
   d. Homework: reading about the moral fiber of George Washington
      -What is the student's personal goal for adulthood?
      -What plan do they have to achieve that goal?

4.) Critical thinking skills has been defined by Michael Scriven & Richard Paul as:

…the intellectually disciplined process of actively and skillfully conceptualizing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, and/or evaluating information gathered from, or generated by, observation, experience, reflection, reasoning, or communication, as a guide to belief and action. In its exemplary form, it is based on universal intellectual values that transcend subject matter divisions: clarity, accuracy, precision, consistency, relevance, sound evidence, good reasons, depth, breadth, and fairness.

To Scriven and Paul, the process of critical thinking has two parts:

1) A set of information and belief generating and processing skills
2) The habit of using those skills to guide behavior.

It would seem that to many college professors, students arrive at universities with poor skills in the area of information analysis, evaluation and synthesis. It is incumbent upon K-12 teachers that we place a higher priority on teaching our students how to make unbiased evaluations of topic material. For the purpose of this lesson, the use of critical thinking will be developed, and used to examine the formative years of George Washington. It will explore how decisions he made as a young man would bear fruit as an adult.
5.) To understand and interpret historical events, students must learn to examine them through comparison with their own knowledge, experiences, and through setting aside personal bias. To teach the concepts of critical thinking, we will be using rebuses of two prominent historical maxims (these will be used throughout the year, so let’s tackle them early):

   a. “History does not exist in a vacuum.”
      1. It is impacted by events that preceded it
      2. It is subject to other events and pressures of the time
      3. It is subject to interpretation and evaluation by future generations.

   b. “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it”.
      1. If we fail to learn from the mistakes of our human past we will likely repeat those mistakes.
      2. By learning from our mistakes, through critical thinking, we can better prepare for the lives of future generations.
         i. Possible tie-ins: global warming, the impact of the population boom, gasoline emissions & fuel shortages, etc.

To use a rebus, students need to understand one by definition:

   1. A puzzle where you decode a message consisting of pictures representing syllables and words.
   2. A puzzle postcard on which words, phrases, or sentences are represented by pictures of objects and signs, the names of which, when sounded in sequence afford the solution.
   3. A puzzle composed of words or syllables that appear in the form of pictures.

Show the class the first rebus while covering up the solution at the bottom (found in the “Activities” section). In order for students to learn this maxim (a saying that is widely accepted on its own merits), they must learn to question what the maxim represents.

6.) Working with students in groups of four, allow for 30 seconds of “think time”, and then have each student write down on their own sheet of paper their answer to the following question: “Summarize in your own words what the meaning of the phrase ‘History does not exist in a vacuum’ is. Allow about two minutes for students to write down their responses. Most likely they will have a difficult time understanding the concept of “a vacuum” as it relates to events in history. The key then to having them understand that they can change their perception of what the statement means is to teach students how to relate their own knowledge and experience to the words stated.

7.) Survey the class, allowing some students to explain what they wrote. It is likely that some will come close, but few will hit the nail on the head. Now is the time to show them that they all have the ability to use prior knowledge to flesh out what is being said.

   a. Ask “What does a vacuum cleaner do?” – Answers will vary, but in general terms, it sucks the dirt in from the carpet, and does not allow it back outside.
   b. Thus, the lesson can be taught that a vacuum is something that is trapped within itself. It neither affects what is on the outside, nor is it affected by what is on the outside.
   c. So... if historical events do not exist in a vacuum, what can logically be assumed: that historical events are all interrelated and:
      o It is impacted by events that preceded it
      o It is subject to other events and pressures of the time
      o It is subject to interpretation and evaluation by future generations.

8.) Now, have students write down 1 really cool event that happened to them during the last break in school. Using partners, have them examine what events had to take place in order for that 1 really cool event to have happened. Follow it up with questions about how that event will be remembered by family members or friends 5 years from now. Will it still be so special? What made it timeless or not? After listening to their partner’s story, can they take the bias out
of it? Can they remove the bias from their own point of view on their story? Was the event extra special, or was it merely special to them? This is a good short lesson in learning how to filter out personal bias.

9.) Now students will explore the second maxim. Spanish historian and philosopher George Santayana is often remembered for this famous statement: “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.” Show the students the rebus (again covering up the answer at the bottom of the image).

10.) After students have come up with the answer to this rebus, repeat the process of studying the phrase as was done with the previous rebus. The essential lesson is that people must learn from the mistakes of the past (their own and those of other people), so as not to repeat those mistakes. Now is the time to take the lesson on critical thinking to the next step. Have students discuss at their tables “How are those two statements similar and different?” What can students learn about the study of history, from those two statements?

11.) Pass out the reading/essay assignment below as homework

**Day Three - An Overview of Young Washington’s Life**

1.) Review of homework: ask your students, “What career would you like to pursue as an adult? Elaborate the reasons why this career appeals to you. Construct a written model of the steps you should accomplish in order to reach your goal.”

2.) From the class select one or two students’ stories to evaluate. Examine each story one at a time. Have the student read their goal aloud, and then explain the steps they saw as necessary to completing their goal. When they are done, have the students of the class critique the organization of the goal setting.
   a. Were there any steps left out?
   b. If so, what should they have added?
   c. Did the student set herself up for success?

   Repeat the process for the second student.

3.) Today’s lesson focuses on some of what we know of the early years of George Washington. Students will understand that because history does not exist in a vacuum, the entrepreneur, military leader, and political dynamo that George Washington would become, was formed from his early years. One of the key lessons that Washington learned early in his life was that manners, charity and chivalry were expected of British officers. Washington wanted to be a British naval officer very badly. During this period of time, it was assumed that if you were an appointed officer, you were also a gentleman. While Washington would become a high-ranking officer, it would be as an American, and despite difficult times, he would always remember his early lessons of being a gentleman. Pass out & “popcorn read” (one student reads the first paragraph aloud, and then “popcorns” to a student of their choosing who does the same. Monitor the pattern so no one student reads more than one paragraph.) the following short excerpt about George Washington’s early years, as found on the Mount Vernon website. Afterwards, introduce today’s new material with another rebus.

4.) Using classroom computers, handouts, or an overhead projecting the website, refer students to *Foundations Magazine*’s article on “George Washington’s Rules of Civility and Decent Behavior in Company & Conversation.” This can be found at the following web address: [http://foundationsmag.com/civility.html](http://foundationsmag.com/civility.html)

5.) The website provides an overview of the lesson that young George Washington was expected to copy by hand. This is a set of 110 rules of behavior, from French Jesuits in 1595. Washington was about 12 when he copied these by hand. More importantly, he took the lessons to heart, and he is often noted for his gentlemanly demeanor. As the website notes:

   Today many, if not all of these rules, sound a little fussy if not downright silly. It would be easy to dismiss them as outdated… but they reflect a focus that is
increasingly difficult to find. They all have in common a focus on other people rather than the narrow focus of our own self-interests that we find so prevalent today. These rules proclaim our respect for others and in turn give us the gift of self-respect and heightened self-esteem.

The *Foundations Magazine* website lists the 100 rules as they were written out by George Washington in about 1744 (his original handwritten notes now rest in the National Archives). In addition, for a few of the rules, the magazine has re-written them for modern language comprehension.

6.) Go over the following rules with your students:

**Rule #1:** “Every Action done in Company, ought to be with Some Sign of Respect, to those that are Present.” - This can be easily translated as “Treat everyone with respect.”

**Rule #44:** “When a man does all he can thought it Succeeds not well blame not him that did it.” - This can be interpreted as “When a person does his best and fails, do not criticize him.”

**Rule # 89:** “Speak not Evil of the absent for it is unjust.” - Translated this could mean “Do not speak badly of those who are not present.” Or... “Do not talk behind someone’s back.”

7.) **Team project:** Assign each team a group of 10 different rules that they must copy (you can adjust this number as you see fit). As a group, they should read each rule, and then come up with a modern translation that applies to the rule. Have each group write out their 10 rules and the modern translations onto a “T” chart on a large sheet or two of large “post-it” paper. When each group is done, they will explain their rules/translations to the class.

**Homework:** using clipart from the internet, photos or pictures from a magazine, or drawings, each student is to create a rebus on poster paper. The rebus must represent the modern translation of one of the 110 rules. Allow for student choice, but make sure that each student is assigned a different rule.

**Day Four – Unit Review**

1.) Students will present their rebus posters to the class. Using only the words of George Washington as he wrote the rules, students in the class will have to interpret the modern translation from the rebus poster that the student created. For example, a student’s rebus might translate into “It is better to associate with no one, than to associate with bad people.” Students in the class would have to guess correctly that it was Washington’s 56th rule of civility “Associate yourself with Men of good Quality if you Esteem your own Reputation; for ‘is better to be alone than in bad company.”

2.) **Short essay quiz for the completion of the unit.**

   **Answer the following question:**

   “Knowing now that history does not exist in a vacuum, given the information you received on George Washington’s early years, what qualities do you think served him well as a military and, later, a political leader? What can you cite to defend you answer?”
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Understanding of Media</td>
<td>The student can define the term “rebus”. S(he) can name the attendant terms that apply to a rebus, and explain how it functions.</td>
<td>The student can define the term “rebus” S(he) can’t name the attendant terms, but can explain how a rebus functions.</td>
<td>The student can explain how a rebus functions.</td>
<td>The student cannot define a “rebus” or explain the function of its parts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creativity</td>
<td>Several of the objects or graphics used in the rebus reflect a great deal of creativity.</td>
<td>One or two of the objects or graphics used in the rebus reflect creativity in their display.</td>
<td>The student made few attempts to make a unique rebus.</td>
<td>The student did not make or customize any of the items in the rebus.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attention to Theme</td>
<td>The student gives a very good explanation of the 21st century translation of the 18th century phrase.</td>
<td>The student gives a reasonable explanation of the 21st century translation of the 18th century phrase.</td>
<td>The student gives a passable explanation of the 21st century translation of the 18th century phrase.</td>
<td>The student gives a poor explanation of the 21st century translation of the 18th century phrase.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time &amp; Effort</td>
<td>Class time was used wisely. Much time &amp; effort went into the planning and design of this project.</td>
<td>Class time was used wisely. The student could have put in more time at home.</td>
<td>Class time was not always used wisely, but the student did do some additional work at home.</td>
<td>Class time was not used wisely, and the student put in no additional effort.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
III. Activities

The Earliest Known Portrait of George Washington (Artist - Charles Willson Peale)
George Washington – Portrait by Charles Willson Peale
“George Washington as President” by Gilbert Stuart
Group Worksheet

Examining George… What do you see in this portrait that describes elements of George Washington’s life?

1. In what year was the portrait made?___________ George Washington was born in 1732, that would make him _________ years-old in the portrait.

2. Where is Washington at?

3. What is he doing?

4. How is he posing?

5. What type of clothing does he have on?

6. What other things do you see in the portrait?

7. What was going on in the world at this time?

8. Based on the types of things you see in the picture, what type of person would you expect George Washington to be?

9. What symbolism do you see in the portrait?

10. What do those symbols represent?

11. Do those symbols tell you anything about the person that George Washington is? Are there symbols that he is strong, weak, peaceful, firm, etc.?

12. What expression does Washington have on his face?

13. What does his “body language” tell you?

14. Notes_______________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________
What Helped George Become “Father of His Country?”

The characteristics you’ve seen in the three portraits, and have discussed with your classmates, have given you a better understanding of who George Washington was at those times of his life. Based on what you know about his outcome, what judgments can you make about how he might have been raised as a boy? What examples from the paintings justify your impression of how he was brought up? Try to use examples from the paintings as evidence to support your impression of George Washington. What about his upbringing helped him to become a leader?

_______________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________

_______________________________________________________________________________________
"History does not exist in a vacuum"
"Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it"
from Reason in Common Sense - by George Santayana
George Washington,  
First President of the United States

George Washington is everywhere in the United States. 740 schools are named for him. 241 townships, 33 counties, 7 cities, 6 colleges, 7 state parks, 5 forts, 3 ports, 1 federal monument, 1 state, 1 federal city, and his likeness is even carved from Mount Rushmore. There are a number of businesses that invoke his name, ideals and likeness. The portrait of our first President is even on the one dollar bill. George Washington is an American icon. But often times, his legend is confused with the factual story of how he rose to become the most famous man of his time—and beyond.

At the time of the American Revolution, George Washington was already a successful Virginia planter, attaining most of his wealth through marriage rather than through birthright. He was a pioneering entrepreneur, yet slavery was the mainstay of supporting his varied business enterprises. While the Revolutionary War would raise him to iconic status as the leader of the Continental Army, in truth he lost more military battles in his life than he won. Perhaps what Washington was best at was his meticulous, keen awareness of his role in public, and his desire and ambition to be seen as a man of decisive leadership, and virtue.

If possible, to understand what type of personal morals and conviction it took to raise himself to become the awe-inspiring “superstar” father of his country, we must first explore the development of George Washington as a young man. As an adult, Washington is often seen as a man of slack-jaw determination, grit and even as downright intimidating. He was a general who determinedly led ragtag forces for 8 years against the greatest military force the world had likely seen up to that point in time. He was a slave owner, who could order the whip, and thought of his slaves as “my people”. While firm, determined and at times merciless, there are many documented instances of Washington being humble, benevolent and charitable—particularly towards those of a lower social rank than his own. In each instance, Washington always governed himself as someone who led by example.

Remember the maxim that we learned in class today that “History does not exist in a vacuum.” To understand why George Washington thought and behaved the way he did as a General and later as President, we have to look at how earlier events in his life shaped him into who he was as an adult. Long before he was an American military leader, George Washington was a young man with a great deal of ambition. He had a personal drive to succeed in all that he attempted. While of course he was not always successful, Washington always pushed himself to perform at his best. Until he married into money, he had a great deal of envy for those with money and power. Washington was a thoughtful young man, who desired social and political power. He gained that power through the study of others who had it: their social graces (good manners), military & political leadership skills. By fiercely studying what he hoped to one day accomplish, Washington, aided by some good luck, became a skillful strong-willed leader of a new nation. In the end, his reputation as a man of superior virtue would be cemented by the morals and values he adopted at a very young age.

For tonight's homework assignment, please write a 1-page essay answering the following question: What career would you like to pursue as an adult? Elaborate the reasons why this career appeals to you. Construct a written model of the steps you should accomplish in order to reach your goal.
George Washington was born at his father's plantation on Pope's Creek in Westmoreland County, Virginia, on February 22, 1732. His father, Augustine Washington, was a leading planter in the area and also served as a justice of the county court. Augustine's first wife, Janet Butler, died in 1729, leaving him with two sons, Lawrence and Augustine, Jr., and a daughter, Jane. The elder Augustine then married George's mother, Mary Ball, in 1731. George was the eldest of Augustine Washington's and Mary Ball's six children.

In 1735 Augustine moved the family up the Potomac River to another Washington home, Little Hunting Creek Plantation (later renamed Mount Vernon). In 1738 they moved again to Ferry Farm, a plantation on the Rappahannock River near Fredericksburg, Virginia, where George spent much of his youth. Little is known of Washington's childhood, and it remains the most poorly understood part of his life. Popular fables illustrating his youthful honesty, piety, and physical strength have long taken the place of documented fact. Some of these fables are more plausible than others. The story that Washington threw a silver dollar across the Potomac River -- an impossible feat -- had its origins in the recollections of a cousin that George could throw a stone across the much narrower Rappahannock River. But others, including the familiar story of Washington and the cherry tree, seem to have been invented by one of Washington's first biographers, Mason Locke Weems.

When George was eleven years old, Augustine died, leaving most of his property to George's older half brothers. The income from what remained was just sufficient to maintain Mary Washington and her children. As the oldest child remaining at home, George undoubtedly helped his mother manage the Rappahannock River plantation where they lived. There he learned the importance of hard work and efficiency.

Little is known about George's formal education. Commonly the children of Virginia gentry were taught at home by private tutors or in local private schools. Boys generally began their formal education around the age of seven with lessons in reading, writing, and basic arithmetic. Later they were taught Latin and Greek, as well as such practical subjects as geometry, bookkeeping, and surveying. Wealthy planters often sent their sons to England to finish their schooling, as was done with George's two elder half brothers, Lawrence and Augustine.

The death of his father, however, made schooling abroad an impossibility for George Washington. He may have attended a school near his home for the first few years. Later he went to another school, either in Fredericksburg, Stafford County, or Westmoreland County. He excelled in mathematics and learned the rudiments of surveying. But he was not taught Latin or Greek like many gentlemen's sons, and he never learned a foreign language. Nor did he attend college. His formal education ended around the age of 15.

Among the gentry class, strong social skills were also considered an essential part of a young man's or woman's education. After the death of their father, George began to spend a great deal of time with his older half brother, Lawrence, at his home, Mount Vernon. Lawrence became a mentor to his younger brother, tutoring him in his studies, teaching him social graces, and helping to introduce him into society.

Throughout his life, Washington regarded his education as defective. He consciously made up for some of what he did not learn in school through reading and study on his own. Over the years he amassed a large and diverse library, and in his later years he subscribed to several newspapers. He became a skilled and prolific writer. Perhaps as a result of his lack of formal education he strongly believed in the value of a good education and left money in his will for establishing a school in Alexandria, Virginia, as well as for establishing a national university.
Answer: “George Washington’s Rules of Civility and Decent Behavior”
IV. Assessment

A short essay quiz will be given to the students on Day Four of this unit.

V. Resources


